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African Americans and the Spanish-American War and Philippine Insurrection: Military  
Participation, Recognition, and Memory, 1898-1904

Doctor of Philosophy

in

History

by

Timothy Dale Russell

June 2013

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The Dissertation of Timothy Dale Russell is approved:

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## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

African Americans and the Spanish-American War and Philippine Insurrection: Military Participation, Recognition, and Memory, 1898-1904.

by

Timothy Dale Russell

Doctor of Philosophy, Graduate Program in History  
University of California, Riverside, June 2013  
Dr. V. P. Franklin, Chairperson

The Spanish-American War, which began in 1898, coincided with a virulent campaign of racial violence and legal segregation directed at African Americans throughout the “Jim Crow” South. As the jingoism of the day stirred American nationalism, the question of whether to support the war against Spain was much more complicated to even the most patriotic African Americans as they faced an unceasing assault on their civil rights. Utilizing numerous editorials from the black press, and letters from African Americans written to President William McKinley, the Secretary of War, the U.S. Army Adjutant General, and various state governors, this dissertation analyzes the African American response to the Spanish-American War, and discusses how they attempted to use the conflict as a new battleground in the larger struggle for equal rights. By outlining the efforts of African Americans to be allowed to volunteer for the army during the war with Spain this study shows how they considered the opportunity to fight to be a right as American citizens. Additionally, I detail how once African Americans earned the right to form volunteer regiments they strove to guarantee the fair treatment of black soldiers, and

labored to insure that African American service and sacrifice was honored and remembered properly. Finally, I chart the evolution of disillusionment as it became increasingly apparent that their contribution to the war effort would not bring lasting change.

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## **Introduction**

The Spanish-American War offered American citizens an opportunity not only to demonstrate their love of country, but also to put those patriotic feelings into practice by joining the U.S. Army. For many Americans it was considered a civic obligation to answer the nation's call at a time of crisis in exchange for the benefits of citizenship. For African Americans, the Spanish-American War was a much more complicated issue, which stirred powerful and conflicting emotions. The war took place during the same period that "Jim Crow," or legal segregation, was being established throughout the South. On the eve of the war with Spain, African Americans were striving to protect and maintain their eroding civil rights in the face of virulent racial discrimination. The Spanish-American War seemed to offer an opportunity to display African Americans' patriotism and their willingness to carry out the responsibilities of American citizenship, and possibly convince white Americans that they deserved full and equal rights. Many African Americans displayed their sincere patriotism and expressed a desire to fight against Spain. However, when considering the African American response to the Spanish-American War, one cannot divorce the conflict abroad from the racial struggle at home. The U.S. Army and many white Americans were unenthusiastic about the idea of incorporating African Americans into the volunteer army organized immediately after the declaration of war, and but for a few exceptions, most black Americans were omitted from the first call for volunteers. This omission led to outcry, direct action, and

resistance to such blatantly prejudicial policies by African Americans who wanted to fight in the war.

There have been several important studies on African Americans and the Spanish-American War. The initial works came in the years immediately following the conflict. Works such as Hershel V. Cashin's *Under Fire With the Tenth U.S. Cavalry* (1899), Edward A. Johnson's *History of Negro Soldiers in the Spanish-American War* (1899), and Theophilus Gould Steward's *Buffalo Soldiers The Colored Regulars in the United States Army* (1904) added the African American contribution to the narrative of the Spanish-American War.<sup>1</sup> These studies were compiled in the same manner as African American historians George Washington Williams and Joseph T. Wilson who offered comprehensive histories of African Americans and the U.S. military. George Washington Williams' *History of the Negro Race in America from 1619 to 1880* and Joseph T. Wilson's *The Black Phalanx*, presented counter-histories highlighting African Americans as active participants in U.S. history, inserting them into key moments of the nation's past where they had been mostly silenced or omitted by mainstream white historians. Cashin, Johnson, and Steward added a new chapter to the already rich history of African American military service.<sup>2</sup>

After T.G. Steward's *Buffalo Soldiers* was published in 1904, there were very few historical studies on African Americans in the Spanish-American War until the 1970s.

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<sup>1</sup> Herschel V. Cashin and Others, *Under Fire With the U.S. Tenth Cavalry*, (New York

<sup>2</sup> George Washington Williams, *History of the Negro Race in America from 1619 to 1880*, (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1883); Joseph T. Wilson, *The Black Phalanx: African American Soldiers in the War of Independence, War of 1812, and the Civil War*, (Hartford, Connecticut: American Pub. Co., 1890).

However, that particular decade witnessed the emergence of important works on the topic. Two notable works were Marvin Fletcher's *The Black Soldier and Officer in the United States Army, 1891-1917* and Jack D. Foner's *Blacks and the Military in American History*. Foner's work covers African American service throughout all of the United States' wars, from the Revolutionary War to Vietnam. As such, Foner only offers one chapter on the Spanish-American War, but it provides a good overview of the challenges black soldiers faced in that conflict. Marvin Fletcher's study deals more extensively with the Spanish-American War, discussing army life on duty and off for African American soldiers, and explores the important issue of African American soldiers and their relationship with, and treatment by, the American public. Fletcher also delves into the complicated history of black officers in the Army during the latter part of the nineteenth century, and the struggles they faced not only at West Point, but also while on active service. He presents a brief, but informative, history of two of the first African American graduates of West Point, Henry Ossian Flipper and Charles Young. Fletcher's history, however, focuses primarily on the regular U.S. Army and ignores the volunteer regiments formed once war was declared in late April 1898.<sup>3</sup>

Published a year after Foner and Fletcher's works was Willard B. Gatewood Jr.'s *Black Americans and the White Man's Burden, 1898-1903*. In this history Gatewood, who was a prolific author on the subject, offered a foundational study on the African American involvement in the Spanish-American War and the Filipino Insurrection. He

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<sup>3</sup> Jack D. Foner, *Blacks and the Military in American History, A New Perspective*, (New York: Praeger Publisher, 1974); Marvin Fletcher, *The Black Soldier and Officer In the United States Army 1891-1917*, (Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 1974).

surpassed many earlier works by delving deeply into the African American reaction to the war, the various issues surrounding the formation of black volunteer regiments, and many of the key events of the war in Cuba and the Philippines. He added important analysis of the war's impact domestically, which revealed a direct relationship between events at home and the war abroad. Additionally, Gatewood introduced many important African American leaders who were influential in the campaign for inclusion in the war, and included several significant sources in his work such as letters from black soldiers, and editorials and articles from a number of African American newspapers.<sup>4</sup>

My study builds upon the groundwork laid by these earlier historians, but differs from theirs in that I approach the issue of African American involvement in the Spanish-American War as an extension of the larger struggle for equal rights taking place at the dawn of the twentieth century, and an important example of the steadfast resistance to the discrimination black Americans faced everyday at the end of the nineteenth century. After African Americans were omitted from President William McKinley's first call for volunteers in April 1898, they demanded the same opportunity as their white counterparts to serve in the Army during a time of war. This carried the struggle for equal rights into the realm of military service, essentially arguing that being allowed to fight in the nation's wars was their right as citizens. This study tracks the evolution of African

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<sup>4</sup> Willard B. Gatewood, Jr., *Black Americans and the White Man's Burden, 1898-1903*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1975); Gatewood also wrote *Smoke Yankees and the Struggle for Empire: Letters from Negro Soldiers 1898-1902*, (Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 1971), which is a collection of letters from many of the soldiers who served in the regular and volunteer regiments in both the Cuban and Filipino campaigns. This serves as an invaluable resource for anyone researching the subject of African Americans and the Spanish-American War.

American attitudes regarding the war with Spain and American overseas expansion, going from optimism and hope that the war might help African Americans with their problems at home, to increasing disillusionment as many realized that their wartime sacrifices went underappreciated and would not assist them in their attempts to improve their position in the United States. I also emphasize the resolve exhibited by many African Americans to resist perceived injustice and discrimination related to the war. Not only did they demand fair treatment in the Army during the war, they also struggled to ensure that the sacrifices of African American soldiers were properly appreciated and remembered during and after the conflict. What emerges is a slow and difficult battle against institutionalized racism that prevented African Americans from getting their fair share of the postwar accolades, or using their service in the war to counter the intensifying violence and discrimination directed at them.

Chapters one and two document African Americans' optimism that they might be able to find opportunity and advancement through military service during the war, and highlights their campaigns to resist exclusion. Chapter one deals specifically with the African Americans' response to the war, and their struggle to be allowed to form volunteer regiments on the eve of war. President McKinley left the decision of how to fill volunteer quotas to the state governors, who mostly omitted African Americans.<sup>5</sup> I explore how and why African Americans refused to be overlooked during the mobilization of the volunteer army. Once African Americans secured the right to volunteer during the Spanish-American War, they quickly shifted their attention to the

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<sup>5</sup> Gatewood, Jr., *Black Americans and the White Man's Burden*, 66.

question of who should lead those volunteer regiments. This was the age of segregation in the Army and African Americans wanted the opportunity to have black officers lead black regiments. However, they quickly came face-to-face with white racism and the belief that African Americans were not capable of military leadership, and an army tradition that effectively kept African Americans from the officer ranks, with the exception of three black West Point graduates in the post-Reconstruction era.<sup>6</sup> Chapter two focuses on this battle to force army officials to allow African American officers to lead black regiments.

The remaining four chapters chart the course to African Americans' disillusionment, that only intensified by the way they were treated during and immediately after the war. In chapter three I argue that even though African Americans obtained the right to volunteer for the war, and achieved some opportunities to act as officers in many of the black volunteer regiments, white Americans showed a callous disregard for their service. This poor treatment of African American soldiers was deeply resented and I explore how African Americans, including members of the black press, strove to combat this abuse.

Chapter four offers a case study of Sergeant John W. Calloway, an African American soldier who was discharged from the army for writing a letter criticizing the way Filipinos were being treated under American rule, even as he participated in efforts to put down the rebellion there. This chapter touches on the personal conflict that many African American soldiers felt while fighting in the Philippines, as they tried to resolve their identity as soldiers in the U.S. Army with their feelings of frustration at being a part of an

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 81.

oppressed minority group that was engaged in the subjugation of the non-white population in the Philippines. Additionally, Calloway's efforts to defend himself and remain in the army show that he was not ready to let his feelings of frustration lead to full-scale revolt against a system that continued to abuse African Americans at home.

Chapter five focuses on the story of Rube Thompson, an African American who was arrested for stealing a bicycle after he returned home from a stint in the Philippines as a civilian employee of the Army Quartermaster Corps, and that of David Fagan, an African American soldier who deserted the Army and joined the Filipino Insurgency. These two case studies serve as the backdrop for a larger discussion on the growing disillusionment among African Americans as it became clear that their contributions and sacrifices in the war were not appreciated, and would not aid them in their fight to obtain full inclusion in American society. This chapter also stresses the different levels of resistance exhibited by disaffected African Americans as they increasingly turned against American expansionism and the continued execution of the war in the Philippines. Using newspaper editorials highlighting white hypocrisy, Rube Thompson's claim during his arraignment that he was a wanted Filipino insurrection leader (which was untrue), and the acts of David Fagan, who became Filipino insurrection leader, I discuss the many levels of resistance to the continued abuse and injustice.

Chapter six looks at the fight over the memory of the Spanish-American War. I show that African Americans were aware that they were not being properly recognized for their sacrifices during the conflict, and were being left out or marginalized in postwar histories. This led to the creation of a counter narrative to battle the silences regarding

African Americans' contributions to the war with Spain. This was yet another area where African Americans actively resisted discrimination, refusing to be forgotten in the various accounts of the war.

Finally, I offer an epilogue that attempts to determine whether African Americans achieved lasting change as a result of their participation in the Spanish-American War. I compare the African American experience in that war to their experience in World War I in order to determine if similar problems and arguments arose. If the answer is yes, then it can be assumed that African American participation did little to change their condition at home after the war with Spain and that they were doomed to repeat the struggles during World War I.

Overall, this is a history of struggle. African Americans mobilized to be allowed to volunteer in the war; they lobbied to be allowed to serve as officers; they tried to get white Americans to respect them as soldiers; they debated among themselves as they tried to resolve the often conflicting natures of their American patriotism and their abhorrence of American prejudice; they sought outlets for their outrage and disillusionment; and finally they struggled to be remembered in the history of the Spanish-American War.



**Chapter One:**  
**A Desire to Serve: The Campaign to Join the Army During the Spanish-American War**

After the sinking of the *USS Maine* on February 15, 1898 the United States set upon a course that led to war with Spain. The time between the sinking of the *Maine* and the beginning of actual hostilities in late June of 1898 was a period of important national self-assessment and significant debate. Americans were placed into a position of weighed their thoughts and feelings concerning the waging of war outside the continental United States. American anti-imperialism at the time ran headlong into a growing tide of American nationalism that was becoming more and more overtly militaristic, and was bolstered by jingoistic attitudes perpetuated by many of the nation's newspapers. As a result, many Americans demanded that Spain answer for the deaths of American sailors, especially after the results of a flawed, and somewhat inconclusive, naval investigation into the cause of the explosion of the *Maine*, which pinned the cause to the "explosion of a submarine mine." In addition, many Americans demanded that Spain account for other slights that impugned American honor. For example, there was the controversial Dupuy de Lôme letter, stolen from the mail and published in the *New York Journal* on February 9, 1898, in which the Spanish Ambassador to the United States made negative comments about President William McKinley.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Louis A. Perez, Jr., *The War of 1898: The United States & Cuba in History & Historiography* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 16; David Traxell, *1898: The Birth of the American Century* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998), 119. The board of inquiry investigating the explosion of the *Maine* cleared the ship's crew of any wrongdoing, and by placing the blame on an anti-ship mine suspicion was

The sinking of the *Maine* capped the growing tension between the United States and Spain due to the Cuban insurrection, which Spain struggled to quell. The rebellion that began in 1895 was the third insurrection over the course of thirty years, and by 1898 Americans bridled at the way Spain executed its war on the Cuban people.<sup>2</sup> The outcome of three years of revolution directly, and negatively, impacted American trade and investments in Cuba, elevated American fears of intervention by other European powers, and created the U.S. outcry over a humanitarian disaster caused by Spain's *reconcentrado* program, where Spanish general Valeriano Weyler rounded up and confined the Cuban civilian population into what amounted to prison camps, all taking place approximately ninety miles from the territorial United States.<sup>3</sup> American politicians constantly demanded that Spain implement reforms and settle the conflict with its Cuban subjects, but they were met with Spanish resentment over attempts to meddle in what was seen as a strictly sovereign Spanish affair. As a result, political relations between the United States and Spain grew ever more strained, especially as increasing numbers of American citizens supported the Cuban cause and began to vilify Spain publicly.<sup>4</sup> The relationship

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immediately cast upon Spain. Traxell notes that Spain conducted its own investigation, which placed the cause of the explosion on an accidental and spontaneous combustion of coal in one of the ships coal storage areas located near an ammunition bunker.

<sup>2</sup> Ada Ferrer, *Insurgent Cuba: Race, Nation, and Revolution, 1868-1898* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 3. Spain faced three insurrections in Cuba during the second half of the nineteenth century. They were the Ten Years War (1868-1878), the Guerra Chiquita (1879-80), and the final insurrection that saw Cuba's independence from Spain (1895-98).

<sup>3</sup> Ernest R. May, *Imperial Democracy: The Emergence of America as a Great Power* (Chicago: Imprint Publications, 1991), 78.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, vi-vii; May mentions that spreading atrocity propaganda coming from Cuba, and nativist backlash against Catholic Spain as a result of the flood of new Catholic

between Spain and the United States was made more complicated by the presence of a Cuban lobby in the United States actively working to gain American recognition for their cause.<sup>5</sup> When the *USS Maine* exploded in Havana Harbor in February 1898, many Americans were already predisposed to think the worst of Spain. This ill feeling toward Spain converged with the influences of yellow journalism and the jingoism of the day, which was processed through the lens of a growing American nationalism, making American citizens more open to military action.

In the years preceding the *Maine* explosion, American nationalism was already evident and growing, but the unexpected and sudden destruction of one America's modern battleships served to further catalyze nationalist fervor. Debate was ongoing over the definition of patriotism, but one of the more militant, and widely accepted, versions of patriotism emphasized the martial obligations of the nation's citizens in times of need.<sup>6</sup> The word *patriotism* was often used in a way that carried hallowed undertones, bestowing a certain reverence to anyone or anything tied to the ideas about the American nation. American patriotism held aloft certain sacred concepts such as "freedom" and

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immigrants to the United States, made it easier to believe the negative information being generated about the Spanish in Cuba.

<sup>5</sup> Walter LaFeber, *The New Empire: An Interpretation of American Expansion 1860-1898* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1963), 284-300; Nell Irving Painter, *Standing at Armageddon: 1877-1919* (London and New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1987), 143-145; May, *Imperial Democracy*, 71.

<sup>6</sup> Walter Berns, *Making Patriots* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 132-133; Berns offers a simplified definition of patriotism. He defines it as a "love of country and implies a readiness to sacrifice for it, perhaps even to give one's life for it." He also explains why people in a democracy would consider sacrificing for the nation. He writes that the interests of an individual in the United States were bound up with the interests of the country. "In a way, their interests, if not identical with the country's interests, were dependent on them."

“democracy,” and reveled in the symbolism of the flag, which was thought to personify American democracy wherever it flew.<sup>7</sup> An example of how this national iconography was used is seen in a May 1898 *New York Times* editorial, which asserted, “It is the innate love of country that sleeps in every honest breast which now leaps up with the shouts and cheers at the sight of the flag, at the sound of the anthem of the free.”<sup>8</sup> The *Los Angeles Times* offered similar sentiments declaring, “it is gratifying to American patriotism to find how steadily it beats for the love of country and the honor of the old flag.”<sup>9</sup>

The Spanish-American War tapped into a growing emphasis on civic obligation, a concept whereby American citizens enjoyed the benefits of democracy, equality, and freedom in exchange for their service and sacrifice in a time of national crisis. However, this civic nationalism, although touting the tenets of democracy and equality, was also influenced and shaped by a growing racialization of American society. Racial stratification and a racialized understanding of American society influenced the way white Americans viewed themselves and others. This shaped the way they understood foreign cultures and civilizations, quickly ending in a circumstance where cultural chauvinism defined the way Americans viewed societies and peoples who were not

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<sup>7</sup> Cecilia Elizabeth O’Leary, *To Die For: The Paradox of American Patriots* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 177. O’Leary explains that between 1880 and 1900 there was a concerted effort to create traditions and rituals involving the flag, such as instituting the Pledge of Allegiance in schools, in order to create a certain reverence for, and strengthen the symbiology of the nation’s flag.

<sup>8</sup> *New York Times*, “Rekindled Patriotism,” May 17, 1898.

<sup>9</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, “American Freemen,” March 13, 1898.

derived from Western European origins. This was seen as wholly hypocritical by American minorities who were often left out of the civic equation.<sup>10</sup>

American nationalism influenced many in the United States to demand retribution from Spain, even at the cost of going to war. The United States was a nation on the rise at the dawning of the twentieth century, growing industrially, economically, politically, and militarily, and as a result, many Americans came to feel that their nation should take its place among the dominant world powers. A number of things contributed to this growing sense of nationalism in the United States. One important issue was the concerted effort by certain groups in the North and the South to foster a strong sense of common identity, which was done by creating a historical narrative that encouraged Americans to embrace certain elements of their national history. Highlighting lessons of American democracy and the nation's martial history worked to tie people in the United States together. American nationalism was defined and driven by certain perspectives on the American past, and the national narrative emphasized a common history and identity, and gave many Americans a shared sense of place and community. This particular national narrative was replete with examples and stories of patriotism. Americans such as Theodore Roosevelt and Henry Cabot Lodge perpetuated the idea that patriotism and

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<sup>10</sup> Gary Gerstle, "Theodore Roosevelt and the Divided Character of American Nationalism," *The Journal of American History*, vol. 86, no. 3 (Dec. 1999): 1280-1307; Other works that discuss the growing racialization of the United States are Matthew Frye Jacobson's *Barbarian Virtues: The United States Encounters Foreign Peoples at Home and Abroad, 1876-1917*, (New York: Hill & Wang, 2000), David Roediger's *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class*, (New York: Verso, 1991), Tomas Almaguer's *Racial Fault Lines: The Historical Origins of White Supremacy in California*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), and Ronald Takaki's *Iron Cages: Race and Culture in 19<sup>th</sup>-Century America*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

civic duty were tied directly to displays of masculinity, military duty, and martial accomplishments.<sup>11</sup>

An example of the way Theodore Roosevelt and Henry Cabot Lodge defined and understood patriotism and civic duty is revealed in a book entitled *Hero Tales from American History*, published in 1908, which combined a collection of historical essays, written by both Roosevelt and Lodge, on prominent Americans and important events in U.S. history. The book was meant to influence the reader's understanding of important historical events, acting as a way to glorify and romanticize the military history of the United States, and worked as a sort of civic primer for American citizens. The book emphasized courage, patriotism, manliness, and sacrifice for country, often couching that sacrifice within the mantle of reciprocity. The acknowledgement section of this book explained why they believed that it was such an important work, and lends a direct understanding of the way Roosevelt and Lodge viewed patriotism and civic duty. They wrote, "It is a good thing for all Americans, and it is an especially good thing for young Americans, to remember the men who have given their lives in war and peace to the

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<sup>11</sup> O'Leary, *To Die For*, 3-9; O'Leary carefully outlines the way groups such as the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR), the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR), The Women's Relief Corps (WRC), United Confederate Veterans (UCV), and the United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC) worked after the Civil War to create a historical narrative and affect the way Americans understood their past. This helped create a common identity as emphasis was placed on the "great men" and "great events" of U.S. history. Lessons included the romanticizing of war, especially the Civil War, the emphasis placed on the flag as a symbol, and the importance of doing one's duty in a time of national crisis. This building of a national narrative came at a time when the North and South were undergoing reconciliation, and as a result the North allowed Southerners to omit slavery and race from their rendition of the causes of the Civil War. The result was the preeminence of the "Lost Cause" rendition of Civil War history in the South. African Americans found their part in American history ignored or omitted.

service of their fellow-countrymen, and to keep in mind the feats of daring and personal prowess done in time past by some of the many champions of the nation in the various crises of her history.” Lodge and Roosevelt defined patriotism and civic duty in terms of martial strength, physical prowess, a functioning society dedicated to democracy, and a willingness to fight and sacrifice for the honor of the nation when necessary. They asserted, “as a civilized people we desire peace, but the only peace worth having is obtained by instant readiness to fight when wronged, not by unwillingness or inability to fight at all.” Lodge and Roosevelt tied courage and the willingness to defend the nation’s honor directly to one’s civic duty, “America will cease to be a great nation whenever her young men cease to possess energy, daring, and endurance as well as the wish and power to fight the nation’s foes. No citizen of a free state should wrong any man; but it is not enough to merely to refrain from infringing on the rights of others; he must also be able to stand up for his own rights and those of his country against all comers, and he must be ready at any time to do his full share in resisting either malice domestic or foreign.” American citizens were bound by an unspoken agreement with their nation, a social contract that allowed them to enjoy the benefits of freedom and democracy, but were expected to defend the nation that offered them these gifts.<sup>12</sup>

African Americans were in a difficult position in the United States as the Spanish-American War loomed. As debate over fighting a war against Spain swept the nation, African Americans were in the midst of battling for their civil rights at home. The same

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<sup>12</sup> Henry Cabot Lodge & Theodore Roosevelt, *Hero Tales From American History* (New York: The Century Co., 1908) ix-x; O’Leary, *To Die For*, 182. O’Leary shows that the GAR also supported the martial understanding of patriotism arguing that “there could be no ‘land of the free’ if the United States was not also the ‘home of the brave.’”

questions of honor, courage, patriotism, and civic duty that impacted white Americans influenced black Americans as well, but with the limitation that they were not offered the same benefits of American citizenship as their white fellow countrymen. Civic duty was felt strongly among black Americans, but they had to weigh this against the poor treatment that they suffered throughout the nation, especially in the South. The concept of patriotism and doing one's duty as an American was intimately tied to an idea of reciprocity, whereby one served the nation during a time of crises to gain, and enjoy, all of the benefits of citizenship during times of peace and prosperity, and assurances that these entitlements would be protected. The sense of duty was related to, and influenced by, the growing establishment of a coherent, and dominant, national history, one in which African Americans actively tried to insert themselves. As a result, the concept of civic duty, the historical narrative that supported this, and their tradition of proud military service worked to push many African Americans to support the war, as well as to demand an opportunity to join the Army and fight for their nation, even while they faced severe discrimination at home.

The United States' declaration of war against Spain created excitement throughout the nation, and forced black Americans to reconcile their patriotism with the realities of the treatment they experienced at home. As a result, debate flared among African Americans over whether it was right to take part in the conflict between the United States and Spain. Regardless of the position African Americans took in this debate, their arguments touched on the precepts of civic duty and reciprocity. Those who argued against taking part in hostilities against Spain often pointed out that since the federal and state



governments did not protect their rights, then they were essentially excused from their obligation of defending the nation. Those who wanted to join the U.S. Army and take part in the war believed that they had to show themselves worthy of full inclusion in American society by sacrificing and placing their loyalty on full display. It was thought that the reciprocity that was inherent in the relationship between a government and its citizens should to be mutually supportive and beneficial. In the case of the Spanish-American War those African Americans who supported abstention from the war wanted the federal and state governments to uphold their end of this mutual bargain first before they consented to risk their lives in war. They endured years of unfair treatment, violence, and the continued assault on their rights, often sanctioned by southern governments through legal segregation, as well as by the federal government's inaction in protecting black citizens, which represented a breach in an unspoken, but expected, social contract that defined the obligations and relationships between a government and its citizens.<sup>13</sup>

As the United States readied for war, some members of the black press wrote editorials that offered African Americans a justification for staying out of the conflict. It is essential to understand that many African American editors, even as they argued for

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<sup>13</sup> Some works that detail the African American struggles in the Post-Reconstruction Era are Michael Perman, *Struggle for Mastery: Disfranchisement in the South, 1888-1908*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001); Steven Hahn, *A Nation Under Our Feet: Black Political Struggles in the Rural South From Slavery to the Great Migration*, (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003); Tara W. Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors After the Civil War*, (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1997); Jane Daily, *Before Jim Crow: The Politics of Race in Postemancipation Virginia*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); and C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877-1913*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1971).

non-participation in the war, asserted that black Americans were still patriotic and loyal to the United States. They did not see their urging their readership to remain out of fighting as disloyal, but seemed to believe that their actions worked within the confines of good citizenship, because they were trying to hold the government to its constitutional commitments.<sup>14</sup> The editor of the *Washington Bee*, W. Calvin Chase, explained why African Americans should not actively support an American push for war. He argued:

While we may be loyal and patriotic, while our blood may boil for revenge upon those Spanish brutes who have spared neither woman nor child even in their diabolical butchery, yet common sense and experience ought to teach that severe silence becomes us. When we shall have been treated as men and accorded the rights for which we voted and fought, when we can consistently claim the right as free American citizens to demand the emancipation of others in bondage, then can we afford to publish our loyalty, then can we make haste to prove that we possess our full share of patriotism. It is inconsistent for practical slaves to fight for the freedom of others when a brave stand is necessary in order to procure liberty for themselves.<sup>15</sup>

Chase's comments asserted African American loyalty, but understood that it was pointless to shed blood for an ungrateful nation. The concept of civic reciprocity was at work here, where W. Calvin Chase wanted to hold back African American support for the war until federal and state authorities showed that they were willing to protect their civil liberties. This concept of reciprocity was reiterated in the Indianapolis *Freeman*, another

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<sup>14</sup> Jonathan M. Hansen, *The Lost Promise of Patriotism: Debating American Identity, 1890-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 35. Hansen argues that William James, a staunch anti-imperialist, held the belief that it was much more patriotic to resist any attempt to subvert the Constitution. His form of patriotism is found among African Americans who argued against fighting Spain until they were treated as equal citizens in the United States.

<sup>15</sup> *The Washington Bee*, "False Patriotism," March 19, 1898.

black newspaper, which “defined patriotism as meaning ‘a home to protect that protects the individual in return.’”<sup>16</sup>

As talk of war captivated the American public immediately after the sinking of the *Maine*, John Mitchell Jr., editor of the *Richmond Planet*, echoed W. Calvin Chase’s sentiments concerning black Americans and war with Spain and reciprocity.

If we are not presumed to be good enough to exercise the right of franchise, why should we be good enough to enlist in the service of the United States?

If the state government will not protect us, why should we be expected to protect the state government?

If the national government will not protect us, why should we be expected to protect the national government? Our allegiances to both is based on upon a principle of reciprocity and partakes of the nature of a contract.

The repeated violation of the obligation on the one side, releases the party on the other side.<sup>17</sup>

John Mitchell Jr.’s analogy of a social contract is crucial to his argument. His position clearly was based on the premise that the state and federal governments were in breach of contract by not protecting the rights of black Americans. He advocated an American citizenship that was non-racialized, where the obligations of the government to its citizens were colorblind and distributed equally.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Willard B. Gatewood, Jr. *Black Americans and the White Man’s Burden, 1898-1903* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1975), 30. The *Indianapolis Freeman*, March 19, 1898, as Quoted in.

<sup>17</sup> *The Richmond Planet*, “The Colored Men and Cuba,” March 12, 1898.

<sup>18</sup> Ann S. Holder, “What’s Sex Got to Do With it? Race, Power, Citizenship, and Intermediate Identities in the Post-Emancipation United States,” *The Journal of African Americans History*, Vol. 93, No.2, (Spring 2008): 153-173. In this article Ann Holder argues that John Mitchell, Jr. was one of many advocates that pushed for a full and inclusive citizenship that deemphasized race. Holder argues that Mitchell, Jr. worked through his newspaper, *The Richmond Planet*, to counter and dismantle arguments that inferred the racial inferiority of African Americans, which were often used to justify the

The danger of encouraging African Americans to stay out of the conflict between the United States and Spain was that it opened them up to criticism. This was why even those who argued against black American participation in the war always seemed to anchor their arguments in ways that highlighted African American loyalty, patriotism, and courage. African Americans who asserted that there was a broken social contract between themselves and the government seemed to avow that they were being good Americans by trying to hold the nation to the tenets of democracy, equality, and freedom. For John Mitchell Jr., the issues of disfranchisement, intimidation, and the violence practiced against African Americans were more than sufficient justification to withhold their service to the government. He also remained steadfast in his belief that service in the war would not benefit African Americans or advance their efforts for equality.<sup>19</sup> However, he later conceded in the same editorial that loyalty and patriotism was felt so strongly among black Americans that they would likely ignore his advice to stay out of the war and offer their services as soon as they were asked. He believed that “our people are the most forgiving nation on the face of the globe. No other race, living in the republic under similar conditions would respond in such an emergency, and yet colored troops would rally by the thousands whether called upon by a president, democratic or republican, or by the governor of the state in which they had been ostracized, hounded, murdered, and even denied the right of the franchise. Truly we are a peculiar race of

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discrimination, segregation, and violence against black Americans in the United States at the dawning of the twentieth century.

<sup>19</sup> *The Richmond Planet*, April 23, 1898. On the issue of uplift due to service in the war John Mitchell, Jr. writes, “well they say the colored people must secure proper recognition by fighting the Spaniards. Vain hope this!” He again expressed this opinion on page 2 of the May 7<sup>th</sup> edition of the *Richmond Planet*.

people.”<sup>20</sup> This is indicative of the difficult, and often divisive influence the war had on the sense of duty of many African Americans, because they were fully aware of the injustices acted upon them, but stood ready to rally to the nation’s cause the minute they were asked.

Mitchell’s words were prophetic in that a movement of support for the war emerged from black Americans. Although many African Americans embraced John Mitchell Jr. and W. Calvin Chase’s sentiments, the enthusiasm to take part in the war seemed to overshadow them. Edward E. Cooper, editor of the *Colored American*, represented a voice in favor of African Americans joining the conflict. His editorials that addressed the war often carried a very patriotic tone, and like Chase and Mitchell, Jr., showed an understanding of the concept of reciprocity. Cooper’s position on civic duty came from the standpoint that African Americans needed to first do their duty in the war with Spain in order to prove to white Americans, and state and federal authorities, that they were worthy of being embraced as full and equal members of American society. In many ways Cooper’s position harkened back to the stance that Frederick Douglass took during the Civil War when the question of African American participation came up. Douglass encouraged black Americans, ex-slaves and freemen, to join the Union Army, because he believed that the man “who fights the battles of America may claim America as his country, and have that claim respected.”<sup>21</sup>

In an editorial published on April 30, 1898, Cooper tried to explain how African Americans would benefit from fighting in the war. He asked, “ Will the war work good

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<sup>20</sup> *The Richmond Planet*, “The Colored Men and Cuba,” March 12, 1898.

<sup>21</sup> Walter Berns, *Making Patriots*, 127.

or evil to the 10,000,000 Negroes of this country?” Answering his own question, he stated, “This war carries nothing but benefit for the Negro, here and elsewhere.” Cooper argued that by joining other Americans in the conflict with Spain that African Americans would legitimate their demands for all the “privileges of citizenship.” Where W. Calvin Chase and John Mitchell, Jr. believed that the government needed to protect the rights of black Americans first before they were obligated to defend the nation, Cooper argued that African Americans were in a position where they needed to sacrifice for the nation to prove that they were worthy of all of the benefits of American citizenship. He believed that in putting their patriotism in full view black Americans would gain the respect of white Americans.<sup>22</sup>

In a later editorial Cooper again addressed the issue of patriotism, and the need to prove one’s worthiness as American citizens. He acknowledged that African Americans had been wronged, but warned, “It is dangerous to trifle with the patriotism of a nation, or to find remedies for real or imaginary grievances at a time when every interest of the nation is centered upon the preservation of the national honor and supremacy of the flag.” He worded his editorial with the same patriotic prose that appeared in many white newspapers. He explained that by aiding the war effort that African American “bravery, heroism, and courage would ultimately conquer American prejudice, and enable him to overcome the obstacles which now stand in the way of his advancement, and will give him character, and a just and equitable claim to the recognition which his merits as a

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<sup>22</sup> *The Colored American*, “What Are We To Get Out of the War,” April 30, 1898.

citizen of the republic deserve.”<sup>23</sup> Unlike Chase and Mitchell, Jr., Cooper chose to see the war as a direct opportunity for advancement, and as a vehicle for strengthening American society, reaching across region, race, and class. Above all, Cooper felt that African Americans needed to put aside their grievances and shoulder the responsibility as citizens during a time of national crisis. His approach was one that was optimistic, informed by his loyalty to the Republican Party, and arguably naïve; however, he understood that to stand aside during the conflict with Spain would offer to those intent on keeping African Americans from advancing an opportunity to question their fitness to practice the duties of citizenship. He, like many others who encouraged African American involvement in the war, was also influenced by the example of how the nation’s last significant conflict, the Civil War, benefitted black Americans. African Americans were offered the opportunity to serve in the Civil War, which allowed them to take an active part in eradicating slavery in the United States, and gave them some advancement in political rights and economic opportunity. It was only natural that many hoped that the Spanish-American War would produce the opportunities the Civil War had.

The editor of *The Savannah Tribune*, Solomon C. Johnson, joined Cooper’s assertions about African American patriotism. He announced that “should war be declared between our country and Spain there are half a million colored men available and willing to take up arms in defense of old glory and the National honor. The American Negro will not be found wanting in patriotism and valor in defending their country in the hour of peril. He

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<sup>23</sup> *The Colored American*, May 7, 1898.

is the one potent factor among Americans who can always be safely relied on by the government in cases of emergency.”<sup>24</sup> The patriotic fervor emanating from the *Savannah Tribune* mirrored the same patriotism asserted among white Americans and made it clear that black Americans were willing to stand up in defense of the nation as well, which was considered by many to be a duty of every American citizen.

### **The Fight for the Right to Fight**

After Congress approved President William McKinley’s request for the declaration of war and intervention in Cuba on April 25, 1898, the President issued a call for 125,000 volunteers.<sup>25</sup> The arguments among black Americans concerning their civic duty, and whether a citizen should enjoy the full benefits of American citizenship before they sacrificed in war, or whether they needed to prove their claims to equality by answering the nation’s call during a crisis, soon became more muted. Instead, it gave way to feelings of dissatisfaction and anger as they were essentially ignored during this first call for volunteers. The federal government tasked the states with filling quotas and delivering the required volunteers to federal service. To fill the demand for large numbers of volunteers in order to swell the army’s ranks in preparation of war, President McKinley issued quotas to each state, but asked that National Guard units get priority. However, he

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<sup>24</sup> *The Savannah Tribune*, April 2, 1898.

<sup>25</sup> Gatewood, *Black Americans and the White Man’s Burden*, 37. The distinction here is that African Americans wanted to be allowed to join the volunteer forces; there were already four African American regiments in the United States Army. Two Infantry regiments, the Twenty-Fourth and Twenty-Fifth Infantries, and two cavalry regiments, the Ninth and Tenth Cavalries. All four regiments were involved in the Cuban campaign, taking part in all of the major fighting there, and were a constant source of pride for African Americans at home.



gave state governors autonomy in how they actually filled their quotas. When the call for volunteers went out, a number of African Americans expressed interest in joining, or forming, volunteer regiments, but the problem that confronted them was the dearth of black National Guard Units and the broad leeway given to state governors that allowed them to overlook the black militia units asking for an opportunity.<sup>26</sup>

One prominent African American, Booker T. Washington, took note of the slight by state governors, and expressed his disappointment. In a correspondence to a Mr. James B. Smith, Booker T. Washington showed that he clearly understood that African Americans were purposely being prevented from service. “I feel, and have felt, that the present war offers an opportunity for the colored man in the South to give to the government an example of patriotism that would not be lost upon it, but unfortunately the quota apportioned to the several states has been made up entirely of white volunteers, the governors of nearly all the Southern states having declined to accept colored volunteers....” Washington showed clear disappointment, because an avenue for advancement was barred by prejudicial policies, keeping black Americans from being able to prove themselves to white Americans through their wartime service. He closed his letter writing, “I regret very much that it is not possible for us to cooperate in the grand work of freeing the oppressed of Cuba from thralldom which has held them, but it is a condition and not a theory which confronts us.” With these words he connected the plight of Cubans under Spain to the African American position at home. Cubans were struggling against Spanish control even as black Americans battled to free themselves

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 66.

from discriminatory policies meant to hold them back. By keeping African Americans from volunteering for the war they would lose a chance to improve their condition at home, and the events surrounding the filling of quotas for the first call for volunteers served only to highlight the ill-treatment and disregard they faced daily in United States.<sup>27</sup>

African Americans responded to this slight with anger and a determination to resist what they saw as blatant discrimination. Letters poured into the offices of state governors, the War Department, Congressmen, Senators, and the President of the United States imploring anyone with the authority to do so to allow them to join the fight. In many cases the lack of states mustering in black regiments reflected the same prejudice and discrimination that met black Americans in everyday life. Many members of the black press expressed their irritation at being ignored. For example, in the April 30, 1898 edition of the *Savannah Tribune* Solomon Johnson revealed his understanding that African American volunteers were being purposely ignored by southern governors, and the resulting frustration. Johnson's editorial specifically discussed the situation in Georgia, but is applicable to the experiences that black Americans faced throughout the South. Johnson pointed out that, "Some weeks ago orders were issued to all of the white companies for the increase of the enlisted number. While the colored companies are a part of the state force, they were completely ignored by not ordering them to do likewise." He continued, "Later, the president issued an order for a number of the state troops. In anticipation of this order the governor invited the commanders of the various

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<sup>27</sup> Louis R. Harlan, Ed., *The Booker T. Washington Papers*, vol. 4: 1895-98 (Urbana: The University of Illinois Press, 1975), 414.

regiments and battalions to confer with him at Atlanta. In extending this invitation, the governor acted as if there were no colored troops in the state.” Johnson made it clear that the slight was felt deeply, but that the members of Georgia’s black militia units remained professional, if not stoic, and “the colored troops of Savannah, while they have not made any public expression, feel the action of the governor very keenly, yet they are loyal and are ready at any time to respond to any orders that may be given them.”<sup>28</sup>

Though disappointed at being left out of the first call for volunteers, these black militia regiments were in a very difficult position. They had to be careful about expressing their disappointment. However, the black press could do what the individual soldier could not and made strong statements that spilled over into the political and social arena. Solomon Johnson explained the injustice of this policy arguing, “Not only have the colored troops been ignored in not being ordered to increase the enlistments, or to attend the governor’s conference, but they have also been denied the privilege of defending their country.” Johnson crafted his editorial in a careful manner, ensuring that the arguments concerning the injustice of ignoring the black Americans was clear, but always leaving the door open for state and federal officials to reverse their policies and be more inclusive. In order to do this, members of the black press often offered the image of members of these black militia units as victims of unfair and prejudicial practices, but stressed that it never let this impact their loyalty or love of country. In fact, Johnson implied that this highlighted the discipline of the black soldier, as they stood by ready for duty even after it was clear that the governor did not want them. Johnson declared,

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<sup>28</sup> *The Savannah Tribune*, “Colored Troops Ignored,” April 30, 1898.

“They are not murmuring, because they are true soldiers and will under no circumstance act insubordinate while in the service of the state. This, though, does not hinder them from feeling these slights.” These soldiers endured the indignity of injustice, rose above it, and still did their duty as soldiers. Above all, Johnson assured the American public that the black military members were still ready to fight. “If the battalion is called out, fully four hundred and fifty men would enthusiastically respond, beside the large number of volunteers who are not now connected with the companies, but are anxious to go to the front.”<sup>29</sup>

The troubled countenance of many African Americans came from the fact that they were being denied an outlet, and an opportunity, to prove their loyalty and patriotism. Once confronted with this discrimination many black Americans began to resist the attempts by various state governments to bar them from the conflict. In a letter from Howell L. Goins, of Tuscaloosa, Alabama to Russell A. Alger, the Secretary of War, he addressed the migration of discrimination into the realm of military service. Goins observed that, “In view of the demonstration which is coming up from all parts of the country, it would be unfair and unjust to draw as there seems to be drawn a color line. No class, or race of people, have been more ardent in their willingness to prove anew their loyalty to bear equal burden of this war than mine.” He asserted that as American citizens, African Americans should be allowed to share in the trials and travails of the nation. “It has been our hope that as a matter of justice when all citizens of this great and glorious country would be called on to defend its honor your fellow citizens of color

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

would have been given a opportunity to demonstrate to the world that they were not only loyal, but possess those qualities referred to by General Jackson to the colored soldiers of the War of 1812.”<sup>30</sup> These qualities that Goins referred to came from a proclamation issued after the battle of New Orleans to the black volunteers. Andrew Jackson announced,

I expect much from you for I was not uninformed of those qualities which must render you so formidable to an invading force. I knew that you could endure hunger and thirst, and all the hardships of war. I knew that you love the land of your nativity, and that, like ourselves, you had to defend all that is most dear to man. But you surpass my hopes. I have found in you, united to these qualities, that noble enthusiasm which impels to great deeds.<sup>31</sup>

His mentioning of General Jackson and the War of 1812 not only invoked the name of a member of the American pantheon of heroes, but reminded the Secretary of War of the faithful prior service of black Americans, Goins was placing black citizens on an equal plain as white when it came to the defense of the nation.

An additional example of how the Spanish-American War became a new battleground over prejudice and racial discrimination in the United States is represented by a letter from Mr. H.B. Taliaferro, from Harrisonburg, Louisiana to the Secretary of War, Russell A. Alger, in response to an editorial printed in the *New Orleans Times-Democrat*, which he included with his correspondence. This article from the *Times-Democrat* angered Mr. Taliaferro, because it strenuously argued against the use of African American troops in the war with Spain, and presented many of the racist positions that confronted black

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<sup>30</sup> Letter from Howell L. Goins to Secretary of War, Russell A. Alger, June 24, 1898, National Archives, Record Group 94, Adjutant General's Office, File number 182301.

<sup>31</sup> Joseph T. Wilson, *The Black Phalanx*, (New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1968), 84-85.

Americans in the South. The article from the *Times-Democrat* (exact date of publication unknown) addressed rumors that President McKinley planned on calling for black volunteers. The editorial asserted, “the President will issue a call for 25,000 colored volunteers within a few days; and that, when raised, they will be known as ‘the army of occupation for Cuba and Puerto Rico.’” The writer of the editorial continued by explaining why, in his opinion, such a move would be ill advised. “We have on occasions already dwelt upon the riskiness and danger of summoning colored troops to fight the countries battles, when there is no pressing emergency calling for such actions. The putting of the races on a military equality means to a certain extent an attempt to put them on a footing of social equality; and social equality with the inferior is a degradation that the superior race will never be induced, under any conceivable circumstance, to tolerate.” The author of this editorial threatened that if the President continued with any plan to establish “social equality” through the placing of black Americans on a military equality, there would be a “race war” intended to teach the “inferior race” a lesson “as to the impropriety of venturing out of its proper sphere.”<sup>32</sup>

The overt racism that permeated the South was revealed throughout this editorial. The editorial expressed opposition to African Americans serving in the army, inferring that the ability to serve the nation during a time of war was not an inalienable right as an American, or at least not for black Americans who were essentially relegated to second-class citizenship. This news article revealed the fear that some white southerners felt

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<sup>32</sup> Newspaper article from the *New Orleans Times-Democrat*, date published unknown, attached to the correspondence from H.B. Taliaferro to the Secretary of War, Russell A. Alger, July 20, 1898, National Archives, Record Group 94, Adjutant General’s Office, File number 110404.

with regard to allowing African Americans to serve under arms, claiming that “the persistency of the President in calling out colored troops in spite of the warnings against such a step which he has received, is, as we said the other day, a sowing of the wind with a sure and certain prospect of reaping the whirlwind; for when the colored volunteers have become inflated with ideas of their self-importance by being appealed-to to fight for the country, and have begun to feel their power when organized into large bodies, then will they give themselves such airs as the white people can never put up with; and then will the trouble commence.” In many ways the attitudes and actions of white southerners were about control, driven by the fear of allowing change and what implications those changes might have on their position in society. The anti-black legislation passed throughout the South after Reconstruction worked to curb the rights of African Americans, and in mentioning the fear of the impact of serving in the Army would have in elevating the position of African Americans made it clear that southern whites were not comfortable with offering them the opportunity to fight in the upcoming war. For many this opportunity had to be hindered and minimized as much as possible. The other concern was what serving in war would mean for the legitimacy of African American claims for equal rights. Finally, there was apprehension that military discipline, and having felt the relative authority that came with military service, could work to exacerbate racial tensions in the South. There was concern that returning soldiers would be less deferential and more aggressive in asserting their rights, feeling that they earned them through their service. If this happened, as the writer of this editorial asserted, there

would likely be a wave of racial violence designed to maintain the social status quo and send a message to African Americans about their place in southern society.<sup>33</sup>

H.B. Taliaferro's response to the opinions expressed in the *Time-Democrat* editorial reveals someone determined to engage and fight against the overt racist demands. He saw it as an extension of the struggle for African American equality and against the rising tide of discrimination faced everyday. As a resident of the state of Louisiana, he saw first hand how state governments throughout the South passed legislation that reduced the civil rights of black Americans by disfranchising them and legally sanctioning racial separation. He abhorred the treatment of black Civil War veterans by southern whites, which again touched upon the concept of reciprocity between citizen and government. He tied the issue directly to the new restrictive state constitutions passed throughout the South and used to limit the civil rights of black Americans. "The Democrats down here are protesting the enlistment of colored troops.... These people have made and adopted a constitution for this state without submitting it to people for their sanction, whereby they have disfranchised the colored people, not even sparing the old Colored Union Veterans, while they have fixed it so that every Confederate soldier can vote." Mr. Taliaferro later utilized the word "injustice" to express how he felt about the treatment of black Civil War veterans, showing his contempt for the exclusion of a segment of the population that sacrificed for the preservation of the nation, while those who were once enemies of the United States enjoyed full rights as citizens. He saw as unjust the discrimination "heaped upon a poor down-trodden race who manifested such fidelity to the government at a time

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.



when its very existence trembled in the scale.” He went on to assert that he found it to be an insult “to every black veteran throughout the land.” The link between discrimination at home and what was perceived as a right to serve in the Armed Forces during a time of war was made when Taliaferro declared, “and now after all of this, they announce that the colored people must not enter the army.” He expressed hope that the President would remain steadfast in any plans to organize black regiments and that African Americans were “armed and equipped and given the same rights and privileges in serving their country in its armies as other citizens of the Republic.” This took the view that military service was a right as a citizen, and no one should be denied this right to serve based on color.<sup>34</sup> Taliaferro implied that this was an inherent right, or more correctly that the issue was simply a matter of equality. If white men are allowed to enter or form volunteer regiments, then black American men should be afforded the same opportunity, without fear of racial discrimination playing a role in who was accepted into service and who was not. A letter to Virginia’s Governor Hoge Tyler, from a black Virginian by the name of George W. Rison, at a time when the states wrestled with how to fill their quotas for volunteers, succinctly summed up Mr. Taliaferro’s thoughts over the right to serve. Mr.

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid; When Mr. H.B. Taliaferro mentions that the right to vote was being denied African Americans, but former Confederates continued to exercise the franchise through the use of a grandfather clause he is referring to the fact that Louisiana passed amendments in 1898 to its state constitution to disfranchise black Louisianans. C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South 1877-1913* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1971), 321, 333-334.

Rison wrote, “Dear Sir, I am a colored man and a Afro-American. I feel that I have as much right to defend the Stars and Stripes as any American...”<sup>35</sup>

### **Memory’s Place in the Fight to Fight**

After the declaration of war with Spain, many American men tried to find a place in the volunteer army in order to take part in the conflict. African Americans, when war seemed imminent, often showed the same interest in serving in the Army as white Americans, but were mostly ignored through the first call for volunteers. The debate that erupted among African Americans spilled into the realm of the ongoing struggle for civil rights and equality. It became a question of fairness, since African Americans were citizens of the United States and felt that they should be afforded all the same opportunities that white Americans received. This meant that if white men could form or enter volunteer regiments in preparation for war, then black Americans should be allowed to do so as well. This is one reason that African Americans like H. B. Taliaferro began to assert military service as a right, and others such as John Mitchell, Jr., began to tie volunteering to fight in war to civic reciprocity, intending to hold the government to fulfill its responsibilities before endorsing any overt support of the impending war. There is no question that African Americans were patriotic, loyal, and willing to place themselves in harms way, but the failure, or outright refusal, of state governors to use

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<sup>35</sup> Correspondence from George W. Rison to Governor of Virginia, Hoge Tyler, April 25, 1898. J. Hoge Tyler Family Collection, Ms67-002-Special Collections, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg, VA, File Number 6290.

black militia units to fill their volunteer quotas was seen as a gross injustice. African Americans wanted to fight for various reasons, they were patriotic, they hoped war time service could legitimate claims to full and equal citizenship in the U.S., offer them an opportunity for advancement, or they did not want to give their enemies the opportunity to claim that they were disloyal or lacking courage. Regardless of their reasons for wanting to enter the volunteer army, many African Americans felt wronged at being overlooked. Once it was clear that they would not be utilized in filling the ranks of the first 125,000 volunteers, movements emerged among African Americans to press their demands for inclusion.

Letters sent to state and federal officials and the editorials published in the black press utilized a number of themes in their quest to convince those with the power to do so to allow them to volunteer for the war. The arguments varied, but the message was often the same, they wanted to be allowed to fight. An important facet of these letters and editorials was the utilization of history to support their arguments. They often evoked history to prove the past sacrifice of black Americans, creating a link between past and present, and as a way to highlight their martial prowess, more or less asserting what once was, could be again and inferring that the nation had yet to tap into an important source of its martial strength. Editors of black newspapers and those who wrote letters to government officials placed the patriotism, heroism, and sacrifice of African Americans in full view of those who read their words. The insertion of past military deeds by African Americans in this effort seemed designed to curry sympathy and favor, and dovetailed into their larger struggle for equality and justice in American society.

That memory worked as a crucial part in the overall effort to be allowed in the volunteer army is clear in the common references to past accomplishments in wars fought by the United States. In a letter to President McKinley, T. McCants Stewart, a “freeborn South Carolinian” and Brooklyn-based lawyer, reminded him of the past services rendered by black Americans in defending and preserving the Union.<sup>36</sup> He wrote, “every American knows what valuable services Afro-Americans rendered in the War of 1812, particularly under General Jackson at New Orleans; and suppressing the Rebellion, they were among the most valiant defenders of the Union.” He utilized this mention of past deeds as a way to prove the usefulness of black soldiers in the impending war with Spain, asserting “this, more than any other extended argument could do, proves conclusively the value, as soldiers, of this part of our great cosmopolitan population.”<sup>37</sup>

The use of history by black Americans to support their campaign to enter into the volunteer service tied into the larger movement of the American public to embrace a common past as part of a growing nationalism in the United States. American patriotism and nationalism was intimately intertwined with the creation of a national narrative. African Americans were being omitted wherever possible from this national history. A

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<sup>36</sup> Shawn Leigh Alexander, *An Army of Lions: The Civil Rights Struggle Before the NAACP* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 9; Charles E. Wynes, “T. McCants Stewart: Peripatetic Black South Carolinian,” *The South Carolina Historical Magazine*, vol. 80, no. 4, (October 1979): 311-317. Wynes indicates that T. McCants Stewart was a vocal advocate for African American rights. He was born to free parents in Charleston, South Carolina in 1852, earned his law degree from the University of South Carolina in 1875, spent two years teaching at Liberia College in Liberia, before he moved to Brooklyn in 1885 and established his law practice. He stayed in Brooklyn until 1898, when he moved his law practice to Hawaii. He was also a close friend of T. Thomas Fortune, who was editor of the *New York Age*.

<sup>37</sup> Correspondence from T. McCants Stewart to President William McKinley, National Archives, Record Group 94, Adjutant General’s Office, File number 85726.

national effort at selective memory took place in the period following the Civil War and continued at least into the early twentieth century as American nationalism grew and tried to establish a common identity. The national narrative was fashioned to reflect the identity that white Americans wanted to hold up and own. This identity was racialized and embraced elements of white chauvinism and Social Darwinism. As a result, American nationalism, as defined predominantly by white Americans, tried to ignore, marginalize, or omit the contribution of those that did not fit their description or understanding of who or what made a good American. In this racialized environment those who fit the dominant American construct were typically white, of western or northern European descent, and Protestant. In addition to placing the fitness for citizenship of southern and eastern European immigrants into question, this completely challenged the African American place in the United States as well. Part of racializing the history and image of the United States was the attempt by white Americans to keep the contributions of those deemed as undesirable from the narrative. This put the black American contribution in danger of being silenced, but African Americans strove to ensure and reassert their place in the American past when and where they could.<sup>38</sup> This constant battle to integrate African Americans into the larger national narrative reflected

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<sup>38</sup> O'Leary, *To Die For*, 132. O'Leary uses Civil War history as an example of how African Americans were being silenced from the national narrative. She argues that around the beginning of the twentieth century historians such as Woodrow Wilson and John Burgess wrote about the Civil War in a way that marginalized the role of slavery as the cause of the war, and all but omitted the service of African American soldiers. They not only omitted black soldiers from the Civil War, but portrayed the South as the victim with regard to the punitive nature of Radical Reconstruction, arguing that it was an unfair punishment. O'Leary wrote, "W.E.B. Du Bois condemned the denigration of history into 'lies agreed upon;'"

a resistance and refusal to be silenced. Pressing their part in the history of the United States was a crucial part in their fight for equality, as the histories offered an uncomfortable reminder to white Americans that their fellow black citizens sacrificed with them through every major conflict that challenged the nation. If past sacrifice and service to the nation defined and strengthened ones claim to their civil rights, then African Americans had earned an equal place in American society. Those in the United States who were not prepared to accept African Americans as equal citizens understood that to omit black contributions to national formation and development was to erode the African American justification to their demands for full and inclusive citizenship.<sup>39</sup> So the use of the black Americans' place in the national history as a weapon to fight discrimination, and to achieve advancement, was not new in 1898, but it was obviously seen as a useful way to bolster claims for opportunity.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> I. A. Newby, *Jim Crow's Defense: Anti-Negro Thought in America 1900-1930* (Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University Press, 1965), 65-67. Newby explains that there were a number of "anti-Negro" historians who argued the inferiority of African Americans, in order to "justify policies of discrimination and exclusiveness." Newby also explains that even when African Americans were omitted from history, it gave a negative impression that they had little to do with important events in history or "the fact that they gave relatively little attention to Negroes enhanced the impression that the race's contribution to Southern history had been entirely negative."

<sup>40</sup> Stephen G. Hall, *A Faithful Account of the Race: African American Historical Writing in Nineteenth Century America* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 151-158. Hall argues that African American historians in the Post-Reconstruction era "assumed responsibility for presenting the race in the most favorable light." They tried to "prove their worth in a society convinced of the race's inferiority;" John Ernest, *Chaotic Justice: Rethinking African American Literary History* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 208-209. Ernest discusses the histories produced by African Americans in the latter half of the nineteenth century, and argued that they celebrated the "life achievement of various people of African origins both to answer the charges of white racial science and to suggest...that African Americans had

The use of the historical record in an effort to be incorporated in the volunteer forces was seen during a public pronouncement made by a delegation of prominent African Americans, just days after the Congress approved McKinley's declaration of war on Spain, led by Representative George White, an African American Congressman from North Carolina, Judson Lyons, Mr. H. P. Cheatham, the Recorder of Deeds of the District of Columbia, and P.B.S. Pinchback, who was a former Governor of Louisiana. This delegation offered a statement imploring President McKinley to help clear the way for the admittance of African Americans into the volunteer army. P.B.S. Pinchback gave the address, and immediately reminded the President that, "In every important martial conflict in which our country has been engaged, beginning with the struggle for independence of the American colonies, colored men have taken their places as soldiers in the ranks with white men, and have fought with a gallantry that will ever be regarded as a climax of courage and daring." Pinchback went on to detail some specific moments of African Americans' participation in the nation's military conflicts, reminding the President that black Americans were there with their white countrymen through the most significant and defining moments of American history. He recounted the fact that a black man, Crispus Attucks, was one of the first to be killed at the Boston Massacre. Like many other black editorialists and historians, Pinchback mentioned the Battle of New Orleans, and important African American contributions during the Civil War. "We called your attention to these facts at this time because we fully appreciate the serious situation that now confronts our government in its relations with a foreign power." Pinchback

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the various skills, professional expertise, and leadership needed to function as an autonomous or politically unified community."

finished by once again asserting the fealty of African Americans. “The colored American is no less loyal and patriotic today than he was when he fought for his country’s independence and for his own freedom.... To support you in your determination to extend liberty on this continent and to maintain the honor and dignity of our country, we tender you the moral and physical support of 9,000,000 colored Americans.”<sup>41</sup> The symbolic offering of all of the nation’s black citizens served as a reminder to the President that a segment of the population stood ready to be utilized during the crisis with Spain, but it also served to express a sense of unity among African Americans that did not fully exist.

Some members of the black press criticized the delegation for being presumptuous in speaking for every black American. In answer to the actions of the delegation that offered an address to President McKinley, W. Calvin Chase offered criticism for the action. He felt that the members of the delegation had no right to speak for all African Americans. By suggesting that all African Americans were in favor of the war, it lessened the impact of the war’s detractors among black Americans. In response Chase wrote, “Who gave him (Pinchback) the right to pledge 9,000,000 Negroes?”<sup>42</sup> In another editorial in the same edition of the paper in which Chase questioned the right of Pinchback and others to offer the services of all African Americans to the President and the nation, he argued, “It is unnecessary for any Negro self-constituted committee, or any other committee, to go to the Executive Mansion and inform the President that 9,000,000

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<sup>41</sup> *The Colored American*, “The Negro Patriotic,” April 30, 1898. It should be noted that the editor of *The Colored American* was also a signatory of this address, which offers an explanation as to why this is given space in this newspaper.

<sup>42</sup> *The Washington Bee*, April 30, 1898.



of Negroes in the United States are loyal to this government and are willing to fight for Cuban independence when the record of past generations and past wars will show that the Negro has always been loyal and true to the flag that has given him his liberty and freedom.” According to Chase, to make a grand symbolic gesture was unnecessary and probably harmful, and could be viewed as a desperate act.<sup>43</sup>

W. Calvin Chase’s reaction was so strong because he resented what looked to be the formation of a “new Negro leadership” group.

Nothing had been more galling to the masses of the Negroes than the action of the combination of the old and new leadership some few weeks ago, when 9,000,000 of Negroes were given to the President, soul and body. The only difference between the old and new leadership is, the former used to give the entire Negro vote to one party, while the latter gives away the entire people physically, without their consent or knowledge. The old leadership always had sense enough to believe that the government had sufficient confidence in its loyalty and patriotism with out having a self-constituted committee to tell it.<sup>44</sup>

### **Double-Consciousness and the Struggle to Join the Army**

The desire to serve the nation at a time of crisis had a profound and powerful draw, and was in many cases bolstered by the hope that state and federal governments, as well as white Americans, would recognize their service and do the right and honorable thing and reward them with a full and inclusive place in the American society. However, the conditions in the United States at the time reflected an environment that was wholly unwilling to embrace African Americans as equal citizens. On the eve of the war with Spain, in 1898, the southern states were engaged in an aggressive campaign to legally

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid, “Loyalty of the Negro,” April 30, 1898.

<sup>44</sup> *The Washington Bee*, “Our New Leadership,” May 7, 1898; Gatewood, *Black Americans and the White Man’s Burden*, 38-39.

segregate their citizenry, separating black and white, shifting from de facto to de jure segregation, taking what was done based on tradition and custom and codifying it into law. The struggle to serve in the U. S. Army in this political and social environment reflected a certain amount of determination and optimism among black Americans, but it also served to exacerbate the level of turmoil within African American communities nationwide. By studying editorials in the black press, one can see a certain stirring up of uncertainty, internal conflict, and perhaps what W.E.B. Du Bois called “double-consciousness.” Many members of the African American press offered mixed messages in their newspapers during this period, as some exhorted their readers to be patriotic in one editorial, but in others denounced instances of race violence that seemed to confront them daily as unprotected by state or federal officials. The divided perspective is evident when some members of the black press tried to whip up patriotic fervor, even as they often reminded their readers that they were not safe in the nation they were being asked to defend.

A notable example of how racial violence facing African Americans entered the discussion of patriotism and the upcoming war was the murder of Postmaster Frazier B. Baker and his infant son. Postmaster Baker was an African American appointed to that position in Lake City, South Carolina by President McKinley over the protests of the local white population. On the night of February 22, 1898, a white mob set fire to his house and shot at members of Baker’s family as they tried to escape the flames. Postmaster Baker and his infant son were killed in the attack, and other members of his

family seriously injured.<sup>45</sup> This attack took place a week after the sinking of the *USS Maine* and became a prominent issue among African Americans, even as they began to debate support for the war with Spain. Though there were other instances of racially motivated violence in the South, during the period immediately prior and during the Spanish-American War, Baker's lynching was unique in that he was a federally appointed official. African Americans constantly expressed disappointment at the lack of effort displayed by state and local officials in prosecuting those involved in the lynching of black Americans and hoped that the federal government, especially President McKinley, would be compelled to override state jurisdiction and act in order to bring those responsible for Baker's death to justice.

One who implored President McKinley to take a personal interest in the Baker case was anti-lynching advocate Ida B. Wells-Barnett. On March 21, 1898 she was escorted to the White House and gave an address, representing the citizens of Chicago, Illinois, asking for action. In the speech, she tied the Baker murder to the lynching epidemic in general, and the troubles in Cuba. She asked the President for three things. First, "for the apprehension and punishment of the lynchers of Postmaster Baker, of Lake City, S.C., second, we ask indemnity for the widow and children, both for the murder of the husband, and father, and for the injustices sustained by themselves; third, we most earnestly desire that national legislation be enacted for the suppression of the national

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<sup>45</sup> Gatewood, *Black Americans and the White Man's Burden*, 32; Nell Irvin Painter, *Standing At Armageddon: The United States 1877-1919* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1987), 164; *The Atlanta Constitution*, "Negro Postmaster Killed," February 23, 1898; *The Savannah Tribune*, "The South Carolina Horror," February 26, 1898; *The Washington Bee*, "Democratic Negroes Please Read, the Constitution Disgraced. Murder, in Cold Blood!!," February 26, 1898.

crime of lynching.” In this address Wells-Barnett decried the fact that lynching was going on unchecked, comparing it to the “Armenian and Cuban” outrages. She questioned the American brand of civilization, contending that “Nowhere in the civilized world, save the United States of America do men, possessing all civil and political power, go out in bands of 50 to 5,000 to hunt down, shoot, hang or burn to death a single individual, unarmed, and absolutely powerless.” Wells-Barnett asserted that “nearly 10,000 American citizens lynched in the past 20 years,” and expressed incredulity at federal officials’ excuse that they could not interfere in state matters. She believed that Baker lynching was different and challenged the government’s ability to use this excuse to justify inaction. “Postmaster Baker’s case was a federal matter, pure and simple, He died at his post of duty in defense of his country’s honor, as truly as did ever a soldier on the field of battle.” Believing the case was a federal matter that should have allowed the President to act, she was troubled that the President did nothing. In an effort to show how the federal government was inconsistent, if not hypocritical, in the way it protected its citizens she ended her address stating, “we refuse to believe that this country, so powerful to defend its citizens abroad, is unable to protect its citizens at home. Italy and China have been indemnified by this government for the lynching of their citizens. We ask that the government do as much for its own.”<sup>46</sup>

Those hoping that President McKinley would act swiftly and decisively to capture and punish Baker’s attackers were quickly disappointed, as he handled the incident in a very passive way. Other than encouraging South Carolina to act, he did little to force the state

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<sup>46</sup> Philip S. Foner & Robert James Branham, ed., *Lift Every Voice: African American Oratory, 1787-1900* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1998), 861-862.

leaders' hands. It seems likely that McKinley was unwilling to pursue justice aggressively for Postmaster Baker and his family at the risk of setting back reconciliation between North and South.<sup>47</sup> For many African Americans, the open contempt for black federal representatives by white southerners, and the lack of federal protection for those African Americans in federal office, seemed like a betrayal by the Republican Party, which the majority of African Americans had supported since the Civil War.

This particular instance of violence pushed many black Americans further toward disillusionment and caused some members of the black press to question whether they should support the coming war with Spain. Editors of the black press quickly made the connection of treatment at home to imperialism abroad, and particularly used the Postmaster Baker murder in their arguments concerning supporting any potential war with Spain. John Mitchell Jr., of the *Richmond Planet*, who remained staunchly against black participation in the war until the federal government guaranteed the rights of black Americans, showed his frustration in the weak government effort to punish those

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<sup>47</sup> Piero Gleijeses, "African Americans and the War Against Spain," *The North Carolina Historical Review*, vol. LXXIII, no. 2, (April 1996), pg. 187. Gleijeses quoted President McKinley as saying with regard to reconciliation, "it will be my constant aim to do nothing, and permit nothing to be done, that will arrest or disturb this growing sentiment of unity and cooperation, this revival of esteem and affiliation...but I shall cheerfully do everything possible to promote and increase it;" The issue of reconciliation between the North and the South was a real concern for African Americans. The Spanish-American War was expected to bring the North and South closer together, and as it did, many African Americans expected they would be more and more marginalized in American society; *The Gazette (Cleveland)*, July 2, 1898. The editor of *The Gazette*, H. C. Smith, expressed this concern, arguing "the closer the North and South get as a result of the present war, the harder it will be for the Afro-American regardless of the part he plays in it, because a closer union between the two sections will be as it has always been, at the expense of the North. The South never gives in a particle for any reason where the Afro-American is concerned."

involved in the Bakers' deaths when he compared a \$1500 reward offered for the "arrest and conviction of each of the lynchers of Postmaster Baker" to the \$50 million appropriated for the preparation of war with Spain. Like Ida B. Wells-Barnett, Mitchell demanded that the federal government appropriate money for Baker's widow and children, and drew examples of foreign governments demanding and securing reparations from those who harmed their citizens. "We can provide fifty millions of dollars for the conduct of an imaginary war with Spain, why can we not appropriate twenty-five thousand dollars for the family of the actually murdered government official at Lake City, S.C.." Mitchell Jr., offered as an example the way Germany, another industrially advanced nation like the United States, handled slights to its citizens abroad. He argued that, "for the murder of a few itinerant missionaries in China, the execution of the alleged murderers was demanded and complied with and the port occupied by the German forces. For the thirty days' imprisonment of a half-breed, Haiti was forced to pay thousands of dollars in gold." Mitchell's examples were used to show the Americans' shortcomings in protecting all of its citizens. Mitchell pointed out that, "for the butchery of a colored citizen of this republic and an officer of the national government, no indemnity had been demanded by the national government of South Carolina."<sup>48</sup> John Mitchell Jr., clearly felt that American priorities were askew and inconsistent.

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<sup>48</sup> *The Richmond Planet*, "The Murder of the Postmaster," March 12, 1898. John Mitchell, Jr., referred to the appropriation of fifty million dollars for the conduct an "imaginary war," because war had not been declared at the time of this editorial. The fifty million dollars was meant to prepare and outfit the United States army and navy for the eventuality of war.

In an editorial in *The Washington Bee*, W. Calvin Chase also tied Baker's murder to the impending war with Spain. He expressed anger that white southerners could so openly challenge federal authority, in the blatant killing of a federal official, without fear of punishment. "Again while the country is all afire over the insults which Spain is offering to this country, an authorized officer of the United States is shot down in cold blood which in the performance of his official duty by citizens whose only reason for murder was the color of the agent's face." Chase tied the incident to the outpouring of patriotism in the days directly after the sinking of the *USS Maine*, asserting that true patriotism should "manifest itself in a vigorous measure looking toward the detection and condign punishment of the blood-thirsty scoundrels who perpetrated the crime." Chase inferred that true patriots embraced the Constitution, and wanted order, stability, and protection for all of its citizens as outlined by the nation's most seminal document. Chase tied reciprocity, justice, and patriotism together, declaring that "the uncertainty of life and property under which the colored people of the South are now suffering can do but very little in stimulating patriotism in case of war."<sup>49</sup>

The connection of Postmaster Baker's murder to the destruction of the *Maine*, the impending crisis with Spain, and America's dealings abroad were common themes used to tie injustice at home to American foreign policy. In *The Savannah Tribune*, Solomon Johnson stressed that "next to the *Maine* horror of last week comes the outrageous conduct of barbarous citizens of South Carolina." Johnson not only likened the violence against Postmaster Baker to the explosion of the *Maine*, he actually compared the actions

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<sup>49</sup> *The Washington Bee*, "The South's Pretended Friendship," February 26, 1898.

of American citizens in South Carolina to that of the Spanish, who stood accused of perpetrating the attack. At the time of this editorial, the Spanish were being vilified throughout the United States, because they were suspected of sinking of the U.S. battleship in Havana harbor, and he argued that those who were responsible for Baker's death were no better than the Spaniards who murdered unsuspecting American sailors.<sup>50</sup>

Based on the response of *The Richmond Planet*, *The Washington Bee*, and *The Savannah Tribune*, one might sense that African American patriotism would have cooled toward serving in the conflict with Spain. However, the condemnatory response of African Americans toward Postmaster Baker's death only serves to reveal how deeply divisive the question of patriotism at the time was among black Americans. As the Postmaster in Lake City, South Carolina, Baker should have been able to enjoy all of the benefits, authority, honors, and respect that the position commanded. Instead, there was a total disregard for this federal authority by the white southerners who threatened and later killed him. This act of violence sparked reaction from the black press, and although the editorials in many of these newspapers were condemnatory, their messages concerning supporting military action against Spain were mixed and somewhat inconsistent. The main concern of editors of the black press was the desire for equality and justice in the United States, and as such they approached the issues in various ways. For all of the anger felt over the continuing racial violence, many black newspapers stopped short at discouraging overt displays of patriotism, showing some uncertainty in what direction to take on the eve of the Spanish-American War. Many of the African American

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<sup>50</sup> *The Savannah Tribune*, "The South Carolina Horror," February 26, 1898.



newspapers that were loudest in its condemnation of the Baker lynching felt the pull of patriotism and service to country and also most staunchly encouraged their readers to defend the nation's honor, often in editorials that ran in the same edition.

For example, in the months leading up to the outbreak of hostilities with Spain, Solomon Johnson offered editorials in the *Savannah Tribune* supporting African American patriotism and condemning the continued racial violence and discrimination. In one editorial Johnson discussed the reaction of African Americans in Chicago toward the murder of Postmaster Baker. "Thousands of colored citizens of Chicago met the other night and denounced the horrible crime committed in South Carolina last week." In this article Johnson went on to encourage African Americans throughout the nation to "let their feelings be known to the civilized world." In another editorial, in the same edition and on the same page, Johnson encouraged military service.

Within the last two months great interest has been awakened in military circles. The young men seem to have become enthused with the spirit of patriotism and the fostering of companies....There is no reason why they should not take an interest in military affairs. They have everything to gain thereby, and can do themselves much good by becoming faithful and efficient soldiers. We commend those who have enlisted and admonish the large number of others to do likewise.<sup>51</sup>

W. Calvin Chase in the *Washington Bee* showed a certain amount of ambivalence with regard to patriotism. Chase, like many other black editors who expressed strong indignation at the treatment of African Americans throughout the United States, could not completely ignore the pull of patriotism. In the same edition where Chase questioned the impact of Postmaster Baker's murder on African American patriotism, the next article was just as jingoistic and patriotic as any found in the mainstream white press. He wrote:

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<sup>51</sup> *The Savannah Tribune*, March 5, 1898.

Indications point to treachery of the most malignant type in the case of the destruction of the *Maine*. In case Spanish duplicity has gone so far as to blow up the *Maine*, there is nothing to do but to declare war, whip the rascals and make Spain pay for all of the trouble she has caused. Spanish threats can do nothing to bluff this country and it matters but little what speculators may do or say, there will be a hot time, if Spain did it. The thousands of patriotic Americans of Caucasian blood who are willing to go to war will be supplemented by thousands of colored men who will vie with them in patriotism and bravery on the field of battle. If he is given but a fair show, the colored volunteer will put up as bold and solid a front, work up to the approved tactics and capture as many flags, positions, and men as a given number of his white compatriots will dare do. Let President McKinley and Congress say the word and recruiting will be a land-office business.<sup>52</sup>

This patriotic declaration is made all the more significant when one considers that Chase often wrote editorials dissuading African Americans from joining the fight against Spain in *The Washington Bee*.

The reaction of African Americans toward injustice and race violence can be seen as part of a long struggle to forge their place in American society. As one reads through the editions of African American weeklies, a growing sense of frustration and disillusionment is clearly visible, however, political loyalties and the Spanish-American War complicated what should have been clear and unabated abhorrence of the way they were treated. The *Savannah Tribune* and *The Washington Bee*'s reaction to the Postmaster Baker murder and the on-going clamor for war showed a certain amount of uncertainty in what tone needed to be set in the press. To write editorials that encouraged their readership to join the war and fight for a nation that did not protect their rights, while denouncing racially motivated violence and discrimination, was indicative of uncertainty and reveals the complexity of the issues before them. They wanted and

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<sup>52</sup> *The Washington Bee*, "Spanish Treachery," February 26, 1898.

demanded fair treatment, but were not willing to miss out on serving in the war for a nation that showed little interest in their plight, because military participation offered a glimmer of hope that advancements might be earned through sacrifice.

The disillusionment felt by many African Americans was tempered and muted as the upwelling of patriotism, nationalism, and loyalty was catalyzed by the impending war. Though aghast at the continued wave of violence in the South, African Americans showed an optimism that change for the better could be affected. The question is whether many leaned toward what W.E.B. Du Bois would call “pretense,” when the post-bellum history of black Americans, from the end of the Civil War to 1898, revealed an increasing disregard for their place in American society by white Americans. The word “pretense” may be too harsh a description of what was going on, but there is no doubt that there was expectation that the Spanish-American War, the first major crisis since the Civil War, would offer African Americans a chance to assume their equal place in the United States. Since the entire nation was captivated by the coming war, African Americans had an opportunity to place their service in full view. The benefits of the Civil War still loomed in the minds of black Americans, since service in that war resulted not only in their emancipation, but offered political and economic advancements. The memory of what the Civil War brought African Americans bolstered optimism and positively reinforced the belief that service in the nation’s wars meant an opportunity for progress. The reason some African Americans may have bordered on “pretense” is that this position clouded the reality of race relations in the United States at the dawning of the twentieth century, where southern society was becoming more and more intolerable for African Americans,

even as they proclaimed their loyalty and patriotism after the destruction of the *Maine*. In fact, it would take the continued assault on African Americans' rights in the South, during and immediately after the war with Spain, to make many African Americans finally admit that sweeping change was not likely to be granted, even after they had fought in Cuba and the Philippines.

### **Acceptance into the Volunteer Army**

The anger among African Americans over their exclusion from the volunteer army gained the attention of politicians, including President McKinley. McKinley felt pressure to accommodate black Americans, because they still represented an important voting block in the South for the Republican Party. This also took place on a state level as some governors and various politicians felt the pressure to mollify their African American electorate, because they represented significant political allies. An example of this occurred in North Carolina, where the Republican governor Daniel L. Russell understood that the support of black voters played a crucial role in his winning the governorship. As a result, he was active in advocating a place for the black citizens of North Carolina in the filling of the state's volunteer quota. Even going so far as to offer a black regiment, with a complete compliment of black officers, for federal service in the war against Spain. Like Governor Russell, others, such as Kansas Populist Governor John Leedy and Illinois

Governor John R. Tanner, understood the political necessity of advocating for the acceptance of African Americans into the volunteer force.<sup>53</sup>

African Americans started to gain admittance to the volunteer forces in several ways. The first was through the federal bill, S.R. 4468, passed on May 10, 1898, which approved the formation of volunteer “immune” regiments. This act ordered the enlistment of 10,000 volunteers for the creation of ten regiments comprised of people who were thought to have resistance to “diseases incident to tropic climates.” Part of the thinking at the time was that African Americans who resided in certain southern climes were “immune” to malaria and yellow fever. Of these ten regiments, four would be comprised of black soldiers.<sup>54</sup>

The other opportunity for black Americans to enter the volunteer army came when President McKinley authorized the call up of an additional 75,000 men into the army on May 26, 1898. This prompted E. E. Cooper of the *Colored American* to publicly express hope that “some of the colored regiments are covered in the call.”<sup>55</sup> During this second call for volunteers President McKinley exerted his influence on some state governors to include African Americans. He “expressed particular anxiety to give colored men an

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<sup>53</sup> Gatewood, *Black Americans and the White Man’s Burden*, 77-80; Gleijeses, “African Americans and the War Against Spain,” 187 & 192; Christopher C. Lovett, “To Serve Faithfully: The Twenty-Third Kansas Volunteer Infantry and the Spanish-American War,” *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains*, vol. 21, no. 4, (Winter 1998-1999), 259.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid, 87-90; Also see House of Representatives Bill, H.R. 10765, “To provide for the organization of a division of colored immune volunteers, Record Group 94, Adjutant General’s Office, File number 91579; Senate Bill S. 4797, “To provide for a volunteer division of colored troops in the United States Army specially adapted to tropical climates, National Archives, Record Group 94, Adjutant General’s Office, File number 92404.

<sup>55</sup> *The Colored American*, May 28, 1898.

opportunity to enter service.”<sup>56</sup> As a result of the clamor for opportunity, the political considerations of officeholders in some states, and the increasing political pressure from the President during the second call for volunteers, seven states created African American volunteer regiments. In many ways this was a victory for black Americans and the determination of many who expressed their anger and frustration at being ignored during the first call up. They showed that they had enough political clout to exact some change to a discriminatory policy. By gaining their place among the 75,000 men of the second call for volunteers, African Americans received the opportunity to serve that many desired, but it did not end their dissatisfaction at the daily discrimination they faced at home. The victory of being allowed to enter the volunteer forces may have temporarily forestalled the disillusionment of many who tried to cling to the hope that service and sacrifice could force meaningful change. Unfortunately, the realities of continued abuse, and the resistance against African American progress at every step would return many to the path of cynicism and disappointment.

Once black Americans earned their place in the volunteer army, they immediately ran headlong into the racism and discrimination prevalent within the military. It was not enough to be allowed to join the army, but African Americans wanted to be able to determine the condition of their service. Part of this struggle to define how they served was battle over allowing black officers to command black regiments. The United States Army and state militia units had a custom of placing black soldiers under white officers, and were reluctant or unwilling to allow black officers in their regiments. African

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<sup>56</sup> Gatewood, *Black Americans and the White Man's Burden*, 92.

Americans stood ready to challenge this, and would campaign hard for this consideration, taking the struggle for advancement and equal opportunity further.

## **Chapter Two: Defining the Way They Served, The Campaign to Become Officers**

On March 7, 1898 George White, an African American Congressman from North Carolina, addressed the House of Representatives asking for an amendment to a bill designed to add additional regiments of artillery to the United States Army. He wanted Congress to designate one of those proposed artillery regiments to be manned by African Americans. At the time of this address there existed two African American cavalry regiments (the Ninth and Tenth Cavalry) and two African American infantry units (The Twenty-Fourth and Twenty-Fifth Infantries) in the regular army, however, there were no allowances for black Americans to serve in other capacities outside of working as civilian mule-skinner/drivers contracted by the army to work for the quartermaster corps. The way black Americans served was dictated by congressional legislation and reinforced by Army custom and tradition. Congressman White highlighted the fact that there were specific provisions allowing for African Americans to serve in the infantry and cavalry, but that there were “no corresponding provisions regarding any regiment or battery of artillery. In the absence of any specific provision or statute, the uniform custom of the army has been to bar colored men from enlisting in the artillery.” He regretted that this was the case and offered to propose an amendment that would change these circumstances.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> As quoted in *The Colored American*, March 19, 1898.



Congressman White questioned the necessity of barring African Americans from any part of the army, explaining that they were citizens, and as citizens they should be given the same opportunities as any other Americans. He argued:

It is a sad commentary that an amendment such as the one I propose be necessary to enforce justice to be done to my people in one of the departments of our great government. The last amendments to the constitution guarantee us all the rights of American citizenship, and it is reasonable to suppose that those rights would be afforded to us without specific statement designating that such should be the case.

His speech went on to highlight the history of service of African American citizens to the United States, arguing that they were strong and loyal patriots, and detailing the challenges that they faced in American society due to the constant threat of race violence, injustice, and discrimination. He stated:

We regret to say that the nation has not at all times given us the protection to which our loyalty has entitled us. This is painfully evidenced by the almost daily outrages chronicled showing lynchings, murder, assassinations, and even cremations of our people all over the southland; and when we protest against this inhuman conduct toward us, we are quietly told that our redress is relegated to the several states and their governments and that the nation has no power to interfere in the premises. Still if some half-breed foreigner claiming allegiance to our government is insulted by a foreign country, redress to his is at once demanded and in most cases large indemnities are given. These words may sound harsh, but they are never the less true, and I very much regret that there is excuse for making these declarations.

Congressman White stressed that “regardless of the faults of this grand old Union of ours, we love her still, and if the nation should find it necessary to resort to arms and our present strained relations with Spain should develop into a war, I pledge you that the black phalanx is ready to be mustered in, one-half million strong.”

He ended his speech to Congress imploring the members to give African Americans a fair chance, stating:

Mr. Speaker, my plea is not for special privileges for my people, but what we want and have a right to expect is a man's chance, a man's protection, in fact all of the privileges of an American citizen. We will be content with nothing less.

We appeal to American patriots to remove all statutory barriers new against us. You have two hundred and fifty years the start of us; and if you are honest, if you are fair, if you are not cowards, and of course you are not, you certainly will be willing to accord us at this late day all the rights of American citizenship enjoyed by you. An even chance in the race of life is all that we ask, and if we cannot reach the goal, let the devil take the hindmost.<sup>2</sup>

This speech represents an impassioned plea for opportunity and a demand for justice, reminding his peers in Congress of the trespasses perpetrated against his race.

A little more than a month after George White's address in Congress the following editorial appeared in *The Richmond Planet* on April 23, 1898, published by the paper's editor John Mitchell, Jr.. He wrote:

President [William] McKinley has called upon Virginia to furnish her quota of troops, which is estimated to be three regiments. An interesting question has been raised, owing to the presence in the state of two colored battalions, the first commanded by Major J. B. Johnson of Petersburg, VA.

An effort is being made to muster in the men without the field and staff officers. The idea is to deprive them of the honors to which they are justly entitled. Major J. B. Johnson out-ranks his white fellow officers in point of service.

It is now proposed to place in charge of these troops white officers and to form a regiment with a white colonel.

The cry should be: "no officers, no fight!" It is the duty of the national government and especially of the state military officials to form a regiment in this state and promote Major J.B. Johnson to the position of colonel.

He is thoroughly competent and his military abilities are conceded by all who are in the least qualified to judge.

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 1; Benjamin R. Justesen, *George Henry White: An Even Chance in the Race of Life*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2001), 223-224. Justesen mentions that for parliamentary reasons "White was unable to propose the specific amendment that occasioned this speech."

Colored men must contend for their rights now, or they will lose them hereafter.<sup>3</sup>

With President William McKinley's first call for volunteers, African Americans hoped that they would get a chance to serve the nation, and black editors like John Mitchell Jr. raised the question of whether black officers would be allowed to lead the African American regiments called into active duty. However, this debate temporarily stalled when it became clear that most black militia were being omitted during this first call throughout the states. However, the question regained momentum as President McKinley issued his second call for volunteers, and it became clear that some state governors were more willing to utilize the services of African Americans from their states. Initially, Mitchell was specifically concerned with the status of the black officers who led Virginia's black militia companies that were on the verge of being transferred from state to federal service in order to fulfill Virginia's quota during this second call. John Mitchell Jr. worried that the African American officers who already commanded these militia units would be replaced with white ones before they were accepted into federal service. Mitchell, who was for the most part against African Americans serving in the war against Spain until the federal government guaranteed the protection of their rights, understood that many black Americans, in his own state of Virginia as well as elsewhere

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<sup>3</sup> *The Richmond Planet*, "The Promotion of Colored Officers," April 23, 1898.

in the United States, were likely to join the army regardless of his objections. As a result, he took an interest in seeing that they were treated fairly.<sup>4</sup>

The issue of allowing black officers to lead black regiments became an important point of debate for John Mitchell Jr., as he set a course to resist discriminatory policies in the Army and started what became his “no officer, no fight” campaign. This was an issue that easily fit into the larger debate for civil rights, and therefore was a battle worth fighting. This campaign was picked up and echoed by many other African American newspapers throughout the nation, becoming a larger movement for change, opportunity, and equality that transcended John Mitchell Jr., or his hometown of Richmond, Virginia, and became a national movement for African American rights.

At first glance, Congressman White’s speech and John Mitchell Jr.’s editorial, other than asking for fair treatment, do not seem related. However, they were part of an emerging movement that carried the struggle for civil rights and equality into the realm of military service. By May 1898 African Americans successfully forced state and federal officials to allow them to enter the U.S. Army as the United States inched closer to war with Spain. Although seen as an important step forward, African Americans were not contented with just their access to the volunteer army. The struggle immediately transitioned from the fight to be allowed to fight, to a demand to be allowed to determine

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<sup>4</sup> Ann Field Alexander, *Race Man: The Rise and Fall of the “Fighting Editor,” John Mitchell Jr.*, (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2002), 89-92. Alexander revealed that John Mitchell Jr. believed that “if the federal government failed to protect his right to vote and hold office, then why should he fight to protect the federal government?” Even though Mitchell did not believe that the war would benefit African Americans, Alexander argued that “once it became apparent that black soldiers were determined to enlist, Mitchell shifted his focus to the question of black officers,” Gatewood, *Black Americans and the White Man’s Burden*, 82.

the conditions under which they served. Congressman White wanted black Americans to be allowed to serve in the Army in an expanded capacity that went beyond infantrymen or cavalymen, pushing for opportunities in other branches of the service that were traditionally closed to them. John Mitchell Jr., among others, demanded that African Americans be given the opportunity to serve not just as enlisted men, but as officers as well. Both Congressman George White and John Mitchell Jr. challenged and directly resisted the status quo, refused to quietly accommodate a system that constrained African Americans, and were determined to win an equal chance for them in the United States.

As the war with Spain inched closer, African Americans pushed for opportunity. The campaign to be allowed to serve as officers grew stronger, with increasing efforts by black editors, and African American citizens, some prominent and some not, to force the hand of state and federal governments. In doing so they confronted preconceived notions that African Americans were incapable of leading troops in battle, demanded equality of service in the U.S. Army, and insisted upon positions in the military that reflected their advancement and growing status in American society. They wanted fair treatment and the same opportunities that were afforded every American citizen, but they faced an institutionalized racism in the Army and the larger American society which dictated the limited parameters in which black Americans could serve.

### **The Post Civil War Army: 1866-1898**

In order to appreciate the difficulties African Americans faced, and to gauge their level of advancement, it is important to understand how black Americans served in the

U.S. military in the years between the Civil War and the Spanish-American War. African Americans who challenged the status quo with regard to officers, on the eve of the Spanish-American War, faced an uphill battle as they hammered away at the institutionalized racism entrenched in American society. They also confronted a military system that held firm to its traditions, resisted change, and had designated how African Americans would serve. These conditions were outlined and supported by the Congressional “Armed Forces Bill” that had created the four existing African American regiments. After the Civil War the United States needed to reduce the size and change the structure of the Army. After four long years of conflict with the forces of the Confederacy, the United States military focused on two main missions. One was to garrison military posts in the South in order to maintain order and make certain that southerners abided by the terms of Reconstruction. The second mission was patrolling the western frontier and controlling the Native American peoples there. As a result, the army’s numbers were cut drastically. In 1866 Congress passed an army reorganization bill, that included provisions outlining the service of African Americans in the Army. The bill initially created two African American cavalry regiments and four African American Infantry regiments.<sup>5</sup>

The Army Reorganization Act of 1866 additionally proposed the creation of a black artillery unit, but this was eventually stricken from the legislation after much discussion among the army generals and the Senators offering the bill. This part of the bill was

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<sup>5</sup> Morris J. MacGregor & Bernard C. Naulty, ed., *Blacks in the United States Armed Forces: Basic Documents, Vol. III: Freedom and Jim Crow, 1865-1917* (Wilmington, Delaware: Scholarly Resources Inc., 1977), 24; Jack D. Foner, *Blacks and the Military in American History: A New Perspective*, (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1974), 52.

taken out was due to questions raised concerning the intelligence and efficiency of black soldiers. Historian Marvin Fletcher mentioned in *The Black Soldier and Officer in the United States Army, 1891-1917* that General Ulysses S. Grant, the Commanding General of the United States Army, was the one who ultimately deleted the section, because “Grant and most of the others in the military establishment assumed that Blacks were not intelligent enough for this highly technical duty.”<sup>6</sup> These questions of intelligence coincided with the growing racial hostility in the United States and crippled African Americans in their demands for advancement in the Army. Black Americans were also barred from the U.S. Army Signal Corps, Engineer Corps, Ordnance Corps, and the Medical Corps. They were mainly relegated to the dangerous and arduous duties of rifleman or cavalry trooper, serving in the field.<sup>7</sup>

Prior to the passage of this bill, the idea of including black soldiers in the Army was hotly debated. For instance, Senator Willard Saulsbury of Delaware opposed any amendment to the bill that allowed for black soldiers in the regular U.S. Army. He stressed that it was not necessary to turn to black Americans to fill the ranks, because the size of the Army would be reduced significantly and he believed that it would be easy to recruit enough white men to meet manpower requirements. Senator Saulsbury also objected to the inclusion of black soldiers on the grounds that this may upset white citizens in the South. He asked his fellow Senators “if the object of the Congress is and certainly it should be, to restore the kind feelings and friendly relations between the

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<sup>6</sup> Marvin Fletcher, *The Black Soldier and Officer in the United States Army 1891-1917* (Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 1974), 20.

<sup>7</sup> Foner, *Blacks and the Military in American History*, 62.

different sections of the country, they should do nothing which in itself is calculated to aggravate feelings already excited or to arouse feelings which may now be dormant.”

Senator Saulsbury explained that foisting African American soldiers upon the South would create anger and resentment. He argued:

What would be the affect if you were to send Negro regiments into the community in which I live to brandish their swords and exhibit their pistols and their guns? Their very presence would be a stench in the nostrils of the people from whom I come. A Negro soldier riding up and down the streets and through your country, dressed in a little brief authority, to insult white men! I have no objection to soldiers of the regular Army being stationed in any community in which I live. In former years, when I was from home, in other states, I have been in the neighborhood of garrisons, and I have seen the soldiers generally well behaved; but if you were to send and quarter among white people a regiment of Negro soldiers, to march into their villages and to deport themselves as it is most likely they would, what would be the consequence? You must expect collisions.<sup>8</sup>

Senator Saulsbury’s address before the Senate reflected a concern that there would be conflict between white Americans and black soldiers, as whites resented their presence. It also assumed an attitude that black soldiers were not as well behaved or as disciplined as white soldiers.

The Army’s reorganization bill was finally passed in 1866 over the objections of Congressmen and Senators like Saulsbury, behind the strength of radical Republicans. In 1869 the number of African American regiments were reduced, maintaining the two black Cavalry units, but consolidating the four black infantry units into two regiments. What was the Thirty-Eighth and Forty-First Infantry became the Twenty-Fourth Infantry

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 20



and what was the Thirty-Ninth and Fortieth Infantry became the Twenty-Fifth Infantry.<sup>9</sup> The consolidation of four infantry regiments into two represented the scope of African Americans serving in the Army for approximately the next thirty years.

One area where African Americans were limited in their Army service was in the officer ranks. African Americans were not completely barred from the officer ranks, as some gained appointments to West Point, and three black cadets actually persevered and graduated from the military academy, earning their commissions as second lieutenants during the period between 1866 and 1898. Gaining entry into the United States Military Academy required an appointment from a Congressional representative, and once that was achieved, candidates for West Point had to pass grueling entrance examinations. Between the years 1871 and 1889 as many as twenty-three African Americans were appointed to West Point, and of those twelve passed their examinations and entered the military academy, and of those only three graduated. Even though there were some Congressmen and Senators willing to appoint African Americans to West Point, the black cadets who managed to pass the entrance exams, and entered into studies there, found life difficult and lonely.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Marvin Fletcher, *The Black Soldiers and Officer In the United States Army 1891-1917* (Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 1974), 21; Morris MacGregor and Bernard C. Nalty, ed. *Blacks in the United States Armed Forces Basic Documents*, vol. III, pg.28; Jack D. Foner, *Blacks and the Military in American History*, pp. 52-53.

<sup>10</sup> Fletcher, *The Black Soldiers and Officer*, 72; Foner, *Blacks and the Military in American History*, 64. Marvin Fletcher claims Twenty-Three African Americans gained appointments to the United States Military Academy, and Foner holds that number to be Twenty-Two, one less than Fletcher.

The white cadets typically ostracized the Black cadets at West Point. The Army took the position that Congress could require it to open the doors of the military academy to African Americans, but it could not force whites to socialize with blacks there. The official findings in the Johnson C. Whittaker case, where an African American cadet was found in his room bound and beaten in April of 1880, offers insight into the conditions for African Americans at West Point. The Army investigated the incident and accused cadet Johnson C. Whittaker of fabricating the event, a board of inquiry was held, and he was found guilty, and expelled from West Point. The findings, written by General John M. Scholfield, the commanding officer of the military academy at the time, took the position that military discipline could not prevent prejudice. He argued that even though the military had been steadfast in upholding and protecting the rights of its black cadets, “Military discipline is not an effective means of promoting social intercourse or overcoming social prejudice. On the contrary, the enforced association of the white cadets with their colored companions, to which they have never been accustomed before they came from home, appears to have destroyed any disposition which before existed to indulge in such association.” This drew a line at where the Army was willing to regulate race relations within its ranks. Officially the Army guaranteed the rights of its black cadets, but would not, at the time dictate how the white and black cadets interacted privately. Scholfield questioned the quality of some of the African Americans who attended West Point, claiming that the prejudice exhibited by whites at the military academy was “due in part to the bad personal character of some of the young colored men sent to West Point, and in part to the natural reaction against an attempt to govern

social intercourse by military regulations.” He did not feel that West Point was the proper laboratory to experiment in comingling black and white Americans, and pointed out that the prejudice at West Point should not come as a surprise to the nation since “West Point will, at the most, only be able to follow the example of the country at large....”<sup>11</sup> This all but officially condoned prejudice and discrimination in the corps of cadets and also bespoke the attitudes within the active duty officer corps. The ostracism faced by black cadets was likely designed to increase the difficulty of successfully completing their studies at West Point. If the white cadets could do nothing to bar African Americans from entering the academy, they could remove the camaraderie and support structure that might have made it easier to complete the course of study there. The corps of cadets strictly enforced this ostracism, threatening to shun any white cadet who attempted to befriend African Americans enrolled there.<sup>12</sup> In this way a strict racial hierarchy was maintained that similarly reflected American society where a system of legal segregation and social norms separated black and white.

General Scholfield found that the U.S. Military Academy was doing a disservice to African Americans in allowing them to enter West Point so soon after emancipation. He questioned their ability to compete and felt that some were rushing their advancement and pushing them forward too aggressively. He believed that African American candidates who sought entrance to the academy were ill prepared for the rigors of life at

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<sup>11</sup> MacGregor and Nalty, ed. *Blacks in the United States Armed Forces*, vol. III, 140.

<sup>12</sup> Fletcher, *The Black Soldier and Officer*, 73. Fletcher quotes a white cadet, Charles Crane, as saying that “no one openly associated” with Henry O. Flipper, the first black graduate of West Point, because “anyone seen doing so would have been ‘cut’ by the Corps.”

West Point. He argued that “to send to West Point for a four year’s competition a young man who was born in slavery is to assume that half a generation has been sufficient to raise a colored man to the social, moral, and intellectual level which the average white man has reached in several hundred years. As well might the common farm-horse be entered in a four-mile race against the best blood inherited from the long line of English racers.”<sup>13</sup> This sort of argument was pervasive among white Americans when it came to the debate over whether to include African Americans in the officer ranks. General Scholfield, in his argument attacked the intellect of black Americans, but conceded that given enough time they would be likely to advance, and eventually become fit for duty as officers, however, there were many who questioned whether African Americans would ever be able to develop their intellect enough to be efficient officers, but this was just racist views. This sort of thinking confronted African Americans throughout the post reconstruction era.

Much of the same prejudice and ostracism that African Americans faced at West Point followed them into the regular Army. Though Henry Ossian Flipper, John Alexander, and Charles Young served in front line units, some of the white officers in these commands objected to their presence. Henry O. Flipper, the first African American graduate of West Point, joined the Tenth Cavalry, which was one of the two African American cavalry regiments in the regular Army. Flipper mentioned that some of the coldness exhibited by his West Point classmates eased once free of the confines of the United States Military Academy, but he still came face to face with many white officers

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, 141.

who resented his presence. His tenure in the Army was relatively brief, serving from 1878 to 1882, and came to a dubious end. In 1881 Henry O. Flipper, while serving as the Post Quartermaster, came up almost \$3800 short in his official quartermaster accounts. He was brought up on charges of embezzlement of federal funds and conduct unbecoming an officer. The court martial cleared him of the embezzlement charges, but found him guilty of conduct unbecoming an officers and a gentleman, because the trial showed that he made false statements during the initial Army investigation and was negligent in handling government funds. As a result he was dismissed from the Army on June 30, 1882. Flipper asserted his innocence of all the charges, could not explain what happened to the missing funds, and claimed that his commanding officer, Colonel William R. Shafter, and a couple of other officers were setting “traps” for him in order to force him out of the Army. This was a frustrating end to his career and showed that African American officers had a small margin of error because there were many who resented their place in the officer ranks enough to use any mistakes against them.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Theodore D. Harris, ed., *Black Frontiersman, The Memoirs of Henry O. Flipper: First Black Graduate of West Point* (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1997), 4-6, 37, 78-79; “The Five-Year Legal Battle to Win a Presidential Pardon For West Point’s First Black Graduate,” *The Journal of Blacks In Higher Education*, no. 24 (Summer 1999), 35. The Flipper saga, regarding this case, did not end with his dismissal. This article reveals the later fight to exonerate Flipper. Henry O. Flipper died in 1940 and his family petitioned the Army to review his case in 1976, claiming that the charges were “racially motivated.” The review board concurred and “changed his discharge to honorable.” He was later given a burial service “with full military honors.” However, the Army review board did not believe it had the authority to overturn the original court martial decision. Two lawyers, Darryl W. Jackson and Jeffrey H. Smith, took up the struggle on behalf of Flipper, and petitioned for a Presidential pardon. President Clinton signed the pardon in 1999 exonerating him from the charges.

The prejudice within the Army's officer corps is also evident when looking at the early career of Charles Young. He graduated from West Point in 1889 and was initially ordered to the Tenth Cavalry, but his orders to that command were rescinded and he was placed in the Twenty-Fifth Infantry. Lieutenant Young protested this through official channels, arguing that he had already purchased his cavalry uniforms and equipment; to be forced to buy the required uniforms and gear for infantry duties would place an unfair financial burden on him. The Army eventually agreed and reassigned him to the Ninth Cavalry, however, these orders were placed in doubt when the commanding officer of the Ninth protested Young's assignment there, because they already had a black officer, John Alexander. Major Guy Henry, the acting commanding officer of the Ninth Cavalry, was concerned that a second African American officer placed into his command might dissuade white officers from taking positions there, which in turn may mean that the quality of white officers to the Ninth Cavalry would suffer as more qualified officers chose to go elsewhere. The Army considered Major Henry's objections, but eventually overruled him, and thus sent Charles Young to that command. He was with the Ninth Cavalry until he was eventually detached and sent to all-black Wilberforce University, where he performed the duties as the Professor of Military Science. Sending him to Wilberforce was a convenient way to address the objections to a black officer serving in the ranks of the Army. He stayed at Wilberforce University from 1894 until the Spanish-American War, began in 1898. On the eve of the Spanish-American War Charles Young

was the only African American officer left in the Army, as Henry Flipper was dismissed from service in 1882 and John Alexander died of natural causes well before the war.<sup>15</sup>

### **“No Officer, No Fight”: the Struggle to Become Officers**

Although the tradition of the regular Army was one where white officers historically commanded black troops, with the exception of the three aforementioned black West Point graduates, some states had a history of African American militia units led by black officers. Black Union Army veterans formed many of these companies after the Civil War. Historian Andrew Amron indicates that many black militia units were formed and available for service in 1898. He explains that Alabama had a black militia battalion named the First Alabama Battalion, which was “comprised of two companies of fifty to seventy men.” He also reveals that Georgia, Virginia, and Washington, D.C. had African American militiamen on their muster rolls just prior to the war with Spain. Amron points out that prior to 1898 many of these black militia units placed themselves in the public eye by participating in parades, town fairs, and mock battles, which allowed African Americans to “bear witness” to the martial prowess of black soldiers.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Brian G. Shellum, *Black Cadet in a White Bastion: Charles Young at West Point* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006), 128-130; Gatewood, *Black Americans and the White Man’s Burden*, 43; Fletcher, *The Black Soldier and Officer*, 91.

<sup>16</sup> Andrew D. Amron, “Reinforcing Manliness: Black State Militias, The Spanish-American War, and the Image of the African American Soldiers, 1891-1900,” *The Journal of African American History*, vol. 97, no. 4, (Fall 2012), 404-408; Roger D. Cunningham, “‘They Are as Proud of Their Uniform as Any Who Serve Virginia.’ African American Participation in the Virginia Volunteers, 1872-1899,” *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, vol. 110, no. 3 (2002), 303. Cunningham indicated that in 1898 Virginia had two battalions of African American militiamen, comprised of a total of eight companies totaling 520 men.

Historian Willard B. Gatewood, Jr. added that in 1898 North Carolina had a single company of black militiamen, the Charlotte Light Infantry, “Georgia had three battalions and six unattached companies,” and South Carolina had a contingent of African American militia units. He mentioned that some northern and midwestern states carried black militia companies on their muster rolls as well. Black militiamen composed Company “L,” which was attached to the mostly white Sixth Massachusetts Infantry, Ohio had a battalion of black soldiers, Indiana had two African American companies, and Illinois had a black battalion. The black officers of some southern state militias were treated as inferiors due to their race. For example, black officers of the Georgia militia were “always junior to the white officer regardless of their relative rank.”<sup>17</sup> Another example was witnessed within the Virginia militia in 1897 when the “First and Second Battalions [black] joined Virginia’s militia delegation at the ceremony dedicating Grant’s tomb in New York City.” The highest-ranking officer of the Virginia contingent was Major William Henry Johnson, an African American who was twelve years senior to Major Sol Cutchins, a white officer who commanded the Richmond Light Infantry Blues. Johnson deferred to Cutchins, and allowed him “to command the combined force” in order to prevent an “awkward and potentially embarrassing situation,” indicating that it was socially unacceptable for black men to hold positions of authority over whites.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Gatewood, *Black Americans and the White Man’s Burden*, 66-77.

<sup>18</sup> Cunningham, “They Are as Proud of Their Uniform as Any Who Serve Virginia,” 320.



Additionally, these units were typically underfunded and poorly equipped by their states, especially in the South.<sup>19</sup>

Although there were a number of African American militia units in state service as the United States readied for war, it was not certain that once states began filling their volunteer quotas that they would include their black militiamen, or that if they offered these regiments for federal service that their black officers would be allowed to muster in with them. The various states were not consistent in their policy regarding African American troops. When the call for volunteers began, African Americans saw the chance to pursue meaningful change, but they faced significant resistance among Army leadership and white civilians who stubbornly held on to the custom that questioned the African American's ability to lead, or the racism that spoke to their unwillingness to offer opportunities to serve in the officer ranks. A letter to the editor of *The Colored American*, from Civil War General Thomas J. Morgan [white], summed up the challenges that faced African Americans as they attempted to break into the Army officer corps. Morgan acknowledged the service of the approximately 200,000 African Americans in the Union Army during the Civil War, but stressed that the United States Army's officer corps was something wholly different than any other organization in the United States. He argued that the "only caste or class with caste distinctions that exists in the republic is found in the army; army officers are, par excellence, the aristocrats, nowhere is class feeling so much cultivated as among them; nowhere is it so difficult to break down the established lines." General Morgan described the officer corps as a small group of tight

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<sup>19</sup> Gatewood, *Black Americans and the White Man's Burden*, 67.

knit brothers who after being educated at the public expense and “appointed to life positions, ...seem to cherish the feeling that they are a select few, entitled to special consideration, and that they are called upon to guard their class against insidious invasion.” Morgan explained that the ascension of African Americans into the officer ranks would be difficult and challenged at every turn because, “the spirit of West Point has been opposed to the admission of Negroes in to the ranks of commissioned officers and the opposition to the commissioning of black men, emanating from the Army will go very far toward the defeat of any project of that kind.”

General Morgan went on to say that the attempt to create black officers for the war with Spain was made more difficult, because the decision of commissioning officers into the volunteer Army, under the second call for volunteers, was left up to the governors of the states. He noted that there was “very naturally the strong public sentiment against the Negro, which obtains almost universally in the South, [which] has thus far prevented the recognition of his right to be treated precisely as the white man is treated.” Morgan’s letter to *The Colored American*, which took a favorable position for black officers, succinctly described the difficult road ahead for those trying to force the military to accept them. The Army discriminated against qualified black Americans in order to keep them out of its fraternity of officers, and the prejudice of white Americans typically made it difficult to appeal to their common sense, or fair play, or patriotism on this particular issue.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> *The Colored American*, “Competent to Be Officers,” July 30, 1898.

African Americans received little satisfaction from President McKinley's first call for volunteers, issued on April 23, 1898, where they were deprived of consideration for the volunteer service. Protesting and agitating for the opportunity to serve, they pushed their message on state and federal officials, which eventually won them two new opportunities to serve. First, President McKinley encouraged the creation of ten federal volunteer regiments, comprised of men thought to be "immune" to yellow fever and malaria, the bill authorizing this passed on May 10<sup>th</sup>, 1898. McKinley assured African Americans that four of these ten regiments would be composed of African Americans. Finally, President McKinley issued a second call for volunteers, two weeks after the passage of the "Immunes Bill", on May 26, 1898, which requested an additional 75,000 men for the Army. McKinley, as well as several governors, wanted black volunteers incorporated in this call up.<sup>21</sup>

The issue quickly turned from demanding to be allowed to serve to inquiring under what conditions they would serve. The key question that emerged was whether black officers would be allowed to lead black soldiers in the volunteer regiments created for service in the war. It seemed unjust to replace the black officers of the various black militia units, with white officers as they were transferred into to federal service.

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<sup>21</sup> Gatewood, *Black Americans and the White Man's Burden*, 64, 87, & 92. A distinction between the Immunes Bill and the Second Call for volunteers should be made. They are different in that The Immunes Bill created ten volunteer regiments that were organized, mustered, and immediately controlled by the federal government. These regiments were designated the United States Volunteer Infantry. The Second Call for volunteers issued by President William McKinley created quotas, based on population, for the states to fill as they deemed best. These regiments were first created, mustered in, and organized under state control and eventually transferred to federal service, but kept their state name and designation. For example, the Sixth Virginia Infantry.

Unfortunately, there was no consistent policy on the creation of black regiments with black officers, as it was determined by on a state-by-state basis, and in some cases black militia officers were not allowed to remain in same positions of authority within their state militia companies. Some states, like Kansas, Illinois, and North Carolina, created rosters completely manned and officered by African Americans. Other states, like Virginia, compromised and placed a white officer in command of the regiment, but commissioned black officers in all other leadership positions. Indiana brought in black officers to the ranks of Captain and below, but filled the higher ranks with white officers. Some states, like Alabama, refused to allow black officers in its black volunteer regiment, keeping African Americans confined to the enlisted ranks.<sup>22</sup> Those governors who showed the courage to commission a full complement of black officers were often lauded throughout the black press as heroes or friends.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Willard B. Gatewood, Jr., "'Alabama's 'Negro Soldier Experiment,' 1898-1899," *The Journal of Negro History*, Vol. 57, No. 4, (October 1972): 333-351. Gatewood indicates that there was some resistance in Alabama over the discrimination of black officers. For instance, the men of a black militia company called the Gilmer Rifles refused to serve when its black company officers were replaced. However, Alabama was able to recruit enough black volunteers to fill out the ranks of its African American volunteer regiment; Willard B. Gatewood, Jr., "Indiana Negroes and the Spanish-American War," *Indiana Magazine of History*, Vol. 69, No. 2, (June, 1973), 115-139. Gatewood indicates that two companies of African Americans from Indiana were created with black Lieutenants and two black captains, and later attached to the Eighth United States Volunteers (Immunes). This is significant because the "Immune" regiments limited African Americans to ranks below Captain, but Governor Mount and Senator Charles Fairbanks exerted political pressure to get the federal government to accept these officers.

<sup>23</sup> *The Colored American*, July 2, 1898. E. E. Coopers, in support of the governors that created black regiments with black officers, singled out the governors of North Carolina, Virginia, Ohio, Illinois, and Kansas saying that they "placed themselves upon the honor roll in the matter of assigning Negro officers to Negro companies; *The Savannah Tribune*, June 11, 1898. Editor Sol Johnson called Governor Russell of North

Advocates for black officers began to earnestly press their cause once it was clear that African Americans would be incorporated within the parameters of the “Immunes Bill” and the second call for volunteers that came a couple of weeks later in late May. The results of their campaign were inconsistent at best. The federal government and the War Department set a policy that African Americans would be allowed to enter as officers at the ranks below captain within the regiments of the United States Volunteer Infantry (Immunes). This was seen as a half measure by many African Americans, as if the government was trying to find a compromise between those demanding an opportunity for black officers and those staunchly against it. The decision by the War Department to limit black officers to first and second lieutenants also created controversy. As a result, those black Americans who wanted equality of opportunity in the Army with white Americans refused to accommodate the McKinley Administration or accept this decision quietly. What emerged was a movement that questioned the decision, and attacked it as unreasonable, unjust, and clearly discriminatory. The battle for black officers in the state volunteer regiments that already had them and agitation over limiting black men to lieutenants in the “Immunes” took place, for the most part, concurrently, but the targets of their protests shifted between federal and various state officials.

John Mitchell Jr.’s “no officer, no fight” campaign, waged in his newspaper *The Richmond Planet*, is perhaps the most significant example of resistance and the most

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Carolina a man of stamina, and mentioned, “The governor had the backbone to call out a regiment of colored men and have them officered by men of their kind.” He further exclaimed that “Governor Russell is the kind of white man whom the colored people delight to honor,” *The Washington Bee*, “It Makes No Difference,” June 4, 1898. W. Calvin Chase in support of Governor Russell wrote, “All honor to the Governor of North Carolina, and the noble colored men who urged him to his just act.”

consistent in its demand for fairness and justice for African Americans in the military. Once it was clear that African Americans would be allowed to join the volunteer regiments that were being accepted into the United States Army in preparation for war with Spain, black editors like John Mitchell Jr. began to demand fairness in the way they served. His crusade to see African Americans enter the officer ranks challenged a system that failed to see black Americans as capable or prepared to take on the duties of leadership. Outspoken African Americans, like John Mitchell Jr., fought against the institutionalized racism that limited and dictated the structure of African American service in the Army for the years preceding the Spanish-American War. Mitchell was consistently opposed to black Americans volunteering to fight for a nation that did not protect them and seemed determined to ensure their continued unequal treatment. Mitchell began to attack the constraints on military service for black Americans, carrying the fight for civil rights into the ranks, and fundamentally demanding that the Army remain color blind not only when filling the ranks, but also when filling its leadership positions.<sup>24</sup>

John Mitchell Jr., and others, challenged the tradition of keeping black men from exchanging their chevrons for epaulets.<sup>25</sup> These members of the black press were

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<sup>24</sup> Gatewood, *Black Americans and the White Man's Burden*, 82; Gatewood gives credit to John Mitchell Jr. as the one who began "no officer, no fight" campaign, and as the one who coin that slogan.

<sup>25</sup> *The Colored American*, "Competent to Be Officers," July 30, 1898; In this article General Thomas J. Morgan argues for the filling Officers ranks in the army based on merit and not race. He mentioned that during the Civil War African Americans "were allowed to wear chevrons but not shoulder straps or epaulets." This is a way of saying that African Americans wanted to have the chance to aspire to positions higher than enlisted men in the army. The enlisted soldier's rank, as they moved up in the service,

frustrated at the hurdles constantly being erected in front of black Americans as they attempted to serve their nation in a time of war. John Mitchell Jr.'s unwillingness to accommodate the officer question was clearly evident in an editorial he wrote on the subject. "The policy is being outlined that this is a war in which the Afro-Americans are to win glory only as privates and that white men are to acquire fame as officers." John Mitchell Jr. stressed that the members of his race had made great strides over the thirty-three years following the Civil War and were not content with being forced to remain at the lowest rung in society, or in this case, at the lowest ranks in the Army. He warned white Americans that things had changed and that black Americans were no longer willing to remain quiet in the face of injustice, in fact they were increasingly motivated to actively challenge those things they deemed unfair. He argued:

The colored people are not the docile creatures, obedient to the command of his master that he was thirty-three years ago. Then he was a slave breathing the miasmatic atmosphere of the swamps. Now he is a freeman, taking within himself deep draughts of liberty.

He has learned to strike back. Individuals must treat him fairly and squarely or like the white man, he will see that there is trouble ahead.<sup>26</sup>

Above all, Mitchell made sure to stress that all he wanted and expected was the same opportunities afforded all American citizens guaranteed by their constitutional rights.

John Mitchell Jr.'s "no officer, no fight" campaign was consistent in its argument, and adhered to the concept of reciprocity. He simply argued that if they were not going to be afforded the same opportunity as whites to ascend in the ranks, then it was unreasonable

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was designated by the number of chevrons affixed to their sleeves, where the officer's rank was designated on epaulets on their shoulders.

<sup>26</sup> *The Richmond Planet*, "The Colored Brother and the War," May 7, 1898.

to expect them to serve. This was essentially a call for a boycott of the military until the officer question was addressed fairly. Mitchell's campaign initially targeted Virginia's governor, because of rumors that the black officers of Virginia's black militia units, who were about to be transferred to federal service, would be replaced with white officers. Virginia's governor, J. Hoge Tyler, chose to create a African American regiment with an officer corps composed almost entirely of black officers, except for the commanding officer who would be white. As this question was settled in Virginia, Mitchell continued to advocate for black officers elsewhere.

John Mitchell Jr.'s "no officer, no fight" campaign was informed and firmly anchored to the Fourteenth Amendment advocating that the law be consistently applied in a colorblind fashion. The issue of black officers was a contentious one, inspiring reaction from members of the white press. The editor of the *Richmond Times* wrote an editorial in May 1898 in which he responded to "no officer, no fight" asking if it is was "good citizenship" for African Americans to refuse to volunteer if they could not get officers appointed to the black regiments. John Mitchell Jr. responded to the *Richmond Times's* editorial by asking whether the government was right in denying African Americans "military appointments simply on the account of his color...." He went on to assert that African Americans did not "ask to fight in his own way, but insists upon fighting in accordance with the laws of the land and the dictates of justice."<sup>27</sup>

Virginia Governor J. Hoge Tyler, in response to President McKinley's second call for volunteers made on May 26, 1898, and bowing to pressure from the President and the

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<sup>27</sup> *The Richmond Planet*, "The Times Answered," May 21, 1898.



many vocal black citizens of his state, decided to create a black regiment with black officers.<sup>28</sup> The decision to create an African American regiment led by black officers was not an easy one for Governor Tyler, nor was it politically popular, and he faced mounting pressure from whites in Virginia to replace the black officers with white ones. As *The Richmond Planet* reported, “the Governor has been somewhat perplexed for some days as to what disposition to make of these battalions. Strong pressure has been brought to bear on him to appoint white officers for the battalion, but he has decided to turn the organizations over to the War Department, as they are now officered, and then if Mr. McKinley desires to make any change in the officers he can do so.”<sup>29</sup> An example of the pressure that faced Governor Tyler is found in a letter from Joseph Button, a clerk working in the Virginia Senate. Button was strongly opposed to appointing black officers and wrote:

I wish to tender a little unsought advice in regard to the appointment of Negro officers to command Negro troops. After the announcement was made that you intended appointing them, I hear scores of people express themselves on the subject and I assure you the feeling against it is intense. For God’s sake do not take such a step, for I verily believe that it will cast a cloud over your entire administration.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Willard B. Gatewood, Jr., “Virginia’s Negro Regiment in the Spanish-American War, The Sixth Virginia Volunteers,” *The Virginia Magazine of Historical Biography*, (April, 1972), 196; Gatewood mentions that the War Department “emphasized that the president had ‘expressed particular anxiety to give colored men an opportunity to enter the service.’” As a result Governor Tyler followed the president’s wishes and created the Sixth Virginia Volunteer Infantry.

<sup>29</sup> *The Richmond Planet*, “The Governor’s Position,” June 11, 1898.

<sup>30</sup> Correspondence from Joseph Button to Governor J. Hoge Tyler, June 7, 1898. J. Hoge Tyler Family Collection, Ms67-002-Special Collections, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg, VA.

Whatever the true motivations of Governor Tyler, in deciding to create a black regiment with a black officers corps, he went ahead with his plans and accepted two battalions of black Virginia militia with their officers, but placed a white officer, Lieutenant Colonel Richard Croxton, in overall command. This was likely a compromise between those advocating a regiment with a full complement of black officers and those demanding that white officers, lead the black troops.<sup>31</sup>

The criticism facing Governor Tyler was fed by the strong and prevalent racism that characterized white American attitudes toward African Americans. These racist beliefs and acceptance of negative stereotypes reinforced many whites' negative opinions about African Americans, and the questioning of their intelligence. Racist attitudes toward African Americans drove some to respond to Governor Tyler's decision to include black officers in black regiments. One such letter came from E. W. Gilliam, M.D., of Baltimore, Maryland. Dr. Gilliam, seemingly on a personal crusade against African Americans serving in the Army, later wrote to the Secretary of War Russell Alger, arguing against their use in the war in the Philippines. Dr. Gilliam corresponded with Governor Tyler just days after his decision to create the Sixth Virginia Volunteers, and his letter reflected the racist attitudes of many whites toward black Americans, and it also indicated some growing unease at allowing them any avenue for advancement. Gilliam wrote:

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<sup>31</sup> Most army regiments at this time were comprised of three battalions of four companies each, and commanded by a full Colonel. The Sixth Virginia only had two battalions of four companies, and was referred to as a Regiment "minus," and commanded by a Lieutenant Colonel (one rank lower than full Colonel)

I am constrained to express my deep regrets that the democratic administration of the state of Virginia, should have commissioned Negro troops for the war, and withal with Negro officers. It may be that the executive had no choice in the matter. The conditions then are lamentable.

I do not believe that Negroes have soldier qualities. They are minus true patriotism. They may possess brute fighting qualities, but more than ever before, the efficient soldier of today must have intelligence, an intelligence the average Congo Negro among us has not. If they must have office or position at all, let it not be one of this kind that tends powerfully to feed their presumption and insolence. Here in Baltimore their insolence and rowdyism are advancing daily, and affairs are moving toward an explosion against them....<sup>32</sup>

E. W. Gilliam represented a segment of the white American population that refused to acknowledge the African American's ability to advance, often couching their ideas in the pseudo science that attempted to support white supremacy, and thereby the non-white's subordination.

Governor Tyler's response to E. W. Gilliam's letter summed up his position and explained why he chose to form the Sixth Virginia with its complement of black offices. Governor Tyler explained that the state constitution authorized the formation of the black militia units many years prior to his administration. He explained that the "officers are efficient, and have drilled their men well, and have them under good discipline." He continued:

Under the second call I was requested to turn over two battalions of colored troops. If I had taken the officers from these battalions, I would have been discriminating against them in violation of the laws of my state, of the United

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<sup>32</sup> Correspondence from E. W. Gilliam, M.D. to Governor J. Hoge Tyler, June 17, 1898. J. Hoge Tyler Family Collection, Ms67-002-Special Collections, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg, VA; Dr. E. W. Gilliam mentioned that he wrote on the "African Problem." He published a number of works concerning the problems of race in the United States. His *African Problem* was published in 1885. He wrote later books such as *1791: A Tale of San Domingo* in 1901, and *Uncle Sam and the Negro in 1920*, published in 1906.

States, in violation of my oath, and it would have been manifestly a disposition to be unfair and unjust to these officers simply on account of their color, when the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the Constitution forbids discrimination on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude. If it had been a question of forming new organizations I could and might have pursued a different course.<sup>33</sup>

Governor Tyler chose to answer his critics by invoking the Fourteenth Amendment, arguing that constitutionally he was obligated to allow the black officers of the militia units that formed the Sixth Virginia to keep their positions. Governor Tyler's use of the Fourteenth Amendment is significant since this was a period where southern governments were inconsistent with its interpretation, and found creative ways to ignore or work around it when desired, as they continued their campaigns of legal segregation and disenfranchisement of African Americans throughout the South.

With the question of black officers in Virginia's black volunteer regiment settled, Mitchell found himself defending Governor Tyler's decision, even as he waged a larger campaign for the inclusion of black officers into the U.S. Army. As a vocal advocate for the advancement of his people, John Mitchell Jr. often traded barbs with the local editors in Richmond and nearby Washington, D.C. over the issue. In an editorial in *The Planet*, Mitchell's defense of Governor Tyler started with his assertion that Virginia had two "colored battalions, officered and commanded by colored majors." He stressed that these battalions were well trained and had "attained a high degree of efficiency under their colored commanders." He inferred that Virginia's own Inspector General gave these battalions high marks for their readiness. With the President's second call of volunteers,

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<sup>33</sup> Correspondence from Governor J. Hoge Tyler to E. W. Gilliam, M.D., June 18, 1898. J. Hoge Tyler Family Collection, Ms67-002-Special Collections, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg, VA.

Mitchell argued that Governor Tyler desired to offer these well-trained battalions for federal service, and since the federal government agreed to accept them, there should be little room for complaint from the critics about this decision. He echoed Governor Tyler's position that following any other course of action, other than allowing the black officers to enter service with their men, would have been unconstitutional. He wrote, "now it is proposed to draw the color line, violate the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution of the United States by removing the officers, because they are colored, and appoint others in their stead because they are white." He ended by reminding his readers that even the highest executive of the state of Virginia understood the injustice of such a policy and ignored the demands that white officers be placed in command of black troops.<sup>34</sup>

Another example of how John Mitchell, Jr. responded to critics of black officers in black regiments came in response to a *Washington Post* article. A typical strategy utilized by Mitchell was to cite parts of the *Post*'s editorial and respond, thereby creating a dialogue where it seemed like Mitchell was in conversation with his white peers, addressing each argument point by point. The *Washington Post* opposed African American agitation and the policy of "no officer, no fight." The *Post* declared, "all this nonsensical uproar has risen over the demands of certain Negro military organizations to be accepted intact, with their officers, and company, and made part of the Army without question, and the ground upon which they base the preposterous assumption is their alleged ability, training, fitness, patriotism, and all the rest of it. As we say, this is too

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<sup>34</sup> *The Richmond Planet*, "Frivolous Reasons," June 11, 1898.

absurd for argument.”<sup>35</sup> The editor of the *Washington Post* took direct aim at the very arguments Mitchell used to justify the fitness of the black officers of the two battalions of the Virginia militia. Mitchell’s response to the *Post* was to ask if the official report of Virginia’s Inspector General, who was a white man, was “too absurd for argument.”<sup>36</sup> Mitchell leaned on the fact that the Inspector General found these black-led militia units fit and ready for service.

*The Washington Post*, however, was not finished attacking the advocates of black officers. The editorial stressed that white militia companies seeking to enter federal command did not ask that their companies be accepted completely intact, thus why should the African American militia companies be accepted on different terms? Mitchell held that white militia companies were in fact accepted in the same way as African Americans were asking be, but that the whites did not need to verbalize their demands, because it was foregone conclusion that their companies and officers would be accepted intact. In addition, Mitchell argued that white militia companies did not have to worry about being mustered into service with black officers, but he saw it as wholly unfair that black militia units were being asked to accept being mustered in with white officers. It came down to a matter of fairness, Mitchell argued, and “what was ‘sauce for the goose’ should certainly be ‘sauce for the gander’”<sup>37</sup>

When the *Washington Post* argued that “the Negroes can enter the Army as the whites do, leaving the government to appoint the officers, or they can stay out of it,” Mitchell

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<sup>35</sup> *Washington Post*, “Negro Organs and Leaders,” June 7, 1898.

<sup>36</sup> *The Richmond Planet*, “The Post and the Negro,” June 11, 1898.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

came to the critical point of his “no officer, no fight,” campaign.<sup>38</sup> He was perfectly content to advocate staying out of the war if African Americans were not treated fairly “Of course we can, and that’s just where the satisfaction comes in. We’ll wait. We’re not wanted yet. Land the white troops in Cuba, if you can. Storm the earthworks. Bake a few more thousand white marines on the deck of a ship by the aid of the hot tropical sun, and Mr. Editor try some of it yourself.”<sup>39</sup> John Mitchell Jr. understood that war was hazardous, and if black soldiers were not going to be given the same opportunities as whites, then it was not worth going through the ordeal of the danger and deprivation that soldiers face on the front line.

Finally, the *Washington Post* indicated that with such demands, like “no officer, no fight,” African Americans were the ones drawing the color line, not whites. The *Post* argued, “the whites are content to be treated as individuals. The Negro leaders insist that his race should be treated as a whole.” John Mitchell Jr. responded arguing that the *Washington Post* was approaching this issue in hypocritical fashion. “If we are ostracized and organized into companies as a whole, why should we not be treated as a whole.” Mitchell felt that segregation in the Army was a policy directed at African Americans as a race. Black soldiers were destined for separate service in segregated regiments. Mitchell offered to stop agitating for black officers if the Army committed to treating black men on an equal basis, by tearing down the barriers that separated white and black military units. He believed that this was the only way to solve the problem. “We will accept the same basis as laid down for the whites. Throw open your white

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<sup>38</sup> *Washington Post*, June 7, 1898.

<sup>39</sup> *The Richmond Planet*, June 11, 1898.

companies to Negro privates, remove the discrimination at Annapolis and West Point, and all talk about Negro officers for Negro companies, battalions, and regiments will cease. Dare you accept the challenge?" If the U.S. naval and military academies accepted more appointments of black candidates, treated them properly once there, did not allow the corps of cadets or midshipmen to ostracize them, and if they were treated justly once in the ranks of the Army and Navy, then his campaign would be unnecessary.<sup>40</sup>

The Saturday *Richmond Enquirer* was another critic of Governor Tyler's offering of black officers for federal service. The editors asserted that it was a mistake to do so. "The Governor of Virginia has commissioned Negroes as officers in the Army of the United States, in the face of the fact that the federal government, after numerous experiments did not dare to do so insult the white people of this country as to certify a diploma of social equality to the inferior race."<sup>41</sup> The *Richmond Enquirer's* blatantly racist position defended the status quo in American society, and raised the concern that white enlisted men may be forced into a position of saluting black officers, placing these black men over white. Mitchell deflected the *Enquirer's* arguments noting that Governor Tyler did not commission the officers of the black militia units, his predecessors did; and he was simply upholding their decisions. He also explained that white people should not feel insulted since they made the law. "The officials of the state and nation are sworn to carry out the law as made by white people of the country." His point was that those

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<sup>40</sup> *The Richmond Planet*, June 11, 1898.

<sup>41</sup> As quoted in *The Richmond Planet*, "Doesn't Like It," June 25, 1898.



white men who complained about black officers were complaining about the execution of laws and policies by elected officials for whom they voted.

The *Richmond Enquirer* continued its attack adding, “does the Governor forget that in 1883 the state of Virginia decreed by the vox populi vox dei that the white men would not be dishonored by Negro equality.”<sup>42</sup> To this Mitchell pointed out that “Equality of citizenship is embraced in the Constitution of the United States and no mandate of a state can change it.” The Constitution, the revered law of the land, was utilized regularly in the battle for equality. If the nation just had the courage to apply the Fourteenth Amendment fairly, there would have been little to complain about. Mitchell’s frustration with the editor of the *Richmond Enquirer* was clear, noting somewhat sarcastically, “this writer does not know that slavery is abolished, the 13<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup>, and 15<sup>th</sup> Amendments to the United States upon the books, and an era of good feeling between the blacks and whites at hand.”<sup>43</sup>

John Mitchell Jr. was not in favor of segregating black from white in the U.S. Army, and he often pushed the point that the ranks should be integrated, but segregation was the official policy in the Army, and he clearly saw this as an extension of racial discrimination in the United States. Given this reality, segregation should be extended to the officer corps in the military. “The flag of race prejudice has been raised. Colored companies have been barred from white regiments, and the talk is to enlist them in separate regiments and brigades. If this be true, we insist that they shall be commanded

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<sup>42</sup> As quoted in *The Richmond Planet*, “Doesn’t Like It,” June 25, 1898.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

by colored officers.”<sup>44</sup> In another editorial he made this point even more clearly; “If we are to be subjected to the insult of this separation, let us enjoy the privilege of being officered by men of our own selection. No Officer, no fight!”<sup>45</sup>

### **The Continued Campaign For Officers**

John Mitchell Jr., was not the only African American editor to advocate for black officers, and others followed suit in their own newspapers. In addition, through letters to politicians and military officials African American citizens demanded equal opportunity. Like Mitchell, they demanded fairness and expressed hope that the war would lead to advancement. Unfortunately the campaign ran into resistance from whites, and African Americans found themselves battling to dispel the misconceptions that African Americans were not capable of leading soldiers in battle.

W. Calvin Chase, publisher of the *Washington Bee*, addressed this issue of fairness. “All the Negro asks is a chance to show what he can do under the command of one of his own soldiers.”<sup>46</sup> In a subsequent editorial he expressed the same sentiments, responding to rumors that black militia officers might be replaced with white men, and noting that the African American militia units might be passed over altogether in order to more easily avoid the issue of black officers. Chase warned whites that discriminatory policies worked to dampen African American enthusiasm to serve the nation. He wanted African Americans to be treated justly; “We only ask what is fair and reasonable when we want

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<sup>44</sup> *The Richmond Planet*, “The Eagle’s Criticism,” May 28, 1898.

<sup>45</sup> *The Richmond Planet*, “The Colored Brother and the War,” May 7, 1898.

<sup>46</sup> *The Washington Bee*, “A Colored Colonel,” May 7, 1898.

colored officers to command colored troops.” Like Mitchell, Chase only saw the justice in offering African Americans the chance to lead black regiments.<sup>47</sup>

E. E. Cooper, editor of *The Colored American*, added his voice to this debate. Washington D.C. had its own quota of volunteers to fill and like many southern states ignored its black militia organizations to the frustration of the African American population. Rumors persisted that if black militia companies were accepted into service, they would be forced to change their leadership to white officers. For Cooper this was unpatriotic and petty, and he believed that this was a concerted effort by whites to wrest opportunity from African Americans. He mentioned, “the discrimination against the colored soldier, however, has become so plainly marked as to admit but one construction and suggest but one course. This is an unmistakable aversion to close contact with the colored comrade, and the whites seem determined that they will not be officered by a Negro no matter how just his claim to seniority may be.” The issue of seniority raised in this statement, indicated that there were senior black officers being passed over for leadership positions in the volunteer regiments in favor of whites who were their juniors. This went against military convention, which traditionally took seniority seriously. He feared that if, or when, Washington, D.C.’s black militia units were finally called up, the black officers would not likely “be permitted to retain the rank they fairly won, nor allowed to assume command of companies or battalions in the usual military order.” He beseeched white Americans to rise above their prejudice, and appealed to their nationalism. “We are all Americans fighting for the glory of our common country, under

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<sup>47</sup> *The Washington Bee*, May 21, 1898.

the same flag and the black and white soldier should be classified by no other standard than that of merit.” He wanted “fair play,” and stressed, “the restrictions placed on the colored officers up to this date and the denial of opportunity for the display of the Negro’s military genius are but little short of a national scandal.”<sup>48</sup>

In another editorial Cooper explained even more forcefully his advocacy for equality and justice. “We do not stop with a petition or a request for an opportunity to serve the country of our birth, we demand it in the name of every consideration of justice and equity.” He continued his editorial by insisting on “every right and privilege accorded to any other American citizen, and will be satisfied with nothing short of it.” He pointed out that African Americans were no more anxious to be shot at than their fellow white citizens, but were willing to serve their nation because, “the principle of military and civil recognition is at stake and we wish to be called, on equality with our fellow countrymen, to bear the nation’s burdens as well as to share her joys.”<sup>49</sup>

The arguments that African Americans presented in support of black officers during the Spanish-American War at times went beyond the core contention that it was a matter of fair play and justice. Some editors believed that it was also a matter of social advancement, and when whites hampered their attempts to rise in the Army’s ranks, it was a clear effort to forestall overall African American progress. Some editors such as W. Calvin Chase saw the war as an avenue for “race progress,” and as such advocated for the highest positions achievable in the Army. In a *Washington Bee* editorial Chase warned that the “Negroes don’t intend to be dirt workers or scullions in the fight.” In this

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<sup>48</sup> *The Colored American*, “Let us all be Americans,” May 14, 1898.

<sup>49</sup> *The Colored American*, “An Equal Chance and Fair Play,” May 28, 1898.

way Chase warned that African Americans would not be content solely in the role of the combat infantryman. Though the vast majority of black Americans who joined the Army would fill positions in the enlisted ranks, he expected that they would also fill important positions as officers that would give them a chance to exhibit their leadership abilities, and that reflected the level of the race's progress since the Civil War.<sup>50</sup> The argument that African American advancement since emancipation had prepared, and entitled them to more significant opportunities in the Army was echoed by John Mitchell Jr. who wrote in response of the editor of the *Richmond Dispatch*'s statements against black officers:

Will his eyes never see? We are at the dawn of the Twentieth Century. We are nearly forty years away from the late Civil War. You cannot turn back, sir, the hands on the dial of progress. Then it was Negro companies with white captains, Negro battalions with white majors; now it is Negro companies with Negro captains, and Negro battalions with Negro majors.<sup>51</sup>

This stressed that time had brought progress for African Americans, no matter how hard some whites tried to hamper it. Editor E.E. Cooper also saw the ascension to the officer ranks as a distinct opportunity for progress and improvement, hoping that African Americans could gain some of those "lucrative positions made necessary by the war."<sup>52</sup>

There was a clear understanding that white opposition to allowing black officers in the volunteer army was another blatant effort to prevent the overall advancement of African Americans. In a letter to the editor of *The Richmond Planet* by a correspondent using the pseudonym "Eva," she could not understand the opposition to black officers, other than

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<sup>50</sup> *The Washington Bee*, "Negro Generals," April 30, 1898.

<sup>51</sup> *The Richmond Planet*, "Frivolous Reasons," June 11, 1898, pg. 2.

<sup>52</sup> *The Colored American*, "Even Our Office Boy Realizes," June 18, 1898.

because some whites were “opposed to the moral advancement of the colored race.”<sup>53</sup> E. E. Cooper, in his *Colored American*, expressed frustration at the *Washington Post* for its continued resistance to black officers, claiming that its effort was “but another chapter in keeping with its time-honored record of scorn and derision for every serious effort for the advancement of the Negro race.”<sup>54</sup>

An important element in their effort to deflect white discrimination was to answer and overcome white preconceptions and stereotypes about black Americans being incapable of leading men into battle. The assertion that African Americans “lacked the intelligence” or the skill not only questioned their individual ability, but that of the entire group. Thus, those advocating for black officers constantly tried to deflect racist justifications meant to keep African Americans from enjoying equal opportunities in the military. For example, Calvin Chase addressed a *Washington Post* article that suggested that there were no African Americans capable of leading soldiers in battle, and mentioned that *The Post*’s arguments could lead people to “conclude that the demand the Negro is making for recognition in the Army is based upon favoritism and not competency. The *Daily Post* would have the world believe that there are not competent Negroes in the United States competent to be a Colonel.” Chase was willing to take up the challenge by promising that he was “prepared to name several educated colored men who are thoroughly competent to command any regiment or body of men.” He went on to stress

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<sup>53</sup> *The Richmond Planet*, “All Honor to Our Fighters,” June 11, 1898.

<sup>54</sup> *The Colored American*, “As to the Washington Post,” June 4, 1898.

that the African Americans he referred to would be much more competent than “many of the milk-and-water aristocrats and society dudes who have been appointed.”<sup>55</sup>

A few weeks later Calvin Chase responded in *The Bee* to an unexpected comment made by President McKinley that he would have appointed an African American officer long ago if “a man of national reputation had been presented to him.” Chase was incredulous that McKinley would make such a statement. “If we mistake not, men of national reputation have been presented to the department of war. It was a very easy matter for the department of war to have selected a colored man of national reputation, because we have hundreds of them in the country who are fighters and far superior to many of the white men who have been appointed.” Chase directly challenge what he saw as poor excuses, by the president, the war department, and many white Americans that obscured the true reason African Americans were being ignored for officer positions, arguing that the Army’s prejudicial policy actually hurt its readiness, because it passed over better candidates just because of the color of their skin. Chase went so far as to name some individuals who should be considered for officer positions in the Army, such as Major Christian A. Fleetwood and Charles R. Douglass, the son of Frederick Douglass, among others.<sup>56</sup>

Solomon Johnson of the *Savannah Tribune* published an editorial from another paper, the *Augusta Union*, that supported African American protests against discrimination in the Army. The editorial declared, “colored soldiers kick and they ought to kick vigorously against having white officers for colored regiments.” In opposing the critics

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<sup>55</sup> *The Washington Bee*, “Competency and Not Favoritism,” June 18, 1898.

<sup>56</sup> *The Washington Bee*, “Colored Colonel,” July 2, 1898.

of black officers' ability, the statement went on to address the leadership abilities black officers demonstrated in black militia units. "Our colonels (with an exception here and there) are well up in the tactics of war and will make as good officers as any other." The discrimination facing black officers was clearly racially motivated, and the goal of those opposed to that discrimination was that the "infernal race hatred might be killed and sent to hell!"<sup>57</sup>

### **Response to the "Immune Bill"**

On May 10, 1898 Congress passed legislation, popularly known as the "Immunes Bill," which authorized the creation of "ten federal infantry units." These immune regiments were separate from the first and second calls for volunteers, which relied on the states to fill volunteer quotas based on their respective populations. The ten immune regiments were to be known as the First through Tenth United States Volunteer Infantry (USVI), and were to be filled with men "possessing immunity from diseases incident to tropical climates." The regiments were composed of men mostly from the South, and because of the "erroneous" belief that African Americans were naturally immune to yellow fever, and other tropical diseases, they were designated to man a number of these units. The Seventh through the Tenth United States Volunteer Infantries were created as African American regiments.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> *The Savannah Tribune*, June 25, 1898.

<sup>58</sup> Roger D. Cunningham, "'A Lot of Fine, Sturdy Black Warriors:' Texas's African American 'Immunes' in the Spanish-American War," *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, vol. 108, no. 3 (January 2005), 346.



When the federal government chose to man some of the Immune volunteer regiments with black soldiers, but decided to limit its black officers to the ranks below Captain, there was a sense that the government was not going far enough, and that such an unfair decision was unjustified. The reaction of African Americans to this decision by federal officials offered another example of resistance to discrimination and an unwillingness to accept a lesser role in the Army without protest. Letters to President McKinley, the Secretary of War Russell A. Alger, editorials in the black press, and letters to the editor questioned the policy of the federal government. In a letter to President McKinley W. A. Lamb-Campbell of Galveston, Texas opposed the policy, and the “limiting of the appointment of colored officers in the immune or other regiments to the grade of lieutenant, but on the contrary being in favor of giving the Negro, the same opportunity of advancement and promotion in the army as the white enjoys....” Mr. Lamb-Campbell went on to tell the President that he was the author and “exciter” of a resolution demanding fair treatment of black Americans in the military. The resolution was enclosed with his letter, and represented views of the African American community of Galveston, Texas, as a result of a meeting that took place on June 9, 1898. The resolution offered the services of the black citizens of Galveston, but also resolved that “the President, the Honorable, William McKinley be requested to accord to the colored troops, the same privileges, accorded white troops, raised in the same section of country; and so far as it is practicable to secure the offices and effectiveness of the Army, that colored

officers be appointed to all grades and ranks in colored regiments, etc., as in white regiments.”<sup>59</sup>

A letter of protest from George A. Green of New Orleans, Louisiana, written to the Secretary of War, Russell A. Alger, also argued against the unfairness of a policy that limited the advancement of officers based on race. Green felt that the policy failed to offer a chance for promotion based on bravery in battle. Black lieutenants, because they could not become captains, could not be offered the reward of promotion for courage under fire, which tied the hands of the Army’s leadership. Green declared that “if such a fact is authentic that there will be no colored men commissioned captain, and only lieutenant with no hopes of promotion, it makes no difference what heroic deed such lieutenant may accomplish, [and] it don’t seem to be in keeping with the law which governs the Army of this nation.”<sup>60</sup>

While George Green acknowledged that the rank of lieutenant was an honorable and worthy position, he completely rebuffed the Secretary of War’s decision, calling it “left-handed and rather on the shady side, providing there is no room for promotion for the said colored lieutenant, and it seems if the law makes it possible for a white lieutenant to be promoted, it seems the same law applies to the colored lieutenant.”<sup>61</sup> This argument was directed at the Secretary of War’s sense of justice, pushing for a colorblind approach

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<sup>59</sup> Letter from Mr. W. A. Lamb-Campbell to President William McKinley, August 8, 1898, National Archives, Record Group 94, Adjutant General’s Office, File number 111711.

<sup>60</sup> Letter from George A. Green to Secretary of War, Russell A. Alger, June 17, 1898, National Archives, Record Group 94, Adjutant General’s Office, File number 117250.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

to the ranks, and he stressed that if there was a law that truly limited black officers, it was not just.

Though justice was an important element of Mr. Green's correspondence, he stressed that he did not address the Secretary of War as "a political leader," but addressed him as "a humble citizen and a race pride man who craves for the elevation of my race that may reach the summit of prosperity in common with other races of the world." He also tried to deflect the belief that African Americans were not prepared to lead troops in war, assuring the Secretary of War that the "colored man has surmounted his limited military knowledge by the fact of his long and continued service in the United States Army. And has ascended to a higher knowledge of military matters, and as a tactician he stands the equal of any white man in the United States Army today, hence his eligibility for promotion."<sup>62</sup> These last comments would not likely move anyone who embraced racist preconceptions of black Americans, but the point was that George Green believed that African Americans had progressed significantly since the end of the Civil War and challenged arguments about their unpreparedness for leadership.

Calvin Chase in *The Washington Bee* expressed his frustration at the limitation of black officers, in the immune regiments to the rank of lieutenant in an open letter to President McKinley in its June 25, 1898 edition. Like many of his peers, Chase refused to accept as fair the policy of the War Department without a fight. The letter expressed disappointment at the president's failure to uphold the laws of the land.

Ten regiments of so-called "immunes" were placed absolutely at your personal disposal Mr. President, and from you as a Republican sworn to carry out the

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

provisions of the Constitution, placed in nomination for high office by black men's votes, and by their aid elected, from you came the ruling discriminating against us "on account of race, color, and previous condition," that no colored man should be given a position higher than a lieutenant in the six regiments set aside for Negroes. Possible a captain or two may have slipped through, but only as the exception to prove the rule. The democratic Governor of Virginia declared that he would not violate his oath of office, the Constitution of the United States and the rights of the Negro, by departing in one iota of treatment from that accorded his white fellow citizens. Does not the contrast in action cause your cheeks to blush with shame? We are told that you positively deny the existence of such a rule, but the War Department officials just as positively assert that it exists, and the fact that such is the unfavorable practice goes a long way ahead of any verbal denial. You cannot plead ignorance Mr. President, nor can the War Department plead that no worthy or capable persons applied, certainly not if compared with many others who have been appointed.

Now Mr. President, we are neither aggressive nor impudent, we have respectfully and firmly asked for recognition as citizen of a common country, nothing more. We want it.<sup>63</sup>

This letter is significant in that it openly questioned the President's virtues, and sought to shame him into action. Chase directly affixed blame to the President when it came to policy concerning the immune regiments. He mentioned that inquiries were made directly to the War Department as to whether it was an official policy to hold black officers below captain.<sup>64</sup> Chase's letter indicated an inconsistency with regard to the policy concerning black officers in the Army, and revealed his disappointment with the

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<sup>63</sup> *The Washington Bee*, "An Open Letter to President McKinley," June 25, 1898.

<sup>64</sup> Correspondence from the Assistant Adjutant General to Henry Demas, June 8, 1898, National Archives, Record Group 94, Adjutant General's Office, File number 114616. This letter was a response to an inquiry by Henry Demas of New Orleans, Louisiana, which established that the Army's policy was to officially hold black officers below captain. It simply stated, "In the organization of the colored regiments, the War Department has determined that the Captain of companies shall be white men of military training and experience. Their appointment and fitness to be determined by an examination before a board appointed by the War Department. The lieutenants in these regiments will be appointed from colored men whose fitness to be determined in like manner. Any assembling of protest against the action of the War Department is not advisable and should be discouraged in every way possible, as it can only have injurious results."

Republican President who represented the political party that benefitted the most from African American support. He was frustrated at what he believed to be the unwillingness of President McKinley to admit his part in creating the policy, and angry at what seemed to be attempts to pass the blame on to the War Department. By bringing up the actions of Virginia's governor, Chase showed that it was possible to do more for African Americans, indicating that if black officers were restricted to certain ranks, it was because the President accepted the policy.

This issue was contentious for several reasons. First, African Americans felt great frustration over this policy because it was patently unfair. Second, by limiting black Americans to the rank of lieutenant, federal officials accepted the idea that black men were incapable of taking on larger and more complex leadership roles. Finally, though the ranks of first and second lieutenant were important and honorable positions in the United States Army, the rank of captain carried with it a significantly higher level of responsibility. Lieutenants took charge of parts of the company and assisted the captains in the daily administration of the company, but it was the captains who were in charge of the whole company of approximately a hundred men, and who made the final decisions. African Americans sought the chance to demonstrate their capabilities at these upper levels of military leadership.

Many African Americans understood that being allowed to serve as lieutenants in the U.S. Army offered them a level of prestige and an opportunity they had not enjoyed before, but they were not willing to accept the message that black men were not prepared to handle the duties of company commanders or higher positions. African Americans

who accepted these lieutenant positions in the immune units may have seemed to be acquiescing to this government decision, but many remained frustrated over the restrictions placed on them because they knew that there were many qualified black men capable of functioning effectively at all levels of the military. A letter from one of the black lieutenants of the immune units to John E. Bruce, a well-known African American journalist whose columns appeared in many black newspapers under the name of “Bruce Grit,” revealed the attitude of those in the “Immunes.”<sup>65</sup>

The unidentified black lieutenant wrote John E. Bruce in response to “Mr. Durham,” a white man who claimed that he did not know of any African American capable of commanding a regiment. In response the soldier simply asked, “do you know of one capable of being a corporal?” He continued, “my dear Mr. Bruce, what I wish to say is this, that any man in civil life who has had no army experience either in the regular service or National Guard is a fool to have made the statement that Durham has made,” asserting that Durham ‘s position was based on ignorance.<sup>66</sup> The lieutenant went on to note that there are already black men serving in the Army who were educated and experienced enough to do so. He mentioned that there were some soldiers in the black regiments of the regular Army, the Ninth and Tenth Cavalries and the Twenty-Fourth and Twenty-Fifth Infantries, who had “finished educations.” The letter explained that there were also many black non commissioned officers who had enough experience to take

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<sup>65</sup> Unfortunately, the signature of the first lieutenant is illegible in his letter, so it is not possible to identify the name of the author of this letter.

<sup>66</sup> Correspondence from First Lieutenant (name illegible) to John Earl Bruce, November 17, 1898, the John Earl Bruce Papers, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library.

command. An example mentioned in the letter was Lieutenant Andrew Smith, who was an officer in the Eighth Immunes, but prior to that he served as a First Sergeant in the Twenty-Fifth Infantry. While fighting in Cuba with his regiment at the battle of El Caney, Smith's officers were killed or wounded and he had to take charge of his company. The lieutenant argued that a man such as Andrew Smith, who took charge of his company in combat, "can supremely command a regiment." The letter went on to emphasize that there were other examples of black soldiers who "but for the hue of their skins would long ago have been knighted with commissions from the President in the regular army."<sup>67</sup>

The first lieutenant then shifted his argument to emphasize the importance of experience as a soldier rose in ranks that came over time, and that black soldiers were just as experienced as white soldiers. He also tried to de-mystify the rank of colonel, the typical rank of the officer who commanded a regiment. The first lieutenant described how the Army worked, emphasizing the concept of "the unit" and detailing the forward progress of a soldier. "One must understand the unit of anything, before this itself can be analytically comprehended." He explained that "the unit of a regiment is [the] soldier, the regiment is an aggregation of those units." He argued that "a good soldier makes a good corporal, good corporals advanced to the grade of sergeants, sergeants to 1<sup>st</sup> sergeants, then onward through the commissioned grade to the colonel, who is not half so mysterious a reality as a civilian would imagine."<sup>68</sup> The argument here is that colonels learn their duties through years of experience while they ascend the ranks. Colonels were

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

typically promoted through excellent performance, advancing on merit. This line of reasoning contended that there were many experienced black soldiers who could have advanced if only given a chance. Unfortunately, black men “were held in the viselike grip of American caste prejudice to the non com grade.”<sup>69</sup>

The letter went on to deconstruct a colonel’s duties, simplifying them and making the job seem almost pedestrian. He asked, “what then must a colonel be, and do of such a magnitude that none of our lieutenants (many of whom are men of professions legal, literary, medical, and military) could properly fill the place?” His answer, “Be able to give regimental commands in the field which are far more simple than a Battalion ‘close order drill’ and can be learned in a few hours.” He explained that a colonel, to be successful, only needed to “be able to select a competent quartermaster to provide for the regiment its transportation and accouterments.” The insinuation here was that a “competent” quartermaster simplified the regimental commander’s job, even suggesting that an excellent quartermaster might be capable enough of heading a regiment. Since a quartermaster handled many of the essential administrative functions of the regiment, and African American regiments in the U.S. Army typically filled those position with it most talented black soldiers, he utilized Lieutenant James Gillespie as an example. Lieutenant Gillespie was once a quartermaster sergeant in the Tenth Cavalry, and later commissioned an officer in the Eighth Immunes. Lieutenant Gillespie was held up as an example of a black soldier capable of command, explaining that he “made an unparalleled record this last Spring when the war broke out, in furnishing, through his

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid.



own system, and organization, and commanding over 300 men, the entire army with supplies, and did in one day and night work which every commissioned and non-commissioned there could not do in three weeks!” The argument stressed that a man with Gillespie’s experience, knowledge, and leadership ability was more than capable of commanding a regiment.<sup>70</sup>

Many embraced demands for fair treatment in the military, but there was some who, though desirous of advancement, were concerned about making such strong demands. Uncertainty emerged for some African Americans when it came to drawing such a hard line with whites, for fear of losing the opportunities already available. This conflict is seen in *The Colored American*, which took an active part in the drive for black officers, then seemed to waiver in its zeal for “no officer, no fight.” In its July 2, 1898 edition, *The Colored American* expressed concern that “no officer, no fight” might be taking the demand for officers too far. E. E. Cooper believed,

It is too extreme a policy to declare “no officer, no fight,” however bitterly we may deplore the narrowness of the army directors in refusing to grant our wishes in respect to commanders. Two wrongs do not make a right. Our duty to our country remains the same, and cannot be lessened by the actions of a set of men who persist in misrepresenting the spirit of her institutions. We should go ahead with the work of enlistment, strive to outdo detractors in brave deeds and good conduct, and grasp every opportunity for advancement that comes within our reach. The rewards due us as men cannot long be denied if our merits are made evident by experience. Let us continue to agitate, protest, and appeal, but ‘hustle’ in whatever stations we are permitted to fill.<sup>71</sup>

Cooper may have also been concerned that white Americans would construe refusing to fight as unpatriotic, and did not wish to give whites a reason to criticize African

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> *The Colored American*, July 2, 1898, pg. 4.

Americans over the issue. If anything, this editorial in *The Colored American* indicated the complex nature of the issue, where E. E. Cooper wanted fair treatment for African Americans, but did not want them to miss the opportunity to serve in the conflict with Spain. This goal is made more pronounced when one realizes that on the same page, in the same issue of *The Colored American*, Cooper ran excerpts from other papers that supported “no officer, no fight,” thus presenting both sides to the paper’s readers. Statements such as one from the *San Antonio Advance*, declaring that “Texas Negroes will fight under Negro officers or not fight at all,” or one from the *Atlanta Appeal* which asserted “Negro officers or no Negro soldiers is the united voice of the editorial Black Phalanx,” pushed home the demand for equal service or no service at all.<sup>72</sup> The lesson here is that even though the message of “no officer, no fight” was seen as a just demand by most African Americans, some such as E. E. Cooper were afraid to lose the opportunities offered them due to the militancy of their demand. Cooper’s loyalty to President McKinley and the Republican Party may have convinced him to tone down his demands to help prevent the Republican administration from falling into a potentially difficult political position.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> *The Colored American*, “Wants Negroes in Command,” July 2, 1898.

<sup>73</sup> Willard B. Gatewood, Jr., “A Black Editor on American Imperialism: Edward E. Cooper of *The Colored American*, 1898-1901,” *Mid-America*, (January 1975): 3-19. Gatewood mentions that Cooper’s was a “highly articulate defender of the ‘party of Lincoln’ in general and of President McKinley and his administration in particular. As other editors increased their attacks on McKinley’s Administration for failing to protect their rights, Gatewood mentions that for Cooper, “McKinley still towered ‘as a giant’ whose essential decency and goodness would ultimately insure justice for colored people at home and in the overseas possessions.” With this in mind it is conceivable that Cooper’s political loyalties kept him from fully pushing the principles of John Mitchell, Jr.’s “no officer, no fight.”

### **The Demand For Black Artillerymen**

The campaign to gain access to the officer ranks was strong and wide-ranging, and designed to force change in the Army to benefit black Americans. Another area where African Americans tried to affect how they served after the outbreak of the Spanish-American War was in their demand for an African American artillery regiment. This movement never gained the momentum of the “no officer, no fight” campaign, but offers another excellent example of trying to obtain the same terms of service that white citizens received. Congressman George White’s speech in the House of Representatives on March 7, 1898 asked Congress to do the right thing and broaden the opportunities of African Americans. He believed there should not be bars to service based on race, but that talent and merit should reign supreme.<sup>74</sup> Although some African Americans served as artillerymen in the Civil War the units were quickly disbanded after the conflict creating a circumstance where there were no black artillery regiments in the regular Army or state militia on the eve of the Spanish-American War. The Army’s leadership and the U.S. Congress also questioned African Americans’ ability to handle the technical aspects of the duties of artillerymen, and this position was clearly expressed in a memorandum from the Army Chief of Staff on April 16, 1907.<sup>75</sup> The opinions reflected then were very much the same as ten years earlier. Racism and pseudo scientific evidence was used to justify the discriminatory policy of barring black Americans from certain jobs in the Army. The Army Chief of Staff responded to a letter from Booker T.

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<sup>74</sup> Benjamin R. Justesen, *George Henry White: An Even Chance in the Race of Life*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2001), 223.

<sup>75</sup> Morris MacGregor and Bernard C. Nalty, ed. *Blacks in the United States Armed Forces Basic Documents*, vol. III, 334-335.

Washington's assistant Emmett J. Scott at the Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute in Alabama. Scott's letter was addressed to President Theodore Roosevelt, who passed it down the chain of command for consideration and a response. Scott asked President Roosevelt to order the Army to create batteries of coastal and field artillery manned by African Americans. He clearly understood that the Army carried "the opinion that colored men with sufficient intelligence to make good artillerymen cannot be found." Scott challenged this position, arguing "this was doubtless true in the '60s and in the period immediately following, but does not hold good now as a trial, I am sure, will show."<sup>76</sup>

Scott believed that African American progress since the Civil War was reflected in increased educational opportunities, a growing black middle and upper class, and an expanding corps of black professionals, showing that African Americans were more than capable of executing the specialized skills required to effectively run a gun crew. Scott mentioned numerous reasons why African Americans were ready to become artillerymen. He pointed to their bravery in the Civil War, Indian campaigns, and the Spanish-American War, and argued, "some of the best shots in the Army of the U.S. are colored men belonging to the colored cavalry and infantry regiments. A man that can learn to shoot one gun can learn to shoot another." He believed that African Americans possessed the intelligence to perform the duties in artillery units since "many of the men at present in the army are especially intelligent, alert, and ambitious fellows." Scott noted that the record of desertions for African American regiments was better than for

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

white regiments, suggesting a high level of loyalty and dedication among black soldiers. “Our population and the progress we have made since slavery was abolished entitle us, we believe, to the recognition above sought.” Like Congressman White, in his speech to Congress in 1898, Scott was only asking for a fair chance, not special considerations, stressing that since “only men of superior intelligence are enlisted for that branch of the service, our most intelligent men deserve a chance to prove their ability and serve their country in the artillery branch of the service the same as white soldiers of similar qualifications do.”<sup>77</sup>

The response to Emmett Scott’s request for black artillerymen represented the stereotypical understanding by many whites concerning African Americans. Major Wilcox, a member of the General Staff of the Army, sent a response to Scott’s letter to President Roosevelt. Wilcox could not refute the courage of black soldiers, because history offered too many examples of courage under fire by African Americans to deny it. Wilcox rejected the argument that since black infantrymen and cavalry troopers were some of the best shots in the Army, they would be able to effectively fire an artillery piece suggesting that proficiency with one kind of weapon did not mean proficiency with another. The two kinds of firing, he noted, “infantry and artillery, are so radically different.” Perhaps the most common argument used against African Americans when it came to trying to advance in the ranks or enter new branches was that they did not have the “intelligence” to handle certain kinds of technical or skilled jobs. Major Wilcox stated that “it is not by way of discredit of the Negro race that we assert it to be inferior to

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

the white race in intelligence and mental ability. This fact is now recognized, and more than that it is recognized by many Negroes themselves.”<sup>78</sup> Wilcox admitted that there were intelligent African Americans, but believed that this group formed “a desperately small minority.” His concern was that if the Army accepted black Americans into the artillery, that there was no way to be sure they would get enough candidates for that particular branch of service. The Army staff also took on the argument that there was no need to create a black artillery regiment. Addressing Emmett J. Scott’s final point that black Americans should be given an opportunity because of the progress they have made since emancipation, Wilcox asked, “why should the Negroes be ‘recognized’ because they increased in numbers and prosperity? Negroes, like anyone else, should be put upon any Government work, taken into the Government service for one reason and only one reason, because they are needed, and then only if competent.”<sup>79</sup> Without question, the idea of African American artillerymen ran into staunch opposition.

Congressman White’s speech in the House of Representatives inspired some members of the black press to raise the point as well. The March 26, 1898 edition of *The Washington Bee* simply printed a transcribed version of White’s speech, the April 2<sup>nd</sup> issue of *The Colored American* directly addressed the issue asking the War Department to “see to it that the brave Negro soldier is not discriminated against in the formation of artillery regiments...”<sup>80</sup> *The Savannah Tribune*, followed a week later, informing its readership that “it is not generally known that there is not a colored man attached to any

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid, 344-346.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> *The Washington Bee*, “One Black Artilleryman,” March 26, 1898; *The Colored American*, April 2, 1898.

of the artillery companies of the United States.” Sol Johnson, the editor of the *Tribune*, mentioned that African Americans were “in evidence” in the infantry and cavalry, but “he is completely ostracized” in the artillery. His editorial came after Congress voted on the proposed artillery bill, which once again ignored black Americans. Johnson noted, “Even in the bill offered authorizing the organization of more artillery companies, the colored man is left out altogether.” His frustration for the outcome did not blind him to Congressman White’s efforts. “Our Congressman White, did his utmost to have our people recognized, but without success. The speech he gave was a most masterly one.”<sup>81</sup>

The results of the bill likely failed to surprise African Americans, because they were well aware of the racial motives behind the decision, but it added to the growing frustration felt at being excluded from the artillery. The demand for black artillerymen might have picked up momentum, but was quickly overshadowed by the campaign for black officers. “No officer, no fight,” another battle in the same fight for equal treatment, seemed to carry more importance and the fight for inclusion in the artillery faded from the forefront, only to be addressed repeatedly in later years.

### **Advancement?: The Mixed Results of the “No Officer, No Fight,” Campaign**

The demand for African American officers in the ranks of the U.S Army morphed into a robust grassroots movement driven predominantly by the black press. It met with resistance from the Army and white Americans in general, but brought some forward progress in spite of opposition. The Army leadership eventually relented and offered

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<sup>81</sup> *The Savannah Tribune*, April 9, 1898.

African Americans the opportunity to serve in the officer ranks below the rank of Captain in the volunteer “immune” regiments that it formed. This brought the issue to the point where advancement and discrimination met. The ranks of first and second lieutenant offered African Americans an opportunity to serve in a role where they were once essentially barred, but Army policy basically told black Americans that they could serve at a certain capacity, but could not expect to advance further, regardless of their skill and capabilities. That no such limitations were placed on white officers assaulted the sense of justice that many African Americans held as citizens of the United States. Though acknowledging the importance of serving at the junior officer level, many wanted opportunity and promotion based on merit and not barred due to race.<sup>82</sup>

The results at the state level varied. Many governors created African American regiments, but some, like Alabama, did not allow black officers in their ranks; Other states commissioned black officers, but limited their positions in the regiment, as in the case of Virginia, which commissioned an all black officer corps, except for its white commanding officer. Other states, such as North Carolina created regiments with a full complement of black officers, ranging in rank from second lieutenant to colonel. This created a circumstance where African American representation in the Army officer corps swelled when state militias were federalized, significantly increasing the number of black

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<sup>82</sup> Continued agitation for opportunity as the focus of the war shifted from Cuba to the Philippines eventually forced the War Department amend its policy. The Forty-Eighth and Forty-Ninth U.S. Volunteer Infantries were formed for the purpose of fighting in the Philippines and allowed African Americans to serve as high as the rank of captain. This meant that black officers in these regiments commanded whole companies, increasing the level of responsibility the War Department was willing to allow black officers to exercise.



officers from one, Charles Young, to hundreds, albeit most of them in the Volunteer Army. For example, the Third North Carolina Volunteer Infantry alone added approximately forty black officers to the ranks of the Volunteer Army.<sup>83</sup>

There can be little doubt that political agitation went a long way in forcing federal and state officials to change their policies, and this can be viewed as progress, even if policies were inconsistent. African Americans found, in places, the opportunity they demanded, a chance to show what they could do and prove that they were capable of leading troops into combat. These black officers, and the African American regiments they led, were held in high regard among black Americans. In addition to the pride they felt for the four black regular Army regiments, African Americans closely followed any news of these volunteer regiments as they mustered into service and entered the Army's camps to organize and train. The black soldiers who entered the ranks of the regular and volunteer armies, and black civilians who monitored the treatment of black troops and officers, realized as time went on that white Americans were unwilling to appreciate their service. Their hope that they would be allowed to prove their claims to equal citizenship, and to be allowed to use the wartime experience for social and political advancement were derailed as racial prejudice continually worked to hold African Americans back. From the declaration of war with Spain, through two calls for volunteers, and the actual period of hostilities in Cuba and later in the Philippines, and the years after, African Americans

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<sup>83</sup> Spanish-American War Regimental Books, 3rd North Carolina Colored Infantry, National Archives, Record Group 94, Records of the Adjutant General's Office. The typical regimental organization required twelve companies, and each company had three officers, one Captain, one First Lieutenant, and one Second Lieutenant, plus a number of staff officers such as the regimental commander, a compliment of surgeons and assistant surgeons, and a regimental chaplain.

were disturbed by the historical reality that their service in the war would not check the growing discrimination at home. White soldiers and civilians insulted and verbally abused black soldiers, especially in the South, black officers were disrespected, and black Americans in general experienced continued racism and discrimination. So there was positive advancement in the opportunities offered African Americans in the Army, but it changed little in the way of race relations at home; and the progress was short lived as these officer positions disappeared once the volunteer regiments were mustered out.

### **Chapter Three: Embattled Patriots: the Experience of African American Soldiers and Civilians During the Spanish Americans War**

African Americans expended significant effort to win the opportunity to join the volunteer army regiments formed during the Spanish-American War, and to be allowed to serve as officers in those units. Through their hard work they achieved notable progress earning positions that they rarely attained before. Unfortunately, most of that progress was temporary in nature, because those positions were in state volunteer regiments, or the United States Volunteer Infantry regiments (Immunes), and would cease to exist once the war ended because the volunteer units were mustered out of federal service. However, temporary or not, the opportunities can still be seen as an important step forward. One common argument often used by African Americans in favor of serving in the U.S. Army during the Spanish-American War was that if they showed their patriotism and a willingness to serve the nation during a time of crisis, they would legitimize their claims to full inclusion in American society. However, the actions of white Americans before, during, and after the war did little to encourage the continued optimism harbored by many African Americans. In fact, violence, discrimination, and prejudice persisted despite active black participation in the war effort.

White Americans often signaled to black Americans that their service during the war against Spain was not wanted, and would not significantly change their position in American society. The resistance to African Americans joining the Army, the poor treatment of black soldiers by white Americans once they entered service, the disrespect

toward black officers by white civilians and soldiers, and the treatment of black civilians before, during, and after the war sent a clear and consistent message that participation in the war would not create lasting change. The treatment experienced by African Americans during and after the Cuban portion of the war, whether they were civilians or soldiers, challenged their sense of justice, fairness, and propriety, and worked to further embitter and disillusion many against the conflict as it shifted its focus from liberating Cubans to pacifying insurgents in the Philippine Islands. This chapter will further examine the experiences of those in the regular Army and black volunteer units.

### **The Abuse of the African American Regulars During the Spanish-American War**

When war was declared against Spain in April of 1898, the United States Army took several actions. It began consolidating and transferring its regular regiments to locations in the South in preparation for the eventual invasion of Cuba, and using the first and second Presidential calls for volunteers, issued April 23, 1898 and May 26, 1898 respectively, to swell its ranks with many new volunteer units. Four of the regular Army regiments sent to the American South were African American. As these regiments entered the South, they came face to face with a virulent and overt racism that made it clear that these black soldiers were unwelcome in or around southern communities.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Frank N. Schubert, *Black Valor: Buffalo Soldiers and the Medal of Honor, 1870-1898*, (Wilmington, Delaware: Scholarly Resources, Inc., 1997), 134; Herschel V. Cashin, *Under Fire with the Tenth U.S. Cavalry*, (New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1969), 120-121; Gatewood, *Black Americans and the White Man's Burden*, 44-46.

From their inception in the late 1860s until the war with Spain in 1898 the Ninth and Tenth Cavalries and the Twenty-Fourth and Twenty-Fifth Infantries served on the American frontier. The companies of each regiment were scattered and garrisoned throughout many western communities. During their service in the American West these African American army regiments earned and maintained a well-respected reputation. They were used heavily in, and critical to, the various campaigns against Native Americans after the Civil War and utilized in various efforts to put down labor unrest in the West. Other than a couple of instances where black army regiments were rotated for duty in the East, these regiments stayed on frontier duty, because white Americans protested their presence in communities east of the Mississippi.<sup>2</sup> They were placed in western locations, in places that typically had small African American populations so black soldiers were seen as less of a threat to the social order there. As a result, conflict between white civilians and black soldiers was less common than when black soldiers served in the more densely populated locations in the East.

On the eve of the war, soldiers from the Ninth Cavalry and Twenty-Fourth Infantry were located in parts of Nebraska and Utah, with their headquarters located at Fort Douglass near Salt Lake City, Utah. Troops from the Tenth Cavalry and the Twenty-Fifth Infantries were based in various areas of Montana, with their headquarters located at

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<sup>2</sup> Gatewood, *Black Americans and the White Man's Burden*, 43. Gatewood explains that there were a couple of instances where African American regiments were transferred to locations in the eastern United States. For example, the Ninth Cavalry was stationed at Fort Myer, Virginia in 1891, but the protests from the community's white citizens forced the army leadership to reverse its decision and return the regiment to the West.

Fort Missoula, in Missoula, Montana.<sup>3</sup> The men of these regiments represented a cross section of African Americans from the North, South, and Western United States. The soldiers from the North had very likely experienced white racism before, but they were unprepared for the extreme hatred they would face from white southerners when they moved to encampments there. The soldiers from the South, while stationed on the frontier, encountered a racial setting that was more benign than in their home environments. In addition, as members of the U.S. Army in the sparsely populated western locations, their position as soldiers gave them a certain level of respect not achieved in the South. Many westerners appreciated their service. This only served to heighten the surprise at, and the sense of moral outrage over, the way white southerners treated the black regulars.<sup>4</sup>

The experience of these black regiments, as they travelled from the North to the South on their way to encampments at Chickamauga Park in Georgia or locations in and around Tampa, Florida, represent the extremes in response to their presence. As the chaplain of the Ninth Cavalry, George Prioleau explained that as his regiment left its base in Nebraska and travelled to locations in the South, “all the way from Northwest Nebraska

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<sup>3</sup> T.G. Steward, *Buffalo Soldiers: The Colored Regulars in the United States Army* (Amherst, New York: Humanity Books, 2003), 89-90, 93-95. Original publication of T.G. Steward’s book was 1904 by A.M.E. Book Concern. T.G. Steward was an African American who served as the Chaplain of the Twenty-Fifth Infantry.

<sup>4</sup> Schubert, *Black Valor*, 134. Schubert cites the response of Corporal John Lewis, a member of the Tenth Cavalry, when his regiment reached Lakeland, Florida. He called Lakeland “the hotbed of rebels, a beautiful little town, [but] a hell for the colored people who live here, and they live in dread at all times.”

this regiment was greeted with cheers and hurrahs.”<sup>5</sup> This was the attitude that met many of the regiments, white and black, as enthusiastic Americans expressed their patriotism and their appreciation to members of the armed forces who were about to risk their lives in a war with Spain. The African American regular army regiments like Prioleau’s Ninth Cavalry enjoyed this fervor north of the Mason-Dixon Line. “At places where we stopped, the people assembled by the thousands. While the Ninth Cavalry band would play some national air the people would raise their hats, men, women, and children would wave their handkerchiefs, and the heavens would resound with hearty cheers.” He indicated that patriotism seemed to overshadow the issue of race with the “white hand shaking the black hand.” Those who met the troop trains along the way offered kind expressions of gratitude that Prioleau explained “aroused the patriotism of our boys....” The heart warming and enthusiastic displays of patriotism and kindness made by civilians toward the soldiers aroused a pride in their service as they headed toward their mustering points. It is likely that the outpouring of emotion by civilians in the North offered them a certain sense of community with their white counterparts, validating their service to the United States.<sup>6</sup>

T.G. Steward, the chaplain of the Twenty-Fifth Infantry, also described the excited and enthusiastic response of the people in the North. The citizens of Missoula, Montana gave the black soldiers of the Twenty-Fifth a rousing send off. Steward mentioned that

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<sup>5</sup> Willard B. Gatewood, Jr., *Smoked Yankees and the Struggle For Empire: Letters from Negro Soldiers 1898-1902*, (Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1971), pp. 27-29. Letter from Chaplain George Prioleau, of the Ninth Cavalry to the *Cleveland Gazette* dated May 13, 1898.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

the soldiers marched through Missoula where the citizens came out to see the soldiers off and explained that the people there seemed sorry to see them go. He wrote, “Many were the compliments paid officers and men by the good people of Missoula, none perhaps more pleasing than that furnished to the regret experienced at the departure of the regiment, signed by all the ministers of the city.” T. G. Steward explained that the Twenty-Fifth Infantry was one of the first regiments to move in preparation of war and as such it attracted the “attention of both the daily and illustrated press.” This meant that the press reported their every move as they travelled east and south, which gave an opportunity for citizens along the route to meet their trains and cheer them on. The fact that Americans met and cheered the soldiers as they headed south speaks to the nationalistic, jingoistic, and patriotic excitement that was building in the United States in 1898. Americans in the North gave their support to the soldiers, regardless of race, as they were about to go into harms way. Like George Prioleau, T. G. Steward described the outpouring of support as they travelled through the northern states toward the army camps in the South. He stated that “all along the route they were greeted with enthusiastic crowds.... In St. Paul, in Chicago, in Terre Haute, in Nashville, and in Chattanooga the crowds assembled to greet the black regulars who were first to bear forward the Starry Banner of Union and Freedoms against foreign foe.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> T. G. Steward, *Buffalo Soldiers the Colored Regulars in the United States Army*, pp. 95-96; Albert G. Miller, *Elevating the Race: Theophilus G. Steward, Black Theology, and the Making of an African American Civil Society, 1865-1924*, (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2003), 127-130 & 132. Miller explains that Steward supported the Spanish-American War seeing it as a fight for Cuban liberation, but eventually opposed the fight in the Philippines once he saw how white American soldiers treated Filipinos. Miller also called Steward an army apologist, arguing that he failed to



For all of the enthusiasm shown by Americans in the North, the reaction of southern whites was something completely different. In some cases there was no one to greet the troop trains, and in other cases there were veiled threats against the black soldiers, as well as acts of violence. If the trip through the North validated and rewarded the African American soldier's service, their treatment in the South worked as a cold reminder that not all Americans appreciated their service, and that their presence in the South was unwanted. There could not have been two more distinctly different reactions from American citizens.

The soldiers left the North where they were cheered and moved headlong into a Southern society that had been "redeemed" by white Democrats and where southern whites again dominated virtually all aspects of life in the region. The recent actions of the South, even as the black soldiers arrived at camps at Chickamauga Battlefield in Georgia, and later in Tampa and Lakeland, Florida, showed a dedicated effort to maintain that domination. Southern states, even though they were forced to accept the Fourteenth Amendment in their post Civil War state constitutions, began to challenge and reinterpret the meaning of the amendment, and passed legislation used to disenfranchise African American males. This was done using a number of tactics such as poll taxes, literacy requirements, and property requirements, which were designed to prevent African Americans from voting. An important part of this effort to disenfranchise black Americans was a campaign of violence and intimidation meant to discourage black participation in politics, and marginalize the African American's place in southern

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see the racial inconsistencies of the regular Army, but was willing to concede that the volunteer Army was rife with prejudice.

society.<sup>8</sup> Another element of this campaign saw southern white Democrats' attempt to gain the support of white voters by making racist arguments that emphasized the inferiority and unfitness of African Americans to hold office or vote. Added to this racist attack on African Americans were claims that they possessed a semi-savage nature, or were not completely civilized, and introduced the concept of the "black rapist" and the need to protect the "purity" of white womanhood from them. These arguments were used to unite whites in the South, elevating race over class, in order to force black Americans to withdraw from public life.<sup>9</sup> Violence often accompanied the campaign to "redeem" the South, as many African Americans were unwilling to relinquish their rights without a struggle. Lynching in the South increased throughout the 1890s. Black soldiers, many who were not used to the virulent racism practiced in the South, were often shocked by the attitudes of whites toward them. The prejudice, discrimination, and abuse directed by

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<sup>8</sup> C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South 1877-1913* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1971), 321. Woodward explains that states started disenfranchising African Americans through state constitutional conventions, which saw Southern states rewrite their constitutions with amendments designed to bar African Americans from voting through the use of literacy tests, poll taxes, or property requirements. Woodward mentioned that Mississippi disenfranchised African Americans through a constitutional convention in 1890 and other Southern states soon followed. South Carolina did it in 1895, Louisiana 1898, North Carolina in 1900, Alabama in 1901, Virginia in 1901-1902, and Georgia in 1908. He also mentioned that "over the same years Tennessee, Florida, Arkansas, and Texas accomplished disenfranchisement by means of the poll tax and other devices."

<sup>9</sup> I. A. Newby, *Jim Crow's Defense: Anti-Negro Thought in America 1900-1930* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1965), 136-137; Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, *Gender & Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 82-83.

white southerners toward black soldiers worked to anger them and often led them to express their outrage in one form or another.<sup>10</sup>

The soldiers of the Ninth and Tenth Cavalries and the Twenty-Fourth and Twenty-Fifth Infantries left the North, and ran headlong into southern white vitriol and resentment at their presence. Chaplain of the Ninth Cavalry George Prioleau remarked on the change, mentioning that they were warmly greeted throughout the trip until they reached Nashville where “there were about 6,000 colored people there to greet us (very few white people), but not a man was allowed by the railroad officials to approach the cars.” After Nashville until they reached Chattanooga, Prioleau noted that “there was not a cheer given us.” He chalked this response in the South up to “gross ignorance.” George Prioleau mentioned that it was a good thing that northerners and westerners acknowledged their service in a positive and enthusiastic manner, because if the reception had been cold all the way from their western headquarters to their termination point in the South, “there would have been many desertions before we reached this point (Chattanooga).”<sup>11</sup> This curious comment exposes the frustration felt by black soldiers at the ingratitude of white southerners. There are many reasons a person serves in the armed forces: for escape, opportunity, adventure, and for patriotic reasons. The federal government ordered them to move in preparation for war, and the regiments, from the commanding officers to the lowest ranking privates, complied. In doing so they were

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<sup>10</sup> Jack D. Foner, *Blacks and the Military in American History: A New Perspective* (New York & Washington: Praeger Publishers, 1974), 75; Foner mentioned that some of the hostility “probably resulted in no small part from the fact that a black soldier in uniform contradicted the stereotype of a subservient inferior, fit for only drawing water and hewing wood.”

<sup>11</sup> Willard B. Gatewood, Jr., *Smoked Yankees*, 28.

caught up in a movement that led to an uncertain future. No one knew how long the war with Spain would last, or how costly in terms of casualties it would be. The soldiers knew they travelled south in order to fight a war, but no one knew if they would survive it. Most of these soldiers were well disciplined, experienced, and prepared to risk their lives in the looming conflict, and all they expected was that the nation's citizens, North and South, appreciated, or at least respected, their sacrifice. To ignore them or to treat them hostilely was to mitigate one of the reasons that people joined the Army, for service to the nation. If the people did not care about his service as a soldier, then why should the soldier care about serving and protecting an ungrateful nation? In this way Prioleau's comment showed that the poor treatment by southern whites wounded them, went against their sense of propriety, and challenged their understanding of moral justice.

Sergeant Frank Pullen, a black soldier of the Twenty-Fifth Infantry, described his impressions of the trip from Montana to Georgia. Like other black soldiers, he noted the warm patriotic response of Americans along the route mentioning, "everywhere the Stars and Stripes could be seen." He explained that it seemed like "everyone had caught the war fever." Sergeant Pullen explained, "all along the route from Missoula, Montana, with the exception of one or two places in Georgia, we had been received most cordially. But in Georgia, outside the Park, it mattered not if we were soldiers of the United States, and going to fight for the honor of our country and the freedom of an oppressed and starving people, we were 'niggers,' as they called us, and treated us with contempt."<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Edward A. Johnson, *History of Negro Soldiers in the Spanish-American War and Other Items of Interest*, (Raleigh: Capital Printing Co., Printers and Binders, 1899), 22-23.

Sergeant Bivins of the Tenth Cavalry also briefly described the prejudice that confronted his regiment as it moved south. Like Sergeant Pullen, Bivins explained, “as we neared the South the great demonstrations became less fervent. There were no places that we entered in which we were courteously treated.” Sergeant Bivins detailed the prejudice encountered in southern railroad stations, writing “the signs over the waiting room doors at the southern depots were a revelation to us. Some read thus: ‘White waiting room.’ On the door of a lunch room we read: ‘Niggers are not allowed inside.’”<sup>13</sup> Describing the treatment as a “revelation” shows the unexpectedness of their experiences in the Jim Crow South, which eventually fueled resentment and frustration.

Other African American soldiers noted the prejudicial treatment they received upon entering the South. In a letter to the editor of the Springfield *Illinois Record*, John E. Lewis of the Tenth Cavalry detailed his experience of the trip to camps in the South. “Our reception along the route were more than my pen could ever tell and we knew no difference until the line of Kentucky was reached.” In Hopkinsville, Kentucky he saw the color line enacted among those who were there to greet the soldiers. He wrote that at Hopkinsville, “it seemed strange that on one side of the road stood whites and that on the other colored.” As they moved further south, he explained that the people of Nashville, Tennessee “gave us a rousing reception and many of the boys longed to return to that city.” However, “at Chattanooga our pleasure was entirely cut off.” He mentioned that members of the Ninth Cavalry moved through the area a couple of days earlier and reacted to the idea of being forced to ride in “Jim Crow” cars, so the angry soldiers broke

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<sup>13</sup> Herschel V. Cashin, *Under Fire with the Tenth U.S. Cavalry*, 60-61.

those cars up “and took several shots at some whites who insulted them...” As a result, there was concern that racial incidents would lead to open conflict. Lewis also explained in his letter that some soldiers of the Twenty-Fifth Infantry broke up the “Jim Crow” cars on a rail line that ran from Lytle, Georgia to Chattanooga “on account of refusing them [Negro soldiers] certain privileges.” The related stories of the Ninth Cavalry and the Twenty-Fifth Infantry’s revolt against the “Jim Crow” cars reflect the response to perceived injustice. African American soldiers preparing to go into harms way did not believe that they should be treated in such a poor manner. So they resisted southern practices, and felt they had the right to do so.<sup>14</sup>

It should not be surprising that African Americans were affected by the attitudes of ingratitude and poor treatment from white southerners. Chaplains George Prioleau and T.G. Steward noted that this prejudicial treatment was an affront to the spirit of the soldier who was marching off to war. T.G. Steward briefly described the racism encountered at Chickamauga Park, explaining that even though the stay of the Twenty-Fifth Infantry was short, it was long enough to be targeted by the Chattanooga Press that gave “expression to their dislike to Negro troops in general and those in their proximity especially.”<sup>15</sup> In his work, *Buffalo Soldiers the Colored Regulars in the Spanish American War*, Steward argued against treating black soldiers any differently than white soldiers. “When the people of this country...come to know that its black men in uniform

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid, pg. 31.

<sup>15</sup> T. G. Steward, *Buffalo Soldiers the Colored Regulars in the United States Army*, pg. 100. Steward does not name the papers in Chattanooga who maligned the African American soldiers, but does mention that the *Washington Post* “lent its influence to this work of defamation.”

are soldiers, plain soldiers, with the same interests and feelings as other soldiers, of as much value to the government and entitled from it the same attention and rewards, then a great step toward the solution of the prodigious problem now confronting us will have been taken.”<sup>16</sup> He argued that black servicemen were worthy of the same gratitude that white soldiers received. They faced the same dangers, lived through the same deprivations, so they should enjoy the same rewards.

In describing the experiences of the Twenty-Fourth Infantry during its march South Herschel Cashin, in *Under Fire with the Tenth Cavalry*, originally published in 1899, expressed his moral outrage at the treatment of black soldiers who confronted racism in the South. “It is needless to attempt a description of patriotism displayed by the liberty loving people of this country along our line of travel until reaching the South,” wrote Cashin, “where cool receptions told the tale of race prejudice and other element inimical to Negro welfare, even though these brave men were rushing to the front in the very face of grim death to defend the flag and preserve the country’s honor and dignity.”<sup>17</sup> The paradox for many of these black soldiers was that they were marching off to defend the same people who abused them.

The experiences of African American soldiers intensified the further south they went. The U.S. Army chose Tampa as the port of embarkation for its soldiers who were to take part in the invasion of Cuba once hostilities began. As a result, the Army ordered most of its regiments to move from Chickamauga Park to Florida. In comparing life between

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 106.

<sup>17</sup> Herschel Cashin and others, *Under Fire with the Tenth Cavalry* (New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1969), 120-121. This history was originally published in 1899.

Chickamauga Park, Georgia, and Tampa, Florida, Chaplain George Prioleau wrote the *Cleveland Gazette* that “the prejudice against the Negro soldier and the Negro was great, but it was of heavenly origin to what it is in this part of Florida, and I suppose that what is true here is true in other parts of the state.” Soldiers, such as Prioleau, complained of the segregation and racism that dominated the region. Prioleau mentioned that “here, the Negro is not allowed to purchase over the same counter in some stores that the white man purchases over.” He argued that the way African Americans were treated in the South, and specifically Florida, the “the Negro of this country is freeman and yet a slave.” It forced him to question whether the United States was any better than Spain.

Talk about fighting and freeing poor Cuba and of Spain’s brutality; of Cuba’s murdered thousands, the starving reconcentrados. Is America any better than Spain? Has she not subjects in her very midst who are murdered daily without trial of judge or jury? Has she not subjects in her own borders whose children are half-fed and half-clothed, because their father’s skin is black.... Yet the Negro is loyal to his country’s flag. O! he is a noble creature, loyal and true.... Forgetting that he is ostracized, his race considered as dumb as driven cattle, yet loyal and true men, he answers the call to arms and with blinding tears in his eyes and sobs he goes forth: he sings ‘My Country Tis of thee, Sweet Land of Liberty,’ and though the word ‘liberty’ chokes him, he swallows it and finished the stanza ‘of thee I sing.’

These strong sentiments described the difficult situation black soldiers faced. They were defending a nation that condoned the prejudicial treatment of African Americans in the South, and did not protect them. The abuse taken in Florida sparked this emotional outburst, and it led Prioleau to realize that the struggle went further than that against Spain. “The four Negro regiments are going to help free Cuba, and they will return to



their homes, some then mustered out and begin again to fight the battle of American prejudice.”<sup>18</sup>

With all of the regular army regiments converging upon Tampa, suitable camping space became limited and some of the units were forced to encamp in Lakeland, Florida. The Tenth Cavalry was one of those regiments. John Lewis of the Tenth Cavalry, like Prioleau, noticed that the quality of life worsened when his command moved to Florida. He wrote that “here [Lakeland] we struck up the hotbed of the rebels.” He explained that the area of Lakeland was an area settled by farmers “or country people, surrounded by beautiful lakes, but, with all its beauty, it’s a hell for the colored people who live here, and they live in dread at all times.”<sup>19</sup>

Several issues defined the anger and frustration of black soldiers on the abuse they received from white Americans. Many black soldiers were angered that white Americans refused to acknowledge their service and instead tried to force them to conform to their restrictive racial norms. White southerners expected black soldiers to follow their customs surrounding Jim Crow segregation in the South, but many of these soldiers were not from the South. Captain John Bigelow Jr., a white officer in the Tenth Cavalry, saw the potential for trouble and mentioned that many of the regiment’s soldiers were “born and bred in the North” and as a result were unused to the verbal abuse directed at them by white southerners. “It is hardly to be wondered at if, having the means to do so, they

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<sup>18</sup> Willard B. Gatewood, Jr., *Smoked Yankees*, 28-29.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, 31-32.

resent the insult by forever stopping the mouth from which it issues.” He foretold circumstances where insulted soldiers would resist and react against ill treatment.<sup>20</sup>

Allen Allensworth, an African American chaplain in the Twenty-Fourth Infantry, also saw resentment from black soldiers over their treatment in the South. He noted that “most of the recruits of the 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry and the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> Cavalry are from the Central and New England states. Many from Massachusetts, New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Illinois, some big fellows from Tennessee and Kentucky.” He recalled,

the fact that the men came so largely from the North led to certain troubles in Florida before the 5<sup>th</sup> Army Corps sailed for Cuba. Having been stationed in the Northwest where their color subjected them to no great inconvenience in dealing with white people, the men of the Tenth Cavalry resented the restrictions placed on them in Lakeland. There was some rioting in consequence of their not being able to buy certain articles in shops patronized by white men.

Their experience in the racially confining South so insulted them that many soldiers lashed out against the things and people who angered them.<sup>21</sup>

The kind of treatment that led to black troopers actively resisting prejudice stemmed from the segregation and blatant discrimination they experienced while in Florida. The local press whipped up sentiment against the African American regiments in the Tampa area. The *Tampa Morning Tribune*, clearly stating the position of much of the white population in the area toward the soldiers of these units, declared, “The colored infantrymen stationed in Tampa and the vicinity have made themselves very offensive to the people of the city. The men insist on being treated as white men are treated and the

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<sup>20</sup> John Bigelow Jr., *Reminiscences of the Santiago Campaign*, (New York & London: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1899), 37.

<sup>21</sup> Charles Alexander, *Battles and Victories of Allen Allensworth* (Dodo Press, 2010), 266. Alexander’s work was originally published in 1914.

citizens will not make any distinction between colored troops and colored civilians.”<sup>22</sup>

This reaction was brought on by the fact that approximately 4,000 African American soldiers were sent to the Tampa region, and many of them questioned or refused to follow the social conventions of racial segregation. Adding to the fact that many of these soldiers were not accustomed to being treated so harshly, they felt justified in resisting the discrimination in the area as they prepared to fight for the nation, and benefitted from esprit de corps, which offered ample support as black soldiers challenged Jim Crow in Florida. Unquestionably, many also felt empowered by the guns they carried and the uniforms they wore, which in theory gave them a modicum of authority, but this only served to fuel the resentment of many whites as they bristled at the confident nature of the African American soldiers. Whites read this confidence, and the resultant determination of black soldiers to be treated fairly, as an effort to move beyond their station and challenge the racial status quo. The *Tampa Morning Tribune* mentioned that whites in Tampa refused to make any distinction between the newly arrived African American soldiers and civilians, indicating that whites in the area were determined to marginalize any claim to equality members of the black regiments might assert. This inevitably led to clashes.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Willard B. Gatewood, Jr., “Negro Troops in Florida,” *The Florida Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 49, No. 1, (July 1970), 3; Jack Foner, *Blacks and the Military in American History*, 76.

<sup>23</sup> Jack Foner, *Blacks and the Military in American History*, pg. 76. Foner also argues that conflict between whites in the Tampa region and African American soldiers was inevitable due to mounting tension.

Some African American soldiers were willing to go to extremes to assure fair treatment by physically challenging southern racial mores through assertive action. There were a number of incidents where southern white business owners in Tampa and Lakeland refused service to African Americans and these sparked direct challenges as armed black soldiers entered their businesses and demanded to be served. For example, members of the Tenth Cavalry were angered over one of their comrades being refused service at a local drug store in Lakeland, Florida, so a number of armed black soldiers entered the store to force the owner to serve them. John Lewis of the Tenth Cavalry, writing about the incident, stated that on May 16, 1898 some African American soldiers went to Lakeland and “went into a drug store and asked for some soda water. The druggist refused to sell them, stating that he didn’t want their money, to go where they sold blacks drinks.” Lewis mentioned that the soldiers did not like that answer and started arguing with the druggist, when Abe Collins, owner of the adjoining barber shop, came into the store and started yelling at the soldiers to leave the store, issuing threats and using racial epithets. The incident continued to escalate. Lewis recalled that Collins “went into his barbershop which was adjoining the drug store and got his pistols, and returned to the drug store. Some of the boys saw him get the guns and when he came out of the shop, they never gave him a chance to use them. There were five shots fired and each shot took effect.” A main point of Lewis’s version of events was to assert that whites in the Tampa region, as well as in the South in general, needed to rethink how they dealt with black soldiers, because men such as Abe Collins, who was likely used to dominating African Americans in his community, soon found out “they had a different

class of colored people to deal with.” This last comment shows indignation at southern racism and indicates a willingness to resist racially motivated abuse given the pride these soldiers felt in their service to the nation, the uniforms they wore, the guns they carried, and the brotherhood they shared with the members of their regiments. Lewis indicated that the Abe Collins’ death and the determined effort to resist discrimination led to a change in the disposition of whites in Lakeland.

Since the shooting of Abe Collins, the white bully who created a disturbance some weeks ago because some soldiers wanted to get a glass of soda water, there has been a marked change in the disposition of the people, and many believe that it was through providence of God that he was killed. People who were known to refuse to sell colored people what they wished now ask you to their place of business and intimate that they are glad to have you call on every occasion.<sup>24</sup>

Lewis suggested it was “providence,” but it is just as likely that these white business owners feared that the armed black soldiers would use force to get service, so it made sense to accede to their demands to prevent damage to their property. The assertive nature of the black soldiers, according to Lewis, won them access to Lakeland businesses, and created change among the citizens, but just as likely these citizens harbored a deep resentment for what they saw as a disruption of their social norms by the members of the black regiments who had a means to resist. This resentment was visible in the white press that did all it could to besmirch the reputation of the black regiments, taking any disturbance as proof that the black soldiers were ill-behaved and out of control. It also fed fears that African American civilians in the area might take note of the resistance of

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<sup>24</sup> Gatewood, *Smoked Yankees*, 35-36; Jack Foner, *Blacks and the Military in American History*, 4.; Frank N. Schubert, *Black Valor: Buffalo Soldiers and the Medal of Honor, 1870-1898*, (Wilmington, Delaware: Scholarly Resources, Inc., 1997), 134

black soldiers and assert their rights in a more aggressive manner. The presence of the black regulars, who were willing to challenge the system in the South, led to claims that they, and later African American volunteer regiments, were the cause of the post-war increase in race violence in the areas where these soldiers once camped. Whites were determined to keep the African American population in these areas from following the black soldiers' example and asserting themselves.<sup>25</sup>

Black soldiers' forbearance was again tried on the evening of June 6, 1898. The African American regulars had the respect of many of their white comrades in the U.S. Army, but when less disciplined white volunteer regiments started arriving in Tampa, Florida, an already tense racial environment exploded into a violent episode labeled "the Tampa Riot." Drunken members of a white Ohio volunteer regiment picked up a two-year old African American child by the leg, dangled him upside down, as members of that regiment shot at him trying to display their marksmanship. Historian Willard Gatewood, Jr. suggested, "presumably the winner was the soldier who sent a bullet through the sleeve of the boy's shirt." The young boy was then returned to his mother, and members of the Twenty-Fourth and Twenty-Fifth Infantries who witnessed the incident were so incensed that they acted. "They stormed into the streets firing their pistols indiscriminately, wrecking saloons and cafes which had refused to serve them and forcing their ways into white brothels." The black soldiers also fought with white civilians and soldiers. The Army sent in the Second Georgia Volunteers, a white

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<sup>25</sup> Gatewood, *Black Americans and the White Man's Burden*, 198. Governor Allen Candler of Georgia blamed the influence of black soldiers in the South for the race violence in Palmetto, Georgia on March 15, 1899, where a white mob killed six African Americans.

regiment, to restore order. These Georgian volunteers put down the riot in a heavy-handed fashion, violently clashing with the black soldiers. Gatewood pointed out that the casualty lists from the riot were extensive on both sides, with “twenty-seven black troops and several white Georgia volunteers” sustaining serious wounds. After facing unfair treatment for so long, it did not take much to spark a violent reaction, and once these soldiers became angry, they directed their ire at those people and establishments that insulted them. Thus, they damaged the businesses that refused to serve them, and fought against the white soldiers sent to get them under control.<sup>26</sup>

These embattled soldiers were all too happy to finally board the transports that would carry them to Cuba and a confrontation with Spanish troops. They were happy to leave the oppressive environment of Florida and were eager to take part in the upcoming war, which offered them a chance for adventure and an opportunity to prove themselves in combat. However, even after leaving Florida and stepping onto the gangway leading to the ship, they could not escape racial discrimination. Not all the soldiers from these regiments boarded the transports. A small contingent of each regiment was left behind in the Tampa area to insure mail and supplies were forwarded to the fighting men in Cuba, to recruit more soldiers, and to train any recruits they received. The soldiers left behind were unhappy, because not only they were missing out on the war, but they also had to continue to face the abuse of the white citizens of Tampa.<sup>27</sup>

Even on the transports the African Americans from the regular army regiments were subjected to segregation on the overcrowded and ill-suited ships. One example was the

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid, pp. 7-9; Foner, *Blacks and the Military in American History*, 77.

<sup>27</sup> Shubert, *Black Valor*, 134.

color line drawn so that black troops were to remain on the starboard side of the ship, and whites would remain on the port side. On the transport ship *Concho*, historian Marvin Fletcher reported black soldiers “lived and slept on the lowest deck, where there was almost no light more than ten feet from the main hatch.”<sup>28</sup> There were other claims of discrimination by black soldiers on the transports. On about June 8, 1898, the invasion force boarded the transports in preparation to sail to Cuba. However, the fleet’s departure was delayed by about a week due to rumors that a Spanish fleet was sighted nearby, which was later determined to be false. Black soldiers suffered in the heat of June in Florida aboard poorly ventilated and overcrowded ships, while the officers of the white regiments allowed their soldiers to come and go from their ships.<sup>29</sup>

### **The Treatment of the African American Volunteers**

African Americans fought and earned the right to form volunteer regiments. The structure and complement of African American officers varied from regiment to regiment, some had a full roster of black officers, some had a partial complement; and in the case of Alabama’s African American volunteer regiment, they had none. Many of these black regiments, that converged on locations in the South in order to further train and organize, came from states in the Midwest and Upper South. Most of the volunteers

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<sup>28</sup> Marvin Fletcher, *The Black Soldier and Officer In the United States Army 1891-1917*, (Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 1974), 34. Fletcher also indicates that many of these transports were ill suited for the job, some being cargo ships that were converted to carry troops. As a result there were not enough facilities to deal with the thousand plus soldiers they carried. Fletcher mentions that the *Concho* only had “one toilet for 1,256 men.”

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, 34.



arrived at camps in southern locations after the regulars departed for Cuba in June 1898, and prepared to be used as a ready supply of reinforcements for the U.S. Army in Cuba. However, after hostilities quickly ended, many regiments began to contemplate the less glamorous duty in Cuba as part of the occupying force that would likely relieve the regular armed forces there. As the volunteer regiments filtered south, they ran headlong into the same abuse that confronted the African American regulars in the preceding months. However, there were some distinct differences in the way white southerners viewed the black volunteers, and the way the volunteers reacted to discrimination.

Whites in the South, who resided near where African American volunteers were encamped, not only complained about having large numbers of armed African Americans near them, but also worried because these regiments were led by black officers. Though many southern whites disliked the presence of the black regulars, their concerns were mollified in knowing that those regiments were officered by white men, which reflected a belief that white officers should exercise control over the black soldiers. However, most of the African American volunteer regiments had some black officers. Regiments officered by African Americans were much maligned and treated poorly by whites in the South. The soldiers in the volunteer regiments were average citizens who put their lives on hold to serve their country, often for the duration of the conflict. These soldiers had already made significant sacrifices well before they were ever put in harms way. Many walked away from jobs and took less money to serve in the ranks; traded life at home for life in tents; and left their families behind to take on the difficulties, deprivation, and rigid military discipline. Their motivations were often patriotic, but the opportunity for

adventure and excitement also influenced American men to volunteer. But when African American men assembled at the camps in the South, they found very little appreciation for their service.

Members of the Twenty-Third Kansas, Eighth Illinois, and Ninth Ohio Regiments rarely encountered the virulent racism black Americans faced in the South, so when they moved there, they were shocked and frustrated by the racist practices. The African American regiments from Virginia and North Carolina were more aware and accustomed to the racial abuse, but these two states, though moving toward it, had not yet legalized racial separation. Above all, many of these men, whether they had experienced life in the Jim Crow South, or not, believed that as U.S. soldiers they should receive better treatment.

There were many incidents that reflected the unwillingness of white southerners to afford black volunteers the appreciation they expected. One incident took place at Camp H.C. Corbin, located at Richmond, Virginia, where the Virginia volunteer regiments mustered, outfitted, and trained. One of the regiments there was the Sixth Virginia, which was an African American regiment with almost all black officers, except for the white commanding officer. Visitors often came to the camp to observe the soldiers train, and during one of these visits some guests insulted the black soldiers. In a letter written to *The Richmond Planet*, an African American soldier using the pseudonym of “Ham” described the episode. “An incident which happened on the occasion of the picnic of the ‘Nineteenth Century Club’ has called forth the indignant protest of the officers as well as the men of this camp.” “Ham” explained that a member of this club was overheard

saying, “they did not care to come in contact with the “D----d black nigger soldiers anyhow.” Ham’s outrage at the event was evident as he reminded the readers of the *Planet* that it was all well and good if the Nineteenth Century Club members did not want to come in contact with the black regiment, but he was angry that it was stated in such a malicious way; “they forget that these men have given up their homes to serve their country....” The disrespect and ungrateful attitude of this man disturbed this soldier who’s sacrifices were so blatantly disregarded. In the same letter, “Ham” mentioned that another member of this club was locked up in the guard tent after a confrontation with an African American sentry. A “Mr. Henry Wilder” was stopped by the sentry “from creating a nuisance around the springs which are used for drinking and cooking purposes.” Mr. Wilder also “used abusive language to the sentinel on duty and was locked up in the guard tent for the rest of the day.” “Ham” believed that the actions of Mr. Wilder was “carrying matters a little too far, and with all respects to the members of this club, the officers of this camp publicly request all visitors to behave themselves while on this government reservation.” He finally added that all visitors to the camp came “under the Rules and Regulations of the camp which are strictly enforced.” There is little doubt that “Ham” was happy to see justice in this case.<sup>30</sup> Since whites in the Sixth Virginia’s own state were engaged in this poor behavior, it did not bode well for them when they left home and had to confront whites in other southern locales.

African American soldiers in the volunteers not only had to worry about potential clashes with white civilians, but they often faced racism and the threat of violence from

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<sup>30</sup> Gatewood, *Smoked Yankees*, 124-125.

their white comrades. A report from Colonel James Young, commanding officer of the Third North Carolina, to the Assistant Adjutant General of the Army described a serious incident that took place on the afternoon of September 18<sup>th</sup>, 1898, when a number of shots were fired from the woods into the Third North Carolina's camp, while they were based at Camp Poland in Knoxville, Tennessee. Colonel Young reported that "on Saturday afternoon, about 4 o'clock about thirty pistol shots [were fired] in the woods just east of our camp, by some white enlisted men, who were seen by several privates in my command; but who were unknown to them." Colonel Young was later informed that the men who fired the pistols were from First Georgia Regiment, a white regiment that had been overheard saying that they were going to attack Young's command. The men of the First Minnesota Volunteer Infantry relayed this information to the men of the Third North Carolina. The white soldiers doing the shooting fled through the woods. The troops of the Third North Carolina were angered by this and wanted to take action, but the Assistant Adjutant General of their brigade, urged restraint and promised that the men of the Third North Carolina would be protected from further attacks. One hundred men from the Second Ohio Volunteers were later stationed in the woods to guard the men of the Third, which eased their concerns.<sup>31</sup> No members of the Third North Carolina were injured in the attack, but it did send a message that enemies were everywhere, outside and inside the camp.

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<sup>31</sup> Record of Correspondence from Colonel James Young, Commanding Officer Third North Carolina, to Captain Babcock, Assistant Adjutant General, dated September 18, 1898. National Archives, Record Group 94, Records of the Adjutant General's Office, 1780's-1917. Spanish-American War Regimental Books, Third North Carolina Colored Infantry Correspondence Log book.

“Ham,” of the Sixth Virginia Regiment, sent the report of this incident to *The Richmond Planet*. His version was somewhat different from Colonel Young’s in that he described an hour-long battle between the Third North Carolina and the First Georgia Regiments. He explained, “We had quite a little battle in the vicinity of our camp last Saturday night. Some of the Third North Carolina and the First Georgia (white regiment), the terrors of the camp, came into collision and blazed away at each other for nearly an hour.” He blamed the Georgians for starting “the row” and said that as a consequence members of the regiment were under arrest, and “will be kept so until they are sent home to be mustered out.”<sup>32</sup> That some Georgians felt such antipathy toward the Third North Carolina should not be surprising. The members of the Georgia regiment, like those of the other volunteer regiments, had been civilians only a short time earlier. Like the men in all the volunteer units, they represented a cross section of their state’s male population. Georgia was one of many states pushing Jim Crow segregation. Part of what was called the “Mississippi Plan,” later applied across the South, was the misrepresentation of African Americans as uneducated and unworthy of the ballot. This included whipping up fear over any instance where black Americans asserted their citizenship rights. The volunteer regiments did not benefit from the years of military service and discipline that the Army regulars were subjected to, so they were more capable of overcoming military regulation and taking action against the Third North Carolina. The lack of discipline, the racism of southern whites, and their abhorrence at being forced to serve shoulder to shoulder with those they deemed inferior very likely

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<sup>32</sup> Gatewood, *Smoked Yankee*, 125-126.

pushed the men of Georgia regiment to act. It is sad commentary on this event that these were men who understood the sacrifices a volunteer made as he transitioned into army life. Unfortunately, they allowed their racism and hatred to overcome their ability to commiserate with their African American brothers-in-arms.<sup>33</sup>

The Sixth Virginia, an African American regiment, faced plenty of turmoil in its brief existence and offers an excellent case study of soldiers whose mounting outrage pushed them to resist racial discrimination. The Sixth Virginia was created with the support of Virginia's Governor J. Hoge Tyler, and began organizing and training at Camp Corbin near Richmond, Virginia in July 1898.<sup>34</sup> The regiment later moved to Camp Poland near Knoxville, Tennessee in order to join with other state militias. While at Camp Poland, Lieutenant Colonel Richard Croxton, the regiment's white commanding officer, decided to call an examination board for nine black officers of the Second Battalion of Sixth Virginia.<sup>35</sup> His justification for this board of examination was that he felt the officers were not fit to command troops and he wanted their abilities assessed. However, the officers who were ordered to present themselves for examination believed that the

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<sup>33</sup> Willard B. Gatewood, Jr., "Virginia's Negro Regiment in The Spanish-American War: The Sixth Virginia Volunteers," *The Virginia Magazine of Historical Biography*, Vol. 80, No. 2 (April 1972), 201. Gatewood relates a further incident where white troops allowed their racism to drive them to protest serving with African American soldiers. He explains that when the Sixth Virginia Volunteers arrived at Camp Poland, near Knoxville, Tennessee, it was placed in brigade with the Thirty-Fifth Michigan and Fourth Tennessee, both white regiments. The soldiers from the Tennessee regiment, when it was clear they were going to serve side-by-side with black troops "stacked arms and refused to drill claiming they preferred to quit rather than be brigaded with a Negro regiment."

<sup>34</sup> Gatewood, *Black Americans and the White Man's Burden*, 97-98. The Sixth Virginia began organizing in July 1898 and completed it in August 1898.

<sup>35</sup> The Sixth Virginia had two battalions, and all of the officers of each battalion were African American. Lt Col. Croxton focused on examining the majority of officers of the Second Battalion, but omitted any officers from the First battalion from examination.

decision was made so that Lt. Col. Croxton could justify replacing them with white officers, so instead of presenting themselves to an examination board whose objectivity they questioned they chose to resign their commissions in protest. Their suspicions were later confirmed when Lt. Col. Croxton admitted to a investigative committee, on October 31, 1898, that it was his idea “to have one battalion officered by white men and one by Negroes.” Historian Willard Gatewood indicates that the officers of the Second Battalion of the Sixth Virginia, led by Major William Henry Johnson, was likely targeted over of the First Battalion because they were more vocal in their criticism of the disrespectful way Croxton treated them.<sup>36</sup> The members of the Sixth Virginia felt the injustice of the act because many had decided to serve with the understanding that African American officers would lead them. Croxton’s examination board crossed a line and transformed the conditions under which they served. Even with the resignation of the officers of the Second Battalion, there was still a chance for Croxton to prove his critics wrong by choosing the replacements from African American candidates. However, Croxton filled eight of the officer vacancies with white men, an act that earned him the further consternation of his soldiers.<sup>37</sup>

Both the African American soldiers and citizens of Virginia were angry over the actions of the Sixth Virginia’s commanding officer. African Americans in Richmond, formed a committee to protest Croxton’s actions to the War Department and Governor Hoge Tyler. They wanted to protest what they saw as an unjust act, and wanted to gain assurances that the vacancies created by the resignations would be filled from within the

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<sup>36</sup> Gatewood, “Virginia’s Negro Regiment in the Spanish-American War,” 202.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 202-204.

ranks. Little was gained from their efforts. The soldiers who served in the Sixth Virginia, especially those attached to the Second Battalion felt the injustice the most. Many of the volunteers came from African American militia companies who were mustered in with their officers in place. When the officers of the Second Battalion resigned in protest and were replaced with white officers, there was a sense that the terms under which the soldiers volunteered had changed. As a result, some felt that it nullified their obligation to serve. John Mitchell, Jr., of *The Richmond Planet* noted, “It is a well-known fact that the men of this regiment volunteered with the understanding that they would be officered by men from the regiment. When the government violates that obligation, wither upon the recommendation of Lt. Col. Croxton or General Any-body-else, the regiment should be permitted to decide whether it will continue in or be mustered out of service.” Mitchell urged action by black Virginians, telling them “the proper movement for the citizens of the state is to send memorials to the Secretary of War, Russell A. Alger and the President of the United States, William McKinley that the Sixth Virginia be mustered out of service.”<sup>38</sup>

John Mitchell, Jr. was a vocal advocate for fair treatment, and his argument for the mustering out of the Sixth Virginia Volunteer Infantry should be seen as a continuation of this work, and more specifically as part of his “no officer, no fight” campaign. If black Americans were going to fight, and if they were going to be segregated while in the Army, then their regiments should be staffed with black officers. Mitchell’s campaign met with success, but he continued to monitor the treatment of African Americans as they

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<sup>38</sup> *The Richmond Planet*, “The Removal of Colored Officers,” October 29, 1898, 4; Gatewood, “Virginia’s Negro Regiment in The Spanish-American War,” 204.



mustered into service, and remained prepared to call out injustice. This was, in his opinion, such an injustice, and since the men of the Second Battalion of the Sixth Virginia were no longer serving under the conditions they expected, and since it seemed clear that Lt. Col. Croxton created the circumstances under which nine officers felt insulted enough to resign, Mitchell argued that the Army needed to release the regiment from its obligation. As for the connection to “no officer, no fight,” it was a simple case of no longer having African American officers in command of the Second Battalion, so the men should no longer be expected to fight.

The men of the Second Battalion took part in an event that showed that they agreed with this sentiment. Lt. Col. Croxton filled the officer vacancies with white officers, which deeply impacted the morale of the men of the Second Battalion. Their sense of fairness was upset and in protest when the white officers issued orders to their men for the first time on November 2, 1898, the soldiers refused to follow the commands. Croxton was incensed, calling it a mutiny, and brought in two white regiments to arrest the men of the Sixth Virginia’s Second Battalion. Major Joseph Johnson, an African American officer who commanded the First Battalion and the highest-ranking black officer in the regiment, spoke to the men and eventually convinced them to begin following orders.<sup>39</sup> The refusal to follow orders was a bold move, since the Army took mutiny and breach of discipline very seriously, but this indicates the level of the soldiers’ frustration and anger at the unexpected and questionable replacement of their officers.

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<sup>39</sup> Gatewood, “Virginia’s Negro Regiment in The Spanish-American War,” 204.

The mass protest of the Second Battalion was a calculated risk, but the soldiers understood it would have been difficult to severely punish as many as four hundred men.

The Sixth Virginia was not immediately mustered out, and was eventually sent to another camp for continued training. The Army commanders transferred the regiment to Camp Haskell near Macon, Georgia. At Camp Haskell the soldiers of the Sixth, who were already demoralized over the loss of their officers and not in a disposition to brook insults, reacted openly to the racism and discrimination they encountered in the region. The Sixth Virginia was one of multiple African American regiments sent to Macon, placing as many as 4,000 black soldiers in the area. This created fear and concern among the town's white residents. As a result, they attempted to force the black soldiers to accept their social customs. Some men of the Sixth Virginia sent a clear message to the people of Macon that they were not willing to be discriminated against. In one incident, after being shown a tree at Camp Haskell known as the "hanging tree" where African Americans had been lynched, some soldiers of the regiment chopped it down and had it "split into firewood." This was an act that not only showed defiance to whites in the area, but also destroyed a symbol of racial hatred. In another incident, upon seeing signs in one of Macon's public parks reading "No Dogs and Niggers Allowed in here," members of the Sixth Virginia "tore the signs down and beat up the park-keeper when he tried to stop them."<sup>40</sup>

Like the other black volunteers, the members of the Sixth Virginia at Camp Haskell faced discrimination and segregation whenever they left camp and went into Macon. Just

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid, 205-207.

as the black regulars were denied service in white-owned businesses, so too were the men of the Sixth Virginia. In addition to the stores, restaurants, and other businesses closed to them, African American soldiers were separated on the city's streetcars. Instead of being allowed to ride inside with the white patrons, African American soldiers were forced to ride on trailers attached to the back of the streetcars. The black volunteers often challenged this rule, which led to confrontations. In one instance, a private of the Sixth Virginia refused to ride in the streetcar's trailer and got into an argument with the conductor. During this argument the conductor drew a pistol and shot the private dead. The streetcar conductor was arrested and placed on trial, but he was freed when the verdict determined that it was "justifiable homicide."<sup>41</sup> This decision by a jury of Macon citizens showed that they extended their contempt for the rights of African Americans to those black soldiers in their midst. African American volunteer regiments faced ingratitude from white Americans, disrespect and resentment from many white soldiers, and in some cases had to deal with injustices from their own commanding officers. There seemed to be danger and difficulty on every side, and the soldiers who joined the Army with hopes that change could be influenced through their service had to face the reality that this optimism was misplaced.

### **The Experiences of African American Officers**

The position of officer in the U.S. Army carries with it the expectation of respect. African Americans engaged in a strong campaign to fill the officer positions in African

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid, 207.

American volunteer regiments. Gaining a commission during the war was an important, if temporary, victory for black Americans, and should have bestowed on the individual officer a level of respect and authority. Military discipline often asserted that if an individual soldier did not respect the officer as a person, he was at the very least obligated to respect the rank and the authority that it represented. Following this line of reasoning, African Americans who were elevated to officers should have enjoyed the benefits of their ranks, or been given proper respect from fellow soldiers and officers from other regiments, white units included. The reality was that black officers often faced the same disrespect and resentment that their enlisted soldiers encountered, coming from white civilians and soldiers. Many black Americans saw the promotion of members of their race as a significant opportunity to prove their ability to lead, as well as to show how far they had advanced since emancipation, but the expectation that black officers would be respected was often challenged.

The aforementioned “mutiny” of the Sixth Virginia offers a clear example of the kind of contempt that faced African American officers. The enlisted volunteers in the Sixth Virginia felt betrayed enough to refuse the orders of the white officers who replaced those black officers who had resigned. However, going beyond the anger of the average soldier in the ranks, this incident represented something else as well. It showed the lack of regard for African American officers by their white commanding officer. Lt. Col. Richard Croxton took command of the Sixth Virginia understanding that the rest of his officers were to be African American. He apparently desired to create a regiment where the officers of one battalion were black and the other white. In order to push the officers

of the Second Battalion out he needed justification. Croxton doubted the ability of many of his officers to lead efficiently and therefore called an examination of most of the officers of the Second Battalion. There was little notice afforded those officers.<sup>42</sup>

In a letter to *The Richmond Planet*, William Henry Johnson, a major in the Sixth Virginia, head of the Second Battalion and one of those ordered to the examination board, acknowledged the right of a commanding officer to use examinations to force out an officer whose leadership was detrimental to the regiment, however, Johnson took objection to the way Croxton used this power, and saw it as an act based on race, arguing that Croxton's goal from the start was "not to find out our efficiency, etc., but to throw us out." William Henry Johnson admitted that if West Point was to be seen as the "standard of efficiency, we admit that we were incompetent, so is everyone else not a West Point grad." His assertion was that like most officers in volunteer regiments, the officers of the Sixth Virginia had little formal training and practical experience, but they were considered competent and actively learning their duties, moreover, it would have been unfair and unrealistic to compare the volunteer officers to a military academy-trained officer in the U.S Army.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> National Archives, Record Group 94, Records of the Adjutant General's Office, 1780's-1917. Spanish-American War Regimental Books, Sixth Virginia Colored Infantry Order book; Issued on October 1, 1898, the order commanding nine African American Officers of the Second Battalion of the Sixth Virginia Volunteer Infantry to appear on the morning of October 3<sup>rd</sup>. It stated that its purpose was to "examine into the capacity, qualifications, and conduct and efficiency" of the named officers, but the officers who were expected to appear before the examination board saw this as a veiled attempt oust them.

<sup>43</sup> Gatewood, *Smoked Yankee*, 134-135.

Major Johnson was critical of the short notice given the officers of the Second Battalion. He argued, “had the board met at the time appointed, we would have been summoned to appear before the board, not knowing what was wanted of us.” According to Johnson’s version of events, the order was for the board to meet on Monday, October 3<sup>rd</sup> at 10am, but he, and his fellow officers, did not receive their orders until Monday, October 3<sup>rd</sup>, at 9am. This showed what he called a “snap judgment” on Croxton’s part to convene the board. It was hastily thrown together and there was not enough time to notify the officers before the board was to actually convene. He indicates that he was shocked at the order for examination, “we were not aware of anything of the kind to take place till we read the order.” Instead of accepting the order, the officers had turned in their resignations by early Tuesday morning. This had everything to do with the fact that they believed that the board of examination was contrived to offer justification for their dismissal from service. William H. Johnson believed that “the intention to get rid of colored officers was evident. We did not fear a fair examination as some of us had been examined more than once, and one of us three times, being always successful, but we were satisfied that it was a case of trot them out and knock them down.” He presented as proof of this accusation not only the lack of notice, but the officers who were to make up the board of examination itself.<sup>44</sup>

Major Johnson firmly believed that the board was purposely composed of officers who would have ruled unfavorably against the men summoned before them. He explained that two of the five officers on the board would probably have given them a

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid, 134-135.

fair examination, but that the other three had little respect for the African American officers, and would have acted to find them incompetent to continue to lead the Sixth Virginia. He mentioned that one of the officers appointed to serve on the board came “from a regiment closely allied to the Georgia Regiment (white) which gave us more trouble than all Camp Poland combined, while the other two, one of whom was the president, was from a regiment, the 4<sup>th</sup> Tennessee, who hated us intensely as by their action on learning that we were to be temporarily assigned to the same brigade with them.” Johnson, and the other officers who resigned with him, firmly believed that they could not get justice from the board of examination called by Croxton. Johnson asserted, “we had nothing to hope for, only swift judgment.”<sup>45</sup>

Johnson believed that there were no other reasons to convene a board, except to find cause to dismiss those officers whom Croxton targeted. He argued that before they left Virginia a board representing the State of Virginia examined them and “pronounced us qualified for our positions.” In Johnson’s view, there was no need for any further examinations. He stressed that the officers and men of the Sixth did their duty and that “the regiment was complimented time and again upon its efficiency....”<sup>46</sup> John Mitchell, Jr. of *The Richmond Planet*, agreed with William Henry Johnson’s assessment of Croxton’s motive. Mitchell in an editorial declared the incident “savored of race

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<sup>45</sup> *The Richmond Planet*, “The Silence is Broken,” November 19, 1898, pg. 1; Willard B. Gatewood, Jr., *Smoked Yankee*, pp. 134-137; *The Richmond Planet*, “Trouble in the Sixth Virginia,” October 15, 1898, pg. 1. In a letter to the editor of *The Planet*, the writer using the pseudonym “Ham” backed up William Henry Johnson’s version of events explaining, “the order for the examination of the officers, as to their fitness, qualification and conduct, was issued Monday evening.” He then mentioned that all those officers up for examination resigned by Tuesday.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

prejudice and carried with it an irresistible conclusion that it was done to reflect upon and to get rid of the colored officers. The person that does not see this must be blind indeed.” John Mitchell, Jr. argued that the actions of the Commanding Officer of the Sixth were completely unjust and transparent. He attacked the assertion that the examination board in this case was utilized to insure the efficiency of the regimental officers, by asking “if efficiency is the basis of this action, why is it that the white companies, battalions and brigades have not been subjected to similar inspections.” He argued that even if some of the officers of the Sixth Virginia were inefficient, this was to be understood, as it was the nature of the volunteer force, and the men and officers of the volunteer regiments needed time to learn their duties. To support this point Mitchell quoted Major-General Fitzhugh Lee, who testified before the War Investigation Committee on October 6, 1898. Mitchell quoted Lee as saying, “as to the efficiency of officers appointed from civil life, some of them learned the duties promptly, others were very slow to learn, others never learned, but a majority did. I believe that volunteers will always become effective, especially when confronted by the enemy.” “No Board of Examination has been detailed to investigate and report on those who never learned.,” declared Mitchell. Lee’s comments indicated that some volunteer officers learned their jobs faster than others, but Mitchell could not accept that all of the men of the Sixth Virginia’s Second Battalion were inefficient. There was no excuse or precedent for the wholesale examination of the battalion’s entire officer corps.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> *The Richmond Planet*, “The Resignation of Colored Officers,” October 15, 1898.



Mitchell also added the testimony of Major-General William Graham who offered an example of inefficiency within the Third Virginia, a white regiment. He explained that the officers in this regiment did not know how to properly fill out a ration requisition form, and therefore, could not draw fresh supplies for their men. A situation that could hurt the soldiers in that regiment. General Graham had to demonstrate for them how to properly fill out the forms. Mitchell questioned why there was never a Board of Examination to “investigate and report on those officers who did not know how to make this ration return.” Since the actions of Lt. Col. Croxton had no true justification, and were seen as racially motivated, Mitchell agreed that the officers of the Sixth Virginia “should not submit to such a manifest discrimination.”<sup>48</sup>

In another editorial Mitchell asked whether it would not be proper for the Secretary of War to “order an examination as to the competency of the Lieutenant Colonel of the Sixth Virginia.” He added that the board should be “made up of the faculty of the military institute at West Point.” Mitchell was certain that if Croxton had been treated in the same manner as the men he ordered to be examined, that he would be certain to fail. He asked, “who believes that this prejudiced officer would be able to undergo such an examination on short notice?”<sup>49</sup> William Henry Johnson and John Mitchell, Jr. both accused Croxton of racism in his decision to bring in so many officers of the Sixth Virginia for examination. Johnson felt that the motive was blatant and that Croxton never truly respected his subordinate officers, led Johnson to declare that “the commanding officer of the Sixth Virginia Regiment has no respect for a man of color,

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> *The Richmond Planet*, “The Removal of Colored Officers,” October 29, 1898.

refined or vicious. All look alike to him.” He believed that to Croxton, as well as a “certain class of army officers, an enlisted man, or an officer if he be a colored officer, is no more than a yellow dog.” Johnson understood through his experiences that there were many white Americans, civilian and soldier, whose biased views immediately clouded their dealings with black officers and enlisted men.<sup>50</sup>

Lieutenant Colonel Croxton’s actions were harmful in that he demonstrated to the officers and men of his regiment that they could not trust him to protect their interests. Not only did the Sixth Virginia have to remain alert for enemies among the white regiments and civilians in and around their encampments, they also had to keep a weary eye on the enemy within their own organizations. In the case of Lt. Col. Croxton, this enemy from within carried the ultimate decision-making authority and had the power to directly influence the command environment for better or worse. Croxton’s decision to take steps to remove many of his African American soldiers was devastating to the overall morale of the Sixth Virginia Regiment, as they felt betrayed by their leader, and chafed at perceived injustice with little recourse. Ultimately, Virginia Governor J. Hoge Tyler accepted the resignations of the African American officers, and gave Croxton the authority to fill the vacated positions with white officers, thus making the fears of the soldiers of the Sixth Virginia realized.

There were other challenges from white soldiers and civilians who showed an open disrespect for black officers. The chaplain of the Twenty-Fifth Infantry, T. G. Steward, reported instances when white soldiers showed their contempt for him. While in the

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<sup>50</sup> Gatewood, *Smoked Yankee*, 137.

Philippines Chaplain Steward wrote *The Cleveland Gazette* describing how he had to correct some white enlisted men. Chaplain Steward carried the rank of captain, and although he had little authority over the soldiers when it came to tactical and operational decisions, his rank was still such that enlisted men and officers of subordinate ranks were required to salute him. As a result, Steward felt compelled to act when ignored by subordinates. “I have found it necessary to round up a few white soldiers for disrespect....” He mentioned that a white soldier, who was attached to the hospital corps, failed to acknowledge him as he came out of the hospital. Steward followed the soldier to his workspace and told his supervisor that he wanted to see the soldier. The soldier “came up and saluted as humbly as need be. I gave him a word of instruction” which, according to Steward checked the spirit of disrespect among the hospital staff.<sup>51</sup>

This was no isolated incident as Steward related another instance of disrespect toward him. He was riding in a “hack” when he passed by three white volunteers. As he passed them, they “indulged in some vile cursing at my expense.” The soldiers kept walking and apparently believed that Steward would not check them. “They did not know me as well as they thought they did.” Steward ordered his driver to turn around and catch up to the soldiers. Once he did, he “read them a lecture” even as they denied that “they had said anything disrespectful” and begged him to let them move on. Steward acted as any good officers should, and used this as a point of instruction for the soldiers and emphasized the point by reporting the incident to their colonel. Steward believed that he was ultimately helping the soldiers. In stopping and correcting these men, Chaplain Steward was

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<sup>51</sup> Gatewood, *Black Americans and the White Man's Burden*, 135-136.

fostering and reinforcing an environment of good discipline, and ensured that the soldiers adhered to regulations. In addition, he was challenging the way many white soldiers treated black officers. It is likely that the white soldiers who carried out passive or overt acts of disrespect believed that black officers would not have the courage to confront their actions. Steward showed that he was not intimidated by the disrespectful acts of white soldiers; and by standing up to this open contempt, Steward took steps that might prevent repeat offenses from these soldiers.<sup>52</sup>

The instance of disrespect from white soldiers was a carryover from their civilian lives. Many of the white volunteers, especially from the South, felt insulted by having to show respect to African American officers. Racist beliefs and attitudes explain their behavior and the act of entering the U.S. Army, or putting on a uniform, was unlikely change what years of indoctrination had created. So when white volunteers, who were typically less disciplined than the Army regulars and only recently pulled from their civilian lives, came in contact with black officers, they resented being placed in a subservient position to black men. In some cases, the officers of white volunteer units perpetuated and even approved of the disrespect toward black officers. In one instance Colonel James Tillman, who was the commanding officer of a volunteer regiment from South Carolina and the nephew of Senator Benjamin “Pitchfork” Tillman, announced, “no earthly power can force our boys to lift their hats to one of these Negro officers. If I hear of one of the South Carolina boys saluting a Negro, I will kick him out of the

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

company. We have enlisted to fight for our country and not to practice social equality with an inferior race whom our fathers held in bondage.”<sup>53</sup>

Colonel Tillman’s relationship to Senator Benjamin Tillman is noteworthy, as the Senator was well known to be actively working against the political advancement of African Americans. Colonel Tillman’s state of origin was also significant as one of the many battlegrounds where African Americans saw the erosion of their civil rights and the strengthening of laws meant to segregate and disenfranchise. This example again showed the difficult situation facing black officers, who hoped to prove their ability to lead men into combat, but faced resistance wherever they looked. In the Sixth Virginia’s case their own commanding officer was willing to destroy the morale of his command and their trust in him in order to get his way. Additionally, in the case of Colonel James Tillman, African American officers had to cope with a white fellow officer who encouraged his men to ignore military regulation and custom, and not acknowledge their rank or authority.

As the Army ranks swelled with the volunteers, the military also needed to meet its administrative needs by increasing the number of paymasters to ensure that the soldiers were paid on time. Two African Americans were appointed Army paymasters by President William McKinley, and with the appointment came the rank of Major. These appointments carried prestige and a certain amount of responsibility. Though these positions were not part of the operational chain of command, these paymasters held the rank of major and deserved the respect the rank commanded. However, even the African

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<sup>53</sup> Gatewood, *Black Americans and the White Man’s Burden*, 135-136.

Americans who were appointed to pay the soldiers in the Army were not immune from racism and backlash from white troops.

Major John R. Lynch was one of the black paymasters appointed to the Army. There was an incident when white troops from Texas refused to take their pay from Major Lynch.<sup>54</sup> The editor of *The Colored American*, E. E. Cooper, clearly saw the incident for what it was, the Texas soldiers resented taking pay from Major Lynch because he held authority over them. Addressing the surprise that some African Americans felt over the actions of the Texans, Cooper responded:

Some of our contemporaries express surprise that the Texas soldiers should refuse to accept money from the hands of a colored man now, when from time immemorial they have been resorting to every means fair or foul to wrest the dollars from the Negro's palm. The difference is easily discernable. The poor Negro farmer, workhand, or menial is nobody in particular and regarded as the legitimate recipient of the kicks and abuse of the dominant race. As a paymaster in the army, wearing the shoulder straps of a major backed by the full authority of a great government, the Negro is a gentleman and a superior officer over many whites. It is the presumption of equality and the actual superiority that cuts the arrogant Southerner to the quick. They will continue to take the defenseless Negro's money in the same old way, and accept it from the Majors Lynch and Wright when they have to.<sup>55</sup>

Major Lynch discussed the incident and admitted that there was resistance to his presence as paymaster, but in actuality only one man "refused to take his pay from him," however, it appeared that others were prepared to follow his example. Major Lynch saw the danger and quickly moved to prevent further trouble. "When it was thought that the

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid,136; *The Colored American*, "paymaster Wright Outraged," September 17, 1898. Editor E. E. Cooper quotes one non-commissioned officer of the Texas regiment as saying, "My father was an officer in the Confederate Army, and I have too much good southern blood in my veins to accept my army pay from a Negro." The reports of the incident show that this was not an isolated feeling.

<sup>55</sup> *The Colored American*, "The Fly in the Ointment," October 8, 1898.

whole regiment would rebel,” he made it clear to the commanding officer of the Texans that “he proposed to pay off his troops and if they didn’t accept their pay, no money at all would be paid to them.” The commanding officer of the Texas volunteers warned Lynch that the men might threaten bodily harm, and he responded that “he was not afraid of that.” He asked the commanding officer to order his men to line up to be paid, and Lynch said that he would be “responsible for the results.”<sup>56</sup> In the end the men accepted their pay, but the incident offers another view of the unwillingness of many white soldiers to respect the rank of black officers.

The distinction between the officer and enlisted ranks typically afforded officers more respect among civilians. The idea that officers were usually from a more educated class lent itself to the moniker of “an officer and a gentleman.” As the Army began to accept black officers with the volunteers, African Americans hoped that they could use the opportunity to prove themselves capable of leadership, and to earn the respect of white Americans. That white Americans typically did not respect black officers became clear very quickly. Whites, especially as volunteer regiments mustered in camps in the South, showed that they were not impressed by their officers’ rank and black soldiers were often treated poorly based on their race, not their rank. For example, the Eighth Illinois Volunteer Infantry, was an African American unit with a full compliment of black officers. Corporal W. T. Goode, who served with the Eighth, explained that when the regiment arrived in Baltimore, Maryland as it travelled to New York City to catch its transport to Cuba, the men encountered overt discrimination. Like the men in the enlisted

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<sup>56</sup> *The Washington Bee*, “Major Lynch in Town,” October 29, 1898.

ranks, the officers of the command faced segregation. Goode wrote that as they awaited for their train to continue on to New York some of the officers “left the train and went into a restaurant to get lunch and they were deliberately refused.” Whether the black soldiers was wearing stripes or epaulets did not matter, race trumped rank. Goode found this treatment appalling. “Think of it. An American refusing to sell a hungry American soldier something to eat! All on account of his color. Such American citizens stand greatly in need of much Christianizing and are void of civilization.”<sup>57</sup>

Chaplain George W. Prioleau of the Ninth Cavalry did not follow his regiment to Cuba, instead he was detailed to recruit soldiers for his regiment. Even as his and other African American regular Army regiments were engaging in battle against Spanish troops, Prioleau travelled throughout the South to encourage more African Americans to enlist. Prioleau, an Army officer on official duty, described in a letter to the *Christian Recorder*, and later republished in the *Cleveland Gazette*, his frustration at the treatment he received while there. While travelling in Alabama and South Carolina, Prioleau came face to face with open hostility and resentment from whites over his presence there.

While recruiting in the vicinity of Tuskegee, Alabama, Chaplain Prioleau took time on a Sunday to attend church service at a white church. Upon entering the church, he was informed that he could not sit where he liked. He was given some options, but the prejudice encountered at the church stung him. “When an officer of the United States Army, a Negro chaplain, goes into their midst to enlist men for the service of the government, to protect the honor of the flag and their country, and this chaplain goes on

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<sup>57</sup> Corporal W. T. Goode, *The Eighth Illinois* (Chicago: The Blakely Printing Company, 1899), 117.



Sunday to the M.E. Church [white] to worship God, he is given three propositions to consider, either take the extreme back seat, go up to the gallery, or go out. But as we were not a back seat or gallery Christian, we preferred going out.”<sup>58</sup>

There are several issues to consider in this incident. Chaplain Prioleau was an officer doing his duty for the Army and the U.S. government, which was engaged in a war at the time. It is clear that he considered their actions as unpatriotic. Moreover, he was a chaplain, a man of God, who wanted to enjoy fellowship with other Christians, but was treated in a manner that made him question their faith. This congregation placed their racism and hatred above any conception of Christian brotherhood. He was angry and informed the church’s leaders that the “act was heinous, uncivilized, un-Christian, and un-American.” These were dangerous things to say to southern white men, who told Prioleau that black men had “been lynched in Alabama for saying less.” However, not to be deterred, Prioleau replied “that only cowards and assassins would overpower a man at midnight and take him from his bed and lynch him, but the night you dirty cowards come to my quarters for that purpose, there will be a hot time in Tuskegee that hour...”<sup>59</sup>

Prioleau encountered further instances of contempt and resentment from whites. He travelled to Charleston, South Carolina, the place of his birth, to recruit there, understanding that it was still “the same old hotbed of rebellion and prejudice.” He mentioned that his trip represented “about the first time that a recruiting officer for the regular Army for colored men ever opened office in this state.” While there he argued that the worst prejudice was reserved for those African Americans who were advancing.

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<sup>58</sup> Gatewood, *Smoked Yankees*, 74.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

The more successful and educated African Americans were targeted more often. Prioleau explained, “the prejudice is not so much against the ignorant Negro, the riff-raffs, as it is against the intelligent, educated, tax-paying Negro; the Negro who is trying to be a man....” Those who were challenging white preconceptions and stereotypes of black Americans were singled out for abuse to hinder their advancement. An African American Army officer, such as Chaplain George Prioleau, would have fit the definition of someone who threatened the white conception of the African American’s place in southern society. While in Charleston, he was poorly treated reporting that “On the public highway, street and railroad cars I received insults daily for 30 days in my own city. My recruiting party was most brutally treated, and there was no redress.”<sup>60</sup>

### **The Treatment of African American Citizens During the War**

The way the soldiers and the officers of the black regulars and volunteer Army regiments were treated by whites served to show that whites in the United States held little regard for their service. The massacres in Wilmington, North Carolina and at Palmetto, Georgia, 1898 reveal that whites were not moved by black participation in the war. They either ignored their service and continued their discriminatory policies, or reacted to the lingering influence that black soldiers had on the black citizens who live near the military camps by increasing violence to reassert the racial status quo. The violence at Wilmington and Palmetto took place only a few months after the hostilities ended with Spain. If there was to be a moment when whites were going to show

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid, 74-75.

appreciation for the service of African Americans, it would have been in this “honeymoon period” where Americans reveled in their victory against Spain, but events proved that this was not to be.

On November 10, 1898, two days after local elections, hundreds of armed white men attacked African Americans in Wilmington, North Carolina and burned down the office of a local African American newspaper there. White Democrats in North Carolina precipitated the race riot, or massacre, in Wilmington in order to wrest political control, elective offices, and power from African Americans in the city.<sup>61</sup> Alfred Waddell, a white man, led the attack on Wilmington’s black citizens, destroying the building and press of Alexander Manly, editor of the *Record*, and then attacked the prominent black citizens in town before turning their wrath against the other African Americans and their property. The end result was that as many as fourteen African Americans were killed and many more were injured, and hundreds fled the city to the safety of the nearby woods, where they remained for days. This attack was part of a larger campaign in the state where white Democrats actively worked to disenfranchise African Americans. Wilmington was a city that had a large African American population, and a significant black middle class. The success of African Americans in Wilmington also translated to elective office as African Americans accounted for some of the town leadership. The effort of whites to usurp the political offices held by Republicans, and more specifically

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<sup>61</sup> William Gleason, “Voices at the Nadir: Charles Chestnutt and David Bryant Fulton,” *American Literary Realism 1870-1910*, Vol. 24, No. 3, (Spring 1992), 23; Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina, 1996), 110-111.

African Americans, was an effort to prevent what some white southerners inaccurately called “black domination.” Racist ideologies fueled this campaign, which perpetuated stereotypes and depended on stirring up fear among the white population of the South.<sup>62</sup>

In her study, *Gender and Jim Crow*, Glenda Gilmore says that middle class African Americans, politicians, and even military officers challenged what whites called “place.” “White men reordered southern society through segregation and disfranchisement in the 1890s because they realized that African American success not only meant competition in the marketplace and the sharing of political influence, but also challenged fundamental social hierarchies that depended nearly as much upon fixed gender roles as they did on the privileges of whiteness.” She later explained that “place assembled the current concepts of class and race into a stiff-sided box where southerners expected African Americans to dwell. Southerners lived under a caste system in which skin color, class, and gender dictated the pattern of every daily interaction.”<sup>63</sup> Seeing African Americans advance pushed white southerners to act to force African Americans back into their inferior social position.

The attack on African Americans in Wilmington carried significance. In addition to attempting to force African Americans back into a subservient position in southern society, and check their economic and political advancement, it reflected the disregard for the sacrifices made by black Americans in the Spanish-American War. The attack on the black citizens of Wilmington happened approximately four months after American forces fought in Cuba, and about three months after peace was signed with Spain. In the battles

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<sup>62</sup> Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow*, 82-83.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid, 3.

fought during the brief conflict in Cuba, four African American Army regiments, numbering as many as four thousand black soldiers, were at the forefront of every significant battle in the war. In addition, by November, there were an additional ten thousand black volunteers in camps preparing for service. Of those, one of the African American volunteer regiments came from North Carolina and had a full complement of black officers.<sup>64</sup>

African Americans saw the unfairness of the violence in Wilmington, given their contributions to the American victory over Spain. Even before the violence in that city, African American newspapers commented on the unwillingness of whites to acknowledge black patriotism and contributions to the war effort. W. Calvin Chase of the *Washington Bee* announced, with regard to race troubles in North Carolina, “the gallantry and patriotism of the Negro soldier in the late Spanish-American War... are not regarded by the southern oligarchy as commendable acts and deeds to raise the citizenship of the Negro.”<sup>65</sup> After the Wilmington massacre John Mitchell, Jr. wrote, “while the North Carolina men were away in the United States service offering up their lives for their country, murderous white men were in the streets of Wilmington murdering their brothers whom they had left behind.”<sup>66</sup> Here *The Richmond Planet*’s editor touched upon a particular aspect of the insult white men perpetrated against black Americans. There were black soldiers from Wilmington, North Carolina serving in the Third North Carolina. As black soldiers served to protect the nation, their family members lives, if

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<sup>64</sup> Gatewood, *Black Americans and the White Man’s Burden*, 115-116 & 148.

<sup>65</sup> *The Washington Bee*, “Southern Chivalry,” November 5, 1898, 4.

<sup>66</sup> *The Richmond Planet*, November 26, 1898, 4.

not directly threatened, were significantly disrupted by events in their hometowns. This went against accepted practices since it was expected that soldiers should be allowed to leave their friends and family behind without having to fear for their well-being. In the case of many black soldiers from North Carolina, events in the state created concern for those they left behind. The irony was that the men who volunteered to face danger in war abroad were less concerned about their own safety than for the safety of their loved ones at home.

Another incident took place in Palmetto, Georgia on March 15, 1899 where six African Americans were killed by a white mob. By itself this attack is not easily connected to the service of black soldiers, but Georgia's governor Allen Candler laid the blame for what was seen as increased racial violence in the region on the presence of so many African American troops in his state. Governor Candler shifted the blame for the attack from those whites who actually took part to the black soldiers who encamped in his state during the Spanish-American War, because their presence "had disturbed 'the peaceful race relations' existing in Georgia and produced tensions which were responsible for violent acts against blacks."<sup>67</sup> The idea that black soldiers were responsible for the violence due to their influence on black civilians residing near the camps was an effort to justify white violence in the region, and worked to besmirch the reputation of the black soldiers who served during the conflict. *The Washington Bee's* Calvin Chase responded by condemning the violence at Palmetto. "The recent blood thirsty murder which took place at Palmetto, Georgia, last week, displays at once the

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<sup>67</sup> Willard B. Gatewood, Jr., *Black Americans and the White Man's Burden*, pg. 198.

cowardice, brutality, and hatred of the whites of that section.”<sup>68</sup> This was a far cry from the expected gratitude many African Americans expected for fighting in the war.

Chase continued to denounce southern whites for allowing the violence to happen, throwing the responsibility for it on the “best element of southern white men.” Chase’s proof that this was so was in Governor Candler’s assertion that black soldiers were ultimately responsible. Chase pointed out, “It is only necessary to point to the interview of the governor of Georgia, in which he attempts to justify the murders upon the plea that the colored soldiers, who went to Cuba to fight for the flag and to whose valor more than that of any other, may be ascribed the success of American arms, had sown the seeds of discord and encouraged lawlessness.” Chase certainly felt that to offer up African American soldiers as the cause of the growing violence in the South was not only to call into question the honor of the soldiers who placed their lives at risk in the service of their nation, but to shift the responsibility for the attack away from whom it should be placed, with the white mob. Instead of Governor Candler following the right course of action and seeking justice for those who were killed at Palmetto, he justified the attack and “thus gave encouragement to lawlessness and open murder.”<sup>69</sup> Sol Johnson, the editor of the *Savannah Tribune*, was also quick to criticize Governor Candler for his position on the killings at Palmetto. He argued, “our governor proved himself very small when he charged that the enlisting of colored men in the Army was the cause of the Palmetto lynching.”<sup>70</sup> In a later edition Johnson echoed Chase arguing that Candler’s attitude only

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<sup>68</sup> *The Washington Bee*, “The Negro South and the Southern People,” March 25, 1899.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> *The Savannah Tribune*, April 1, 1899.

encouraged further violence by whites in the South. He felt that Candler's position explained why crime was "so rampant in Georgia," because "the chief executive continually gives excuses for certain classes of men who violate the law."<sup>71</sup>

The issue of sullyng the reputation of black soldiers created outrage among African Americans. They were indignant because it undermined their contribution to the war effort. The nature of white supremacy in the South would not allow the acknowledgement of the positive contribution of African Americans in the Spanish-American War. Claiming that the black soldiers who encamped in the South represented a bad influence on the African American citizens in the region spoke to the reality that African Americans in uniform represented an unacceptable level of authority. For many whites their concern was that armed African Americans demanding to be treated with respect and refusing to accept local social norms would inspire others to resist discrimination. It angered many southern whites that black soldiers were not deferential to them. In addition, the war took place, as did the resultant convergence of soldiers to the South, during the era of political disenfranchisement. This was a time when white southern Democrats sought to remove African Americans from the electorate. Black soldiers, who were so resented by whites, offered a convenient excuse for race violence. In vilifying the black soldiers, whites had to overlook their military contributions, emphasize any incidents of unacceptable behavior, and work to write them out of the commentaries on the war effort. The high hopes that many African Americans had at the beginning of the war, that it could be used as an avenue for meaningful and positive

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<sup>71</sup> *The Savannah Tribune*, April 8, 1899.



change, were dashed throughout the South as violence increased, leading itself to an increase of bitterness and disillusionment among many African Americans.

## **Chapter Four: The Case of John W. Calloway**

In a letter dated February 5, 1900 Sergeant-Major John W. Calloway, an African American soldier who was attached to the Twenty-Fourth Infantry serving in the Philippines during the Filipino Insurrection, wrote to a Filipino acquaintance named Tomas Consunji. The four-page letter expressed his frustration at the American imperialist venture in the Philippines and revealed a sense of remorse for the future of Filipinos under American rule. Sergeant Major Calloway wrote to Mr. Consunji that,

...After my last conference with you and your father, I am constantly haunted by the feeling of what wrong morally we Americans are in the present affair with you. What a wrong to crush every hope and opportunity of a youth of a race of which you, your brothers...form such brilliant examples. Would to God it lay in my power to rectify the committed error and compensate the Filipino people for the wrong done! But what power have I? If I could muster every youth of the race under my hand I would say to them be not discouraged. The day will come when you will be accorded your rights. The moral sensibilities of all America are not yet dead; there still smolders in the bosom of the country a spark of righteousness that will yet kindle into a flame that will awaken the country to its senses, and then! What you young men must do is Educate, Educate, Educate! Not alone in the sense knowing what others have written, but what the Filipino is capable of doing. Bring up the masses, teach them. The capacity of a people is measured by its masses, not its exceptionals. Teach them not alone to know, but to Do [*sic.*]. Let sanitation, high plane of living, exalted ideas be their catechism. Teach them to know that a man who can do a common thing in an uncommon way is the man the world respects most. I know you will feel this is very drawn in the face of your being denied liberty of action, but that will come. Mark well my words!<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Letter from John W. Calloway to Tomas Consunji, February 5, 1900, Office of the Adjutant General, Record Group 94, File number 17043 National Archives, Washington, D.C..

This letter exposed Calloway's conflicted views at the time. Looking past Calloway's criticism and his initial gloom one can see that the letter has a distinctly optimistic tone, counting on American morality and its dedication to democracy to win out and eventually influence the treatment of Filipinos. His comments concerning education indicate that he understood and adhered to many of the principles of the "civilizing mission" that so many other Americans clung to at the time, but as a member of an oppressed group in the United States that was struggling for equality, Calloway also offered his insight on how to achieve uplift and advance as a people. Although the letter is critical of American policy in the Philippines, it did not seem to assert any real intent for disloyalty, revolt, or treason; however, the reaction of U.S. army officials to this correspondence reflected a multitude of issues and insecurities with regard to race relations at home and abroad. Moreover, it caused the arrest and ouster without a proper hearing, of Calloway, who until this incident held a high-enlisted rank, had earned the trust of his officers, and was in the midst of a promising military career.

### **The Racial Environment Influencing Calloway's Case**

When contemplating Calloway's case, one needs to consider that the Spanish-American War and the Filipino Insurrection placed significant stress on American society, but offered what seemed to be an avenue for advancement for African Americans. Many African Americans hoped answering the call during a period of national crisis would bring them the appreciation of whites in the United States, and gain them critical support in their fight for equal rights. When this did not happen,

disappointment increased among black Americans, and clearly confirmed what many did not want to believe, that they would not be able to turn the tide of racial discrimination and violence through sacrifice and service to nation. This disappointment eventually stirred up doubts among African Americans and often raised questions about their identity and place in United States. The story of Sergeant Major John W. Calloway reveals the many pressures that worked against African Americans at the start of the twentieth century, at a time when black Americans were targeted at home and when the United States began to assert its control over new populations of people of color overseas.

The John Calloway case highlighted white American fears about African American soldiers serving overseas in conflicts against other people of color; the soul searching by African Americans as they tried to resolve what their part should be in the imperialist venture while they battled discrimination at home; and the demand and expectation for recognition of black Americans for the services they rendered and the sacrifices they endured in the nation's conflicts. It also emphasized what W.E.B. Du Bois called double-consciousness, in *The Souls of Black Folk*. Du Bois stressed that black Americans faced,

...A peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness, an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, (New York: Barnes & Noble Classics, 2003), 9.

Throughout *The Souls of Black Folk* Du Bois eloquently related the emotional struggle of African Americans for equality in the United States as they faced harsh discrimination and everyday violence. He desired to see an American society where it was acceptable to be black and an American, but these two elements of identity seemed to be in constant conflict at the beginning of the twentieth century. Du Bois argued that the constant injustice practiced against African Americans served to drive them to extremes. Society in the United States was changing rapidly at the dawning of the twentieth century, but the advancement for black Americans did not keep in step with the changes taking place in mainstream American society due to prejudicial policies that hindered their advancement and limited their opportunities. He argued that “the worlds within and without the Veil of Color are changing, and changing rapidly, but not at the same rate, not in the same way; and this must produce a peculiar wrenching of the soul, a peculiar sense of doubt and bewilderment. Such a double life, with double thoughts, double duties, and double social classes, must give rise to the double words and double ideas, and tempt the mind to pretence or to revolt, to hypocrisy or to radicalism.”<sup>3</sup>

If one carefully analyzes the racial climate in the United States around 1900, Du Bois’s double-consciousness is seen working on African Americans as they strove to assert their place in American society, even as the nation dealt with expansion overseas and rapid industrial growth at home. In addition, the events surrounding the Spanish-American War and the Filipino Insurrection accelerated the disillusionment felt by many African Americans. It is important to stress that African American identity was not

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 143.

uniform in the United States, meaning that there was not a single African American identity. The same stresses that impacted white identity throughout the country were also felt in the formation of African American identity. Among these influences were life experience, class, gender, region, whether one lived in rural or urban America, and education. These considerations are apparent in the debates that developed among African Americans with regard to politics, education, and the suggested strategies for dealing with racism and discrimination. These different influences on identity created varying opinions among African Americans, which at times hindered the formation of any true racial consensus in their approach to combating racial injustice. It also worked to create infighting and divisions among black Americans.<sup>4</sup>

Despite sometimes divergent and multifarious identities, by definition they were African Americans in a nation dominated by white Americans, whose racism was institutionalized and designed to hinder the advancement of black Americans and other

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<sup>4</sup> A classic example of infighting among African Americans during this period centers on Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Du Bois' debate over black education, and the controversy surrounding Washington's Atlanta Cotton Exposition speech in 1895. In Washington's speech at the 1895 Atlanta Cotton Exposition he asked white and black Americans in the South to work together in developing the New South. He seemed to accept segregation temporarily for economic opportunity for African Americans. Washington also emphasized the importance of black Americans accepting jobs that were predominantly manual labor, asserting the importance of starting at the bottom of society, building a foundation, and working their way up. W.E.B. Du Bois, in *The Souls of Black Folk*, attacked Washington's approach to race relations in the South in a chapter entitled "Of Mr. Booker T. Washington and Others." He argued that Washington was asking African Americans to accept subservient positions in society, and once put in those positions it would be difficult, if not impossible, to escape them and advance in the future. He also asserted that black Americans had a duty to demand full and equal inclusion into American society. The debate between Washington and Du Bois resonated throughout African American society as many black Americans chose sides in this disagreement.

minorities in the United States. Du Bois's theory of double-consciousness distilled the conflict impacting black identity formation in the United States into its most common, recognizable forms. However, the reality is much more complicated, because as Du Bois's two dominant elements came into conflict with each other the many other elements that impacted identity also came into play and melded with their "Americaness" and "blackness" in different ways. For Sergeant Major Calloway, not only was he impacted by trying to merge being black and an American, he also had to interpret events through his regional, class, and educational understanding, as well as being a soldier in a war that in many ways seemed like a struggle for American imperial conquest. This was a complex meeting of elements that created who he was and developed his own unique social consciousness.<sup>5</sup> In addition, the road to pretense or revolt was traveled at a different rate by each individual. Some African Americans immediately understood that they were unappreciated for their contributions to the United States and little was likely to change, but others optimistically held out hope that they could earn respect and opportunities through education, works, moral and economic uplift, and in the case of the Spanish-American War, overt displays of patriotism and loyalty to nation.

The political and racial environment for African Americans in the United States at the beginning of the twentieth century was fraught with a number of frustrations and uncertainties. The period beginning with the close of Reconstruction in the 1870s to the

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<sup>5</sup> Gerald Early, ed., *Lure and Loathing: Essays on Race, Identity, and the Ambivalence of Assimilation*, New York: Penguin Books, 1994. This book offers a collection of essays that tackle the issue of multi-consciousness, often asserting that Du Bois' argument of Double-consciousness does not go far enough in defining identity among African Americans.

Spanish-American War saw a series of successful attacks on African Americans' civil rights. For approximately twenty-five years black Americans fought a slow unsuccessful battle to hold on to the gains made during Reconstruction.<sup>6</sup> Historian Rayford Logan called this period the "nadir" for African Americans and their quest for equal rights. Logan identified the Presidency of William McKinley as the true "nadir," and the reasons for this conclusion are manifold. This was the era of *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896), the Supreme Court's decision that sanctioned racial segregation in the South declaring "separate but equal" to be constitutional. Rayford Logan called attention to the fact that during the McKinley Administration's tenure Louisiana, North Carolina, Virginia, and Alabama disenfranchised African Americans through various political maneuvers, and that William McKinley had a "callous disregard for the protection of the constitutional rights of Negroes."<sup>7</sup> Logan argued that McKinley focused on reconciliation between the North and South and, as a result, was unwilling to support policies that would exacerbate sectional disagreements. For instance, in the face of increased lynching, McKinley often condemned these actions, but refused to support calls to use federal authority to quell and effectively prosecute vigilante actions. In addition, he did very little to attack the "grandfather clause" that allowed illiterate southern whites to continue to vote, while literacy tests and poll taxes were used to deny African Americans the franchise. Finally,

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<sup>6</sup> Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877*, New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1988; W.E.B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America: 1860-1880*, New York: The Free Press, 1998; C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South: 1877-1913*, Louisiana State University Press, 1971. These works display the difficulties that African Americans faced in achieving equality and claiming their Civil Rights during and after the period of Reconstruction.

<sup>7</sup> Rayford W. Logan, *The Betrayal of the Negro: From Rutherford B. Hayes to Woodrow Wilson*, New York: Da Capo Press, 1997, 84.



Logan explains that McKinley failed to act against the racial violence that erupted in Wilmington, North Carolina in late November of 1898, all but sanctioning such violence through his inaction.<sup>8</sup>

W.E.B. Du Bois agreed with Rayford Logan, arguing that “for the American Negro, the last decade of the nineteenth and the first part of the twentieth centuries were more critical than the Reconstruction years of 1868 to 1876.”<sup>9</sup> In 1899 Du Bois summed up the frustrations felt by African Americans in an editorial published in the *Independent* (New York). He stated, “There can be no doubt as to the wave of intense feeling which has recently stirred American Negroes. Events of grave significance to them have followed fast and faster in the last ten years; the Wilmington riot, the murder of Postmaster [Frazier] Baker, the crucifixion of [Sam] Hose, continued lynchings and disturbances, progressive disfranchisement, the treatment of Negro soldiers, and the attitude of trade-unions.” This listing highlighted many of the more visible issues and events troubling African Americans at the time. Du Bois placed much of the blame on President McKinley. He resolved:

That we are heartily grieved that the President of the United States and those in authority have not from time to time used their high station to voice the best conscience of the nation in regard to mob violence and fair treatment of justly deserving men. It is not right that American citizens should be despoiled of life and liberty while the nation looks silently on, or that soldiers who, with conspicuous bravery, offer their lives for the country, should have their promotion result in the practical dismissal from the army.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 87-89.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, xxi.

<sup>10</sup> Herbert Aptheker, ed., *Writings By W.E.B. Du Bois In Periodicals, Vol I 1891-1909*, Millwood, New York: Kraus-Thomson Organization Limited, 1982, 60-63. This is an editorial from the *Independent* (New York), “Two Negro Conventions,” September 7, 1899.

Du Bois revealed the growing dissatisfaction over the difficulties facing black Americans, even as they sacrificed for the nation. The lack of protection from the federal government added to the sense of injustice, and seemed as if political leaders colluded to undermine African American advancement through their inactivity. Moreover, Du Bois accused federal officials and the War Department of active discrimination in their failure to promote black enlisted men to the officer ranks as a reward for their bravery under fire in the Spanish-American War. These soldiers when promoted were forced to take positions in black volunteer regiments, not in the regular army. This is significant, because these promotions were temporary, evaporating once the government disbanded their volunteer regiments after the war, leaving newly promoted black officers with a decision, to leave the Army because there was no place for them in the regular army as officers, or to return to the enlisted ranks. Many African Americans, like Du Bois, considered this to be a hollow and unfitting reward for these courageous soldiers.

These assertions are important when one considers why many African Americans were forced into facing a decision between “pretence or revolt.” This decision was often created by the constant assault on the rights of black Americans and what was seen as the visible and unabashed hypocrisy of white Americans in American government and society. This time of severe trial for African Americans was also the period when John W. Calloway served in the United States Army in the Philippines. It is natural that he would transfer his understanding of the conditions at home to the new territorial possessions of the United States, causing him to question the validity of the American

mission there. Calloway unquestionably understood that he was part of an oppressed group at home, and he considered Filipinos to be victimized in the same way under the direction of the United States Army. He made this connection in a statement written after his arrest, which explained why he expressed sympathy for the Consunji family. He wrote that Tomas Consunji explained to him “all the wrongs the race of the young man had suffered for centuries at the hands of the Spanish,” and that they felt that they were close to achieving independence before the United States entered the fray. Calloway connected African Americans and Filipinos’ conditions when he argued, “I probably remember[ed] that I too was a member of an oppressed race, and a cord of sympathy for condition was felt.” He thought, after hearing Senor Consunji’s history of the oppression of the Filipinos, that “it would have been cruel in humanity, indeed, should I, a son of a persecuted people also, reply to a harmless recital of past wrongs done another with a cruel, iron-like negative.” Due to the difficult social and political circumstances facing African Americans at home, Calloway’s assumption that American imperialism portended the same for Filipinos was not unrealistic.<sup>11</sup>

### **“Revolt,” or No?**

At first glance the words in John Calloway’s letter of February 5th reflect a certain level of revolt and radicalism, because he linked his concern for the Filipino people under the United States to his understanding of the racism in American society and chose to

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<sup>11</sup> Statement of John W. Calloway, December 11, 1900, National Archives, Record Group 94, Adjutant General’s Office, File number 17043, National Archives, Washington, D.C.. Calloway wrote this while at Bilibid Prison, Manila, Philippine Islands, while he awaited transportation to the United States.

voice his displeasure concerning the situation. As an African American, he likely encountered discrimination throughout his upbringing in the United States.<sup>12</sup> His letter directly tied the social conditions for blacks in America to the U.S. policies of overseas expansion, as he hinted at the establishment of a Jim Crow system in the new American possessions. In this way his comments can be seen as a form of resistance or an attempted warning about the exportation of American racism. In protesting Calloway seems to have used the means that were at his disposal to vent his frustration, but he was not too extreme. The comment was calculated to keep him within the bounds of social propriety and from crossing the line into open revolt. Calloway's conflicted nature clearly emerges when one considers that he proudly served in the United States Army, even as he penned his letter to Tomas Consunji.<sup>13</sup> However, serving in the army meant that Calloway was an instrument of the U.S. policy to bring overseas populations to heel, and it seemed certain that he understood this. His letter to Tomas Consunji displayed his frustration at the way Americans treated Filipinos, and shows that he personally carried some guilt over his part in the American venture in the Philippines.

Letters that Calloway wrote, prior to his correspondence to Tomas Consunji, to the editor of the *Richmond Planet*, John Mitchell Jr., showed that he was affected by his experiences in the Philippines. He boldly stated his fears for the future of the Philippines

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<sup>12</sup> According to his service record, located at the National Archives in Washington, DC, Sergeant-Major Calloway was from Bristol, Tennessee.

<sup>13</sup> As a Battalion Sergeant Major, John Calloway would have been one of the top four sergeants in his regiment. There was a regimental Sergeant Major who would have had authority over him, and since the regiment was typically comprised of three battalions, he was one of three Battalion Sergeant Majors, and would have been in charge of anywhere between 300 and 500 enlisted men. Calloway was in a position of great responsibility.

and the Filipino people when he wrote that “the whites have begun to establish their diabolical race hatred in all its home rancor in Manila, even endeavoring to propagate the phobia among the Spaniards and Filipinos so to be sure of the foundation of their supremacy when the civil rule that must necessarily follow the present military regime, is established.” Calloway’s frustration was likely fed by the fact that African American soldiers suffered and risked their lives for American expansion only to see similar U.S. racial patterns emerge in new places. He continued in his letter to the *Planet* mourning the fact that “the future of the Filipino, I fear, is that of the Negro in the South.... No one (white) has any scruples as regards respecting the rights of the Filipino. He is kicked and cuffed at will and he dare not remonstrate.”<sup>14</sup>

An interesting aspect of Calloway’s letter to the *Richmond Planet* was his racial solidarity with the Filipino people, connecting their plight with the plight of African Americans at home. He also made it clear that some Filipinos understood the distinction between black and white Americans, and that the Filipinos were aware of what was happening to African Americans in the United States. In the same letter where he excoriated the United States for bringing racist attitudes to the Philippines, he offered excerpts from interviews with some Filipino natives. One question he posed to them was, “Do the Filipinos hold a different feeling toward the colored American from the white?”

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<sup>14</sup> *Richmond Planet*, “Voices From the Philippines,” December 30, 1899. This letter to the editor is also in Willard B. Gatewood, Jr.’s *Smoked Yankees and the Struggle for Empire: Letters From Negro Soldiers 1898-1902*, Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1971, 251-255. It should be noted that Willard B. Gatewood, Jr. calls John W. Calloway John W. Galloway. Why he makes this mistake is uncertain as Calloway’s last name is clearly typed out on a number of cover sheets attached to his correspondences.

The answer he received was that initially many Filipinos did not know anything about the different races from the United States stating, “all were simply Americans to us. This view was held up until the time of the arrival of the colored regiments in Manila, when the White troops, seeing your acceptance on the social plane by the Filipino and Spaniard was equal to, if not better than theirs, began to tell us of the inferiority of the American blacks, of your brutal natures, your cannibal tendencies, how you would rape our senoritas, etc.” This indicates that white Americans attempted to introduce to Filipinos the myth of the “black male rapist” and the idea that black Americans were still somewhat savage or only semi-civilized.<sup>15</sup> These were prevalent arguments used in the American South against black advancement there, and lent additional credence in the Philippines to the assertion that the United States was guilty of exporting Jim Crow abroad.

Calloway showed that many Filipinos and black American soldiers had a certain positive feeling toward each other, often based on being fellow peoples of color. He related a statement from a Filipino which confirmed this, asserting “of course, you are both Americans, and conditions between us are constrained, and neither can be friends in the sense of friendship, but the affinity of complexion between you and me tells, and you exercise your duty so much more kindly and manly in dealing with us. We cannot help

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<sup>15</sup> Logan, *The Betrayal of the Negro*, 108; I. A. Newby, *Jim Crow's Defense: Anti-Negro Thought in America, 1900-1930*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1965), 137-138; Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, *Gender & Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 72-73 & 83-89. These works describe efforts by white Americans in the South to create the myths of the black rapist and the sanctity of white womanhood in order to justify race violence and pass legislative acts that controlled African Americans, and limited their advancement.

but appreciate the differences between you and the whites.” Calloway quoted another Filipino, a doctor named Tordorica Santos, who reemphasized the point that black soldiers were known for their kinder treatment than whites. Santos stated, “that the colored soldiers do not push them off the streets, spit at them, call them damned ‘niggers,’ abuse them in all manners of ways, and connect race hatred with duty, for the colored soldier has none such for them.”<sup>16</sup> These quotes from Filipinos, as offered by Calloway, are important, because they indicate that he was involved in on-going discussions with the people there, as well as actively thinking about the impact of American governance of the Philippines.

Calloway’s reference to being “kicked and cuffed” by white Americans is understandable as he was certainly aware of the state of race relations at home. The fact that John Calloway stayed apprised of the news from the United States, and had the opportunity to read a black newspaper on occasion, is supported by a letter to the editor of *The Planet* that began, “We received the copies of the *Planet* sent to us at this point. You can imagine how much we appreciate them.” It would have been difficult to miss articles detailing the continued abuse and discrimination against black Americans such as one in the *Richmond Planet*, which reprinted an editorial from the *Richmond Times*, a white newspaper, highlighted the attitudes of southern whites. The *Richmond Times* editorial supported the law in Virginia mandating racial separation, and essentially blamed African Americans for its passage. In this article the editor made many racist assertions and ignored the contribution of African Americans to the development of the

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<sup>16</sup> *Richmond Planet*, “Voices From the Philippines,” December 30, 1899. Also found in Willard B. Gatewood, Jr., *Smoked Yankees*, 251-255.

United States, and the wealth that was accumulated in the United States due to slave labor. It also ignored the contributions of African American during the previous conflicts fought by the United States. The *Richmond Times* editor, in addressing the need for separate public accommodations, stressed that “the Negroes of the South have complained bitterly that the Legislature of some of the Southern States have enacted laws requiring the railroad companies to have separate cars for whites and blacks. Their complaint is that the ‘Jim Crow’ car is a reproach to the Negro.” He continued by arguing that the “Negro himself is responsible for it.” The law was necessary because of instances where drunken and unruly African Americans boarded train cars and sat next to “respectable white women” who objected to their presence.<sup>17</sup> These bitter sentiments were communicated to the soldiers like John Calloway who served and risked their lives while their families and friends encountered marginalization and continued oppression.

Southern white Democrats, who labeled themselves “Southern Redeemers,” attacked the rights of black Americans everywhere in the region, and African Americans found themselves in a position of constantly battling unjust accusations. In their defense they often focused on the behavior of lower class whites. It was common strategy to attack racist arguments by calling attention to the whites’ hypocrisy. For example, in the same article discussing the separate car act in Virginia, the *Planet*’s editor, John Mitchell Jr. complained, “the truth is such conduct is noticeable in the lower elements of the white

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<sup>17</sup> *Richmond Planet*, “Disorder on the Railroads,” December 30, 1899; Charles E. Wynes, “The Evolution of Jim Crow Laws in Twentieth Century Virginia,” *Phylon*, vol. 28, no. 4 (4<sup>th</sup> Qtr., 1967): 416-425. Wynes indicates that Virginia’s Separate Car Act was passed and signed into law in 1900. African Americans were later disenfranchised by a new state constitution in 1902.



race as much as in the lower element of the colored. In the one case they are ‘glossed’ over and in the other they are magnified.” Mitchell called attention to the fact that there was misconduct by both blacks and whites, turning the problem into more of an issue of class, instead of race. Mitchell asserted that Southern whites refused to honestly assess their own conduct, or actually ignored it, and took every opportunity to highlight any impropriety by African Americans in order to further their political and social agenda.<sup>18</sup>

In the *Richmond Planet* on February 3, 1900, two days before John W. Calloway wrote his letter to Tomas Consunji, Mitchell published letters that indicated growing frustration by black soldiers in the Philippines. The first was a letter from a soldier in the Twenty-Fifth Infantry, another African American regiment, who was stationed in the Philippines at the same time John Calloway was there.<sup>19</sup> The soldier directed his anger at the racism and abuse from white Americans. He, like Calloway, decried the exportation of Jim Crow practices to Cuba and the Philippines. In explaining why Emilio Aguinaldo, the leader of the Filipino Insurrection, would not freely surrender to U.S. forces the soldier wrote that Aguinaldo “takes it for granted that just as the colored people are treated in the United States that his people would be dealt with accordingly....” He continued, “the Cubans and the Filipinos do not want a Jim Crow car, they do not want

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 4. Glenda Gilmore’s *Gender and Jim Crow* details the Southern white assault on black rights, and the creation of the myth of the sanctity of white womanhood and the myth of the black rapist. She argued that this was a conspiracy that crossed class lines, and pulled poor and rich whites together in an effort to suppress African Americans.

<sup>19</sup> The term regular army is to distinguish between already standing and established regiments that existed prior to the Spanish-American War, and the Volunteer Regiments established at the outset of the war as the army expanded to meet its requirements in the war. Volunteer regiments were typically temporary units that would remain in existence only while the national requirement remained.

hotels where they will be refused admission on account of their color. They do not want more than half of their rights most shamefully and basely denied them by the people, and their actions sustained by Congress and the whole government.”<sup>20</sup> Black soldiers understood what was taking place in the American South and that these practices were being transferred to the new American possessions. The growing frustration among African Americans was quite apparent, because it was serious act for an American soldier on active duty to write such condemnatory words about his government, a lesson that John Calloway would learn.

Several African American soldiers serving in the Philippines wrote black newspaper editors, criticizing U.S. actions there. In fact, many of these letters came from members of the Twenty-Fourth Infantry in which John W. Calloway served. Patrick Mason, a Sergeant of the Twenty-Fourth Infantry, wrote a letter to the editor of the *Cleveland Gazette* dated November 17, 1899. “I feel sorry for these people and all that come under the control of the United States. I don’t believe that they will be justly dealt by. The first thing in the morning is the ‘Nigger’ and the last thing at night is the ‘Nigger.’ You have no idea the way these people are treated by the Americans here.” Mason witnessed the mistreatment and unfairness practiced toward the Filipinos, but he also understood the complications associated with being a black soldier fighting in the Philippines, for a country that discriminated against its colored populations. He too seemed conflicted

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<sup>20</sup> *Richmond Planet*, “A Fiery Response,” February 3, 1900.

about his duty, but his service obligation tempered his statement. “I must not say much as I am a soldier.”<sup>21</sup>

In an unsigned letter from the Philippines, published in the *Wisconsin Weekly Advocate* (Milwaukee), a black soldier wrote that through mingling with the native peoples, he could understand why the Filipinos were justified in their continued struggle against the United States. He claimed “all of this never would have occurred if the army of occupation would have treated them as people.” He continued:

The Americans, as soon as they saw the native troops were desirous of sharing in the glories as well as the hardships of the hard-won battles with the Americans, began to apply home treatment for colored people: cursed them as damned niggers, steal (from) and ravish them, rob them on the street of their small change, take from fruit vendors whatever suited their fancy, and kick the poor unfortunates if he complained, desecrate their church property, and after fighting began, looted everything in sight, burning, robbing the graves.<sup>22</sup>

This soldier demonstrated an awareness of the common abuse linking African American soldiers and the Filipino insurgents, which also explained the continued resistance.

Private Joseph H. Tucker, another member of the Twenty-Fourth Infantry, expressed a similar perspective in a letter to Booker T. Washington. “I have come in contact with every tribe of Filipinos on this island and there is no question in my mind but what the Negro and the Filipino are closer together than any two distinct races on the globe.” Like other letters from black soldiers there appears to be a sense of shared experience with the Filipinos. Tucker continued, “I have talked with many of the brained men over here and they are all unanimous in their opinion that the Negro of America has an opportunity now

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<sup>21</sup> Gatewood, *Smoked Yankees*, 257.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, 279-281. Willard Gatewood believes that this letter came from a soldier from the Twenty-Forth or Twenty-Fifth Infantry.

that he can ill afford to throw aside, they refer to missionaries, both as teachers and preachers.” A number of African Americans considered the idea of immigrating to the Philippines in order to find financial opportunity or to serve as Christian missionaries. Tucker argued that white racism opened the door for African American missionaries, because “the white missionary will never succeed on this island as the natives have learned to hate everything white.” This observation coincided with his view of the brutal way that American forces were conducting the war. “The tales they [the Filipinos] tell of outrages committed by the Spaniard and to an extent by the white American Volunteer are enough to justify them in their persistent fight to be left alone.”<sup>23</sup> This view justified continued Filipino resistance, given what was in store for them if they allowed the Americans to take control of the islands. In considering how an African American should approach the war in the Philippines, John Calloway summed up his personal conflict, when he declared that, “we black men are so much between the ‘Devil and the deep sea’ on the Philippine question.”<sup>24</sup> White Americans’ attitudes and actions were likely to be taken overseas, but denouncing American involvement in the Philippines would open African Americans to claims of disloyalty, further impeding their own struggle for equality at home.

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<sup>23</sup> Louis R. Harlan & Raymond W. Smock, ed., *The Booker T. Washington Papers*, Vol. 5, 1899-1900, (Urbana, Chicago, & London: University of Illinois Press, 1976), 468-470.

<sup>24</sup> *The Richmond Planet*, “Colored Troops in the Philippines,” September 30, 1899, 1.

### **Duty, Loyalty, and Military Traditions**

African American soldiers serving in the Philippines struggled over issues concerning loyalty to race or country and were forced to face the complicating factor of their duty as soldiers in the United States Army. As one soldier explained, “whether it is right to reduce these people to submission is not a question for the soldier to decide. Our oath of allegiance knows neither race, color, nor nation, and if such a question should arise, it would be disposed of as one of a political nature by a soldier.”<sup>25</sup> Another black serviceman commented on the difficulty facing those African American soldiers who felt some sympathy for the Filipino people. In a December 25, 1900 letter to Booker T. Washington, Robert L. Campbell of the Forty-Ninth Infantry, revealed that, “I believe these people are right and we are wrong and terrible wrong. I am in a position to keep from bearing arms against them and I will try and keep myself in such position until we are mustered out, of course, if I am ordered to fight, I will obey orders as a soldier should....”<sup>26</sup> Robert Campbell abhorred the mistreatment of the Filipinos, but he had to acknowledged his duty as a soldier. Military discipline and commitment to duty required that soldiers follow their orders, regardless of their personal feelings. Captain W. H. Jackson of the Forty-Ninth Infantry (an African American regiment with black officers serving in the Philippines), acknowledged that the Filipinos were “especially friendly to the colored people, always saying that there is no difference between them and us.” However, Captain Jackson revealed the pull of a soldier’s duty, declaring that “all

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<sup>25</sup> Willard B. Gatewood, Jr., *Smoked Yankees*, 248-249.

<sup>26</sup> Louis R. Harlan & Raymond W. Smock, ed., *The Booker T. Washington Papers*, Vol. 5: 1899-1900, 695.

enemies of the U.S. government look alike to us, hence we go along with the killing, just as with other people.” Despite the affinities between Filipinos and black soldiers, Jackson’s comments reveal the impact of rigid military discipline, which allowed him to convert a potentially complicated issue into something much more simplistic and manageable.<sup>27</sup>

In addition to military discipline, the rich history of African American service had a great impact in encouraging black soldiers to faithfully discharge their duty, even when as individuals they were critical of these actions. Pride in the military achievements of the black army regiments helped to keep most black soldiers focused on their mission. Most black servicemen understood the pride that African Americans in the United States took in their martial history and contributions. African Americans in the military were well aware that their service carried larger implications for their people, which transcended the day-to-day conditions during combat operations. Many of these soldiers knew that they were on trial, being judged by a white public that was quick to condemn and had low expectations of them. For some black troops participation in the Spanish-American War represented a multi-faceted conflict. First, it was a struggle against the Spanish, and eventually the Filipinos, but there was also an acknowledgement that another part of this conflict was the battle against racial discrimination at home. What black regiments did in the war and how they served mattered, and they were determined to bring honor to African Americans at home and to hold up and emulate the high level of

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<sup>27</sup> Willard B. Gatewood, Jr., *Black Americans and the White Man’s Burden, 1898-1903*, 285. W. H. Jackson, “From Our Friends in the Far East,” *The Colored American Magazine* August 1900, 145-149.

service established by those who came before them. More importantly, they were determined not to do anything that could be used by whites as a justification for continued abuse of African Americans at home. This understanding was confirmed by one black soldier, serving in the Philippines, who wrote, “I want to say right here that if it were not for the sake of the 10,000,000 black people in the United States, God alone knows on which side of the subject I would be.”<sup>28</sup>

Winning laurels for “the race” was an important motivation for black soldiers, and the pressure of representing something more than themselves provided an added impetus to military duties. Sergeant M. W. Saddler in Company K of the Twenty-Fifth Infantry asserted, “Our greatest aim is to maintain our standing among American soldiers and add another star to the already brilliant crown of the Afro-American soldiers.” He continued, “as the situation now stands, we moisten the soil with our precious blood, stain the colors with our oozing brains, only to make an already popular race more famous.” Sergeant Saddler was aware of the record of black soldiers in the United States Army, and that the Spanish-American War and Filipino Insurgency would be another proud chapter in their story. “I point with pride to the Fifty-Fourth Massachusetts, the regular army in the Indian campaigns, the ninth and tenth cavalry and the Twenty-Fourth Infantry at San Juan Hill, the Twenty-Fifth Infantry at El Caney and before Santiago. The latter regiment in which the writer had the honor to exercise military skill and face cannon balls. The honors of the campaign in the Philippines are to come.”<sup>29</sup> The history of black soldiers generated racial pride at home, and as representatives of African Americans in the armed

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<sup>28</sup> Willard B. Gatewood, Jr., *Smoked Yankees*, 280-281.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*, 248.

forces, they hoped to do their part in “advancing the race” through their exemplary service.

While John Calloway criticized U.S. policy and the actions of white soldiers in the Philippines, his letter to Tomas Consunji did not indicate that he was prepared to act on these feelings. He was a ten-year veteran of the army, a commitment that held real meaning. He likely understood that to support the insurgents would give ammunition to the enemies of his people at home. If anything, his letter reflected someone trying to reconcile his duty as an American and a soldier with his abhorrence of the treatment of non-white populations overseas and at home.

### **The Army’s Reaction to Calloway’s Letter**

In October 1900, the army discovered Sergeant-Major Calloway’s letter to Tomas Consunji, approximately eight months after it was written, during a search of the home of Tomas’s father Antonio Consunji. The army searched Antonio Consunji’s house, because he was suspected of being a sympathizer for the insurgent cause. A. Williams, an army Captain, and the Provost Marshall for the U.S. Third Infantry, sent the letter to his superior in the Philippines. “I enclose herewith a letter found in the house of Antonio Consunji, a man after taken the oath of amnesty, has acted as a political agent for the insurgents.” The Provost Marshall suspected that John Calloway’s letter might be important, and feared that there might be some treasonous intent. “The letter is addressed to the son of Antonio, who is well known to be opposed to the United States occupying these islands. The writer is, to say the least, very indiscreet.” He recommended that



Sergeant Major Calloway's commanding officer see the letter.<sup>30</sup> This began a chain of events that led to John W. Calloway being arrested, stripped of his rank, sent back to the United States, and dishonorably discharged. Calloway's words in his defense, the accusations from the military leadership in the Philippines, and the actions of both parties revealed the different perspective about U.S. military actions overseas. At the same time, these events revealed the deep racism in the U.S. military and its treatment of black soldiers, and a callous disregard for their sacrifices on the battlefield. Calloway was essentially considered guilty of being a sympathizer, because he befriended a family purported to have ties to the insurgency, and the tone of his letter was construed as disloyal.

Calloway's commanding officer, Colonel Henry B. Freeman, read the letter and took action. He recommended that John Calloway be "immediately sent to Manila for safe-keeping until he can be discharged without honor and deported." Colonel Freeman's racist views surfaced in his recommendation to his superiors. "Battalion Sergeant Major Calloway is one of those half-baked mulattoes whose education has fostered his self-conceit to an abnormal degree." Colonel Freeman emerged as one who could not accept African Americans as equals, and viewed educated black Americans as threatening, especially in the Army. It appears that Colonel Freeman considered too much education for a soldier to be a waste, if not a bit dangerous. To him, a free thinking and highly educated soldier would be more likely to question orders and consider the implications of

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<sup>30</sup> Report from Captain A. Williams, Provost Marshall of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry, to Adjutant General of the District of San Fernando, Philippine Islands, October 29, 1900, Adjutant General's Office, Record Group 94, File number 17043, National Archives, Washington D.C.

any military action, thus making him more resistant to following orders unquestioningly. Colonel Freeman sealed Calloway's fate by asserting "in my opinion he is likely to step into the Filipino ranks, should a favorable opportunity occur."<sup>31</sup>

Colonel Freeman's endorsement of Calloway's arrest and discharge may seem excessive, if not surprising, but he echoed the fears of many other white Americans who questioned the loyalty of African Americans in a war against other people of color. These white Americans demonstrated a heightened fear that African Americans would identify with Filipinos and turn their guns on their white comrades. War Correspondent Stephen Bonsal in a 1907 article looking back on the service of African American soldiers, struck at the heart of these concerns of some white Americans. "While white soldiers, unfortunately, got on badly with the natives, the black soldiers got on much too well." Bonsal asserted that as the relationships strengthened between Filipino natives and black soldiers, "the Negro soldiers were in closer sympathy with the aims of the native populations than they were with those of their white leaders and the policy of the United States."<sup>32</sup>

Bonsal's discussion also turned to the issue of desertions, arguing that the motives for white and black deserters were completely different. He claimed that white soldiers deserted because they were "lazy and idle and found service life irksome." However, he

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<sup>31</sup> Endorsement of Colonel H.B Freeman, Commander of Twenty-Fourth Infantry, November 11, 1900, Adjutant General's Office, Record, Group 94, File number 17043, National Archives, Washington, D.C.. This was the 2<sup>nd</sup> endorsement written on the wrapper that contained the letter from Captain Williams, the Third Infantry Provost Marshall.

<sup>32</sup> Stephen Bonsal, "The Negro Soldier in War and Peace," *The North American Review*, June 7, 1907, 321-327. Bonsal's views are also discussed on pages 288-289 in Willard B. Gatewood Jr.'s *Black Americans and the White Man's Burden*.

suggested that the motives of African American deserters were based more on race sympathy, deserting to join the insurgents to fight “the white troops, or their former comrades, with zest and ability.”<sup>33</sup> These worries were more or less an acknowledgement of the poor treatment that African Americans received in the United States. Many white Americans thought that African Americans would feel compelled to support or even join the Filipinos who were on the verge of being subjugated. This poor treatment of black soldiers manifested itself in many ways. Many African Americans grew increasingly angry and disillusioned over continued discrimination and racism, even as black soldiers returned from Cuba and others crossed the Pacific to fight in the Philippines. White Democrats in the South continued to press for legal segregation and black disenfranchisement throughout the region. In addition, there was an increase of racial violence that southern Democrats overtly endorsed, and the rest of the United States seemed to accept through their unwillingness to stop it.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> James Robert Payne, “Afro-American Literature of the Spanish-American War,” *MELUS*, vol. 10, no. 3 (Autumn 1983): 19-32. In this article Payne shows that African American literature and poetry evolved from something patriotic into something more disillusioned as the war with Spain ended and the insurrection in Philippines dragged on with no benefit to African Americans; Charles Frederick White, *Plea of the Negro Soldier and Hundreds of Other Poems*, (Freeport, New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1970). Charles White was a soldier who served in Cuba with the Eighth Illinois Volunteer Infantry as part of the occupation force after the war with Spain ended. His poems represent this growing disillusionment. In a poem penned in February of 1898 named *War's Inspiration* White reflected the patriotism and war fever that influenced much of the United States, writing “If God hath willed that I should die/ And thus our race name glorify/ ‘Mid crashing shells and cannon storm/ While freedom’s flag waves o’er my head/ O’re dire remains of martyred dead/ ...To die upon the battle-ground/ with unfurled glory all around/ Then, I am full content to die/ And be upraised to Him on high.” However in the poem *Plea of the Negro Soldier* he starts by calling America an “ungrateful land,” referring to the sacrifices made by African Americans that went

This distrust is further seen in a letter sent to the War Department by a “Doctor Gilliam,” a white doctor from Maryland, who expressed displeasure at the thought of the army using black soldiers in the Philippines. As in other former slave states, Maryland witnessed many of the same conflicts over racial discrimination and increasing segregation. Dr. Gilliam exhorted the government not to use black soldiers in the Philippines, claiming “the Negro soldier in the end will never bring credit to the country. The Negro at Manila will darken and curse the situation....” There were likely numerous reasons for his views. Dr Gilliam was an admitted “staunch democrat” who could not overcome his deep-seated racism and refused to accept anything that gave African Americans an opportunity for advancement. His racist beliefs clouded his ability to recognize black soldiers as efficient and effective. He feared that African American troops would fail to execute their duty due to the developed sense of kinship with the Filipinos.

It is important to note that John W. Calloway’s fate cannot be fully understood without introducing the story of David Fagan. David Fagan, a Private in the Twenty-Fourth Infantry, deserted and joined the Filipino Insurgents while serving in the Philippines at the same time as Calloway, who came from the same regiment. Fagan’s actions, from his desertion to his activities as an insurgent fighting against the United States, spoke to the fears of white Americans about the loyalty of black soldiers.

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unrecognized. In the forward of his book White explained that “If you had served your country in the ranks of the volunteer army in foreign war, when that country did not protect your life, nor even your property, at home, when you could not be sure that upon your return you would not find that some friend or relative had been despoiled of life, liberty, or property without due process of the law...you would surely think this a wretched and ungrateful country.”

Unquestionably, Fagan made the ultimate decision when he chose to change sides, and his act was considered treasonable and punishable by death. Fagan's reasons for deserting his comrades were not completely clear. After joining the insurgency, Fagan led a number of successful raids against U.S. forces in the Philippines. He was promoted to the rank of captain in the Filipino insurgency due to his accomplishments on the battlefield. David Fagan's actions caused concern among the army leadership, and made them sensitive to anything that seemed disloyal within the black regiments. As a result, Fagan had a direct impact on the way the army handled Calloway's case. Fagan deserted on November 17, 1899, just months before Sergeant Major Calloway wrote his letter to Tomas Consunji, and almost a year before Calloway was arrested for that letter and discharged from the Army.<sup>35</sup> By the time Calloway was arrested, David Fagan was a guerrilla leader responsible for a number of successful raids against the U.S. Army.<sup>36</sup>

Army officials referred to Fagan's desertion when they discussed Calloway's letter to Tomas Consunji. General Arthur MacArthur, the commanding general in the Philippines at the time, in his own endorsement and recommendation of Calloway's arrest and discharge, declared, "it is very apparent that he is disloyal and should he remain in these islands, he would undoubtedly commit some act of open treason and perhaps join the insurrection out and out. One man of the Twenty-Fourth Infantry by the name of David Fagan has already done so and as a leader among the insurrectos is giving great trouble

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<sup>35</sup> Regular Army Muster Rolls, 24<sup>th</sup> Infantry, Company I, October 31, 1899 – December 31, 1899, Record Group 94, Adjutant General's Office, National Archives, Washington D.C..

<sup>36</sup> Michael C. Robinson & Frank N. Schubert, "David Fagen: An Afro-American Rebel in the Philippines, 1899-1901," *The Pacific Historical Review*, vol. 44, no. 1 (February, 1975): 74-76.

by directing guerrilla bands.”<sup>37</sup> MacArthur connected Calloway and Fagan’s actions and inferred Calloway’s potential to do the army harm just as Fagan did. David Fagan’s legacy may also explain why Colonel Henry B. Freeman, the commanding officer of the Twenty-Fourth Infantry, was so condemnatory of Calloway, and was quick to have him removed from the Philippines and the Army. One of his soldiers deserted, and this had an impact on American morale in the Philippines and Freeman likely felt betrayed and embarrassed that another one of his soldiers might be disloyal. Freeman seemed determined to prevent anyone else in his command from going over to the enemy. The United States Army arrested Sergeant Major John Calloway, reduced him in rank to private, and sent him to the Presidio in San Francisco, California to await his discharge “without honor.” To Calloway’s misfortune, the Judge Advocate General, and the Adjutant General of the Army, Henry C. Corbin concurred with the recommendation of Calloway’s superiors, effectively releasing him from the service on February 15, 1901 under a cloud of suspicion and shame.<sup>38</sup>

### **Calloway’s Defense**

John Calloway did not watch these events unfold quietly and actively tried to defend himself by consistently asserting his innocence in the face of the accusations of disloyalty. However, he was not given a proper hearing to allow him to clear his name,

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<sup>37</sup> Endorsement of General Arthur MacArthur, Commanding General of the U.S Volunteer Forces, December 15, 1900, Adjutant General’s Office, Record Group 94, File number 17043, National Archives, Washington, D.C..

<sup>38</sup> Special Order no. 39, dated February 15, 1901, orders discharging John Calloway from the army without honor, Adjutant General’s Office, Record Group 94, National Archives, Washington, D.C..

so his defense was presented only through a number of letters and statements explaining his actions. He admitted that he wrote the letter to Tomas Consunji, but stressed that he did nothing wrong. In a statement made after his arrest, Calloway mentioned that he felt sympathy for the Filipino people, tying together African Americans and Filipinos as fellow oppressed colored people. In writing the letter to Tomas Consunji, Calloway admitted that his concern for the Filipinos appealed to him only “in a sense and way that could come...to a son of an oppressed race.” He made it clear that there were no divided loyalties in expressing these feelings and in serving in the army. “This expressed feeling had nothing whatever to do with my official connections.” Calloway explained that his sympathy was similar to what black soldiers felt over the treatment of their own people at home, arguing that even though African Americans were treated unfairly, it did not affect their dedication to their military duty.<sup>39</sup>

John Calloway’s statement exposed his personal conflict, but he suggested that this was a common feeling among black soldiers. He revealed some of his frustration at the lack of civil rights for African Americans, noting, “that we as a people in America have few rights that anyone is bound to respect is perfectly plain to every colored man.” He asked, however, “does it reduce our love for our country, or does it affect in the least our fealty in the discharge of our duty to the government, whether a citizen or a soldier?” His answer was an emphatic, “not one jot or tittle. And so it was with me in this case.”<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Statement of John Calloway, Private, Company “F”, 24<sup>th</sup> Infantry, December 11, 1900, National Archives, Record Group 94, Adjutant General’s Office, File number 17043.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid

What followed in John Calloway's statement was a sharp and assertive denial of any treasonous activities or ideas. "No conversation with this young man [Tomas Consunji] even so much as suggested that he was an active sympathizer with his people." He added, "no thought or action of Tomas Consunji, or his father, ever suggested to me the slightest act of mine in the service. If any impropriety was committed, I committed it alone and unassisted." Calloway understood the gravity of the charges leveled against him, and while he admitted to interacting with Tomas Consunji, Calloway did not know of the suspicions that Consunji was an insurgent sympathizer, claiming, "of their conduct subsequent to the short acquaintance and friendship of the son and myself, I know nothing." It seems clear Calloway was hurt by the accusations against him that questioned his character and devotion to country. What took place between himself and the Consunji family was innocent, and if the words in his letter to Tomas Consunji were damaging to his reputation, then it was done inadvertently. "With my open, impulsive nature I might commit an error, but to deal dually would be impossible."<sup>41</sup> What was seen as "impulsive" to Calloway was considered "half-baked" by his commanding officer Colonel Freeman.

Calloway disavowed any treasonous aspect to his relationship with Tomas Consunji, and declared, "I wrote the letter and expressed nothing therein concerning military matters, and however it may be considered, I know from the fullness of my bosom that no intent to injure my country was meant. My impulsive statements is one thing, and my overtowering duty to my country is another." Again Calloway expressed his strong sense

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid, 2.



of duty to country. The years of military life shaped his identity and the accusations created a sense of personal shame at being removed from the service under dishonorable circumstances. He considered this completely unfair and continually requested a hearing so he could defend himself.

Calloway also argued that to make treasonous comments to Tomas Consunji would have been far from intelligent. “If I had intent on some material purpose in the interest of the Filipino Government, I am sure that Tomas Consunji would have been the last person in whom I would have confided, he being in the employ of the United States Government, and I, under no circumstance, would have signed open and above-board my name, rank, and regiment. Such stupidity could not have been mine, but I had nothing to conceal in the missive.” Calloway claimed that Consunji seemed unlikely to be working for the Filipino insurgency, and if so, Calloway did not know about it. Above all he asserted that “it was a personal feeling, expressed to a personal friend, I had no other intent or motive.”<sup>42</sup> In this instance army officials made no allowances for personal feelings that they considered “disloyal.” The Army leadership’s understanding of American society, their misconceptions about African Americans, and their racism (subconscious or overt) informed perceptions about Sergeant Major Calloway, placing him in a precarious position over which he had little or no control.

In professing his innocence, Calloway offered witnesses from commanding officers under whom he previously served. “Every commanding officer under whom I have ever served will vouch for my fealty, especially in a circumstance of emergency.” His most

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid, 3.

recent commanding officer Col. Freeman, however, thought differently and he recommended Calloway's dismissal from the army. Calloway's use of his former commanding officers as character references introduced an important aspect of the Spanish-American War and the Filipino Insurrection's impact on African Americans. Recognition of previous service and sacrifices carried weight in the on-going fight for equality and social advancement. On a personal level, past service represented a badge of honor for black soldiers. For John W. Calloway, to make it to the rank of Battalion Sergeant Major in the United States Army was an impressive achievement. Battalion Sergeant Major was one of the highest ranks that enlisted men could achieve in a regiment, and for Calloway to rise to that position indicated that he was an excellent, trustworthy soldier with strong managerial skills. In that position he represented an important link between the Twenty-Fourth Infantry's enlisted men and its officers. As Calloway faced the charges stemming from his letter to Consunji, he understandably expected that his past service in the army, would serve as an important character reference.

Calloway's expectations of recognition mirrored those of African Americans throughout the nation. The Spanish-American War offered many African Americans a chance to demonstrate their worthiness for full citizenship rights in American society. However, in order for African Americans to enjoy the benefits of their service, they needed to be recognized for it, which often did not happen. White historians and contemporary press often ignored or omitted the part that black soldiers played in the conflict with Spain. Without this recognition African Americans understood that they

were being cheated of a crucial element in their strategy to combat continued discrimination at home. In addition, the unwillingness of whites to recognize the service of black soldiers was considered an affront to the concept of esprit de corps among soldiers. The idea of being “brothers in arms” was sacred to many, but refusing an honest appraisal of the service record made a mockery of the concept. White leaders, especially in the South, ignored the contribution of African American soldiers in order to make it easier to continue the campaign for disenfranchisement, which only served to further anger and disillusion of African Americans as the war in the Philippines continued.<sup>43</sup>

Calloway understood that his army career was in jeopardy, and he asked the army leadership to take his tens years of service as proof of his unwavering loyalty to the United States. “I wish to assure the authorities of the entire absence of any treasonable intent on my part; a treasonable demonstration could not emanate from me; my love for my country is entirely too strong to permit it. Just as I feel I have ever acquitted myself of my duty in the ten years of service I have spent in her arms, so now I wish to exculpate myself of the charge of wronging her.”<sup>44</sup>

In another statement Calloway discussed his service in the Army, and reminded the authorities, “in a few more months I should have completed ten years of service in the army.... In that time I have occupied many positions of responsibility, such as fall to the

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<sup>43</sup> I. A. Newby, *Jim Crow's Defense*, 79. Regarding the ignoring of the African American contribution to American history Newby explained, “The sin of most historians was one of omission rather than commission. More often than not, they expressed their disregard for the race by exactly that – disregarding it altogether.”

<sup>44</sup> Statement of John Calloway, Private, Company “F”, 24<sup>th</sup> Infantry, December 11, 1900, Adjutant General's Office, Record Group 94, File number 17043, National Archives, Washington, D.C., 4.

career of an enlisted man, including Battalion Sergeant Major and Quartermaster Sergeant of regiment.” The duties of the Battalion Sergeant Major and Quartermaster Sergeant were positions of great responsibility. As the Quartermaster Sergeant he would have been entrusted with large quantities of supplies and equipment, and substantial sums of money. Calloway mentioned these positions in his statement, but perhaps these achievements worked against Calloway, and explain why his Commanding Officer, Colonel Freeman, was so quick to condemn him.<sup>45</sup>

As part of his claim for recognition, Calloway discussed the battle campaigns, challenges, dangers, and deprivations he faced during a decade of service.

I have been in three expeditions through the Spanish-American War and the Philippine Campaign. Beginning with the first Coeur d’Alene riots in Idaho of 1892, on which expedition I saw service throughout its duration as a member of Company F, Twenty-Fifth Infantry; in 1893 I was one of the volunteers of the same company who went on the expedition to rescue the son of General Carlin, then lost in the mountain fastness of Montana. Of the severity of this expedition the department well knows. In 1894 I was a member of the expeditionary forces of the Twenty-Fourth Infantry against the riotous strikers in Southern Colorado. In 1898 I went to war as a member of Company H, Twenty-Fourth Infantry, and took part in all the service in Cuba, from the battle of July 1<sup>st</sup>, to the completion of its tour of duty at the yellow fever pest camp, Siboney, August 26, 1898.<sup>46</sup>

Calloway took great pride in being part of these campaigns, and expected those judging his case to be able to appreciate his service.

Of the campaigns and expeditions Sergeant Calloway mentioned, the Spanish-American War in Cuba, and his time in the “yellow fever pest camp,” were noteworthy. The U.S. Army in Cuba during the war with Spain suffered significant hardships. The

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<sup>45</sup> Statement of John Calloway, Private, Company “F”, 24<sup>th</sup> Infantry, November 27, 1900, Adjutant General’s Office, Record Group 94, File number 17043, National Archives, Washington, D.C..

<sup>46</sup> Ibid, 2.

soldiers were poorly equipped and forced to wear uniforms that were not designed for tropical climates. The U.S. Army in Cuba often out-marched its supply line, forcing the soldiers to eat reduced rations, or go without food. They endured hot, humid days, rainstorms from which they had little shelter, and cool and damp nights. Finally, the army invaded Cuba during the “sick season,” the part of the year when mosquito-born illnesses were more prevalent. Within days of the Spanish Army’s surrender, the majority of the U.S. soldiers came down with malaria or yellow fever. Once a soldier was diagnosed, he was sent to hospital camps designated, especially for yellow fever patients. Patients were quarantined in an attempt to prevent epidemic.<sup>47</sup>

Calloway mentioned his time in the “yellow fever pest camp” in Siboney, Cuba. The story of the Twenty-Fourth Infantry and Siboney was an example of selflessness and courage. The American public was well aware that malaria and a yellow fever epidemic swept through the U.S. Army in Cuba, because many soldiers wrote about it in letters to newspapers and family members. One account reported that in Siboney, “during the entire active campaign, the hospital facilities were greatly overtaxed.... The shortage of skilled nurses was most distressing.” Army Colonel Francis A. Winter wrote of the problems at Siboney in an essay published in the book *The Santiago Campaign*, and he explained that in order to make up for the absence of nurses and orderlies, troops from

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<sup>47</sup> Published by: The Society of Santiago de Cuba, *The Santiago Campaign: Reminiscences of the Operation for the Capture of Santiago de Cuba the Spanish-American War, June and July, 1898*, (Richmond, Virginia: Williams Printing Company, 1927), 215; T. G. Steward, *Buffalo Soldiers: The Colored Regulars in the United States Army*, (Amherst, New York: Humanity Books, 2003), 222-223; Herschel V. Cashin, *Under Fire with the Tenth U.S. Cavalry*, (New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1969), 131.

combat regiments were used. The Twenty-Fourth infantry was one of these regiments tasked to nurse the sick.

The Chief Surgeon in the field appealed to Headquarters and the Twenty-Fourth United States Infantry (colored), which had already suffered heavy battle casualties at San Juan Hill, was called upon for volunteer nurses. The entire regiment, officers and men, responded on the evening of July 15<sup>th</sup>, and led by their commander, Major A.C. Markley, made a forced march to the hospital to undertake its new duties. Most of this regiment contracted the disease themselves.<sup>48</sup>

War correspondent Stephen Bonsal, who covered the war in Cuba, mentioned this sacrifice. He described how initially the Twenty-Fourth Infantry was sent to guard the hospital at Siboney, but “when the regiment reached the yellow fever hospital, it was found to be in a deplorable condition. Men were dying every hour for lack of proper nursing.” The commanding officer Major A. C. Markley drew his men together and explained the need for people to care for the sick, but also emphasized the dangers of attending to the needs of yellow fever patients. “Major Markley then said any man who wished to volunteer to nurse in the yellow fever hospital could step forward.” According to Bonsal, sixty men were selected from the regiment, and within “forty-eight hours, forty-two of these brave fellows were down seriously ill with yellow or pernicious malarial fever.” The regiment was again brought together and another call for volunteers to nurse the sick was made. “When the request for volunteers to replace those who had already fallen in the performance of their dangerous and perfectly optional duty was made again, the regiment stepped forward as one man.” Bonsal indicated that when the Twenty-Fourth Infantry left the trenches outside of Santiago and marched to Siboney,

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<sup>48</sup> *The Santiago Campaign*, 316-317.

there were eight companies of forty men each, totaling three hundred and twenty men and officers. After forty days at the hospital treating the sick, “only twenty-four escaped without serious illness.”<sup>49</sup> Sergeant Calloway declared that he was one of the soldiers who contracted the illness. “While at Siboney I suffered nigh unto death from yellow fever contracted while on duty as acting Sergeant Major of my regiment.”<sup>50</sup> The events at Siboney and the difficulties that the U.S. soldiers experienced in Cuba with yellow fever and malaria were well known to military officials and Calloway expected some acknowledgement for the risks he took at Siboney and San Juan Hill.

In 1900 the military leadership reflected the white racist attitudes of the era toward African Americans. Immediately after the war, African Americans received some statements of recognition in the white press, and even in the occasional book, but as time passed the white press ignored black soldiers’ contributions to the war. Indeed, African Americans were aware of newspapers, politicians, authors, and historians trying to silence and subvert their contributions to the war effort because they did not match the dominant notions of white superiority. To admit that black soldiers were brave and an important element in the fight against the Spanish would be to provide African Americans ammunition in their fight for equal rights. Calloway’s long and distinguished

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<sup>49</sup> Stephan Bonsal, *The Fight for Santiago: The Story of the Soldier in the Cuban Campaign From Tampa to the Surrender*, (New York: Doubleday & McClure Co., 1899), 433-434. Bonsal’s most descriptive discussion of the Twenty-Fourth Infantry’s experience at Siboney takes place in his footnote beginning page 433; Miles Lynk, *The Black Troopers, or the Daring Heroism of the Negro Soldiers in the Spanish American War*, New York: AMS Press, 1971, 69-70.

<sup>50</sup> Statement of John Calloway, Private, Company “F”, 24<sup>th</sup> Infantry, November 27, 1900, Adjutant General’s Office, Record Group 94, File number 17043, National Archives, Washington, D.C..

service was ignored, along with the long distinguished record of military service of other African Americans. Members of the black press such as W. Calvin Chase, publisher of the *Washington Bee*, surveyed the attitudes of African Americans toward the war in the Philippines, and pointed out that they were increasingly against the fight in the Philippines, because “the spirit of discrimination shown and practiced in the Cuban War is hardly calculated to over-stimulate patriotic sentiments among our people.... The whites got all there was of glory and profit out of the war, while the colored soldiers get all the ‘cussing.’”<sup>51</sup>

Sergeant Calloway completed his written statement of November 27, 1900 with what amounted to a plea asking that the U.S. Army leadership understand him as only soldiers could. “Laboring as I do from the disadvantage of an adverse opinion, I submit the above summary of my service for the consideration of the division commander before whom I desire to place myself in the proper light, lest I be considered by superior authorities a general worthless.”<sup>52</sup> He believed that the accusations against him were unfounded and that his exemplary service for ten years, if taken into consideration, should subvert any suggestions that he was disloyal.

In addition to his long and distinguished service, John Calloway introduced character references as part of his defense. He added a number of letters from the officers under whom he served during his army career who testified to his efficiency and dedication to

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<sup>51</sup> *The Washington Bee*, “Negro Troops For the Philippines,” April 30, 1899, 4.

<sup>52</sup> Statement of John Calloway, Private, Company “F”, 24<sup>th</sup> Infantry, November 27, 1900, Adjutant General’s Office, Record Group 94, File number 17043, National Archives, Washington, D.C..



the army. However, it must be noted that these letters were written before his legal trouble with the army, and many were endorsements used in an effort to support his promotion into the officer ranks at the beginning of the Spanish-American War. Calloway hoped that the words of praise from the people who directly supervised him would be influential in exonerating him. He asked that the Adjutant General, an officer with the power to acquit him, consider the letters to support his case. "Attention is invited to endorsements of Lieutenant Colonel E. H. Liscum, Twenty-Fourth infantry (Colonel Ninth Infantry, deceased), and First Lieutenant J. D. Leitch, Adjutant Twenty-Fourth Infantry (Now captain Twenty-Fifth Infantry). The words of these officers speak more than anything I could say in my own behalf. They knew me from years of service under them, and I trust that what they say will have the full weight and measure I place upon them."<sup>53</sup> Perhaps in the racial climate of 1900 the testimony of white officers would have more significance than that of African Americans. Given the wide divide between officers and enlisted men during this period, and since an officer was synonymous with being a gentleman, their word was usually considered above reproach. Officers were almost always highly educated, and most came from the Military Academy at West Point. To be an officer in the United States Army was to be accepted into a close-knit fraternity defined by tradition, ritual, and etiquette. As a result, Calloway's use of the letters from Lieutenant Colonel Liscum and First Lieutenant Leitch was a wise move.

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<sup>53</sup> Letter from John Calloway, Private, Company "F", 24<sup>th</sup> Infantry, January 12, 1901, Adjutant General's Office, Record Group 94, File number 17043, National Archives, Washington, D.C..

The letters from Liscum and Leitch were in many ways typical letters of endorsement that were short and to the point in their praise of Calloway. First Lieutenant Leitch offered words in support for Calloway, and in the half-page letter he summed up Calloway's courage, manliness, and reliability. Leitch stated that he knew Calloway "for a number of years." This was important, because it revealed that the letter of recommendation was the result of a long relationship, and provided a sound and informed assessment of Calloway's character and performance. Leitch's letter, written May 21, 1899, stated:

This is to certify that I know the bearer, Corporal John Calloway, Twenty-Fourth Infantry, for a number of years. I take pleasure in attesting to his worth as a man. During the Spanish-American War Corporal Calloway served with credit as acting Sergeant Major of his regiment, performing the duties of the office entirely unassisted; also at the yellow fever camp, Siboney, Cuba, he remained zealously at his post as acting Sergeant Major until stricken himself with the fever. He is an excellent clerk, accurate, painstaking, honest, and sober.<sup>54</sup>

Leitch's letter confirmed Calloway's sacrifice during the war in Cuba, facing the Spanish forces and the yellow fever epidemic. In addition to referencing Calloway's strong work ethic, he brought attention to Calloway's sobriety and honesty. These were apparently important traits of a soldier, and actually stood in opposition to the charge of disloyalty placed on him. Lieutenant Colonel Liscum's letter was essentially an approval of First Lieutenant Leitch's endorsement:

During two years of service in the Twenty-Fourth Infantry, Corporal Calloway was under my observation; he was with the regiment in Cuba and performed his duties in a faithful and soldierly manner. He participated in the battle of San

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<sup>54</sup> Letter from J. D. Leitch, First Lieutenant & Adjutant, 24<sup>th</sup> Infantry, May 21, 1899, Adjutant General's Office, Record Group 94, File number 17043, National Archives, Washington, D.C..

Juan, on July 1<sup>st</sup>, 1898, and was with the regiment in its most trying service at Siboney, Cuba.<sup>55</sup>

Calloway used these letters a year and a half after they were written, for a purpose they were not specifically intended to address. He sent these letters in with his statement of innocence, demonstrating that he actively engaged in his defense to clear his name. These letters directly refuted the attacks on Calloway's character, and since Calloway owned copies of these letters, and knew what these officers said about him, he understood that this would highlight his dedication to duty. The issue of nursing yellow fever patients at the sick camp in Siboney demonstrated this dedication to duty. That a soldier was willing to face bullets on the field of battle was not uncommon, but to put oneself at higher risk of contracting a debilitating and often deadly disease while caring for soldiers suffering from yellow fever presented another sort of moral and inner courage and commitment. The words of Liscum and Leitch confirmed Calloway's presence at San Juan Hill and Siboney, and could influence his current judges by asserting that past conduct earned him an irreproachable reputation. Calloway obviously understood that loyalty, dedication, and courage were the most important and respected traits of a soldier, and constituted a large portion of one's identity. The Army served as a sort of fraternal organization based on the trust and dedication to their fellow soldiers against a common enemy. To call someone untrustworthy, as the army did to Calloway, was to cut at the heart of what it meant to be a soldier.

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<sup>55</sup> Letter from E. H. Liscum, Colonel, 9th Infantry, May 21, 1899, Adjutant General's Office, Record Group 94, File number 17043, National Archives, Washington, D.C..

### **The Aftermath**

John Calloway showed that his dishonorable discharge hurt him greatly, and in many ways this reaction reflected his conflicted identity as an American, a person of African descent, and a soldier. His struggle against the accusations of disloyalty, his words, and his actions after the fact indicate that he was not pushed completely to a point of “revolt” despite unfair treatment at home and abroad, but in fact he seemed to lean toward “pretence” once army officers adversely reacted to his letter. It is clear that the accusations against him wounded him deeply, and he mounted an emotional defense, demanding a court martial in order to clear his name. Initially, the words in his letter to Tomas Consunji and the letter to the *Richmond Planet* reflected someone who seemed fed up with the abuse and injustices practiced by those around him on a daily basis. These words offered a view of his deepest thoughts and frustrations, but he had not resolved them with his feelings of patriotism and dedication to duty as a career soldier. Once the army arrested him, Calloway immediately declared that there was no disloyal intent, even though in that particular racial environment it was dangerous to express such sentiments. It is possible that Calloway’s letter to Tomas Consunji was his way of protesting social conditions at home in the United States, and was as far as he was willing to go, but there is no doubt that he was surprised by and unprepared for the harsh reaction of the army.

Calloway’s identity as a soldier defined him, and he made it clear that he was determined to clear his name and return to the ranks. He continued to battle against the charges, even after his dismissal from the army and showed his desire to serve again. He

wrote the Secretary of War in October 1901, approximately eight months after his discharge from the Army and reasserted his innocence of any disloyal or treasonous actions, and asked for the opportunity to reenlist in the army. He wrote, “by faithful and diligent service I hope to demonstrate that the harsh judgment that caused my summary dismissal was not in its entirety warranted.” He wanted to prove his innocence of the charges against him through reliable service in the army again. This letter showed that Calloway could not easily move on. “I love the service and find it hard after so many years within to accommodate myself to surroundings without.” The fact that he held on to his love for the army and the desire serve the nation after the way he was treated seems to suggest that he was not prepared to act on any of the words of protest in his letters to Tomas Consunji or to *The Richmond Planet*. Instead, he disavowed any wrong doing and showed a desire to reenter the service, with the expectation that the nation owed him something for his years of service. “I have given my country many years of honest, hard, and valuable service and feel now that she should not in return deny me the pittance of continuing in her ranks as a private soldier.” The frustration he felt at having his sacrifices dismissed upset and demeaned him.<sup>56</sup>

In a letter to William Howard Taft, then the Secretary of War, Calloway revealed the sting of being discharged under dishonorable circumstances. He wrote Taft in 1904 asking that his dishonorable discharge be changed to honorable. “I pray that my petition may be granted that I may have a man’s opportunity in life in my future years.” He

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<sup>56</sup> Letter from John Calloway to the Secretary of War, October 2, 1901, Adjutant General’s Office, Record Group 94, File number 17043 National Archives, Washington, D.C..

continued by lamenting that “the weight of official condemnation is too great a burden for a man down in life to hope to rise against.” Calloway, after being discharge from the army returned to the Philippines and worked for the civilian government there, and he mentioned this in his letter, hoping that it would grant him some consideration. “I have tried by exemplary conduct and faithful service during my two years connection with the civil government of the Philippines to grow out of my condition, only to find at this time that I am as far from the goal of a healthy recognizance as I was at first.”<sup>57</sup> Just as Calloway hoped to exonerate himself by highlighting his service as a soldier, he tried to shed his past, and the shadow of a dishonorable discharge. The act of writing letters that criticized the government’s policies at home and abroad, then fighting a losing battle to save his reputation in the army, only to join the civilian government in the Philippines was reflective of someone who was convinced his loyalty lay with American society. Neither the army, nor William Howard Taft acted to change the conditions of his discharge, or to allow him to reenlist. This left him to pickup the pieces of his life. What happened to Calloway after his last letter to Taft is unclear, but his story certainly reflected the uncertain position of African Americans at home and overseas, as civilians and soldiers, in the racially charged environment of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

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<sup>57</sup> Letter from John Calloway to William Howard Taft, Secretary of War, April 25, 1904, Adjutant General’s Office, Record Group 94, File number 17043, National Archives, Washington, D.C.. The year that Calloway dated this letter was 1901, this is certainly an error, as the Secretary of War did not receive it until June 1, 1904. In addition, since it was addressed to William Howard Taft, Secretary of War, the letter must have been written in 1904, because that was the year Taft became Secretary of War.

The U.S. Army's treatment of John Calloway is emblematic of the way it dealt with its African American soldiers. At times the Army showed a callous disregard for the African American men serving in its ranks, reflecting its harsh and reactionary nature during moments of alleged poor behavior of members of the African American regiments. Calloway's dismissal from the Army, a decision based heavily upon circumstantial evidence, was repeated again at Brownsville, Texas, just a few years later in 1906. That year the U.S. Army transferred three companies of the Twenty-Fifth Infantry to Fort Brown located near Brownsville.<sup>58</sup> The people of Brownsville, Texas were immediately resentful of the presence of the black soldiers sent to garrison the fort near their community. There were a number of incidents between the citizens of Brownsville and the men of the Twenty-Fifth. The soldiers faced racial slurs, segregation, and harassment from law officers, which only served to increase tension. It was clear that these soldiers were unwelcome in the town and that the soldiers resented the treatment they received from the townsfolk. The tension culminated in an incident in the early morning of August 13<sup>th</sup> when shots rang out near the fort. Reportedly "a shadowy group of from nine to twenty persons charged up an alley toward town, firing several hundred shots indiscriminately into lighted areas." One man was killed during the incident and several others were wounded.<sup>59</sup>

The citizens of Brownsville immediately blamed the soldiers of the Twenty-Fifth Infantry for the incident and demanded an investigation. Major Charles W. Penrose, the

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<sup>58</sup> Garna L. Christian, *Black Soldiers in Jim Crow Texas, 1899-1917*, (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1995), 69.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid, 72-73.

ranking officer at Fort Brown, called out the men of his command during the incident and noted that they were all present or accounted for. Historian Garna Christian writes, “Noncommissioned officers in charge of the quarters and arms vouched for the enlisted men’s presence during the shooting and accounted for all weapons and ammunition.” The soldiers’ rifles were immediately checked for any evidence that they had been discharged, but they were found to be clean and unfired. However later that day Brownsville’s mayor, Frederick J. Combe, presented Major Penrose with spent shells that matched the caliber of his soldiers’ rifles, which convinced him of his men’s guilt. On August 18<sup>th</sup>, the Assistant Inspector General, Major Augustus P. Blocksom, conducted an investigation, but the men of the Twenty-Fifth Infantry maintained their innocence. Major Blocksom leaned heavily on the testimony of the citizens of Brownsville, and discounted the soldiers’ claims of innocence, finding that unidentified men of the Twenty-Fifth were guilty of the shootings, even after he acknowledged that “none of the individual raiders was recognized,” that the streets were poorly lit, “and it was dark at night.” Even though no one was able to identify the assailants twelve members of the Twenty-Fifth Infantry were jailed.<sup>60</sup>

The men of the Twenty-Fifth Infantry’s first battalion were transferred from Brownsville, Texas to Fort Reno, Oklahoma where the investigation into the incident continued. President Theodore Roosevelt sent General Ernest A. Garlington, the Inspector General, to Fort Reno to attempt to find the guilty party. He was unable to extract a confession from the soldiers who continued to assert their innocence. As a

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid, 74-78.



result, On November 4, 1906 President Roosevelt, who was convinced of the men's guilt in not only the shooting rampage in Brownsville, but of a conspiracy to cover it up, signed an executive order discharging the 167 men of Companies B, C, and D of the Twenty-Fifth Infantry from the Army and barring them from ever reenlisting. This caused an outcry from African Americans throughout the nation who saw it as a miscarriage of justice. These men, like John Calloway, were forced out of the army on circumstantial evidence, much of it weak, and were never given an opportunity to defend themselves. Calloway's case and the Brownsville incident show how prejudice and stereotype influenced Army officials when it came to handling and disciplining African American soldiers. They were often reactionary and more willing to embrace racial preconceptions than impartial justice.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid, 79-81.

## **Chapter Five: Disillusion and Revolt**

### **The Bicycle Thief and the Insurgent**

In July 1901 Rube Thompson, an African American man, returned to the United States after serving a stint as a mule driver for the Army Quartermaster Department in the Philippines, while the United States was fighting to put down the insurrection there. After he left San Francisco, the port of his debarkation, with the intent of returning to his home in Texas he quickly found himself in serious legal trouble. Rube Thompson was arrested in Pasadena, California, and arraigned in the Los Angeles County Court in early August 1901 for stealing a bicycle worth \$30. Thompson's story is significant, because as it is pieced together, it becomes clear that it is intertwined with the political and social problems facing the nation at the turn of the twentieth century.

Upon his arrest Rube Thompson claimed that he was destitute "and happened to run across a white man who gave him the wheel [the bicycle] and told him to sell it and keep half the money."<sup>1</sup> When Thompson was brought before the judge, he refused to offer a defense. This troubled the judge because he wanted to prevent claims of "railroading" the defendant. The judge asked Thompson why he refused to defend his actions and Thompson answered, "I am pleading guilty because I haven't got no witnesses and no lawyer." This statement revealed Thompson's understanding of American society and the judicial system. Why get a lawyer when you do not have witnesses, and when it was

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<sup>1</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, "Not Allowed To Go To State's Prison". August 8, 1901.

the word of a white man against that of a black man? Thompson saw the futility in making such a defense.<sup>2</sup>

The judge halted the case for a week to allow Thompson to find a lawyer and make his defense. During the course of his trial Rube Thompson made a startling claim. He announced that his name was not “Rube Thompson,” but actually “John Fagans,” (sic) a deserter from the U.S. Army and a “wanted” Filipino insurrection leader.<sup>3</sup> The next day, when pressed by a Los Angeles County deputy sheriff, he recanted and admitted that he was not “John Fagans.”<sup>4</sup> Although he got the name wrong, the fact that he tried to appropriate the name of “David Fagan,” the real African American deserter and Filipino insurgent leader, demands attention. Thompson understood who Fagan was and what he represented, and he knew the Army was eager to capture him. It is most likely that he learned Fagan’s story when he worked as a teamster for the Army in the Philippines.<sup>5</sup> He very likely brought supplies to soldiers who had encounters with Fagan, or if he was dealing with the Twenty-Fourth Infantry, he might have even talked to soldiers who once knew him. The legend of David Fagan was spread in the mainstream white press, and brought back by the returning soldiers. At the time many Americans likely understood David Fagan’s significance.

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, “Hot Time Brewing For Army Deserter”, August 16, 1901.

<sup>4</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, “Not A Deserter”, August 17, 1901.

<sup>5</sup> Reports of Persons and Articles Hired, December 1899-April 1900, Office of the Quartermaster General 1818-1905, Record Group 92, Box 719, National Archives, Washington, D.C.. The records indicate that Rueben Thompson was hired by the U.S. Army Quartermaster as a teamster on November 1, 1899 and was discharged April 4, 1900. There is no indication as to why he spent only five months working for the army in the Philippines.

Of all the possible names Thompson could have used why did he chose Fagan's? Perhaps he admired Fagan for defying an unjust U.S. government. The importance of invoking the name of David Fagan in this case should not be ignored, because in 1901 it represented a powerful symbol of resistance, but to understand why Fagan's name was so representative of defiance, it is necessary to document his story.

David Fagan was a member of the Twenty-Fourth United States Infantry, an all-black U.S. Army unit, which was sent to the Philippines in 1899 to help quell an insurrection after the United States gained possession of the islands from Spain. While fighting in the Philippines, Fagan made the decision to desert the Army and join the Filipino insurgency. This was a serious decision that could not easily be reversed, as it amounted to treason and was punishable by death. In fact, General Frederick Funston, whose troops fought several engagements against Fagan-led insurgents, called him a "wretched man" and admitted, "it was understood that if taken alive by any of us, he was to stretch a picket-rope as soon as one could be obtained."<sup>6</sup> This suggestion of "vigilante justice" reflects the severity of the consequences for desertion and "giving aid to the enemy." It was clear that Fagan could not expect to receive a fair trial if captured as his actions condemned him in the eyes of most Americans. The *San Francisco Chronicle* further emphasized this point in an editorial dealing with traitors during the Filipino insurrection:

If there ever was a case which required the infliction of summary punishment on the culprit it is one of this type. There can be no palliation of the crime....He must have known when he cast his lot with a band of semi-savages and used his intelligence and knowledge to enable them to wage guerrilla warfare against the

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<sup>6</sup> Frederick Funston. *Memories of Two Wars*, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1911), 376.

troops and authority of his own country that no mercy would be shown him should he ever be made a prisoner.<sup>7</sup>

This editorial indicated many American's attitudes toward perceived traitors, but the fact that Fagan was an African American heightened many white American fears, because there was a lingering anxiety that African American soldiers might find common cause with other people of color in the newly acquired colonies. Given the consequences, it must be understood that the decision to turn his weapons against his former comrades could not have been made lightly, leading one to ask what precipitated Fagan's joining the Filipino insurgency.

### **The Rise of Disillusionment**

To grasp the reasons that may have influenced David Fagan to desert from the army, one must understand social and political conditions facing African Americans at the dawning of the twentieth century. The period after the Cuban segment of the Spanish-American War was a time of great disappointment for African Americans. It was a period of assessment as African Americans tried to understand how their service and sacrifices in the conflict in Cuba might benefit them and advance their cause for equal rights. Unfortunately, there was little change to their social status after the war, and whatever recognition they received for their contributions in the war was fleeting, working to frustrate, disillusion, and even radicalize many African Americans pushing them to resist participation in the war in the Philippines.

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<sup>7</sup> *San Francisco Chronicle*, "Summary Punishment of Traitors", August 28, 1901, 6.

The period following the end of hostilities with the Spanish mirrored, in many ways, society prior to the war. Though African Americans gained some opportunities during the war, such as obtaining officer positions in the volunteer regiments and being allowed to show their ability to lead troops in battle, the overall result was that white southerners continued with their campaign of disenfranchisement, discrimination, and segregation. A concerted effort to disenfranchise African Americans started around 1889 with legislation in Tennessee and Arkansas designed to restrict their access to the polls. In Mississippi white Democratic politicians disenfranchised black Americans in 1890 through poll taxes and literacy tests, followed by South Carolina in 1895, and Louisiana in 1898, just before the Spanish-American War.<sup>8</sup> The effort to deny African Americans the right to vote was influenced by a combination of racism and the desire of southern Democrats to control the politics of their state. They whipped up support in their states by constantly raising the specter of “Negro domination,” arguing that black voters in their respective states had enough numbers to determine which rival white party would win local and state elections.<sup>9</sup>

These southern states accomplished disenfranchisement using a combination of devices in their voter registration process. For instance, many southern states instituted the secret ballot designed to allow them to enforce literacy requirements that put in jeopardy the ability of many African Americans, as well as many whites, to cast a ballot.

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<sup>8</sup> Michael Perman, *Struggle for Mastery: Disfranchisement in the South 1888-1908*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001); for his treatment of Tennessee and Arkansas read 48-69, Mississippi pp. 70-90, South Carolina 91-115, and Louisiana 124-147.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 24-25, John Hope Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of Negro Americans*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1980), 259.

In order to gain the support of illiterate whites, the “understanding clauses” and/or “grandfather clauses” were added. In the case of the “understanding clause” an illiterate man could still register to vote if it was deemed that he understood the section of the state constitution that was read to him. This was left to the discretion of the voter registrars, who generally were lenient in his assessment of white voters, but typically stringent in his judgment of potential black registrants.<sup>10</sup> The “grandfather clause” was usually put in place with literacy tests, to allow illiterate white voters whose grandfathers had voted before 1866, to register anyway.<sup>11</sup> The “understanding” and “grandfather” clauses allayed fears that illiterate whites would be disfranchised along with African Americans. These disenfranchisement measures often included disqualification due to criminal convictions, poll taxes, and property requirements meant to target the African American populations in these states.

After answering the call to duty during the Spanish-American War, African Americans hoped that things would improve, but southern Democrats showed their unwillingness to comply or acknowledge their contribution. Instead they continued their campaign of disenfranchisement. In 1898, North Carolinian Democrats amended their

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 85. In the case of Mississippi, section 5 of their constitutional amendment on voter registration instituted an “understanding clause.” It required would-be voters to either read a portion of the state constitution or “to demonstrate to the registrar sufficient understanding of it.”

<sup>11</sup> Rayford W. Logan, *The Betrayal of the Negro: From Rutherford B. Hayes to Woodrow Wilson*, (New York: Da Capo Press, 1997), 209; C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877-1913*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1971), 334; Michael Perman, *Struggle for Mastery*, 140. Perman discusses Louisiana’s “grandfather clause,” which “admitted those who had been voters before January 1, 1868, or their descendants from literacy requirements. The date chosen was designed to exclude as many black voters as possible.

state constitution to eliminate the black vote in their state. The effort to deny the vote to African Americans in North Carolina brought with it malicious language that incited violence during the campaign to “redeem” the state from Republicans and so called “Negro domination.” A well known incident that resulted from this campaign was the Wilmington Riot, where white citizens of Wilmington attacked black residents in the city in a bold effort to push out Republican and black officeholders. The violence in Wilmington in November 1898, and the following repression in the state, caused an outcry among African Americans throughout the country. Later, Alabama followed with disfranchisement measures in 1901 and Virginia in 1902.<sup>12</sup>

As with disenfranchisement, Southern states passed segregation legislation before and after the war with Spain, codifying a separation between the races that was traditionally understood by custom. Florida (1887), Mississippi (1888), Alabama (1890), Georgia (1890), Louisiana (1890), Tennessee (1890), and Arkansas (1891) had enacted Jim Crow laws prior to hostilities with Spain, and South Carolina (1898), North Carolina (1899), Virginia (1900), and Maryland (1904) passed them after the Spanish-American War, despite the military service of African Americans.<sup>13</sup> These laws were supplemented by other ordinances that separated races in all public facilities. The assault on African Americans’ rights in the Spanish-American War period occurred during the presidency of

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<sup>12</sup> C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South*, 330-331 & 341-342; Michael Perman, *Struggle for Mastery*, for Perman’s treatment of North Carolina read 148-172, Alabama 173-194, and Virginia 195-223; for a description of the Wilmington Massacre see Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, *Gender & Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 105-113.

<sup>13</sup> Michael Perman, *Struggle for Mastery*, 247-248; C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South*, 211-212 & 353-355.



William McKinley, which historian Rayford Logan described as the “nadir” of African American history. With war with Spain looming, McKinley seemed to place reconciliation between North and South above justice for black Americans. He often ignored southern retrenchment, and through his inaction appeared to accept what was taking place in the South. Historian Michael Perman pointed out that in late 1898, after war with Spain had ended, McKinley toured the South, and while visiting Alabama, he had many positive things to say about the state, but “no mention was made of the bill calling for a disfranchising convention that the Alabama legislature had passed only a few days earlier.” McKinley was accused of placing reconciliation between North and South over the well-being of the Republican Party in the region, or protecting the right to the franchise for African Americans there. In addition to McKinley’s quiet complicity, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in the landmark case *Williams v. Mississippi* “that the suffrage provisions of Mississippi’s 1890 constitution ‘do not on their face discriminate between the races, and it has not been shown that their actual administration was evil, only that evil was possible under them.’” With this decision southern Democrats could go on with their plans to disenfranchise African Americans without fear that their legislation would be declared unconstitutional.<sup>14</sup>

The continued oppression and constant struggle at home led to feelings of anger and resentment. In *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), W.E.B. Du Bois’s social commentary presented the African American perspective on race relations in the United States, and he declared that “the Nation has not yet found peace from its sins; the freedman has not yet

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 120-121. C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South*, pp. 322-323.

found in freedom his promised land. Whatever of good may have come in these years of change, the shadow of a deep disappointment rest upon the Negro people....”<sup>15</sup> This statement spoke to the frustration most African Americans felt, especially the generation born in freedom, stemming from their inability to receive equal rights in American society after the Civil War. Du Bois bemoaned the fact that Reconstruction, which made sweeping changes in attempting to include African Americans in American society, fell well short of its goals. When Du Bois first published this text in 1903, Jim Crow laws, disenfranchisement, and lynching were a fact of life for African Americans living in the South threatening their well-being and making them second-class citizens.

Working intimately with the growing disenfranchisement and legal segregation was a continued campaign of intimidation, violence, and lynching. The threat of racial violence was real for African Americans prior to and during the Spanish-American War and did not subside after the conflict. The continued effort to suppress African Americans through intimidation and threat of violence rankled as they focused on the hypocrisy of such actions at a time when white Americans championed the concept of exporting American civilization overseas. The years of 1898 and 1899, immediately following the war with Spain, showed no drop off in violence against African Americans. The anti-lynching campaign of Ida B. Wells challenged the justifications for vigilante actions against African Americans. The common excuse white men used to justify lynching was that they were punishing perpetrators of sexual assault or rape against white women.

Wells, in her pamphlets *Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in All Its Phases*, *A Red Record*,

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<sup>15</sup> W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*. New York: Barnes & Noble Classics, 2003. 11.

and *Mob Rule in New Orleans*, published in the 1890s, exposed the lies and misinformation used to justify race-based murder. In her *Mob Rule in New Orleans* Wells reported that of 127 African Americans lynched in 1898, “24 were charged with the alleged ‘usual crime.’ In 1899, of the 107 lynchings, 16 were said to be for crimes against women.” She stressed, “these figures, of course, speak for themselves, and to the unprejudiced, fair-minded person it is only necessary to read and study them in order to show that the charge that the Negro is a moral outlaw is a false one, made for the purpose of injuring the Negro’s good name and to create public sentiment against him.”<sup>16</sup> The goal of consistently using the threat of the “black rapist” was to develop white support for the Democratic Party in the South and destroy Republican power there. Creating a movement based on fear, using an issue that was likely to excite whites in the South, gave Democrats a useful weapon to eliminate African Americans’ political power in southern society.

The black press kept track of these abuses, and reports of lynching typically caused black editors to respond. Their editorials often showed an abhorrence of vigilante action and stressed that justice should be determined by the courts, not by mob violence. Echoing Ida B. Wells’ efforts and reports on lynching John Mitchell, Jr., editor of *The Richmond Planet*, regularly printed a tally of vigilante actions. In the August 5, 1899 issue of *The Planet*, for example, he ran a list of dates, the names of the victims, the charges levied against them, and the place of their lynching. Under the title of “The

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<sup>16</sup> Jacqueline Jones Royster, ed., *Southern Horrors and Other Writings: The Anti-Lynching Campaign of Ida B. Wells, 1892-1900*, (Boston & New York: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 1997), 206-207.

Reign of Lawlessness,” it covered a period from January 7, 1898 to July 24, 1899, and represented 364 victims. The list served as a reminder to his readers of the brutality of white Americans, and offered evidence refuting the assertion that white southerners were only responding to charges of rape. Of the 364 victims on this list, according to Mitchell, less than twenty were lynched for charges of rape or sexual assault. The list showed a variety of other reasons for the murders, such as the killing of white men, or other acts of violence, but also minor infractions such as being “impudent” to a white man, being “troublesome,” wanting a drink of “soda water,” talking “too much,” or just by being the “brother to a murderer.” At the beginning of the list was the question “Shall this barbarity continue until the God of retribution marshals his strength against the barbarians?” It was ironic that at this same time white Americans were extolling their “civilizing mission,” which inferred that they were “civilized” and in a position to help the peoples of lesser-developed nations advance. Mitchell seemed to disagree by pointing out that the nation still had “barbarians” in its midst.<sup>17</sup>

Mitchell could not understand how white Americans could defend mob violence as “justice.” In response to a letter from the editor of the Shreveport, Louisiana *Watchman*, in which he expressed his distaste for lynching while in the same paragraph he justified it, Mitchell questioned the “lynch law.” The editor of the Shreveport *Watchman* wrote his letter in response to something Mitchell had previously written about the lynching of two African American men, Bedney Hsarn and John Richards, on December 6, 1899. The *Watchman*’s editor claimed that the two men were responsible for the murder of a “rich

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<sup>17</sup> *The Richmond Planet*, “The Reign of Lawlessness,” August 5, 1899.

planter,” Larry Vance. “They were suspected of the crime, arrested and jailed, and tried by a ‘citizens court,’ found guilty on the private and public confessions of one of them before 2000 people and hung.” The *Watchman*’s editor continued, “Of course we object to lynch law in all cases, but we do not think that any man ever had a fairer trial or a juster (sic) penalty....” This was the sort of logic confronting African Americans at the end of the nineteenth century, where even those white men who stated that they “objected” to the lynch law still found justifications for it. The letter from this editor raised a significant question about how the confession was extracted from one of the accused. If the confession was extracted under beating or other forms of coercion, then it must be called into question, however, the editor did not offer any detail on this issue.<sup>18</sup>

Mitchell’s response to the editor’s letter offers insight into the way African Americans felt about the lynch law. Many people pointed out that the vigilantes should stay home and allow the legal system to sort out the facts in each case. Mitchell could not understand how white Americans who took part in a lynching could see themselves as exacting “justice” when for him they were equally complicit in murder. Mitchell mentioned that the editor of the *Watchman* took “exception” to his report that Hsarn and Richards “were tried by a mob of orderly disorderly persons....” Mitchell questioned the *Watchman*’s editor’s use of the term “citizens court.” He asked, “what is a ‘citizens court?’ Has it any standing whatever in law?” From a legal standpoint, how can a body of irresponsible citizens who have not sworn to support the U.S. or state constitution try, convict, and execute a citizen without due process of law. Mitchell believed they were

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<sup>18</sup> *The Richmond Planet*, “The Watchman Objects,” December 31, 1898.

“guilty of a crime as heinous as the one which their victim stood charged.” He emphasized the culpability of the mob in “murdering” their victims. “Bedney Hsarn and John Richards were said to be guilty of murder. The ‘citizens court’ that tried and executed them is guilty of murder. What’s the difference? The one [is] the same offense as the other, yet you hang one set and fail to even arrest the other set. What kind of justice is this?”<sup>19</sup>

The editor of the *Watchmen* wanted Mitchell to get his facts straight before condemning mob action in Louisiana and to give the people involved “the benefit of the doubt, even though they may be white men.” John Mitchell brushed this request aside asking, “Did the colored men have the benefit of the doubt, which you claim for your white neighbors? If so, why was it that the law was not permitted to take its course?” He further asked, “are not the jurors in your locality white men? Are not the judges and the commonwealth attorneys white men? Were not the laws made by white men? Then why was it necessary to commit two willful and premeditated murders in such a case as this?” This again questioned the true motives behind mob violence. Mitchell refused to accept that the people involved in this lynching truly believed that the two accused men would get a fair trial in what could be seen as a prejudicial legal system. In such a system, if people wanted these two men found guilty of the crimes, it would have been easy to make it happen in the courts, which would give the verdict some legitimacy. There had to be more to this mob action than justice.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

Mitchell ended his editorial by condemning the original crime that saw the white planter murdered, but he held firm in his condemnation of the lynch mob as well. He asked,

Yet how many colored men have been butchered? How many colored women have been outraged? How many children left motherless and fatherless by white brutes, who are alive and well today? The soil of Louisiana is red with the blood of black martyrs and the winds of the swamps and plantations sing a requiem over their graves: *I call it murder, there you have it plain and flat, I don't have to go on [further] than my testament to that.*

Lynching was an emotional subject for African Americans, as it was usually directed at them, and reflected their impotence and police officer's unwillingness to protect them, or their families from the rages of whites determined to control southern society. For John Mitchell, Jr. to call the victims of mob violence "martyrs" suggested that he felt that their mounting deaths would eventually benefit the race as a whole because the American public would be sickened by the violence and lawlessness. He obviously saw the issue of lynching as part of the larger struggle to be treated fairly under the law, and by continuing to question actions of lynch mobs he and others might eventually be heard, and meaningful change might be achieved.<sup>21</sup> There was little question that for African Americans their treatment contradicted the language of the "civilizing mission" that many pro-expansionist Americans perpetuated.

### **Challenging the "Civilizing Mission"**

As the United States began fighting the insurgency in the Philippines, it became clear that this conflict was much different from the conflict in Cuba. The Spanish-

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

American-Cuban war pitted the United States, with its Cuban allies, against Spanish forces. Conversely, the Filipino insurgency saw the natives of the Philippines attempt to fend off their new American colonial masters. In the United States, the Cuban war could be interpreted as a war of liberation. In order to overcome the early opposition of the “anti-imperialists to the war with Spain, the Teller Amendment was passed in Congress, which prevented the United States from annexing Cuba. The amendment declared, “the United States hereby disclaims any disposition or intention to exercise sovereignty, jurisdiction, or control over Cuba except for the pacification thereof, and asserts its determination when that is accomplished to leave the government and control of the island to its people.”<sup>22</sup> This assisted many Americans in perpetuating the high-minded idea that they were conducting a war of liberation, not of occupation or expansion.

There was no such amendment concerning the Philippines. In fact, President McKinley expressed concern for the well-being of the people in the Philippines if the United States did not step in and take control. He presented a number of justifications for the decision to annex the Philippine Islands. Historian H. W. Brands pointed out that “he rejected returning the Philippines to the Spanish, whose record in Cuba as well in the Philippines showed them unfit to govern other peoples.” McKinley was also concerned about allowing another European nation to take control, because “relinquishing the islands to a commercial rival would be ‘bad for business.’”<sup>23</sup> Business considerations

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<sup>22</sup> David Traxel, *1898: The Birth of the American Century* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998), 122.

<sup>23</sup> H.W. Brands, *Bound To Empire: The United States and the Philippines*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 24&25.



carried added weight when one considers the proximity of the Philippines to China, making it an ideal way station for the Asian trade.

Another significant justification for the annexation of the Philippines was the idea of the “civilizing mission.” This concept was made popular by Rudyard Kipling’s poem *The White Man’s Burden*, and was embraced by U.S. politicians and religious leaders alike. To the language of civilization was added the discussion of manliness, and the Filipinos were targets of this racially charged and culturally hegemonic discourse. Theodore Roosevelt argued that, “no nation capable of self-government and of developing by its own efforts a sane and orderly civilization, no matter how small it may be, has anything to fear from us.”<sup>24</sup> He believed that it was the duty of the United States to assist “savage” peoples in accepting the merits of civilized society. This included teaching the Western concept of civilization to non-westerners, which meant the ability to self-govern using democratic principles, maintaining a well-ordered and stable society, as well as introducing them to Christian morality and Western education. He also suggested that the United States needed to hold onto the Philippines, because if Americans failed to do their duty, “some stronger, manlier power” would step in and “do the task we had shown ourselves fearful of performing.” Roosevelt reminded Americans of the rewards of fulfilling the civilizing mission adding that “this country will keep the islands and will establish therein a stable and orderly government, so that one more fair spot of the

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<sup>24</sup> Gail Bederman, *Manliness & Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), 189.

world's surface shall have been snatched from the forces of darkness. Fundamentally the cause of expansion is the cause of peace.”<sup>25</sup>

In some ways African Americans could accept the rhetoric of the civilizing mission, as they themselves were westerners and that affected their view of “others” in the world. The language of civilization and the assertion of Western cultural hegemony were apparent in the comments concerning Filipinos by Preston Moore, an African American sergeant. He stated, “With few exceptions the Filipinos are half civilized; their education is very limited. In some of the large coast cities the Filipinos go half naked; having a cloth tied about their body to hide their shame, and all the rest exposed.”<sup>26</sup> These statements reveal that African Americans were not free from the urge to exoticize and look down on cultures that were strange to them.

Moreover, most African Americans were practicing Christians, and looked to imperialist ventures as a way to enter new countries to “save souls.” Historian Lawrence Little, in *Disciples of Liberty*, noted that “even the most ardent anti-imperialist agreed that American imperialism provided the opportunity and duty to spread African Methodism to the people of color in the Philippines and the Caribbean.”<sup>27</sup> This contention was supported by an African American Army officer, Captain F.H. Crumbley of the Forty-Ninth Infantry U.S. Volunteers, when he observed, “The natives are very friendly to the Negro soldiers, and since it will soon be the purpose of the churches and Christian

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<sup>25</sup> Theodore Roosevelt, *The Strenuous Life: Essays and Addresses* (New York: The Century Co., 1901), 35&36.

<sup>26</sup> Gatewood, *Smoked Yankees and the Struggle for Empire*, 289-290.

<sup>27</sup> Lawrence S. Little, *Disciples of Liberty: The African Methodist Episcopal Church in the Age of Imperialism 1884-1916* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2000), 114-115.

agencies to send missionaries to this island, the young colored men and women of Christian education who desire to labor among an appreciative people ought to be selected to come as missionaries with spelling book and Bible; they should not wait till the field is covered by others, but should come in the front ranks and assist in developing these people.”<sup>28</sup> Captain Crumbley’s comments show that an affinity existed between African American soldiers and Filipinos, and that he wanted to improve on this relationship through the education and Christianization. The tone of his words was paternalistic in nature, as he pressed for the education of the Filipinos with a “spelling book and the Bible.” The language of moral uplift reflected aspects of W.E.B. Du Bois’s notion of double-consciousness, allowing African Americans to support the nation’s policy of imperialism as a way to uplift the less fortunate, but also allowing for feelings of racial solidarity as they assisted other peoples of color. However, even if African Americans were willing to accept the civilizing mission in principle and the message of western cultural superiority, they abhorred the language of racial inferiority that white Americans often included in the discussion of expansion. The language of civilization sounded eerily familiar to African Americans in the South who were in the midst of seeing their own liberties eroded through Jim Crow laws, disenfranchisement, and lynching. African Americans often tied their plight at home to the imperialist mission, and some attacked the idea of the “civilizing mission” as hypocritical in light of the abusive treatment they faced at home. This frustration at their own treatment, and the perpetuation of a discourse that asserted racial and cultural superiority as a justification

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<sup>28</sup> Gatewood, *Smoked Yankees and the Struggle for Empire*, 271.

for expansion overseas and the subjugation of non-white population abroad, caused African Americans to withdraw their support for, or resist, American expansionism.

Many African Americans saw the issues of disfranchisement, lynching, imperialism, and the concept of the “civilizing mission” as interconnected. White Americans who defended the violence leveled against African Americans in the South, while, at the same time, stressing the importance of trying to bring America’s brand of civilization to the peoples in their new overseas possessions, were accused of hypocrisy. Many African Americans saw the United States as completely unprepared to govern or elevate others in its new possessions when it failed to protect its own citizens at home. Connecting the problems at home with American expansionism revealed growing resistance to American foreign policy, which was augmented by increased frustration over repression at home. Though not resistance at the level of Rube Thompson or David Fagan, the reaction in the black press represented a challenge to the status quo, using one of the avenues available to them.

A key message emanating from the black press after the conflict in Cuba ended was that the United States set a poor example of civilization to the colored peoples in newly acquired territories. With racial violence continuing after the war, many black editors wondered if Cubans and Filipinos would not look at these events with growing trepidation. W. Calvin Chase of *The Washington Bee*, referring to the efforts of whites in North Carolina to wrest power from the Republican Party under the banner of white supremacy, warned “no wonder the Cubans and the [Filipinos] look with fear and distrust upon American occupation and control. The way we treat our own citizens in North

Carolina and other southern states is positive proof that their doubts are well founded.”

Chase added in another editorial blast in the same edition that “if the southern whites should get control of Cuba it would be but a transfer of masters, the latter being worse than the former.”<sup>29</sup> *The Colored American* printed an editorial that expressed the same sentiment: “If the Filipinos read any of the North Carolina papers, they are apt to decline the American brand of civilization.”<sup>30</sup>

Often the arguments questioning “American civilization” were tied to the issue of lynching in the United States, as this was seen as the height of barbarity and represented a complete lack of social control. John Mitchell, Jr. responded to a lynching that took place during the same period the United States was trying to put down the Filipino insurgency. In his July 1899 editorial Mitchell referred to an incident in Georgia where two African Americans were “lynched and scalped,” a crime so shocking that he had to repeat it, “yes, we said scalped, a custom in vogue among savages.” Mitchell’s editorial was replete with denunciations of that form of American “civilization” and called into question the nation’s Christian values, likening the members of the lynch mob to “savages.” Mitchell explained that one of the victims was “hanged and his body riddled with bullets.” However, before death came to the victim, “his body was mutilated and the flesh distributed.” Mitchell felt that the events of the lynching were so horrific that “the indignities to which he was subjected cannot be published, but must be left to the imagination.” The actions of the mob, and the unwillingness of the Georgians to demand justice for those who were lynched, Mitchell viewed as “a disgrace to Christendom.” In

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<sup>29</sup> *The Washington Bee*, November 5, 1898.

<sup>30</sup> *The Colored American*, November 12, 1898.

another editorial, in the same edition, Mitchell argued that “lawlessness is rampant, and civilization in many sections has been overthrown.”<sup>31</sup> It is clear that in Mitchell’s opinion, a civilized nation should hold the rule of law as sacrosanct and not condone white citizens’ mob action.

E.E. Cooper of *The Colored American* echoed Mitchell’s sentiment, arguing that lynching hurt American credibility as it attempted to represent itself as “a fount of civilization.” Cooper declared that, “the spread of the lynching evil may be viewed with alarm. It is a blot on our civilization.” He continued to assert that the people in America’s new territories would be unimpressed with American civilization if it carried with it so much violence and repression; and just as importantly, he argued that Americans were deluded if they thought their society was perfect, pointing to the examples of racial violence to support this contention. Cooper explained,

our pretensions about carrying Christianity and civilization to the heathen nations on earth will remain a subject of laughter and ridicule as long as the Wilmington, Palmetto, and kindred tragedies are permitted to go unrebuked in our land. Men and women shot down in cold blood! The law impotent and the public voice silent! Civilization indeed! Bah!<sup>32</sup>

The lynching of Sam Hose in Newnan, Georgia in April 1899, and African Americans’ response to it, were indicative of the abhorrence and anger they felt toward the racial violence directed at them. This lynching was the kind of incident that led to claims of American hypocrisy, arguing that the United States embarked on a “civilizing mission” to assist lesser developed societies, but could not prevent violence and brutality

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<sup>31</sup> *The Richmond Planet*, July 29, 1899.

<sup>32</sup> *The Colored American*, April 15, 1899.

at home.<sup>33</sup> Sam Hose was accused of murdering a white man by the name of Alfred Cranford and sexually assaulting his wife, and Hose was pursued by a lynch mob for several days before his capture. Days prior to his capture, Solomon Johnson of the *Savannah Tribune* denounced the crimes that Hose was accused of, but expressed hope that the mob would not find him, because Johnson understood what would happen if Hose were apprehended. Johnson wrote of the zeal of the white lynch mob, “so anxious are these people for the capture of Hose that they offered prayers in the various churches in that direction, and if he is captured, a cannibalistic fete will be the result. We do not condone Hose for the crime that is alleged against him, but it is hoped that the mob that is seeking him may not find him because he will be killed on sight.” He ended by expressing hope that if caught, Hose would get a fair trial. This was not to be.<sup>34</sup>

In its next issue *The Savannah Tribune* ran a front-page article on the lynching of Sam Hose. According to *The Tribune*, Hose was hiding at the home of his mother, and was captured at approximately 9:00 pm on Saturday and was lynched on the following Sunday afternoon. The article indicated that Sam Hose was brutally tortured and “mutilated.” He was then burned at the stake in front of a mob of over 2,000 people. The report noted that the lynchers sifted through Hose’s remains looking for souvenirs, describing the crowd as desperate to bring home a memento of the occasion. *The Tribune* reported, “not even the bones of the Negro were left in peace, but were eagerly snatched by a crowd of people drawn from all directions, who almost fought over the burning body of the man....” This article highlighted the brutality of the event, and showed the cruelty

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<sup>33</sup> Gatewood, *Black Americans and the White Man’s Burden*, 198-199.

<sup>34</sup> *The Savannah Tribune*, April 22, 1899.

of the lynch mob. *The Tribune* castigated not only those present at the murder of Sam Hose, but southern society as well; “for sickening sights, harrowing details, and bloodcurdling incidents, the burning of [Hose] is unsurpassed by any occurrence of a like kind ever heard of in the history of Georgia.”<sup>35</sup>

At a time when the United States was embarking on overseas expansion, justified by grand pronouncements of exporting “civilization” to others, and encouraged by writers such as Rudyard Kipling whose “White Man’s Burden” was published just a few weeks prior to Hose’s killing, the connection of domestic racial violence to the nation’s imperialist mission were inevitable. In this way what went on at home was closely related to events overseas, and vice versa. How could Americans try to teach others how to be “civilized” when its own citizens often acted in a savage and uncivilized manner? African Americans often pushed these points, indicating their waning interest in seeing the United States govern and control the lives of non-white peoples abroad.

The lynching of Sam Hose angered African Americans and caused many to speak out. One correspondent to the *New York Sun* asked how “any American, or any number of Americans, living in any part of this supposedly enlightened country can so degenerate and partake of the nature of wild beasts it is almost impossible to comprehend, and nearly inconceivable.” An African American preacher, Reverend B. L. Tomkins, immediately tied the Sam Hose incident to U.S. imperialism, claiming, “I would much rather be a Filipino and be under the Spanish yoke than under the law and order now practiced in Georgia.” This quote is significant when one keeps in mind the justification that the

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<sup>35</sup> *The Savannah Tribune*, “Sam Holt Burned at the Stake By Enraged People,” April 29, 1899.



United States used to enter into conflict with Spain was the humanitarian disaster that developed in Cuba under Spain's *reconcentrado* program, and Tompkins inferred that the United States was actually more brutal than Spain.<sup>36</sup>

*The Colored American* addressed the issue as well, and like other African American newspapers, immediately linked Sam Hose's murder by mob action to the nation's claim to enlightenment. *The Colored American* expressed shame in learning of American citizens taking justice into their own hands flaunting the rule of law. E. E. Cooper the editor declared, "the much-vaunted civilization of the world's grandest republic is clad in garments of mourning. About the so-called free institutions, under whose sheltering arm all classes are guaranteed equality of legal protection, is draped the humiliating sack-cloth and ashes." The editorial expressed shock that American citizens could so easily turn to savagery and barbarity, noting that, "a conscienceless mob in the proud commonwealth of Georgia has perpetrated an outrage which for fiendishness and barbaric atrocity has not been outdone since the days of the Inquisition or the brutality of the witch-torturing era of the formative period in New England." In bringing up the Inquisition, or the witch trials, E. E. Cooper, of *the Colored American*, seemed to imply that the United States was not evolving, but lapsing back into practices of a less civilized era. Like Reverend Tompkins, Cooper placed the perpetrators on the same level as the Spanish. Cooper also questioned the sincerity of the American motives in fighting the war against Spain, and the nation's ability to improve conditions overseas when Americans could fall into such cruel behavior. In the same issue *The Colored American*

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<sup>36</sup> *The Savannah Tribune*, "Comments on Lynching," April 29, 1899.

reprinted an editorial from *the New York Journal* that used the Sam Hose lynching to question Americans' sense of superiority.

I suppose these outrages, these frightful crimes, make the same impression on my mind that they do on the minds of all civilized people. I know of no words strong enough, bitter enough, to express my indignation and horror. Men who belong to the 'superior race' take a Negro, a criminal, a supposed murderer, one alleged to have assaulted a white woman, chain him to a tree, saturate his clothing with kerosene, pile fagots about his feet. This is the preparation for the festival.<sup>37</sup>

Likening the lynching to a festival indicated the editor's revulsion that so many people would participate. This showed the difference between how "civilized" Americans acted, and how enlightened they thought they were.

*The Colored American* discussed a speech by Bishop Alexander Walters at the opening of the New Jersey Methodist Conference in 1899. The editor explained that Bishop Walters' position reflected the sentiment among African Americans in the wake of the Sam Hose lynching. Bishop Walters expressed doubt that Hose had assaulted the wife after killing her husband and was sure that the "charge was manufactured as a justification for the lynching." *The Colored American* further explained that Walters was certain that "the Cubans and Filipinos, whom we have spent so much money and shed so much blood to free from Spanish oppression, were never treated so barbarously in time of peace by that government as some Negroes have been in the states of Arkansas, Texas, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia." Walters revealed that many African Americans saw absurdity in America trying to export a flawed and brutal system. Walters observed, "it is rather amusing to intelligent Afro-Americans to read in the great dailies and weeklies of our country for the Americans to give the Cubans and Filipinos an

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<sup>37</sup> *The Colored American*, "American 'Civilization' in Mourning," April 29, 1899.

equitable and beneficent government, when they are powerless to secure the life and liberty to their citizens at home.”<sup>38</sup>

### **Refuting Rudyard Kipling**

The irony of instances of lynching, like that of Sam Hose, along with other moments of violence practiced against African Americans, while, at the same time, being assailed by pronouncements of American superiority and fitness to uplift “uncivilized” peoples, was not lost on African Americans. Rudyard Kipling’s “The White Man’s Burden” summarized the motives of the “civilizing mission,” but seemed disingenuous when one considered the attitudes and actions of many whites in the United States towards non-whites. Kipling, an Englishman, wrote his poem in order to encourage the United States to hold onto the Philippines and work to advance the people there.<sup>39</sup> Kipling’s poem is replete with idealistic and romanticized language, exhorting more advanced Western societies like the United States to embrace the challenges and accept the sacrifices that come with civilizing “backwards” peoples. It is also full of language reflecting cultural chauvinism, asserting that, like other advanced civilizations, the United States should “send forth the best ye breed,” essentially banishing Americans to locations overseas in order to help peoples that Kipling clearly saw as savage, and as “half-devil and half child.” This insinuated that these peoples lived in a state of cultural infancy and needed assistance to advance to American or Western European levels of civilization. This

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<sup>38</sup> *The Colored American*, “Bishop Walters’ Prophecy,” May 20, 1899.

<sup>39</sup> Bederman, *Manliness & Civilization*, 187; Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Barbarian Virtues: The United States Encounters Foreign Peoples at Home and Abroad, 1876-1917*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 2000), 226.

included instituting western political, legal, and educational systems, and increased emphasis on sanitation and public health. The doctrine also encouraged missionaries to Christianize the populations in these new territories. Kipling idealized the civilizing mission by warning those willing to take up the challenge that these peoples would likely resist and resent efforts to change them, but his paternalistic tone suggested that it was for their own good. In addition, it appealed to notions of masculinity among American men, asking them to demonstrate the courage and selflessness to face the dangers and hardships connected with the uplift other less developed peoples. “The White Man’s Burden” also played into the growing sense of cultural and racial superiority that many white Americans felt. White Americans often defined their sense of racial superiority by contrasting themselves with those they considered inferior. This growing sense of white preeminence, increasingly supported by flawed studies that attempted to prove scientifically their superiority, often informed and justified their discriminatory and abusive treatment of African Americans in the United States. Influenced by the conception of white superiority and cultural chauvinism, Social Darwinist ideas also often influenced Americans’ activities overseas.<sup>40</sup>

The African American reaction to Kipling’s “The White Man’s Burden” was indicative of their growing disillusionment with American imperialist expansion. The reaction to Kipling ranged from condemnatory editorials in the black press to the publication of satirical poems meant to poke fun at Kipling, highlighting the hypocrisy of

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<sup>40</sup> Rudyard Kipling, *Complete Verse: Definitive Edition*, (New York: Anchor Press, 1989), 321-323. *The White Man’s Burden* was originally published in early 1899, and intended to encourage the United States to take on the “civilizing mission” in the Philippines.

his message.<sup>41</sup> One of the editors who rejected the principles encompassed by Kipling's

"The White Man's Burden" was *The Washington Bee's* W. Calvin Chase.

Much is being said about the 'white man's burden.' The interpretation of this paradox is that the white people of this country have assayed to take upon themselves the task of civilizing and Christianizing all of the races not Anglo-Saxon. This is indeed a herculean task and for obvious reasons. In the first place the people of this country have not demonstrated their ability to apply the principles of justice and Christianity to all of the people within their immediate limits. There are millions in the United States to whom justice and humanity are denied. They are not permitted to enjoy life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, even in a moderate degree.

Chase's editorial continued by asserting that racism was clouding the judgment of white Americans, and if they were serious about uplifting others they would have to divest themselves of the "deep prejudice" they held toward the non-white peoples of the world. Otherwise, their mission was doomed to failure.

The spirit that "I am better than thou, because I am white," has pervaded the entire South and is fast making its way northward, the effect of which is to persecute those whom God has tinctured with the "livery of the burning sun." This spirit is born of arrogance and deep prejudice which blind whites to the merits of other races and the depths of degradation from which they themselves have sprung. Hence the self-appointed mission to humanize other races will not be successful unless the operators depart from their unchristian moorings and adopt the motto of the Great Master. "Peace on earth and good will to all men."<sup>42</sup>

Another key argument made by Calvin Chase was that whites were not the ones carrying the burden; in fact, it was being placed squarely on the peoples of color, because "they are compelled to advance, encumbered by the prejudice, hostility, and opposition of the whites." Chase saw through the language of imperialism and understood that arguments of uplift were disingenuous when white Americans approached the task with a

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<sup>41</sup> Gatewood, *Black Americans and the White Man's Burden*, 183-186.

<sup>42</sup> *The Washington Bee*, "The White Man's Burden," March 11, 1899.

sense of superiority. He stressed that white Americans could free everyone from their burdens simply by giving “all a fair chance in the race of life,” regardless of color or ethnicity. Chase concluded by pointing out, any burdens white Americans had, were self-imposed. “The ‘white man’s burden’ is his want of Christianity, his prejudice, his greed, his arrogance and false pride and when they are removed the mythical burden will disappear as mist before the rising sun.” Chase clearly felt that the United States needed to improve its own society before venturing overseas to assist others.<sup>43</sup>

Solomon Johnson, the editor the *Savannah Tribune*, echoed Chase’s contention that it was African Americans who really carried the burdens in the United States, and not whites, given the disadvantages and discrimination against them in American society. “The black man has a burden,” declared Johnson, “which he is wearing patiently and without murmuring, and that burden has been placed upon him by those who are against his advancement. His burden consists of great prejudice against him, unjust laws, discrimination of a varied degree and numerous kinds of advantages that are taken of him.”<sup>44</sup>

Edward E. Cooper of *The Colored American* joined the discussion with a similar argument, scoffing at the concept of a “white man’s burden,” and placing the real burden on African Americans. He called Kipling’s poem a “conglomeration of rot” and emphasized that it was the “the dark races who have borne the world’s burdens both in the heat of the day and the travail of the night.” By calling Kipling’s words “rot” and questioning those who embraced his sentiments, Cooper stressed that any burden that

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid; *The Colored American*, March 4, 1899.

<sup>44</sup> *The Savannah Tribune*, March 11, 1899.

faced whites was of their own making, frequently emanating from the troubles connected with “greed of gold or territory.” Cooper asserted that imperialism, justified by romanitized notions such as those coming from Kipling, often required the use of force to bring about change. American imperialism also placed a burden on the populations of the new possessions. White Americans believed they knew what was best for other peoples and at times used coercion in bringing change because they believed it was for the greater good. Cooper challenged these ideas, arguing that, “might has been made to pose for right and the weak and untutored peoples have had burdens forced on them at the mouth of the cannon or point of the bayonet. The whole white man’s burden is a myth. The black man’s burden is a crushing, grinding reality.” He declared, “Let us have done with cant and hypocrisy.” Instead of dealing with “a burden” to civilize and educate others, white Americans and Europeans imposed innumerable “burdens” on others through their quest for empire.<sup>45</sup>

A poem by H. T. Johnson in the *Christian Recorder* echoed these themes, arguing that American imperialism only served to create troubles for others. It brought misery and war, and Americans’ record reflected their inability to assist others in an honest and judicious manner, pointing to the way they dealt with Native Americans. Johnson wrote:

Pile on the Black Man’s Burden.  
‘Tis nearest at your door;  
Why heed long bleeding Cuba.  
Or dark Hawaii’s shore?  
Hail ye your fearless armies,  
Which menace feeble folks  
Who fight with clubs and arrows  
and brook your rifle’s smoke.

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<sup>45</sup> *The Colored American*, “Two Burdens,” March 18, 1899.

Pile on the Black Man's Burden  
His wail with laughter drown  
You've sealed the Red Man's problem,  
And will take up the Brown,  
In vain ye seek to end it,  
With bullets, blood or death  
Better by far defend it  
With honor's holy breath.<sup>46</sup>

"The White Man's Burden," in the context of domestic U.S. race relations, so clearly represented hypocrisy that it was the target of derision and satire. Kipling's poem inspired others to submit parodies of it for publication in the black press. For example, *The Colored American* published a poem on March 25, 1899 entitled "The White Man's Burden (With Apologies to Mr. Rudyard Kipling)." Using the title of the original work, it offered a tale of a chief in a far off land who welcomed white men to his country. The story revealed the impact of whites as they took control of the new territories. It described the gradual decline in the chief's power, the erosion of the native society, and the impoverishment of the people as their wealth and natural resources were taken away. The author of this poem, who was not identified, repeatedly called the chief a "fool." Prior to the introduction of white men in their society, the "fool, he was chief of this peaceful land/ The rule of his people was justly planned,/ and they cheerfully wrought with heart and hand." The poem described the whites as teachers, but the lessons were designed to influence the chief to relinquish his power. Eventually, the chief was "stript to his foolish hide/ Which they might have seen when they threw him aside/ So his body lived, but his spirit died/ and so did his ancient pride." This was what the "civilizing

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<sup>46</sup> Willard B. Gatewood, Jr., *Black Americans and the White Man's Burden*, pg. 184.



mission” did to the people in America’s overseas possessions. It devalued their culture and forced them to accept new norms, to which they had no historical or societal connection. In devaluing their cultures and society, these people were repeatedly told that they were inferior. The loss of native culture and the assault on their identity lent itself to discontent and uncertainty. Thus instead of uplifting the natives, the “civilizing mission” actually demeaned and degraded them. In its conclusion, the poem also addressed the cynical, and more pragmatic, view of imperialism. It was not meant to uplift the native population, but to enrich the imperialists. “The treasure ships their anchors weigh/ For the White Man’s homeland far away/ They’re freighting the White Man’s burden away.” The only burden white men bore was the weight of the wealth they extracted from the colonies.<sup>47</sup>

Another poem written in response to Kipling placed the “burden” on white Americans to give African Americans, who are “burdened” with injustice and racism, a fair chance at home. In J. Dallas Bowser’s poem “Take up the Black Man’s Burden,” published in the April 8, 1899 issue of *The Colored American*, he challenged white Americans to “send forth the best ye breed/To judge with righteous judgment/The black Man’s work and need.” The poem addressed white racial preconceptions and attitudes toward African Americans asking them not to “curse him in advance/ He can not lift a White Man’s load/ Without a White Man’s chance.” It also described the discrimination facing black Americans, and asked white Americans to consider and address these practices. Bowser argued that white Americans saw black poverty and the inability to advance economically

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<sup>47</sup> *The Colored American*, “The White Man’s Burden (With Apologies to Mr. Rudyard Kipling), March 25, 1899.

as an issue of race; but he asked that before jumping to that conclusion, they need to consider that black men were “shut out from mill and workshop/ From counting room and store/ By caste and labor unions/ You close industry’s door.”<sup>48</sup>

Bowser placed much of the blame for the contemporary condition of African Americans on whites, whom he asked to bear in mind that it took “Anglo-Saxons” “a thousand years of freedom” to advance to where they were. He preached patience when it came to their fellow black citizens, asking not to “crush him with his load.” Instead, he wanted white Americans to accept the role as teachers and leaders and take a sincere approach to uplifting black men at home and abroad. Bowser saw Kipling as misguided and wanted a more honest and heartfelt approach to advancement, one based on more altruistic motives. Rather than exhorting white men to carry the burden of selflessly aiding others, Bowser concluded by telling black men to be prepared to struggle against injustice and mistreatment. He stressed that they needed to exhibit the courage to resist and assert their rights when necessary.

Take up the Black Man’s burden  
Black freemen! Stand alone,  
If need be! Gird your armor,  
For conflicts yet to come!  
When weighed be not found wanting,  
But find or make a way,  
To honor, fame and fortune,  
To God and destiny.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> *The Colored American*, “Take Up The Black Man’s Burden,” April 8, 1899.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid; Mathew Frye Jacobson, *Barbarian Virtues*, 257. Jacobson also quotes H. T. Johnson.

### **Disillusionment Persistent**

The handling of the “race problem” at home, the lack of recognition for the African American contribution to the war effort, and the growing suspicion that white Americans were in the process of exporting “Jim Crow” abroad angered, disillusioned, and in many cases radicalized black Americans. All of these issues worked in concert to influence growing anti-imperialist sentiments among African Americans, and many became more outspoken as the conflict in the Philippines continued. African Americans used the means at their disposal to make their voices heard. In most cases this was done through the black press, but black writers and scholars also documented the dissatisfaction with the lack of social progress and growing retrenchment at home. The growing frustration felt by African Americans in the wake of the Spanish-American War can be best summed up by W.E.B. Du Bois when wrote in *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), “the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color-line, the relation of the darker to the lighter races of men in Asia and Africa, in America and the islands of the sea.”<sup>50</sup> This comment reflects the connection of race relations at home to the larger question of imperialism. With growing expansion of industrialized western nations, the likelihood of conflict between white and non-white peoples increased.

The continued oppression at home, and the fear that racism would be transported overseas, forced many African Americans to become more introspective. What Du Bois termed “double-consciousness” was the conflict between two key elements in defining their identities, race and nationality. As white Americans persistently drew the “color-

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<sup>50</sup> W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, (New York, Barnes & Noble Classics, 2003),16.

line” throughout the nation, and the position of African Americans in American society continued to deteriorate, many black Americans were forced to choose between, as Du Bois put it, “pretense and revolt.” For Du Bois by 1903, the year he published *The Souls of Black Folk*, it was clear that things were not getting better. He argued that “double-consciousness,” and the constant striving to satisfy both their American and African American identity created a situation where “such a double life, with double thoughts, double duties, and double social classes, must give rise to double words and double ideas, and tempt the mind to pretense and revolt, to hypocrisy or to radicalism.”<sup>51</sup> Though each individual reached this realization and decision at his or her own pace, Du Bois argued that once they realized the magnitude of the racial problems in the United States, they become radicalized or delude themselves into believing that things will eventually improve. The latter approach forced them to embrace the fallacy that the American system was colorblind, and to deny the power and influence of institutionalized racism and how it permeated every aspect of American society. The events following the Spanish-American War pushed African Americans increasingly into the realm of “revolt,” as they could no longer hold on to the pretense that conditions were improving.

Certain texts allow us to see the dramatic shift from hope before and during the Spanish American war to disillusionment afterwards. The poet Charles Frederick White offers an excellent example of the evolution of someone who was idealistic at the beginning of the Spanish-American War, reflecting the optimism that martial prowess and courage on the battlefield would encourage whites to embrace their black fellow

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid,143.

countrymen, but later transforming into bitterness and disillusionment. The shift is evident in his collection of poems entitled *Plea of the Negro Soldier*, where his poem “War’s Inspiration” expresses the same idealism, romanticism, and jingoism sweeping the nation at the time.<sup>52</sup> In this poem, penned a few months prior to the war in February 1898, he wrote:

If God hath willed that I should die,-  
And thus our race name glorify,-  
While the fight amid war’s alarms,  
‘Mid crashing shells and cannon’ storms,  
While freedom’s flags waves o’er my head,  
O’er dire remains of martyred dead  
Who gave their lives and lent their aid,  
Who faltered not, nor were afraid  
To die upon the battle-ground  
With unfurled glory all around,  
Then, I am full content to die  
And be upraised to Him on high.<sup>53</sup>

This poem reflected White’s perspective on the coming war with Spain and his optimism that sacrifice would be appreciated by white Americans and advance black Americans at home.

Charles Frederick White, like other American men who felt it was their patriotic duty to take part in the conflict against Spain, joined the Eighth Illinois Volunteer Infantry, which served as part of the occupation forces in Cuba after the cessation of hostilities.<sup>54</sup>

White wrote two poems that showed his pride in serving in the Eighth Illinois. “The

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<sup>52</sup> James Robert Payne, “Afro-American Literature of the Spanish-American War,” *MELUS*, Vol. 10, No. 3, (Autumn, 1983), 20.

<sup>53</sup> Charles Frederick White, *Plea of the Negro Soldier and a Hundred Other Poems*, (Freeport, New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1970), 50.

<sup>54</sup> James Robert Payne, “Afro-American Literature of the Spanish-American War,” *MELUS*, 20. Payne mentions he served in the Eighth Illinois.

Eighth Illinois in Cuba” described the regiment’s participation in the occupation of Cuba and stressed the pride in the duty and the sacrifice. He mentioned that fourteen soldiers from the Eighth died while serving in Cuba, and he praised their sacrifice. “But, instead of tears of pleasure, / Some must shed their tears for grief, / For depleted is our measure;- / Fourteen rest the sod beneath.” He continued, “No more reveille shall wake them; / Taps has blown for them it last; / Nor shall ever foe o’ertake them, / for their fighting all is past.” White’s poem “The Eighth Returning From Cuba,” written in March 1899, was still positive in tone, mostly describing the picturesque scenery witnessed on the trip back to Chicago and ended by praising the regiment for its service to the nation. “Thus come the gallant Eighth Regiment, / Volunteered from Illinois, / Back from the Cuban intrenchment- / Brave band of true-hearted boys.”<sup>55</sup>

If Charles White’s verses represented a positive and hopeful outlook on serving in the war, two of his other works indicate the disillusionment. As a soldier who fought in the war, he would have felt the slights and lack of recognition more personally than those that did not serve. Two pieces, “The Negro Volunteer” and the title poem in his book, *Plea of the Negro Soldier*, expressed his bitterness at the treatment of black soldiers specifically, and black Americans in general, in the years following the conflict. “The Negro Volunteer,” written just months after his return from Cuba, displayed his outrage at a nation that refused to respect the service of men who left their homes, faced the dangers of bullets, shells, and disease, but returned to a country that refused to acknowledge their sacrifices and contributions. White also stressed the incongruity of

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<sup>55</sup> Charles Frederick White, *Plea of the Negro Soldier*, 54-58.

these men serving a nation that failed to protect their basic civil rights. “He volunteered his life and health / To go to cruel war- / Increasing thus his country’s wealth / In soldier boys afar- / To fight the battles of a land / Which does not him protect, / And, though great danger was at hand, / He did not e’en object.” Much of the poem highlights the difficulties faced by black soldiers in Cuba, and the challenges that were met with courage and resolve. However, in the conclusion of “The Negro Volunteer” White asserted that the black soldiers did their duty and the nation should be proud of their service; but when these heroes returned, they were treated in ways unbefitting their service. “Of such brave hearts as he does own / A land might well be proud, / Enforce the laws, protect his home, / His all, from lawless crowd.” This was an appeal to the American people to protect African Americans’ rights and to give them a fair opportunity to pursue happiness and enjoy a sense of security.<sup>56</sup>

His title work, “Plea For the Negro Soldier” represented an even more powerful example of disappointment than does “The Negro Volunteer.” The poem is replete with anger and bitterness at the nation’s unwillingness to embrace the contributions of African Americans. He started the lengthy poem by calling the United States an “ungrateful land.” The poem was written and published in February 1907, which gave the Spanish-American War veteran plenty of material to assess the benefits, or lack thereof, from their participation in the conflict. The years after the war brought setback after setback in U.S. race relations, especially in the South. The first half of the poem exposed the unfairness of disfranchisement and lynching among other social ills visited on black Americans at

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid, 58-59; James Robert Payne, “Afro-American Literature of the Spanish-American War,” *MELUS*, 21.

the time. White highlighted the hypocrisy of those who held the nation up as “the land of the free,” even as they oppressed their fellow citizens. “Dost boast a land of freedom, but / Whose flag waves o’er a land of crime, / The makers of whose laws unjust / Themselves stained with blood and slime.” Charles White reminded his readers that African Americans answered the nation’s call in every instance it was required. Invoking the memory of the Boston Massacre, Yorktown, the charge at Fort Wagner, he reminded people of their service in the nation’s most recent war, fighting in the battles of San Juan Hill and El Caney. “My comrades have thy glory wrought / In war, in peace, with skill and vim.”<sup>57</sup>

White’s “Plea of The Negro Soldier” struck a tone of militancy when he warned the nation that African Americans would continue their struggle against injustice, and that they would not be cowed. He argued that they would persist in their struggle with the same energy, dedication, and courage that they exhibited when facing the nation’s enemies in war. “Our voice of protest shall not cease / Until thy unjust bonds release / Our rights, that our lives may increase / In riches, happiness and peace.” White concluded his verse with a plea to God to give him strength to wage the battle against injustice. “O God of justice and of right! / If thou art deaf and hast no sight, / Lend me Thy weapons and Thy might, / That this last battle I may fight.”<sup>58</sup>

John Edward Bruce, a journalist who contributed to many newspapers using the pseudonym “Bruce Grit,” offers yet another example of someone whose optimism was

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<sup>57</sup> White, *Plea*, 140-144; James Robert Payne, “Afro-American Literature of the Spanish-American War,” *MELUS*, 21-22.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.



transformed to expressions of disappointment and frustration in the years immediately following the conflict. A writer who always strongly advocated for fairness and justice for black Americans, Bruce wrote editorials on the eve of the Spanish-American War, indicating that it was everyone's patriotic duty to aid the United States at a time of national crisis. He expressed hope that by contributing to the war effort, African Americans could earn the respect of white Americans. "His bravery, heroism, and courage will ultimately conquer American prejudice, and enable him to overcome the obstacles which now stand in the way of advancement, and will give him character, and a just and equitable claim to the recognition which his merits, as a citizen of the republic deserve."<sup>59</sup> Bruce's hopefulness was likely influenced by his loyalty to the Republican Party, the fact that the Civil War brought major gains to African Americans, and the hope that answering the call to duty against Spain might further their cause.<sup>60</sup>

Months after the war with Spain, as time made it clear that the war would not help African Americans, and when the language of the "civilizing mission" became more imbued with racism, Bruce began to work earnestly against continued U.S. expansion and imperialism. In an editorial in *The Colored American* on April 8, 1899, he wanted American leaders to reconsider their policy with regard to the territories received from Spain. By the time of his editorial, the United States was engaged in a struggle to put down rebellion in the Philippines, and John Edward Bruce was wholly against the conflict. "I have been giving some attention to the war in the Philippines and the more I

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<sup>59</sup> *The Colored American*, "Valor of Negro Soldiers," May 7, 1898.

<sup>60</sup> William Seraile, *Bruce Grit: The Black Nationalist Writings of John Edward Bruce*, (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2003), 51-52.

think about it, the more I am convinced it is an unjust war, a war of conquest.” This position matched other black Americans’ arguments about imperialism and the “White Man’s Burden.” General Elwell Otis was the man in charge of the American forces in the Philippines at the time, and Bruce quoted the *Seattle Washington Herald* arguing “probably no worse man in this country could have been placed in control of the American forces than General Otis.” The argument against Otis was that he was a “despiser of human liberty,” and that he was from Maryland and “believed in a ruling class, and a serving class in America, a stern aristocrat who conceives utter contempt for people of ‘rabble.’ He has always opposed any recognition of popular rights.”<sup>61</sup>

Bruce continued his attack on the man leading the campaign against Filipino rebels, calling him an “American Weyler,” a reference to Valeriano Weyler, the Spanish general responsible for devising the *Reconcentrado* program that led to humanitarian disaster in Cuba. The comparison is significant, as pro-expansionists in the United States tried to assert that the American form of imperialism was benevolent, and viewed it as completely different from Spanish colonialism. However, Bruce was convinced that with a man like General Otis in charge, a harsh policy would be pursued against the Filipinos, because Otis believed “they are inferior.” Bruce questioned American imperialism and painted the nation as the oppressor, likening the Filipino insurgents to America’s patriots who rebelled against the British when Great Britain “brutally sought to make laws for them.” He saw the irony of the Filipino Insurgency as the United States, the self-proclaimed beacon of freedom, did not know how to “manage people who aspire to be

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<sup>61</sup> *The Colored American*, “Notes of the Inner Circle,” April 8, 1899, pg. 1 & 4.

free.” Bruce saw the transformation of the United States into something more repressive, a nation that was more likely “to be tempted to feel more sympathy for the autocratic Spaniard than for the people they went to war to assist.” In Bruce’s opinion, the war in the Philippines was clearly amoral and a blemish on the nation’s soul.<sup>62</sup>

In the editorial Bruce was critical of American foreign policy, but in an editorial published on May 27, 1899 in *The Colored American*, Bruce set his sights on President William McKinley. In 1899 McKinley was preparing for reelection and Bruce wrote an article arguing against African American support for him. This was noteworthy because Bruce had traditionally been a vocal supporter of the Republican Party. The editorial attack on McKinley showed Bruce’s growing disenchantment with the administration. The article entitled “Two Presidents Compared” contrasted William McKinley and Ulysses S. Grant. Bruce argued that Grant was a no nonsense President who took a hard line with white southerners who resorted to violence against freed people. Bruce believed that President Grant “possessed the courage to exercise the executive authority in the enforcement of all the laws upon the statute books for the protection of citizens of the United States, without regard to race or color.” As a result, Grant urged Congress to enact laws designed to target violent groups such as the Klu Klux Klan. Bruce emphasized Grant’s moral courage in doing the right thing. “General Grant didn’t have a chalk liver and he wasn’t mealy mouthed in his remarks to the white men of the South, who inaugurated these despicable methods for making life unbearable for the Negroes, whom he knew had aided the federal government in putting down these vipers, and who

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

were being persecuted for their loyalty to the old flag.” A key point in Bruce’s argument was that white southerners, instead of openly challenging federal authority, were “fighting the government over the heads of the black men, as we all know they are doing now, by resorting to one subterfuge or another.” However, President Grant had the mettle to take on the South.<sup>63</sup>

In comparing the two presidents, it is clear to Bruce that McKinley was no Ulysses S. Grant. Indeed, Bruce simply called McKinley “a disappointment.” “He appears to lack the moral courage to exercise his constitutional authority in these circumstances, or utter one word of earnest protest against the black-hearted villains which have disgraced the South, and country during his administration.” Bruce’s criticism of McKinley was shaped by the perception that the President was ignoring racial violence in the South, and did not use his authority to protect American citizens. Bruce accused McKinley of being duplicitous in his dealings with southern whites and African Americans, telling each what they wanted to hear. He contended that McKinley preferred to temporize with the South.” Bruce accused him of being “apologetic, diplomatic, and political on this southern question, and when delegations of Negroes have called on him to urge him to do something to stop these outrages he has talked to them in the strongest language in expressing his disapproval....” Bruce called Grant a “man of action” and McKinley a “man of words.” His anger was directed at McKinley’s efforts to reconcile North and South at the expense of African Americans. Bruce asked African Americans why they would want to reelect McKinley.

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<sup>63</sup> *The Colored American*, “Two Presidents Compared,” John Edward Bruce, May 27, 1899.

Negroes will doubtless be asked in the next nominating convention to vote for William McKinley of Ohio, to succeed himself as President-what for? What has he done outside of giving a few offices to Negroes, to merit their further support and allegiance? What has he said in any of his annual messages to Congress in condemnation of lynching and mob violence in the South, can anyone point to a single act or utterance of William McKinley directed against these iniquities? He has gone into the South on three separate occasions and distributed bouquets to the people of that section. He is the great [pacifier] and temporizer and apologist, who while he has not tacitly sought the support and friendship of the democrats of the South, has indirectly made overtures in his speeches and in private conversations for a closer union of the Anglo-Saxon race of the two sections and his honeyed words have been misunderstood by political Warwicks of the South.<sup>64</sup>

Bruce's frustration with McKinley was evident in these editorials, but his dissatisfaction toward the other Republican Presidents who followed McKinley was evident in a short story entitled "The Call of a Nation," published in 1912. The story is about a fictional war that erupted between the United States and Japan, which required the coming together of all Americans, regardless of race or ethnicity, in order to meet the Japanese threat. The result was a pulling down of the barriers that held African Americans back, as whites began to fully appreciate them as fellow citizens, and allowed them complete inclusion in American society.<sup>65</sup> Although the story is about white Americans releasing their animosities toward black Americans during and following a time of national crisis, his description of the sinking of American battleships named after two prominent Republican Presidents was notable. In the first pages of the story he described the destruction of the USS *Theodore Roosevelt* and the sinking of the USS *Taft*, two imaginary battleships that were lost in the opening, and pivotal, sea battle in the

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Ralph L. Crowder, *John Edward Bruce: Politician, Journalist, and Self-Trained Historian of the African Diaspora*, (New York: New York University Press, 2004), 66.

fictional war against the Japanese. It is possible that Bruce chose these names at random, but more likely he singled out Roosevelt and Taft as a protest. Roosevelt and Taft were President in the years immediately following McKinley and continued to ignore racial violence in the South, tried to further reconciliation between the North and South, and only paid lip service to black Americans' demands without actually implementing meaningful legislation that protected them, or their rights. Roosevelt and Taft were a continuing disappointment for African Americans who maintained support for the Republican Party.<sup>66</sup>

Roosevelt, the author an article in *Scribner's* that attacked the reputation of black soldiers fighting at the Battle of San Juan Hill, was also a major proponent of the "civilizing mission" abroad, and seemed to embrace the moderate and accommodating approach to race relations reflected in the leadership of Booker T. Washington.<sup>67</sup> Roosevelt also angered many African Americans by his handling of the Brownsville riots in 1906 when he authorized the investigation that eventually found that members of the Twenty-Fifth Infantry were responsible for the attack on Brownsville, Texas even though they could not identify the actual culprits. Since the investigators were unable to obtain evidence against the attackers, but were certain that men from the regiment were to blame, they claimed that there was a "conspiracy of silence" among the soldiers to

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<sup>66</sup> John Edward Bruce, "The Call of a Nation," 1912, Bruce MS. F: 10-5, Bruce Papers, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture.

<sup>67</sup> C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877-1913*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1971), 465-466. Woodward mentions that Roosevelt, in a speech, "...advised the Negroes at Tuskegee to stay out of the professions and trust southern whites as their best friends." This followed Booker T. Washington's accommodationist stance represented in his 1895 speech in Atlanta.

protect the guilty. Roosevelt concurred and ordered the dishonorable discharge of 167 African American soldiers, and barred them from ever reenlisting in the Army. African Americans saw this as a miscarriage of justice, punishing many innocent men for the actions of a few, on such poor evidence.<sup>68</sup>

President William Howard Taft, who followed Roosevelt, also took a passive approach to lynching and discrimination in the South, refusing to antagonize whites in that region. Taft like Roosevelt and McKinley, embraced Booker T. Washington's accommodationist stance, asking black Americans to be patient and to understand that "their greatest hope lay in the sympathy and the help of the 'noble, earnest, sympathetic white men in the South.'"<sup>69</sup> With these points in mind, it should not be surprising that African Americans, who had lent their support in preceding elections to McKinley, Roosevelt, and Taft, displayed anger and resentment at these presidents as they failed to safeguard black American rights, despite the contributions to the Spanish-American War and the Filipino Insurgency. It also explains why John Edward Bruce singled out Roosevelt and Taft in his short story. It might have been done as measure of retribution against two presidents who failed to live up to the hopes and expectations of many black Americans. Perhaps

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<sup>68</sup> Jack D. Foner, *Blacks and the Military in American History: A New Perspective*, (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1974), 95-98; Also See, Marvin Fletcher, *The Black Soldier and Officer In the United States Army 1891-1917*, Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 1974), 119-152; Garna L. Christian, *Black Soldiers in Jim Crow Texas 1899-1917*, (College Station, Texas: Texas A&M University Press, 1995), 73-81.

<sup>69</sup> I. A. Newby, *Jim Crow's Defense: Anti-Negro Thought in America, 1900-1930*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1965), 167-168. Newby argues that Roosevelt held the same viewpoint.

Bruce felt a certain satisfaction in imagining the two vessels slipping below the surface of the ocean, never to be seen again.

### **David Fagan and his Infamous Decision**

It is unlikely that David Fagan was unaware of the racial troubles at home or was unaffected by them; and he saw the subjugation of the Philippines and the abuses heaped on its people first hand. It is possible that Fagan was already dealing with a level of disillusionment when he arrived in the Philippines. Historians Michael Robinson and Frank Schubert indicate that during Fagan's first couple of months in the Philippines, he "experienced difficulties with his superiors," which included his white officers and black sergeants.<sup>70</sup> Robinson and Schubert were not able to identify what sort of troubles Fagan was having with his chain of command, but it is likely that these personal problems added to the frustration and moral questions surrounding the expansionist mission in the Philippines, pushing Fagan to switch sides during the conflict. Perhaps the final push for Fagan came from the main insurrection leader Emilio Aguinaldo himself, who sent a pronouncement to African American troops "advocating solidarity against white oppressors and by offering commissions to defectors."<sup>71</sup> Aguinaldo highlighted the racial

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<sup>70</sup> Michael C. Robinson, and Frank N. Schubert, "David Fagan: An Afro-American Rebel in the Philippine, 1899-1901," *The Pacific Historical Review*, (February 1975), 74. Further information on David Fagan is sparse. Robinson and Schubert represent the only article I could find on him. All other information was pieced together from various newspaper articles.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid, 73.



problems in the United States and referred to the lynching of Sam Hose.<sup>72</sup> This was a smart strategy on Aguinaldo's part, because lynchings of this sort were not uncommon in the United States. African Americans throughout the United States felt the government was failing them by not doing more to stop lynching.

Aguinaldo's plea to African American soldiers went out in late October 1899, and David Fagan deserted November 17, 1899, making it likely that the decree had some impact on Fagan's decision to join the Filipino insurgency.<sup>73</sup> It is at this point that the constant conflict between the African and American elements within his "double-consciousness" led Fagan to revolt. He revolted against a system that worked against him at home, but utilized his services abroad. Once he offered his services to the insurgents, he was made an officer. It is important to understand that gaining an officer's rank was symbolic in several ways. It allowed Fagan to demand respect where he previously had none because not only was he a lowly enlisted man, he was black. It also gave Fagan a claim to equality with white U.S. army officers, a claim he never would have had in the United States. In an incident after Fagan captured American officer F.W. Alstaetter, the white lieutenant claimed that Fagan "would take out his Filipino commission as a captain and show it to me and say, 'we are equals, we amount to something.'"<sup>74</sup> Showing Lieutenant Alstaetter his commission as proof of equality reveals an intriguing and possible motive for leaving the Army. Fagan was aspiring to a

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<sup>72</sup> Shawn Michelle Smith, *Photography on the Color Line*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 113-114.

<sup>73</sup> National Archives Microfilm Publications, Microcopy No. 233, Registers of Enlistments in the U.S. Army 1798-1914, Roll 1899.

<sup>74</sup> *The New York Times*, "Lieut. Alstaetter Talks of David Fagen", December 10, 1901.

social standing he could never achieve in the United States. When David Fagan was killed, Lieutenant Alstaetter's West Point ring was found on his finger. Earlier, when Lieutenant Alstaetter was about to be released by Fagan, he asked for his ring back, but the insurgent leader made the excuse that he had given it to a friend who went to another island, so he was unable to return it. Why did he keep the ring? Perhaps he held onto the ring as a symbol of social standing, because in the United States the ring not only was a symbol of the brightest military minds in America, but was a source of pride and fraternity among U.S. Army officers. Only the elite went to West Point.

### **Conclusion: Rube Thompson's Fate**

For Rube Thompson, after being arrested and charged with grand larceny for stealing a bicycle, David Fagan represented a powerful symbol of protest. While still attempting to pass himself off as Fagan, Thompson was asked why he had deserted and joined the insurgency. He responded to the question by stating:

I deserted the American Army in November 1899, because I was so brutally treated by Lieutenant McMasters. He is a white man and treated me like a dog. At the time I deserted we had been marching all day and far into the night, when we got about two hours of sleep. Then the insurgents attacked us and we had a fight. In the morning we were given hardtack and water, and immediately ordered on a forced march. I fagged out and fell behind, whereupon the lieutenant came back and took my gun and hardtack from me and marched away. Leaving me without defense in a hostile country or a bite to eat.

He had previously told me that he was going to get rid of me somehow, and I thought that this was my time to go. As soon as I was rested I started back and was soon captured by a band of insurgents. For a month or so I was guarded as a prisoner, until I finally consented to join their rank. Yes sir, they treated me fine, and before I got homesick Aguinaldo had made me a major. Everybody knew me and I had all the money I wanted.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, "Hot Time Brewing For Army Deserter", August 16, 1901.

This tale tells us so much. It is significant that Thompson immediately singled out a racial element and expressed resentment for the inhumane treatment heaped upon him. Portraying Lieutenant McMasters as someone out to get him might have reflected his mistrust of white American leadership. He was unhappy and abused in the United States Army led by white men, and it is equally significant that he found happiness, social standing, and wealth as an insurgent leader for the Filipinos, who were fellow people of color who were resisting subjugation by Americans. Thompson's statement reflects the nature of double-consciousness affecting many African Americans. He resisted racial injustice, but also got homesick and returned to the United States. This indicates that he could not ignore the American part of his identity. This conflicted identity helps to explain why many more black soldiers did not join the insurgency. Even though they wanted racial justice, they still viewed themselves as Americans.

Rube Thompson used David Fagan's story to resist the system in one of the few ways available to him. Thompson slowed the judicial proceedings against him, and made a verbal protest, that made it into the newspapers, by utilizing the name of an African American man with an infamous reputation among white Americans. When Thompson finally confessed that he was lying about being Fagan, he explained that he used the name in the hopes of being transferred to military custody. He thought that he would be sent to San Francisco and held until the investigation revealed that he was not David Fagan. He hoped that when the Army finally ascertained the truth, they would just release him, and

he would get out of the grand larceny charges against him in Los Angeles.<sup>76</sup> This did not happen, and Thompson was sent to San Quentin prison for two years, but it was a bold plan in an attempt to manipulate the legal system in his favor.<sup>77</sup> David Fagan and Rube Thompson are excellent case histories that allow a better understanding of the effects of discrimination, repression, and Jim Crow on African Americans. They show people reaching a point where resistance was a more attractive recourse than obedience.

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<sup>76</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, "Not A Deserter", August 17, 1901.

<sup>77</sup> It is unclear if this was a common prison term for Grand Larceny, or for stealing a bicycle.

## **Chapter Six: The African American Battle For Memory in the Spanish-American War**

Mr. J. L. Moore wrote a letter dated August 22, 1898 to President William McKinley complaining about the lack of recognition for the courage displayed by African American soldiers during the conflict in Cuba with Spain. He enclosed a letter from a black soldier who took part in combat, which claimed that their contribution was being ignored. “I know if the officers commanding fail to recognize the valor of the colored soldiery in common with others,” wrote Moore. “I know it does not meet your approval, because manhood is what the nation and the nation’s interests demand whether in ebony or marble it is the same and should be recognized.”<sup>1</sup> Moore’s letter touched on something that concerned many African Americans at the time, namely getting the proper recognition for their contributions to the Spanish-American War.

Moore’s letter to the President contained a correspondence dated July 17, 1898, from a member of the Twenty-Fifth Infantry, who complained about the lack of credit being given to the black soldiers who helped win victory in Cuba.

...My regiment won a hard fight, but as usual we get no credit. We captured a fort and works that 7 regiments had tried for 9 hours to take and could not. They were afraid to charge but the 25<sup>th</sup> charged up as soon as they got on the firing line.

Even the town of Caney was silenced by the fire of our regiment as the fort commanded the city. After the 25<sup>th</sup> did the work the 12<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> claimed the victory. When official orders were read, not once was the 25<sup>th</sup> mentioned nor was it likely to.... I am disgusted and don’t think I am going to stay here after the war is over. Our services are so little thought of that we are not even mentioned in any of the orders, yet we won one of the worst fought hard fights of the entire

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<sup>1</sup> Letter from Mr. J. L. Moore to President William McKinley, August 22, 1898, National Archives, Record Group 94, Adjutant General’s Office, File number 118192.

campaign. We lost 4 officers and 37 men killed, wounded, and missing in the fight.

When I said the worst fought battle, I mean that the fight was poorly fought till the 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry went into action. Then under Col. Daggett, everything changed. He looked over the country and when he sent his men in, he knew where they were going. And of course they won. But I don't even look forward in recognition of our work. Our regiment in general is in good health and spirits. They are ready for another fight....<sup>2</sup>

The soldier, whose name was not mentioned in the letter, was clearly frustrated at witnessing recognition being given to other regiments not in the thick of the fighting and pivotal to the success of the battle. Though there may have been a bit of braggadocio on the part of this soldier, the record clearly shows that the Twenty-Fifth U.S. Infantry played a significant part in the Cuban campaign and in the Battle of El Caney. This soldier saw his comrades' efforts and sacrifice being ignored by army leadership, and he was upset. In the particular case of the Twenty-Fifth Infantry's participation in the Battle of El Caney, a controversy arose over which U.S. Army regiment was the first up the hill and to enter the Spanish blockhouse that defended the hill against the American assault.

The Battle of El Caney took place along with the more famous Battle of San Juan Hill. The battle plan called for two attacks. First, U.S. forces were expected to attack and take the Spanish positions at El Caney, then march to support and reinforce the regiments attacking San Juan Hill. Things did not go as intended, General William Shafter, the commanding general and his staff, underestimated the resistance on the hill at El Caney, and therefore the amount of time it would take to defeat the Spanish there. This battle took on the same savage nature that confronted U.S. troops at San Juan Hill. Eventually,

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid. This letter was enclosed with Moore's correspondence to President McKinley.

after a hard day of fighting, the U.S. soldiers dislodged the Spanish from their positions by a determined advance uphill in the face of staunch opposition.<sup>3</sup> One of the regiments that charged the hill was the Twenty-Fifth Infantry. The soldier in the above letter asserted that his regiment was the first to the “stone fort.” This issue is of significance because those who could claim that they captured the stone fort would make an important entry into their regimental history and bolster the pride they felt for their command. In addition, if the men of the Twenty-Fifth Infantry could claim that they captured the stone fort on El Caney, it might serve as a point of pride for African Americans back home.

The controversy over who actually captured the blockhouse on El Caney erupted over the official reports in the battle’s aftermath. It showed the complexity and difficulty in accurately recording military encounters. The differing vantage points of observers and the confusion created by the combat led to varying versions of what happened at El Caney. Where one was positioned, one’s duty in the battle, or whom one served affected how they events were reported. Men of the Twenty-Fifth Infantry asserted that they were the first up the hill and first into the fort, but another regiment, the Twelfth Infantry, challenged this and General Adna Chaffee, the officer in charge of one of the divisions attacking El Caney, sided against the Twenty-Fifth in his report. The unnamed soldier’s letter represents the viewpoint of the infantryman serving on the frontline who saw and

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<sup>3</sup> David Traxel, *1898: The Birth of the American Century* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1998), 185-189; R. A. Alger, *The Spanish American War*, (New York & London: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1901), 131-150; Joseph Wheeler, *The Santiago Campaign 1898*, (Boston, New York, & London: Lamson, Wolfe and Company, 1898), 41-42. Both Russell A. Alger and Joseph Wheeler indicate that the battle at El Caney was only expected to take a couple of hours at the most, but the terrain, and the fact that the Spanish reinforced their position on the hill, made the assault more difficult and it wound up taking most of the day.

understood only part of the battle. The black soldier argued that the Twenty-Fifth was able to do what other regiments could not, successfully assault the Spanish positions on the hill, which suggested that the Twenty-Fifth possessed more ability and courage than other regiments (white or black). He also claimed that his regiment “captured the fort,” but was not credited for it.

Other soldiers from the Twenty-Fifth Infantry reported being the first to the stone fort as well. One soldier’s account was recorded in T.G. Steward’s *Buffalo Soldiers: the Colored Regulars in the United States Army*. Steward quoted a soldier who recalled that after a hard fight up the hill at El Caney, they “rested for a couple of minutes.” The soldier continued:

We lay there about five minutes, looking into the Spanish fort or blockhouse; we measured the distance by our eyesight, then with our rifles; we began to cheer and storm, and in a moment more, up the hill like a bevy of blue birds did the Twenty-Fifth fly. G and H Companies were the first to reach the summit and to make the Spaniard fly into the city of El Caney, which lay just behind the hill. When we reached the summit, others soon began to mount our ladder.

This version offers the glory of the capture to the Twenty-Fifth, noting that the other regiments followed, or benefitted from the path blazed up the hill. However, Colonel Richard Comba, the commanding officer of the Twelfth Infantry, claimed that men from his regiment were the first into the small fort as they took advantage of gaps made in the stone fort made by the artillery. The counter claims made by other regiments further clouded the issue.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> T. G. Steward, *Buffalo Soldiers: the Colored Regulars in the United States Army*, (Amherst, New York: Humanity Books, 2003), 164-167. Steward’s book was originally published in 1904.



The argument of who arrived at the stone fort first travelled up the chain of army leadership. The Twelfth's commanding general Chaffee argued that the "troops arriving at the fort were there in the following order: Twelfth Infantry, which took the place," followed by the Twenty-Fifth Infantry. Lieutenant Colonel Aaron S. Daggett, the acting commanding officer of the Twenty-Fifth Infantry, was clearly frustrated at this declaration and wrote a letter to his own commanding general two weeks after the battle because he believed that his regiment was being denied hard earned accolades. He went right to the point claiming that "the Twenty-Fifth Infantry has not received credit for the part it took in the battle of El Caney...." He then entered into a lengthy description of the fight, highlighting his regiment's actions. He explained that two companies of the Twenty-Fifth arrived within yards of the stone fort, and it was to his men that the Spaniards offered a white flag of surrender. Unfortunately, there was so much cross fire that neither his soldiers nor the Spanish could move toward each other to complete the surrender. As this was happening, the Twelfth came up the hill and was able to get behind the blockhouse without taking fire and took the Spanish soldiers prisoner. His contention was that his men did the work that precipitated the surrender, but the Twelfth swooped in and made the capture. Moreover, while soldiers of the Twelfth Infantry accepted the white flag of surrender from the Spanish, soldiers from the Twenty-Fifth entered the fort simultaneously, captured the Spanish national flag, but were ordered to "give it up by an officer of the Twelfth."<sup>5</sup> Not only did Col. Daggett feel that his men

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 171-172.

were denied recognition they deserved, they were also kept from receiving a valuable war trophy.

Lt. Col. Daggett tried to place the actions of his men in the official record, but was hurt by the counter reports of the Twelfth's commanding officer, and General Chaffee, their commanding general. Both the Twenty-Fifth and Twelfth Infantry were clearly instrumental in the final phase of the battle, but the requests by the African American soldiers that they were not being given their due credit touched upon a very sensitive issue. African Americans asserted that their part in the war in Cuba was being marginalized, and the black regulars were not being properly recognized for their contribution to the overall military success. During the first few months after the war in Cuba, African Americans suspected some white Americans of purposely trying to omit black soldiers' role in the war. African American historians who later wrote histories of the war, as well as the black press, believed that the mainstream white press was silent and histories written by white historians ignored African Americans' contributions. As a result, they endeavored to enter their part in the war into the national memory.

The reports of the commanding officer of the Twelfth Infantry, and General Chaffee acted as source material for the press and later became part of the archives that historians used in their study of the Spanish-American War. When coming to the question of whose version of events to accept, General Chaffee's report carried more weight than Lt. Col. Daggett's because Chaffee was the commanding general with greater tactical and strategic knowledge and a more complete picture of the battle than Daggett. Most

historians looking at the archival record would more likely accept the general's report over his subordinate's.

In his study, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*, Michel-Rolph Trouillot addressed the creation of archives and their subsequent impact on the writing of history. Trouillot observed, "silences enter the process of historical production at four crucial moments: the moment of fact creation (the making of sources); the moment of fact assembly (the making of the archives); the moment of fact retrieval (the making of narratives); and the moment of retrospective significance (the making of history in the final instance)." <sup>6</sup> The silence of African American participation in the Spanish-American War enters at all four of Trouillot's levels of historical production. The making of sources through the army reports, eyewitness accounts, and the stories written by war correspondents such as Stephen Bonsal and Stephen Crane immediately influenced the way the American public viewed the war. Trouillot claims that as historical narratives are created, it must be understood that "any historical narrative is a particular bundle of silences."<sup>7</sup> This is both intentionally and unintentionally done. In omitting African Americans' part in the war, or minimizing their contribution, many people remained ignorant of their role in making history. Eventually, archivists decide what documents and items should be collected in their archives. If the archive contains reports that tell an incomplete story of an event, the historian who utilizes those resources would be unknowingly guided to write about events in a certain way unaware of the biases. In this

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<sup>6</sup> Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), 26.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 27.

instance the reader is presented with a partial version of the Spanish-American War that often ignored, or underrepresented, the contribution of black soldiers. Many African Americans believed that there was a conspiracy to wrest credit away from black soldiers, and it was these deliberate attempts at silencing that some African American historians and newspaper editors attempted to counter.<sup>8</sup>

Michel Trouillot also asserted that there is power in historical creation. When collecting material for archives “sources are thus instances of inclusion, the other face of which is, what is excluded.”<sup>9</sup> This implies that there is active decisions concerning what is and is not included in a narrative. When discussing uneven power relationships inherent in histories of the Spanish-American War, African American powerlessness was revealed in the continued episodes of racial violence throughout the United States. Those whites who dominated the production of the national narrative actively silenced African Americans by ignoring their place in American history. At a time when their civil rights were under constant attack, while African Americans demanded their full and equal rights under the Constitution, it was important to show that they properly carried out their responsibilities as American citizens and were willing to sacrifice their lives in defense of the nation at times of crisis. To be able to display their willingness to serve, they had to be included in the national narrative about the war. In marginalizing African Americans’

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<sup>8</sup> Booker T. Washington, *A New Negro for a New Century*, Miami, Florida: Mnemosyne Publishing, Inc., 1969), 37; T.G. Steward, *Buffalo Soldiers*, 252; Herschel V. Cashin, *Under Fire With the Tenth U.S. Cavalry*, (New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1969), 57.

<sup>9</sup> Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, 48.

role in the Spanish-American War, they were essentially denying them the ability to fully enjoy the benefits of their service.

### **The Black Press and the Counter-Narrative**

African American editors were well aware of the pattern of white newspapers presenting unfair representations of black soldiers in their accounts of the war. Thus, many black editors showed great determination in adding the African American voice to the national narrative on the Spanish-American War, and reminding their readers of the African American contribution. Black publishers were determined to inform their readers of the African Americans' place in making history. They bolstered and legitimized arguments for full inclusion in American society and acted as a counter-narrative that broke the silences in the mainstream white press. The development of a counter-narrative was important to African Americans, not only because it was part of American military history, but because it was important that black and white Americans understood the contributions of African Americans. It supported their demands for civil rights, purchased with the blood of previous generations. The men who fought in the Spanish-American War carried on what others before them had been doing. The key to the counter-narrative was to show African Americans in a way that whites were not used to seeing them, challenging preconceptions held by whites.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Shawn Michelle Smith, *Photography on the Color Line: W.E.B. Du Bois, Race, and Visual Culture* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2004). Shawn Michelle Smith's work offers an example of the counter-narrative. Although her study deals with "visual culture," she shows how W.E.B. Du Bois's Negro exhibit at the 1900 Paris Exposition was created as a counter-narrative to challenge what whites understood about

African Americans stressed their place in the national narrative and in May 1898 *the Washington Bee* ran a speech by Henry Demas delivered in New Orleans, Louisiana. Demas alluded to the unfair telling of American history. “History, as portrayed by the partial pen of the narrator conceals his prowess in battle; the honorable dart he bore in the successive wars are not praised in verse or song.” Demas clearly understood that the nation’s history ignored African Americans, and during his speech he included accounts of African American patriotism and courage. Demas’s speech outlined African Americans’ participation in the Revolutionary War, the War of 1812, and the Civil War, emphasizing key accomplishments, and in doing so he connected patriotic African Americans to the generations who came before them. “The hour is almost again upon this country when it will again be plunged in the vortex of war and to her soldiery must she look. The colored man of this Union are no less today desirous of entering the service of this country than they were in preceding wars.”<sup>11</sup>

The editor of *The Colored American*, E. E. Cooper published editorials extolling the patriotic history of African Americans. “The Negro is no less patriotic today than when he followed the flag at Bunker Hill and Fort Wagner,” wrote Cooper; “and in every war he has marched to the front to preserve the integrity of the Union.” In mentioning Fort Wagner, Cooper referred to a proud moment of African American tenacity in the face of

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African Americans. By exhibiting photos of middle-class and upper class African Americans he was challenging racial stereotypes that asserted their inferiority and their ability to fully “civilize.” He showed African Americans in a way whites were not used to seeing them. My approach to the black press, and black historians asserts the same arguments. African American editors constantly fought against prejudicial stereotypes. They also emphasized African American courage, trying to show black Americans in a way not commonly considered by white Americans.

<sup>11</sup> *The Washington Bee*, “The Black Brigade Leader,” May 14, 1898.

adversity. Fort Wagner was a Confederate held fort on the South Carolina coast. The Union assaulted the fort in July 1863, and the regiment leading the charge was the Fifty-Fourth Massachusetts, an African American regiment. In the face of withering fire, the Fifty-Fourth pressed forward with its attack, scaling the walls of the fort, trying to create a breach in the defenses in hopes of allowing the following Union forces to pour in behind them and capture Wagner. The attack was repulsed, but the Fifty-Fourth's courage under fire, and determination to reach the objective in the face of heavy casualties, including the death of the commanding officer, impressed all who witnessed the attack.<sup>12</sup>

John Edward Bruce, also known as “Bruce Grit,” was another vocal defender of African American patriotism. In an article that appeared in *The Colored American* in May 1898 he offered a history of black military service. Bruce went on record declaring, “In all of the wars of the republic from the revolution down to the present, the Negro has always shown a commendable and praiseworthy desire to defend the honor of the nation.” He went on, “as far back as 1770 the Negro was addicted to the habit of fighting for ‘Old Glory,’” alluding to the death of Crispus Attucks in the Boston Massacre. Bruce discussed the African American part in the American War for Independence, the War of 1812, and the Civil War, highlighting particular instances of bravery. His intent was “to show where [the black soldier] has stood, what he has done, and what he has sacrificed for his country in the hour of danger.” Bruce also noted the descendants of black patriots, arguing, “the children and the great grand children of those men are as loyal and patriotic

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<sup>12</sup> *The Colored American*, April 23, 1898.

as were their sires, and whatever may be said by prejudiced white men to blacken the memory and defame the record of the living and the dead Negro soldiers who helped to make this government a nation and the Union perpetual, it cannot with truth be said that these Negro soldiers proved recreant to the trust imposed upon them.” Bruce also mentioned the attempts to besmirch the reputation of black soldiers and their place in the national history, and pointed to the unfair treatment of African Americans in the national narrative.<sup>13</sup>

In accusing African Americans of apathy in their defense of the United States, the white press actively worked to reduce past African American accomplishments on the battlefield and added support to the arguments seeking to undermine black advancement. The black press was aware of these efforts and criticized the white press for unfairly attacking African Americans. W. Calvin Chase, of *The Washington Bee*, accused white editors in the Washington, DC area of trying to portray African Americans as generally unpatriotic. “There seems to be a concerted attempt on the part of local contemporaries to place the colored people in an unenviable attitude toward the American people. They are striving to show that the martial spirit and sentiment of patriotism are absolutely wanting in our people.” Chase clearly understood these editors’ motives for misrepresenting African Americans. They were “seeking...by misrepresentation and contumely to impress the American people that the colored man is not entitled to the consideration he has hitherto received, on the ground that he displays a dogged

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<sup>13</sup> *The Colored American*, “Valor of Negro Soldiers, May 7, 1898.



disposition to shirk the responsibility of citizenship in his indifference in the present war.”<sup>14</sup>

Chase offered one explanation why certain members of the white press seemingly conspired to belittle the contribution of black patriots, living and dead. These editors “would not have us take part in this glorious war for the reason that when the war is over, we might claim some of the credit for the victories.” Chase’s concerns were that in an increasingly patriotic era, for African Americans to be portrayed as unpatriotic or unwilling to do their civic duty, was to undercut their arguments against racial discrimination and segregation. Chase knew that these white editors were “playing on the prejudices of the thinking class and the ignorance of those who have not had the time to read for themselves the history of their country.”<sup>15</sup>

Chase, like many other black editors, was determined to challenge these unfair representations, declaring “we hurl back the lie to those who have the temerity to charge the colored man with disloyalty or a full share of true Americanism and warn our would be traducers that a base misrepresentation is in the nature reactionary as well as unpatriotic, unjust, and un-American.” He made it known that he would challenge such assaults, and even went so far as to question the patriotism of those who openly questioned the courage of African Americans. He believed that it was unpatriotic to unjustly take the recognition away from those men who had a hand in building and protecting the nation, regardless of race. Chase ended the editorial by questioning the motives, and the courage, of the white editors. He stressed, “that we are just as true to the

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<sup>14</sup> *The Washington Bee*, “A False Attitude,” June 18, 1898.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

cause of liberty and social advancement as any of the editors who are attempting to prejudice the public mind with their editorial hog-wash and predict that the colored man will be at the front when our howling traducers are skulking behind the bulwark of their editorial sanctum or are safely protected by a certificate of substitution.”<sup>16</sup>

### **Defending the Reputation of African American Soldiers**

When the first African American regiments arrived to mustering points in the South, the white press was quick to point out any instance of unruly behavior. Many whites in the South were leery of having large groups of armed African Americans in their communities and feared that it would impact race relations by emboldening black southerners to resist the racial status quo. African Americans soldiers therefore garnered a great deal of negative coverage in the southern white newspapers. The mainstream press in the South was filled with stories of near riots in the army camps and instances of disorderly conduct by black soldiers while visiting the nearby towns.<sup>17</sup>

Editors of the black press understood that African Americans were on trial and were active in trying to insure fair treatment in the media. The journalists protested against white newspapermen embellishing events and turning the smallest issue into a major

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> An example of this is discussed on page 140 of Willard B. Gatewood’s *Black Americans and the White Man’s Burden*. He mentions that the arrival of large numbers of black soldiers to Camp Haskell, near Macon, Georgia, “caused fear and alarm among whites.” Gatewood revealed that “white newspapers in Macon, as well as those in nearby Atlanta, spoke disparagingly of the black soldiers whose ‘riotous mood’ and contempt for local racial mores were producing an ‘unhealthy’ effect on the Negro population in the area;” *The Macon Telegraph*, “Rowdy Negro Soldiers, November 17, 1898. *The Weekly News and Courier* (Charleston, South Carolina), “Riotous Negro Soldiers,” November 19, 1898.

incident, and complained that the white press all but ignored similar acts of disobedience by white soldiers. African American soldiers were portrayed as more troublesome than their white counterparts. White Americans who relied on the mainstream press could develop the view that black soldiers were too difficult to control generating an outpouring of indignation when they were assigned to camps near white communities. This portrayal of blacks gave weight to arguments justifying legal racial segregation in the South. African Americans needed to offer arguments refuting these biased descriptions of the behavior of black soldiers.<sup>18</sup>

African American editors battled to present a more equitable view of black soldiers, admitting that they were not exactly saints. They argued that white journalists often took every opportunity to present acts of unruliness among black soldiers, but turned a blind eye when white soldiers were disruptive. Concerned over the ultra-sensitivity of white Americans, the editor of *The Savannah Tribune* warned his readers that “the colored man has to be very careful over his every word and action. In whatever he does, he must remember that ‘discretion is the better part of valor.’ The opposite race is ever ready to misconstrue whatever he does.”<sup>19</sup>

In another editorial in *The Savannah Tribune* it was noted that “many of the small fry daily papers have been speaking degradingly of some illegal actions of the colored regulars. We are reliably informed that the record of the colored regiments for discipline

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<sup>18</sup> Instances where the black press discussed the unfair representations of black soldiers can be found in the following issues: *The Savannah Tribune*, August 20, 1898, August 27, 1898, October 8, 1898 December 3, 1898; *The Colored American*, June 25, 1898, July 16, 1898, August 20, 1898; *Washington Bee*, July 23, 1898, August 27, 1898, September 17, 1898.

<sup>19</sup> *The Savannah Tribune*, May 7, 1898.

is among the best. The white members of these companies can act with impunity, and do things that the colored men would dare not do, but nothing is said about them, but the moment that one of the colored men commits the least wrong, he is published as a bad ‘nigger.’”<sup>20</sup> Black editors protested the unfair attention paid to black troops, and in their own papers highlighted incidents of white rowdiness. In so doing, these editors made it clear that boisterous activity was not based on race, but happened when thousands of men were brought together, a long way from home, and were dealing with pent up energy. African America editors noted that black soldiers were no more likely to cause disruptions in the communities where they camped than white.<sup>21</sup>

In the June 25, 1898 issue, Edward E. Cooper, editor of *The Colored American*, took the opportunity to show the hypocrisy of the white press in ignoring the disruptive behavior of white troops. Cooper mentioned that *The Atlanta Constitution* wanted black soldiers removed from its “vicinity because of alleged misconduct.”<sup>22</sup> Cooper invited the editor of *The Atlanta Constitution* to consider the behavior of white troops during incidents at two army camps in Maryland. Cooper wrote, “the white troops in this vicinity raised ‘Old Cain’ out at Cabin John Bridge and Glen Echo the other night. No colored men were in the melee, and the press was robbed of golden opportunity to vilify the Negro race.” Cooper insinuated that since African American soldiers were absent from this particular disturbance, the white press was not interested in publishing the story. Cooper admitted, “evidence at hand proves that the black soldiers, in company

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<sup>20</sup> *The Savannah Tribune*, May 14, 1898.

<sup>21</sup> *The Colored American*, June 25, 1898, *The Richmond Planet*, “Again Suffering.” August 27, 1898, *The Savanna Tribune*, August 20, 1898.

<sup>22</sup> *The Colored American*, June 25, 1898.

with northern whites, have possibly committed a few depredations in the South because of the denial of ordinary civil accommodations, and the exasperating taunts from the mouths of ex-rebel gangs down there.” He explained that the white press did not highlight the misconduct of white troops.

Up here, the whites had the whole situation to themselves, and ‘raised sand’ out of pure devilment. The Negro shortcomings are a fruitful theme for fiery, and misleading editorials. The white men’s evil doings are passed over in an apologetic news item, calling them harmless frolics. Verily the Negro is forced into the unenviable role of the ‘bad child’ in the American family.<sup>23</sup>

John Mitchell, Jr. editor of *The Richmond Planet*, though cool to the idea that the war would help advance African Americans, was an energetic defender of the reputation of black soldiers, and supported their equitable treatment in the press. Like Cooper, Mitchell tried to reveal the double standard and sought to bring balance to the reporting by showing instances of white unruliness. In one issue of *The Planet* Mitchell challenged *The Washington Post* for attacking the character of black soldiers. *The Post* declared, “our complaint against the colored troops is that they do not respect the civil law; that they constitute an element of peril and disorder in any peaceful community; that officers of their own color exercise no control over them and generally, they are turbulent, riotous, and offensive whenever they break out of camp and escape for so much as an hour from the supervision of their white superiors.”<sup>24</sup> Mitchell accused *The Washington Post* of engaging in “Negrophobia.” He reminded *The Post*’s editor, “white troops at Chickamauga, Georgia were so riotous that the state authorities had to threaten to take a

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> *The Richmond Planet*, “Again Suffering,” August 27, 1898.

hand. Those at Tampa, Florida disgraced themselves.” Mitchell described the poor behavior of white soldiers at Camp Alger, Virginia, “where the white troops not only were guilty of riotous conduct, but disobeyed their commanding officers and insulted their Major-General....” He pointed out that race was not a determining factor when it came to disorderly conduct, and concluded that *The Post* should “close its mouth, cease its hypocritical cries, purchase a scrubbing brush, together with a thousand cans of concentrated lye and begin the work of cleaning instead of scandalizing and slandering an inoffensive people.”<sup>25</sup>

*The Savannah Tribune* added its voice to this attempt to defend black soldiers from calumny. The editor Solomon Johnson suspected that the white press was doing this on purpose. In its August 20, 1898 issue, *The Tribune* asserted, “The newspapers are ever ready to chronicle the least unlawful act that the colored soldier may commit, but the many escapades of the other fellows are either applauded or not spoken of.” In another article in the same issue, Johnson responded to a negative article in *The Savannah Morning News*, concerning the conduct and efficiency of black soldiers. *The Morning News* claimed, “the Negro troops have shown a lawless spirit wherever they have been in camp near towns.” *The Savannah Tribune* responded by questioning the motives of *The Morning News*. Though not denying that there were moments of disorderly conduct by black troops, Johnson reminded the publisher of another incident.

By way of comparison the *News* ought not forget the outrageous conduct of the white volunteers at Griffin where open defiance of the local authorities and other crimes were manifested by some of the soldiers; nor should it forget the revolting crimes committed by the volunteers at Chickamauga, crimes so heinous that the

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

governor of Georgia had to take the matter in hand and a special term of the superior court held to protect the homes of citizens and the virtue of women. But has anyone yet attempted to hold the entire army of white volunteers responsible for the disgrace brought on the American uniform by the conduct of a class of criminals who had managed to get in the army? No, for it would be unjust to do so.

Clearly, the editor of *The Savannah Tribune* felt the injustice of blaming all African American or white soldiers for the actions of an unruly few.<sup>26</sup>

In the next issue of *The Savannah Tribune*, the editor once again expressed his dismay over white newspapers purposely portraying black soldiers as troublesome. “The effort to blacken the career of the colored men of the United States as soldiers and officers cannot and must not succeed.” He emphasized the need to expose the misinformation spread by certain white newspapers. “Colored men must meet the issue made by a prejudiced newspaper press and strike back.” This attitude explains why *The Savannah Tribune* denounced the negative views published in *The Savannah Morning News* the week prior. This active resistance was designed to show the difficulty of controlling black or white soldiers. Black soldiers were informed that they were on trial, and that they faced a discriminatory white press just waiting for them to misbehave. African American troops should “be courteous and self-respecting whether in camp or out of camp, because certain white troops are riotous and disgrace their uniforms is no excuse for the colored troops to do likewise.”<sup>27</sup>

*The Savannah Tribune* later reprinted excerpts from an article by Dr. Wilbur P. Thirkield, originally published in *The Atlanta Constitution*, that presented some insight to

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<sup>26</sup> *The Savannah Tribune*, August 20, 1898.

<sup>27</sup> *The Savannah Tribune*, August 27, 1898.

the approaches of some white Americans when it came to African Americans.

Apparently the riot in Tampa, Florida in June 1898 inspired Dr. Thirkield to write this article.

It seems to me that I have observed a tendency on the part of many people, in the North as well as the South, to take every evil act of a bad Negro, or the lawlessness of small companies of Negroes, as representative of all Negroes. That is, every lawless act of a black man is charged up to his black skin, while the bad acts of white men are simply charged up to the individual or individuals, or simply humanity in general. For example, all Negro soldiers are here condemned, because a small number of bad Negro regulars in company with bad white regulars, and the influence of bad whiskey, are incited to crime and violence.

I make no plea in extenuation of the disgraceful conduct of the drunken rioters, black or white. I do, however, plea for the sake of such law abiding, self-respecting soldiers represented by the Twenty-Fourth regiment that all Negro soldiers be not condemned.... And I further plead that, in simple justice to the men who have the black skins that God gave them, that we do not condemn them wholesale for the acts of a few low, drunken, and brutal men of their race, when we do not thus condemn all white soldiers for the same brutality and crime committed by soldiers of the white race.<sup>28</sup>

### **Setting the Record Straight**

Asserting their place in the overall history of U.S. military conflicts and refuting the unfair representation of black soldiers as unruly were among the ways African Americans journalists challenged attempts by the white press to influence the way African Americans were seen. Added to these poor and inaccurate depictions was the tendency in the white mainstream press to ignore the contributions of black soldiers in their telling of the battles in the Spanish-American War in Cuba and the Philippines. The black press addressed these issues, suspecting that this was purposely done in order to shape the

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<sup>28</sup> *The Savannah Tribune*, July 2, 1898.



narrative of the war in a way that omitted African Americans. Without publishing their battlefield accomplishments, as time ticked moved on, whites received an incomplete version of history. Black editors not only addressed the silences, but gave black soldiers the credit they deserved.

In August 1898, *The Savannah Tribune* pointed out, “the army correspondents, of course there are no colored ones, have completely ignored the heroism displayed by the colored troops, yet are ever loud in praise of others. They should at least give credit to whom credit is due.”<sup>29</sup> The absence of black war correspondents meant that there was no one dedicated to protecting the interests of black soldiers in harm’s way.

In a September 1898 letter to the editor of *The Savannah Tribune*, the writer reproached the white press for ignoring the courage of black soldiers.

Mr. Editor, there seems to be a studied and vigorous attempt upon the part of certain newspapers to belittle the part played by Negroes in the American-Spanish war, notwithstanding the testimony of officers who commanded them, of the men who fought beside them, or of the brave women who saw them laughing at the pain in the hospitals. They close their eyes to the facts in the case, facts easily obtainable, and, out of their venom and spite for a race that has never done aught to harm them or this country, they send forth malicious inimical words to the injury of the Negro. What the object of these prejudiced, un-American newspapers is, I cannot tell. (I say un-American, for the true American newspaper, the true American man, believes in fair play, even for an enemy).<sup>30</sup>

Even though the letter’s author initially indicated that he or she was not sure of the motives of these journalists the possible reasons for the silences were mentioned.

“Possibly, these bigoted newspapers are jealous of the small amount of prestige and honor which must come to the race from a duty well done.” The letter continued, “let

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<sup>29</sup> *The Savannah Tribune*, August 13, 1898.

<sup>30</sup> *The Savannah Tribune*, “An Open Letter, “ September 17, 1898.

this country and the world begin to honor us as soldiers and patriots and they soon begin to respect us as men and citizens.” He understood that many white Americans would say “anything rather than have the world know that the Negro is an intelligent, faithful, and brave citizen; that he possesses every characteristic, every feeling, every emotion of man. And the more I think of it, the more I am persuaded that that is the motive which actuates them, for I note that the same paper that speak disparagingly of the Negro as a soldier or citizen give the largest headlines and most complete account of every act of crime committed by a black man.”<sup>31</sup>

This letter to the editor stressed that it was not necessary to go into a large discussion of the bravery of the black soldier, because “their record is history,” and echoed concern over the lack of a black correspondent in Cuba during hostilities. “Unfortunately for us there was no Negro reporter at the front, had many suggestion been acted upon there would have been, but there were fair minded Americans and representatives of foreign countries all of whom bear witness to the skill and bravery of the Negro soldiers. Sober history will write their praise, and posterity will reward them.” The letter writer went on to issue a warning to the newspapers that wrote prejudiced articles against African Americans.

One of our American writers says, ‘knowledge is power, and truth is in the knowledge; whoever, therefore knowingly propagates a prejudice, willfully saps the foundation of his country’s strength.’ Such are the men who diffuse the idea that the Negro is not worthy of his American citizenship. They are weakening their country, sullyng its greatness, and making mistakes that will bear bad fruit in the years to come. In a country like this, where public opinion governs everything, much care should be exercised in keeping it pure and free from prejudice. Narrow-minded editors drop a bit of poison in the wellspring of public

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

opinion, the press, and the whole stream flowing therefrom is diseased. Old and young, men and women, even children drink from this poisoned water, and they have the disease. It is by such men that this prejudice is kept alive, and by such means that enemies are made out of a race that would make better friends.<sup>32</sup>

For the author of this letter, the only reason that journalists failed to honestly report the contribution of African Americans, or inflated reports of their criminal activity, was to prejudice white Americans against his race.

Edward E. Cooper added his voice to the debate, and pushed for the sending of black war correspondents to the front. African American papers typically did not have enough revenue to hire a full time war correspondent, and began discussing the idea of black newspapers pooling their resources to hire one. Cooper stressed, “The necessity for a correct, graphic, and thorough report of the military skill, and daring conduct of our gallant boys in blue in Cuba is apparent every day. A few Caucasian (sic) journals are conscientious enough to pay us an occasional compliment, but the most fragrant ‘bouquets’ are cast at the feet of white companies and officers, and the few kindly references to such grand work as the terrible charge of the Tenth Cavalry is made to savor of patronizing charity, almost to an unpalatable degree.” A black correspondent was seen as a way to help balance the reporting on the war. Cooper wanted someone where the action was who possessed “courage, discrimination, and journalistic capacity to gather the news most interesting to our people.”<sup>33</sup>

W. Calvin Chase of *The Washington Bee* was incredulous that European newspapers would praise the courage of black troops before the mainstream press in the United

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> *The Colored American*, “A Negro War Correspondent,” July 16, 1898.

States. Chase observed, “notwithstanding the disposition on the part of the white press not to give our colored troops their hard earned meed of praise, the European papers and officials know where to give credit when credit is due. It is a sad commentary on American justice and patriotism when American heroes can receive deserved commendation only from foreigners. When will the American white man learn to be fair?” Chase saw this as an issue of fairness, and questioned the morality and patriotism of any men who robbed other patriots of their due.<sup>34</sup>

An example of how certain newspapers marginalized the role African American soldiers played in the war can be found in the reporting on the Battle of Las Guasimas, where the Rough Riders were purported have walked into a Spanish ambush. *The Atlanta Constitution* printed an account of the battle that briefly mentioned that the Tenth Cavalry was part of the fight, but focused attention, and gave credit for the victory, to the Rough Riders. Arguing that the Rough Riders extracted themselves from the trap and eventually forced the Spanish to disengage, *The Constitution*’s rendition of events minimized the importance of the Tenth Cavalry to the outcome of the battle, placing them on the fringes of the fight. The Atlanta newspaper claimed that Colonel Leonard Wood’s Rough Riders walked into a trap and dramatized the events for effect. *The Constitution* reported, “That it did not end in complete slaughter of the Americans was not due to any miscalculation in the plan of the Spaniards, for as perfect an ambuscade as was ever formed in the brain of the Apache Indian was prepared, and Lieutenant Roosevelt and his

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<sup>34</sup> *The Washington Bee*, July 23, 1898.

men walked squarely into it.”<sup>35</sup> The article went on to stress that “for an hour and a half they held their ground under a perfect storm of bullets from the front and sides, and then Colonel Woods at the right, Lieutenant Colonel Roosevelt at the left, led a charge which turned the tide of battle and sent the enemy flying over the hills toward Santiago.” Although the article gave a brief nod to the stoicism of the Tenth Cavalry by relating a story of a black soldier continuing to fight despite what was described as a “ragged wound in thigh,” the rest of the article focused on the Rough Riders.<sup>36</sup>

Given this description in *The Atlanta Constitution*, readers would not have known that the Tenth Cavalry was actively supporting the Rough Riders throughout this battle, and gave critical assistance by moving “to the front with their Hotchkiss guns” and by attacking “the Spaniards at what was considered their most impregnable point.”<sup>37</sup> The article gave full credit for the victory to the quick thinking of Colonel Woods and Lieutenant Colonel Roosevelt, and the overall courage of the Rough Riders. However, the version that came from the African American soldiers and the black press stressed that if not for the men of the Tenth Cavalry, the Rough Riders might have been decimated. *The Savannah Tribune* ran a short editorial stressing this point. “When the Rough Riders were ambushed,” black soldiers “reinforced them at an opportune time and

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<sup>35</sup> *The Atlanta Constitution*, “Wood’s Rought Riders Walked Into A Well Laid Spanish Ambuscade,” June 27, 1898. It must be noted that the article was initially incorrect about Roosevelt’s rank. He was a lieutenant Colonel, second in command of the Rough Riders, not a Lieutenant, which would have put him at a lower officer rank well below that of Lieutenant Colonel. They correct themselves later in the article.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Gatewood, *Black Americans and the White Man’s Burden*, 56.

saved many of them from instant death. Too much praise can not be given to these soldiers for their valor and fidelity.”<sup>38</sup>

The members of the black press provided details of instances of courage during the Spanish-American War, and wrote or reprinted from other newspapers the stories of the valor and effectiveness of black soldiers in Cuba. *The Richmond Planet* reprinted a story from the *New York Mail and Express*, one of the white newspapers that gave a moment of recognition to black soldiers’ contributions. “All honor to the black troopers of the gallant Tenth! No more striking example of coolness has been shown since the destruction of the Maine than by the colored veterans of the Tenth Cavalry during the attack upon Caney on Saturday.” The article noted that the members of the Tenth charged up the hill alongside the Rough Riders, and in dramatic fashion explained that pushed uphill “from whose crest, the desperate Spanish poured down a deadly fire of shell and musketry. They never faltered. The rents in their ranks were filled as soon as made.” The author of this story stressed that the courage shown by the Tenth Cavalry won the admiration of the white troops fighting beside them. “Firing as they marched, their aim was splendid, their coolness was superb and their courage aroused the admiration of their comrades, their advance was greeted with wild cheer from the white regiments, and with an answering shout they passed onward over the trenches they had taken close in pursuit of the retreating enemy.”<sup>39</sup> In John Mitchell, Jr.’s reprinting of an article published, one day after the battle, he was passing on the praise coming from

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<sup>38</sup> *The Savannah Tribune*, July 9, 1898.

<sup>39</sup> *The Richmond Planet*, “The Gallant Tenth,” July 23, 1898, pg. 1. There is an error in this article. The Rough Riders were involved in the battle of San Juan Hill, not El Caney.

another newspaper, and educating his readers about the accomplishments of the black troops.

W. Calvin Chase, of *The Washington Bee*, wrote an editorial after hostilities in Cuba ended which showed his frustration over the difficulty of gaining an understanding of black troops' role without the assistance of war correspondents honestly reporting the war's events. Without worthy sources in the press, Chase explained, "the only knowledge respecting the behavior of the colored regular at the front during the battle of Santiago, July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, and 3<sup>rd</sup>, is obtained merely through letters and shattered descriptions, the boys themselves have managed to write." This put the soldiers in the position of acting as their own war correspondents, whether they intended to be or not, but it also demonstrates one way, albeit not ideal, for balancing the accounts in the white press. Chase suggested the motives of white correspondents in ignoring the contribution of the black regulars. The story of Lieutenant Colonel Roosevelt and the bold charge of the Rough Riders up San Juan Hill would be less dramatic and would have made a white regiment look bad for its inability to move up the hill in the face of Spanish fire. Chase noted, "*The Bee* readily conceives why the war correspondents failed in their dispatches to the press to mention the bravery of the U.S. Regular. The daring of the Rough Riders would have been questioned and the credence would have established the fact that the 71<sup>st</sup> New York were not the nation's defenders...." The Rough Riders, with its regiment comprised of cowboys and New York aristocracy, became the darling of the mainstream press. Chase believed members of the white press did not fully include the deeds of other

regiments, including the black regulars, because it would reduce the significance of the Rough Riders' charge.<sup>40</sup>

In fact, W. Calvin Chase revealed how the white press marginalized the deeds of black soldiers, even when they acknowledged their presence in battle. He explained that it was “through [shrewd] diplomacy that the colored regiments merely fought, making timely advances at the commands of their respective officers.” The Rough Riders became the heroes of the battle, and the rest of the soldiers including the black regulars, took on the supporting role. Chase, however, resented this.

*The Bee* observes more than this. Regardless of command and all else, charge after charge was made by our boys and with a soldierly discretion. They drove the Spaniards from their blockhouse, and trenches. Now they are in sight of Santiago that is soon to surrender.

Chase revealed his frustration at the marginalization taking place and that white journalists thought black troops' service was “only worthy of fragmentary praise and no matter how laudable the ambition, how daring the exploit, the colored troopers vanish before his own deeds and blushes at the injustice of the superior agencies.”<sup>41</sup>

### **The Demand for Proper Recognition**

The attempt to influence the interpretation of the war went beyond adding a counter-narrative to the national discourse, and members of the black press were vigilant in exposing instances of unfair treatment to the veterans of the Spanish-American War at home. This meant going beyond demanding that their role in the war be told, and

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<sup>40</sup> *The Washington Bee*, “Corporal Conn,” September 24, 1898.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*



protesting when African Americans were not given their due recognition and just rewards for their service. The struggle for full recognition expanded into the demand for commissions for enlisted men as rewards for their courage and skill; the inclusion of veteran regiments in victory celebrations and parades; and concern over the treatment of the black regulars when they came home from Cuba. In each instance African Americans believed that their sacrifice was not fully appreciated.

After the fight in Cuba ended, six African Americans from the regular army, Sergeants William Washington and John C. Proctor from the Ninth Cavalry, and Sergeants William McBryar, Wyatt Hoffman, Mason Russell, and Andrew J. Smith of the Twenty-Fifth Infantry, were promoted to the rank of first or second lieutenants.<sup>42</sup> Some, Like Edward E. Cooper of *The Colored American*, saw these promotions as a reward. Cooper declared, "Six colored non-commissioned officers who rendered particularly gallant and meritorious service in the face of the enemy in the actions around Santiago...have been appointed Second Lieutenants in the two colored immune regiments recently organized under a special act of Congress."<sup>43</sup> These men were place in the "Immune" regiments which were created by the federal government, instead of the states, and consisted of volunteers who were believed "immune," or resistant, to tropical diseases such as malaria and yellow fever. Of the ten U.S. Volunteer Infantry regiments created four were African American, which were to allow black officers below the rank of captain.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> *The Richmond Planet*, "Colored Troops Promoted," August 13, 1898.

<sup>43</sup> *The Colored American*, "Our Heroes Promoted," August 6, 1898.

<sup>44</sup> Roger D. Cunningham, "'A Lot of Fine, Sturdy Black Warriors': Texas's African American 'Immunes' in the Spanish-American War," *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, vol. 108, no. 3 (January 2005): 346.

Others saw these appointments as a lesser reward and a half-measure, and understood the discrimination connected to the honor. John Mitchell, Jr., editor of *The Richmond Planet*, admitted that the Army honored these soldiers by promoting them and “they should congratulate themselves upon their good fortune.” However, he questioned the fairness of the act, because “it has set us to thinking however. No colored man can pass the ‘deadline’ in the regular army....” He explained that these soldiers, in order to accept the commissions, “must be put ‘out of doors’ so to speak. He must be detached from the regular army and placed in command of volunteers.” Mitchell revealed his frustration.

These brave men were good enough to fight with their regiments as subordinates. They were not good enough to serve with it as commanding officers. Where will the discrimination end? What will be done about it? The War Department has more than once officially recognized the existence of caste, the color line in the army.

Mitchell implicated McKinley in this discrimination, but seemed saddened about it, apparently not wanting to believe the President’s role in treating black and white soldiers differently. “The President of the United States seems to have concurred in this recognition. We would not have believed it of that pure, patriotic statesman, William McKinley, and even now we hesitate before charging with an offense, which will shock manly sensibilities of every race-loving Afro-American in this country. Again, we ask it, where will the end be?”<sup>45</sup>

W. Calvin Chase’s own editorial on the subject was in agreement with Mitchell’s argument and asked:

Well, six colored privates who fought so bravely at Santiago, while the generals and commanders were about two hundred miles away giving orders,

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<sup>45</sup> *The Richmond Planet*, “Colored Troops Promoted,” August 13, 1898.

have been promoted to the immune companies to second lieutenants. Why were they not promoted in their own companies? Will not American prejudice ever die out? This is discrimination pure and simple and so glaring is this discrimination that the American Negro will resent it at the proper time. They could have been promoted in their own companies instead of sending them to colored regiments.<sup>46</sup>

The editor of *The Savannah Tribune* pressed the issue of allowing these promoted soldiers to be officers in the regular army and in the regiments they served with during the war. “Some of these boys who distinguished themselves so nobly in this fight should be allowed to wear shoulder straps in the regiment they fought in.”<sup>47</sup> This challenged the War Department’s history of resistance to allowing black officers, and it pushed headlong into the raging debate at the time over commissioning African American officers to lead the state and U.S. volunteer regiments. The idea that these men were good enough to serve, fight, and risk their lives in the regulars, but not serve as officers insulted these editors and many others, but the War Department likely viewed the decision to place these soldiers in the U.S. Volunteer Infantry, also known as the “Immunes,” as a compromise that would both be seen as a reward for valor on the battlefield, and not create controversy within the Army and among white Americans.

Another place where a lack of recognition was apparent were the postwar celebrations and parades honoring the victorious soldiers of the Spanish-American War. Since African Americans took part in the conflict they had a claim to their share of public affirmation. After the Cuban conflict, many Americans were quick to put together victory celebrations and invited various regiments to take part. In northern cities it seems

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<sup>46</sup> *The Washington Bee*, “Small Promotions,” August 13, 1898.

<sup>47</sup> *The Savannah Tribune*, August 13, 1898.

that there was some level of inclusion of black regiments, but southerners often prevented their participation where they could. In an editorial published in *The Washington Bee*, W. Calvin Chase reported that southern white troops protested having to march with the black soldiers in national drills or parades. He offered the example of the National Drill in Washington, D.C. where “several southern companies withdrew from the line of march, because colored soldiers were in the line. The southern soldiers absolutely refused to attend the Chicago drill until they had a written guarantee from the managers that Negro troops would not be allowed in line.”<sup>48</sup>

Chase’s editorial offered other examples of how African Americans were being abused or left out of ceremonies meant to honor American soldiers. “At the Indianapolis drill,” Chase noted, “the southern soldiers attacked the Negroes on the streets and one Negro was maimed for life. At the reunion in Philadelphia a few months ago the southern ex-Confederate veterans refused to march, because colored veterans were in line.”<sup>49</sup> These drills and parades were commemorations, which further cemented the American understanding of historical events. Michel-Rolph Trouillot in *Silencing the Past* declared “commemorations sanitize further the messy history lived by actors. They contribute to the continuous myth-making process that gives history its more definite shapes: they help to create, modify, or sanction the public meanings attached to historical events deemed worthy of mass celebration.” In the case of southern soldiers working against allowing black soldiers to participate in national drills or parades following the Spanish-American War, they changed people’s understanding of who participated in the

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<sup>48</sup> *The Washington Bee*, September 10, 1898.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

war. By acquiescing to southern white soldiers' demands that they would not allow black troops to march in their parades, the national awareness that black soldiers participated in America's conflicts was altered. The parades were communal celebrations meant to create a shared understanding of past and current events, making the people who viewed these celebrations witnesses to history. In the celebrations that omitted black troops, white Americans watched regiment after regiment march by, further marginalizing African American participation. Americans and other peoples used such celebrations to make and re-make the way they understood past events.<sup>50</sup>

Another aspect of public recognition carefully monitored by the black press was the way the men of the black regulars and veterans were treated when they returned from Cuba. While at Montauk Point in New York, where the troops from Cuba went to recuperate, the soldiers, black and white, were highly praised and lionized. However, once the black regulars began to travel west and south to their new duty stations, they

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<sup>50</sup> Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, 116; Another example that reflected African American fear of being cheated from their proper recognition was the circumstances surrounding the National Peace Jubilee in Washington, D.C. in 1899. African Americans were not included in the planning, and felt that they would be ignored at this event. E. E. Cooper of *The Colored American*, in his April 1, 1899 edition, asked "what is to be the part in the much advertised Peace Jubilee arranged to take place in this city in May? So far as we have been able to learn, no overtures have been made to the various military and civic organizations of our people to aid in making the pageant." W. Calvin Chase, in his May 27, 1899 edition of *The Washington Bee*, attacked the Jubilee after the fact stating, "The Peace jubilee, otherwise, to be handed down to posterity as the white man's farce in which the butchers, bakers, and candlestick makers occupied a prominent space in the line of march." He was upset at the fact that black Americans were not represented arguing, "A peace jubilee in which the negro was ignored and discriminated against on account of his color, is not only farcical but a disgrace to American civilization." These pointed editorials not only showed the anger at being ignored, but they add to the argument Trouillot makes, where African Americans are omitted from celebrations and remembrances, and whites are not reminded of their place in the war.

quickly learned that recognition and respect for their wartime deeds was short lived. For many African Americans, public recognition meant something as simple as treating the returning veterans fairly. Many black Americans considered the maltreatment of the black regulars as unpatriotic and reflecting the ingratitude of many white citizens.

White southerners' disregard for the sacrifices made by the black soldiers during the war was apparent in the way whites treated the black soldiers, discriminating against them, even after their military accomplishments were in the public record. This poor treatment was clear as early as October 1898, just months after hostilities ceased in Cuba. Army officials temporarily stationed the Tenth Cavalry in Huntsville, Alabama and the black troops were met with discrimination and violence. Trouble occurred almost immediately upon their arrival after some members of the regiment went in search of the city's "red light district" only to find out that it was "closed to their race." An altercation ensued as these men protested their treatment. After this initial incident, there were other violent episodes with the citizens of the city. The soldiers of the Tenth were often implicated in instances of unruliness or civil disobedience, and the accusations against the soldiers were offered as proof of their racist views about black soldiers, justifying the increased discrimination and demands that they be removed from southern communities.<sup>51</sup> *The Richmond Planet* printed a letter from a soldier of the Tenth Cavalry, who used the alias "Equal Rights." The soldier described the poor, abusive treatment his regiment encountered while in Huntsville, Alabama. "No one local paper in this country

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<sup>51</sup> Gatewood, *Black Americans and the White Man's Burden*, 116-118; Garna L. Christian, *Black Soldiers in Jim Crow Texas, 1899-1917*, (College Station: Texas A& M University Press, 1995), 3-7.

could put into print the details of the horrible treatment we are undergoing.” The soldier lamented the change in the attitudes of the American people, as well as the President and Secretary of War, who seemed to “have quite forgotten the ‘Noble 10<sup>th</sup> Cavalry’ of whom they boasted of being so proud.” He asked, “for God’s sake, if not for ours, why do they not remove us to some place, no matter where so long as we are where one might leave the camp at 2 p.m. and go into town without being afraid of being murdered?” He referred to the killing of two of Tenth Cavalry soldiers in Huntsville by local residents.<sup>52</sup>

This soldier decried the abusive treatment in Huntsville as wholly unfair in light of the regiment’s performance in Cuba, declaring that the black soldier was “inspired by a patriotic feeling [and] left good positions and homes far behind to face Spanish treachery and bullets in that dreaded diseased and unhealthy climate of Cuba. Many a brave soldier was left behind.” The soldier compared their treatment in the South with the hero’s welcome it received when the regiment arrived at Montauk Point on Long Island, New York. “A transport lands at Montauk Point, L.I. in August. On it was the 10<sup>th</sup> Cavalry, ‘the Heroes of Santiago and San Juan Hill.’ Every Rough Rider and member of the 71<sup>st</sup> New York together with hundreds of their friends and relatives flocked to the wharf to see (as they spoke it) ‘the colored boys who saved us.’” The people of New York treated them well: “we were cared for and visited daily by the best and wealthiest families in New York, Brooklyn, Philadelphia, Albany, Jersey City, and other cities for miles around every citizen did all in their power to make us comfortable and happy. We had

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<sup>52</sup> *The Richmond Planet*, “Uncle Sam and the 10<sup>th</sup> Cavalry,” December 3, 1898.

everything we wanted to eat and drink. Mr. editor, I assure you a 10<sup>th</sup> Cavalry man's money was no good in New York.”<sup>53</sup>

The reception of the returning veterans at Montauk Point made the men feel appreciated and they reveled in the recognition, but it was short lived and virtually nonexistent once they entered the South. The black soldier recalled, “on October 7<sup>th</sup>, we left our happy homestead for another, and arrived at Huntsville, Ala., the 11<sup>th</sup> inst (sic), at 5:30 a.m. and instead of being welcomed as we were in New York and many other cities were shown to be very unwelcome by a volley of bullets. Result two of our assailants killed, one wounded. One 10<sup>th</sup> man wounded.” He described how white citizens of Huntsville pulled black residents in the town into a conspiracy to kill the soldiers. He believed that “ignorant colored citizens were enlisted into the confidence of the faint hearted and cowardly whites to lay in wait at night and murder the members of the 10<sup>th</sup>. The murderers being promised (as I have been told) a handsome ransom.” Even though they were threatened with mortal danger, the army officers disarmed the black troops, therefore they were “at the mercy of these villains.” He directed his anger not only at the citizens of Huntsville who showed no appreciation for the Tenth's military role, but also at the President of the United States William McKinley. He asked, “will the President of this glorious union suffer us (United States soldiers who are sworn to protect the Stars and Stripes) to be shot down in cold blood like dogs by an organized mob of Negro haters? God forbid!”<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.



In the letter the anonymous soldier complained about the poor conditions they lived under while in Huntsville, and lack of reasonable accommodations for soldiers, not to mention heroes of the nation's most recent war. "We have no fires, it rains almost daily, the nights are very cold and ice is formed sometimes one and a half inches. Our water supply was frozen tight this morning. Our tents are leaky. We retire only to awake cold and stiffened to answer the call of the bugle for Reveille."<sup>55</sup>

*The Savannah Tribune* also expressed its indignation at the treatment of the men of the Tenth in Huntsville.

It is reported that the men of the Tenth cavalry now in camps in Alabama, are being shamefully treated. Their arms have been taken from them, some of their numbers have been assaulted and their tents are in a section that is only fit for the raising of hogs. They have no comforts whatever and feel very keenly the treatment, especially after having fought so bravely for the preservation of the stars and stripes.<sup>56</sup>

It frustrated members of the black press that no one seemed to care to remember and fairly recognize the accomplishments of the black regulars. In the case of the black regulars who ventured South after the war, any hope of being recognized and appreciated for their service was dashed in the face of virulent white racism.

### **Memory and Black History**

The African Americans' place in how the Spanish-American War was remembered was defined in the various histories and remembrances published within a few years of the end of hostilities. The African American authors of these histories believed that

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> *The Savannah Tribune*, December 24, 1898.

white chroniclers ignored the place of African American soldiers in the war, and as a result presented an incomplete history.<sup>57</sup> In their study *Under Fire with the Tenth U.S. Cavalry*, first published in 1899, Herschel Cashin, Charles Alexander, William T. Anderson, Arthur Brown, and Horace Bivens immediately addressed the issue of the misrepresentation of African Americans in American history, and the military histories published right after the war with Spain. They explained that they wrote their account in order to give a fair representation of the black regulars. They argued in their preface:

Contemplating the great inequalities of men, the tendency of the average historian to either entirely ignore or very grudgingly acknowledge the courage, valor, and patriotism of a so-called *alien race* (sic.), in their efforts to court the favor and patronage of the influential and popular; appreciating the fact that some men are almost imperceptibly raised to the very summit of human glory without apparent effort on their part, while others are depressed to the lowest level of humiliation; some have powerful and brilliant intellects, while others slowly drag out a miserable existence of imbecility and helplessness; some enjoy perfect health and are happy, while others are afflicted from their birth with every ill that flesh is heir to; some are made rich by a sudden turn of fortune, while others are doomed to a life of dire poverty and distress; and that some classes and races meet special impediments, peculiar obstructions to fame, justice and progress; because of the fact that the Negro race belongs to such a class and is already the subject of slight, parsimonious notice in the histories which were largely made by its deeds, this work is presented to the reading public....

But history demands that all events in human affairs shall be carefully recorded; and, as some historians allow their narrow prejudices to enter into the

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<sup>57</sup> There are other accusations of misrepresenting African Americans in important events in history. Although dealing with the Reconstruction after the Civil War, in the chapter entitled “The Propaganda of History” in W.E.B. Dubois’s *Black Reconstruction*, He deals with how historians subverted the history of the Reconstruction, presenting African Americans in a negative way, and indicating that White southerners were justified in resisting the governance of Northerners and freed slaves. Du Bois wrote, “It is propaganda like this that has led men in the past to insist that history is ‘lies agreed upon.’” Du Bois shows how memory was shaped by well-respected historians, resulting in a change of how Americans viewed Reconstruction. This same effort to shape memory can be seen in how white historians represented the history of the Spanish-American War; I.A. Newby, *Jim Crow’s Defense: Anti-Negro Thought in America 1900-1930*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1965), 67 & 79.

execution of their intellectual tasks, it is to be seriously regretted that great injustice is often done to the most worthy.

The diffusion of general knowledge concerning the war so recently ended between the United States and Spain has taxed the book-making machinery of this country to its utmost capacity. It is therefore important if another book is to be present to the public, it should have a special mission, and be designed to fill a place in the records of races peculiarly its own.

“Under Fire with the Tenth U.S. Cavalry,” a purely military narrative, was written for the purpose of telling the Negro’s story of the Cuban campaign....<sup>58</sup>

This preface was signed “The Authors,” indicating the consensus among the writers in their accusations that other historians approached their histories of the war in a racist manner. Cashin and his fellow contributors’ text was intended to challenge this marginalization, but this would be a difficult task given the volume of works published immediately after the war.

Where Cashin’s study focused on the Tenth Cavalry, W.T. Goode’s *The Eight Illinois*, also published in 1899, was intended to give voice to the African American men of that particular volunteer regiment. The Eight Illinois also had a full compliment of black officers. Goode’s history of the regiment’s experience in Cuba was meant to challenge the criticism and misrepresentation of the Eighth. “Considerable criticism, much of it of a prejudicial character, has been published about this regiment and greatly to its detriment. The author of this book has endeavored to eradicate the falsities of these criticism by presenting to the public a true story of the Eighth Illinois Volunteer Regiment (Infantry), colored, who were sent forth as an experiment to the soldiery of the United States Army.” Goode understood that the color line was being drawn in the

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<sup>58</sup> Herschel V. Cashin and Others, *Under Fire with the Tenth U.S. Cavalry*, (New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1969), iii-iv. This work was originally published in 1899.

telling of the history of the war. His concern was that if someone did not try to refute unflattering histories, then they would be taken as truth. His history is an attempt to offer a counter-narrative. The reputation of the African American soldiers rested on men such as Goode who tried to set the record straight by offering the black soldier's perspective.

The reputation of the Negro soldiers, their bravery and conduct, will compare favorably, not only with the white soldiers of our own army, but with the soldiery of the whole civilized world. This is a sweeping statement, but who is there to dare refute it. There have been so many conflicting stories put in circulation concerning the Eighth Illinois Regiment, some of which if allowed to go uncontradicted, would leave a lasting stain on its good name, while others were so biased in their nature as to hardly need a refutation, the author feels that is only an act of simple justice to give the public as true and complete a story as possible of the Eighth Illinois Volunteers.<sup>59</sup>

Goode's history is not unbiased, since he served as a corporal in this regiment during the war, but the point is that he, like other African American historians, saw racial prejudice dominating the way white historians treated black actors in the war.

Chaplain James M. Guthrie's *Camp-Fires of the Afro-American* showed African Americans as important actors in American history. He wanted to offer an account that presented African Americans as patriots, and understood that even though the evidence was readily available, often historians were guided by their prejudices in reporting historic events. He explained, "History, herself, is impartial, and ultimately succeeds in establishing the truth, although many of her scribes have failed or refused to do her bidding." He indicated that bias often clouded historical writing in the United States and withheld from African Americans their place in the national discourse. He asserted:

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<sup>59</sup> W.T. Goode, *The Eight Illinois*, (Chicago: The Blakely Printing Company, 1899), pg. 8.

The time has about come when History, delighting to be impartial, will call around the Colored school children, and the Colored people in their homes, and exhibit them a scroll, long withheld or hidden, whereon they will see that which to many may be a revelation. She will show them Colored men enlisted in the militia of the Colonies, marching and camping with White men, sitting and eating together around forest camp-fires, guarding together settlements exposed to savage cruelty, and in the faithful discharge of duty falling victims under the tomahawk and scalping-knife.

The truth would eventually come out and African Americans would see the important contribution they had made to the creation and preservation of the nation. Guthrie wanted to be one of those “scribes” who offered truth-telling in the national narrative. “The mission of this book is to woo History and persuade her to throw off some of her enforced reserve, in deference to Colored Americans among whom she has garnered men of the brightest pages in her archives, and to impart to them a fair share of historic inspiration....” He wanted his work to be useful in convincing not only African Americans, but “all those who oppose them, that, in view of the distinguished services of themselves, and their ancestors, in the Wars of the Union or of the Colonies, and as prominent factors in the growth, prosperity, advancement, and perpetuity of the Republic they are not aliens and foreigners, but fellow-citizens....”<sup>60</sup>

In 1900 Booker T. Washington in *A New Negro for a New Century* voiced his concern about the way African American soldiers’ roles were marginalized. He noted that selective memory was an old problem, but all they had to do was look at their performance in the Civil War.

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<sup>60</sup> Chaplain Jas. M Guthrie, *Camp-Fires of the Afro-American: or The Colored Man as a Patriot, Soldier, Sailor, and Hero in the Cause of Free America*, (Philadelphia: Afro-American Pub. Co., 1899), 21-25.

It seems incredible, in view of the record these regiments have made in the regular army, and the record Afro-American regiments made in the Civil War, a record any race may well be proud of, that there should have been any one who doubted the capacity and courage of Afro-American soldiers; and yet there were plenty of people who did so, and were greatly surprised and taken back when these veterans in Cuba, these 'smoked Yankees,' as the affrighted Spaniards called them:

Storm'd at with shot and shell,  
While horse and hero fell,  
They who fought so well,  
Came through the jaws of Death,  
Back from the mouth of Hell  
All that was left of them:

emerging on the top of El Caney and San Juan Hill, in a mad charge singing as they mowed down the enemy: 'There'll be a Hot Time in the Old Town Tonight.'<sup>61</sup>

In suggesting how it was possible for people to be shocked at the effective service of black troops in the war with Spain, Washington believed "the incredulity can only be accounted for upon the theory that in the main one generation is ignorant of what another did, despite the activity of the daily and periodicals press and of the making of books without number." The issue for African Americans was that the numerous books, histories, and newspaper articles often failed to introduce black soldiers as military heroes. Washington added, "then too there is a deep-seated disposition among the white Americans to discredit the Afro-Americans, however worthily they acquit themselves, in war or peace. This disposition was shown in a very marked and provoking degree in the news dispatches from Cuba during the days of active hostilities when the part taken by

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<sup>61</sup> Booker T. Washington, *A New Negro for a New Century*, (Miami, Florida: Mnemosyne Publishing, Inc., 1969), 36-37. This study was originally published in 1900.

Afro-American soldiers was minimized or slurred over, except in rare instances.”<sup>62</sup>

Washington’s book included chapters offering a detailed history of the black regulars in the war with Spain.

In T.G. Steward’s *Buffalo Soldiers*, first published in 1904, he added his positions to the debate over the memory of the war. His history was a detailed account of the service of the black regulars in the conflict, highlighting their courage and accomplishments, but he also understood the attempt to withhold credit from the men who fought and risked their lives. Reverend Steward believed “that the colored soldier is entitled to honor and dignity must be admitted by all who admire brave deeds, or regard the welfare of the state.” Steward explained that the appreciation of the American people for the black soldiers was short lived, and by the close of 1898 “assiduous efforts were made to poison the public mind toward the black soldier, and history can but record that these efforts were too successful.” The black regular was muddled in the popular press, he explained, “this was done with such vehemence and persistency that by the opening of 1899 the good name of the black regular was hidden under the rubbish of reports of misconduct.” The black soldiers were either being ignored or being presented in a negative way, which hurt their efforts for full recognition.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid, pg. 37.

<sup>63</sup> T. G. Steward, *Buffalo Soldiers: The Colored Regulars in the United States Army*, (Amherst, New York: Humanity Books, 2003), 249, 252-253.

### **The Battle for Memory: Roosevelt's *Scribner's* Article**

The memory of African Americans' contributions in the Spanish-American War was negatively affected by the way Theodore Roosevelt remembered the war in Cuba. Roosevelt questioned their courage and leadership ability in an article in *Scribner's* Magazine, published in 1899. Roosevelt's article is an excellent study of how silences were imposed on African Americans; for example, in his description of the Battle of Las Guasimas, where some had argued that the Rough Riders were ambushed and that the Tenth Cavalry prevented Roosevelt's regiments from being destroyed. As discussed earlier, whether the Tenth Cavalry "saved" the Rough Riders or not, an unquestionable fact was that Tenth played an important role in the battle, but Roosevelt omitted the regiment from his article.

If Roosevelt ignored the black soldiers in his telling of the Battle of Las Guasimas, he actively attacked their reputation in his account of the Battle of San Juan Hill. Roosevelt's insult of African American soldiers negatively impacted the African American campaign for black officers to lead the black troops. In a backhanded compliment Roosevelt stated, "no troops could have behaved better than the colored soldiers had behaved" during the initial assault on the hill, however, black soldiers "are, of course, peculiarly dependent upon their white officers." He admitted that occasionally there were black non-commissioned officers "who can take the initiative and accept responsibility precisely like the best class of whites; but this cannot be expected normally, nor is it fair to expect it. With the colored troops there should always be some of their officers; whereas, with the white regulars, as with my own Rough Riders,



experience showed that the non-commissioned officers could usually carry on the fight by themselves if they were once started, no matter whether their officers were killed or not.”<sup>64</sup> Roosevelt’s racist views were apparent in his assertions that black soldiers were not the equal of white, and capable of exhibiting strong leadership on the battlefield.

Roosevelt went on to question the courage of the black soldiers. He argued that during the battle “none of the white regulars or Rough Riders showed the slightest sign of weakening; but under the strain the colored infantrymen (who had none of their officers) began to get a little uneasy and to drift to the rear, either helping wounded men, or saying that they wished to find their own regiments.” This presented black soldiers as less than courageous. Roosevelt was a popular figure after the war, and his words carried weight in the way the American public understood the events of the war. By casting aspersions on the courage of black troops, he communicated the idea that the black regulars were less than brave. He even went so far as to relate a story suggesting he had to pull his revolver on some black soldiers to get them to return to the front. In indicating that many black soldiers drifted to the rear for a variety of reasons, he stated, “this I could not allow, as it was depleting my line, so I jumped up, and walking a few yards to the rear, drew my revolver, halted the retreating soldiers, and called out to them that I appreciated the gallantry with which they had fought and would be sorry to hurt them, but that I should shoot the first man who, on any pretence (sic) whatever went to the rear.” Roosevelt explained that after this incident, he had no more trouble with the black regulars, and they seemed to accept him as “one of their officers.” In claiming that the black soldiers saw

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<sup>64</sup> Theodore Roosevelt, *The Rough Riders*, (Mineola, New York: Dover, Publications, Inc., 2006), 86.

him as one of their officers, he offered an explanation as to why they fought gallantly after the incident, because they were under the leadership of a white officer (Roosevelt) who gave them the stability of command.<sup>65</sup>

Edward Johnson, in his *History of Negro Soldiers in the Spanish American War*, summed up Roosevelt's criticism as saying "that colored soldiers were of no avail without white officers," "that when the white commissioned officers are killed or disabled, colored non-commission officers could not be depended upon to keep up the charge already begun," and that the men of the black regulars started to drift into the rear only to be stopped by Roosevelt. In order to counter Roosevelt's criticism, Johnson published the eyewitness account of Sergeant Presley Holliday, an African American non-commissioned officer of the Tenth Cavalry who took part in the fight. Sergeant Holliday understood the damage done by Roosevelt's version of events, which "read by those who do not know the facts and circumstances surrounding the case, will certainly give rise to the wrong impression of colored men as soldiers, and hurt them for many a day to come...." Holliday explained that he felt it was his duty to "make an unprejudiced refutation of such charges, and to do all in my power to place the colored soldier where he properly belongs; among the bravest and most trustworthy of this land."<sup>66</sup>

One of the first issues that Sergeant Holliday addressed was the fitness of black non-commissioned officers to lead troops in battle. Holliday believed that Roosevelt was misinformed, asking "did he [Roosevelt] know, that of the four officers connected with

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid, 38-39.

<sup>66</sup> Edward A. Johnson, *History of Negro Soldiers in the Spanish American War, and Other Items of Interest*, (Raleigh: Capital Printing Co., Printers and Binders, 1899), 40-41.

two certain troops of the Tenth Cavalry one was killed and three were so seriously wounded as to cause them to be carried from the field, and the command of these troops fell to the first sergeants, who led triumphantly to the front?" Holliday added, "Does he know that both at Las Guasimas and San Juan Hill the greater part of troop B, of the Tenth Cavalry, was separated from its commanding officer by accidents of battle and was led to the front by its first sergeant?" This answered Theodore Roosevelt's statement that black sergeants could not lead their men if their white officers were killed or injured. This also struck at the larger debate that went beyond Roosevelt's *Scribner's* article, declaring that there were African Americans qualified and capable of being officers.<sup>67</sup>

In answering Roosevelt's contention that black soldiers tended to drift to the rear, Holliday explained that during the battle "there were frequent calls for men to carry the wounded to the rear, to go for ammunition, and as night came on, to go for rations and entrenching tools. A few colored soldiers volunteered, as did some from the Rough Riders." As for the soldiers Roosevelt claimed he stopped at gun point, Holliday argued that those men were heading to the rear under the orders of their Lieutenant "for the purpose of bringing either rations or entrenching tools, and Colonel Roosevelt seeing so many men going to the rear, shouted to them to come back, jumped up and drew his revolver." Holliday added that members of the Rough Riders assured Roosevelt that the soldiers he stopped would do their duty, arguing that "you won't have to shoot those

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid, 41.

men, Colonel. We know those boys.” Holliday further emphasized, “everyone who saw the incident knew the Colonel was mistaken about our men trying to shirk duty....”<sup>68</sup>

Sergeant Holliday was perplexed as to why Roosevelt would write such negative things of the black cavalrymen, when he later “came to the line of the Tenth the next day and told the men of his threat to shoot some of their members and, as he expressed it, he had seen his mistake and found them to be far different men from what he supposed.” As a result of this admission from Roosevelt, Holliday thought Roosevelt sufficiently aware of the courage of the black regulars “not to make a so ungrateful statement about us at a time when the Nation is about to forget out past service.” Holliday understood the importance of Roosevelt’s article and that negative comments would hurt African Americans and aid those looking to hinder their advancement. For Holliday the harm was already done, and for all the damage control that he and other African Americans tried to do in refuting the *Scribner*’s article, he declared:

I could give many other incidents of our men’s devotion to duty, of their determination to stay until the death, but what’s the use? Colonel Roosevelt has said they shirked, and the reading public will go on thinking they shirked. His statement was uncalled for and uncharitable, and considering the moral and physical effect the advance of the Tenth Cavalry had in weakening the forces opposed to the Colonel’s regiment, both at Las Guasimas and San Juan Hill, altogether ungrateful, and has done an immeasurable lot of harm.<sup>69</sup>

Finally, Holliday’s account explained that eventually challenges to the history of Spanish-American War written by former African Americans soldiers would present events in an alternative way, as an essential part of the key battles of the conflict. They

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid, 45.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid, 45.

would act as a counter-narrative to the uneven representations already published. He stressed:

I will say that when our soldiers, who can and will write history, sever their connections with the Regular Army, and thus release themselves from their voluntary status of military lockjaw, and tell what they saw, those who now preach that the Negro is not fit to exercise command over troops, and will go no further than he is led by white officers, will see in print held up for public gaze, much to their chagrin, tales of those Cuban battles that have never been told outside the tent and barrack room, tales that it will not be agreeable for some of them to hear. The public will then learn that not every troop or company of colored soldiers who took part in the assaults on San Juan Hill or El Caney was led or urged forward by its white officer.<sup>70</sup>

Sergeant Holliday hit on many key points here. He believed that some white Americans would be shocked to read a more inclusive telling of the events of the war, but that others would refuse to believe it, holding onto their racist preconceptions that black men could not aspire to leadership in the U.S. Army.<sup>71</sup>

The frustration at not receiving proper respect for the military services they rendered was apparent. It was morally correct to offer men who risked their lives for the nation proper recognition and this encouraged African Americans to demand the same recognition being given to other returning veterans. Recognition worked on many levels. To be properly recognized was to be given a “pat on the back” by commanding officers and the Army chain of command; it was to be properly lauded by the American public; it was to be fairly represented in the Army after-action reports and the histories that flooded the nation; it was to be given good postings for regiments as a reward for a job well done;

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid, 45-46.

<sup>71</sup> Sergeant Presley Holliday’s account, which attempted to refute Roosevelt’s unflattering representation of black soldiers was so poignant that it was also published in Booker T. Washington’s *A New Negro for a New Century*, 54-62.

and it was to be treated respectfully by the public, regardless of race. African American soldiers failed to garner much recognition after the war, and what little they received was fleeting. Months after the war their recognition was lost to the destructive nature of race relations, especially in the South. However, this did not mean that African Americans quietly accepted it. They resisted the silences where they could, but the racial environment in the United States made it difficult to get white Americans to listen to or accept the challenges black Americans made to the mainstream accounts of the history of the war with Spain.

### **Epilogue: Assessing the Changes**

Initially, the majority of African Americans viewed the Spanish-American War with optimism, hoping that in defending the nation against its enemies, they would demonstrate that they were willing and capable of executing their civic duty as American citizens. Many trusted that by displaying their loyalty and courage in the war they would impress white Americans enough to be granted full inclusion into the nation's social life. The idea of war as an avenue for advancement was not without precedent as African Americans made notable gains from their previous service in the Civil War. As a result of their service in the Civil War, African Americans not only achieved their emancipation, but also managed to achieve the franchise, garnered educational opportunities, and earned moderate economic advancement. However, in the years following Reconstruction, African Americans saw the persistent withdrawal of their rights and faced increasing hostility from southern whites. Therefore, it was not unrealistic for them to believe, a generation later, that they could build new momentum for change by taking part in the war against Spain. In trying to ascertain if there was any lasting change, it is possible to gauge the progress from the Spanish-American War by comparing their experiences in that conflict with their involvement in World War I (1917-1919). If African Americans had the same difficulties, or made the same arguments for inclusion during the First World War, then it is indicative of little change.

In comparing the Spanish-American War with World War I, it is important to immediately note some key differences between the conflicts. The most glaring was the

scope. World War I was much larger in magnitude. Where the United States attempted to create an army of several hundred thousand men in the Spanish-American War, World War I required the creation of an army of many millions. As America's first total war, the United States government instituted a draft in order to quickly and efficiently increase the size of the U.S. Army. The federal government needed all of its citizens to pull together in order to win the conflict and could not afford to ignore African Americans, who represented an important source of draft-eligible men. Where tens of thousands of African Americans served during the Spanish-American War, hundreds of thousands took part in World War I.<sup>1</sup> Another important difference was that during World War I the federal government passed an Espionage and Sedition Act that could punish persons for "interfering with the conduct of the war" including fines of \$10,000 and "sent to prison for up to twenty years." In addition, the U.S. Postmaster General monitored various papers for dissent and had the power to prevent the circulation of newspapers deemed seditious through the mail. This had the potential to devastate financially many black publications, because much of their subscribed readership took delivery by mail. Black editors were forced to use caution in deciding what to print, and the government had a powerful tool to control the press.<sup>2</sup> This monitoring and censoring of the press was not an issue during the Spanish-American War.

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<sup>1</sup> Adriane Lentz-Smith, *Freedom Struggles: African Americans and World War I*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2009), 4. Smith mentions that the war brought "almost 400,000 African Americans into a military of four million...."

<sup>2</sup> William G. Jordan, *Black Newspapers & America's War For Democracy, 1914-1920*, 110-111.



In looking at the African American responses to both the Spanish-American War and World War I, the similarities are striking, indicating that the benefits from serving in the war with Spain were neither far-reaching nor lasting. In both wars African Americans expressed optimism that the war would benefit them as they earned the respect of white Americans by participating in the war. Editor E. E. Cooper of *The Colored American* argued that the Spanish-American War would “bring about an era of good feeling the country over and cement races into a more compact brotherhood through perfect unity of purpose and patriotic affinity.”<sup>3</sup> As the United States began organizing for war against Germany in 1917, many African Americans revisited the argument that war offered an opportunity to prove their loyalty and patriotism to the nation “in its hour of need.”<sup>4</sup> Prominent African Americans such as W.E.B. Du Bois, editor of the NAACP’s *Crisis* magazine, asserted that patriotism should overshadow the social issues facing African Americans while the nation was engaged in war. He published his controversial “Close Ranks” article in *The Crisis* in 1917, which stressed that African Americans needed to put aside their grievances for the moment and help support then nation to victory.

We of the colored race have no ordinary interest in the outcome. That which the German power represents today spells death to the aspirations of Negroes and all darker races for equality, freedom and democracy. Let us not hesitate. Let us, while this war lasts, forget our special grievances and close our ranks shoulder to shoulder with our white fellow citizens and the allied nations that are fighting for

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<sup>3</sup> Willard B. Gatewood, Jr., “Black Americans and the Quest for Empire, 1898-1903,” *The Journal of Southern History*, Vol. XXXVIII, No. 4 (November 1972): 548; Willard B. Gatewood, Jr., *Black Americans and the White Man’s Burden, 1898-1903*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1975), 24.

<sup>4</sup> Chad L. Williams, *Torchbearers of Democracy*, 16.

democracy. We make no ordinary sacrifice, but we make it gladly and willingly, with our eyes lifted to the hills.<sup>5</sup>

Many African Americans were eager to serve in the U.S. Army and sought out ways to volunteer, and in the case of World War I, even those who were drafted typically accepted their fate with patriotic resignation.

The black soldiers in both wars served in a segregated army. Even though the regiments were separate, black soldiers dealt with discrimination at every turn. African American troops faced abuse from whites, especially when encamped in the South, who feared that African Americans who served would be more assertive and challenge the racial status quo.<sup>6</sup> This attitude led to clashes between white southerners and black soldiers, and indicated whites' clear determination to ensure that segregation laws and social customs were strictly adhered to. During World War I many black soldiers were sent to training camps in the South where, like their Spanish-American War counterparts, they endured racist treatment. The 369<sup>th</sup> Infantry regiment, a black National Guard regiment from New York, was sent to Spartanburg, South Carolina where members were barred from stores, thrown off streetcars, and subjected to racial epithets. The 370<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, a National Guard unit from Illinois, was sent to Houston, Texas, and

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<sup>5</sup> As quoted in William G. Jordan, *Black Newspapers & America's War For Democracy, 1914-1920*, 114.

<sup>6</sup> Arthur E. Barbeau & Florette Henri, *The Unknown Soldiers: African American Troops in World War I*, (New York: Da Capo Press, 1996), 34. Barbeau and Henri state that there was opposition in the South over the drafting of African Americans into the army, because "in the South especially it was feared that military service would make black laborers less docile and might lead to dangerous militancy after the war."

was treated in a similar abusive and unwelcome manner.<sup>7</sup> The rough treatment of black soldiers in both wars clearly insulted their sense of propriety and pushed them to resist the restrictive laws and customs facing them in the South. These soldiers believed that they were entitled to better treatment and respect due to their willingness to serve at a time of war, and when they failed to receive proper recognition, they responded.

The men serving in the U.S. Army during World War I were equally fed up with racist practices. Men of the 370<sup>th</sup> Infantry, while on their way to Fort Logan near Houston, Texas, refused to adhere to Jim Crow laws at train stations, and challenged “southern codes of racial etiquette, going so far as to loot stores practicing segregation, blowing kisses to white girls, and taunting local whites into verbal and physical confrontations.”<sup>8</sup> The tension continued once they arrived in Houston where some soldiers were arrested for getting into fights with white citizens. The soldiers were barred from the city’s streetcars “for refusing to obey Jim Crow rules....” The men of this regiment, who came from the North, could not accept the restrictive social practices of the South.

Racism in the South created explosive situations. In both the Spanish-American War and World War I the constant abuse by whites led to riots. The Tampa Riot occurred on June 6, 1898 on the eve of the war with Spain, and the Houston Riot erupted during the First World War. Both were sparked by racial tension and resentment as African American soldiers encountered constant abuse and injustice. The riot in Houston also originated in the boiling over of frustration at their treatment, but the outcome was much more tragic. When the Third Battalion of the Twenty-Fourth Infantry came to Fort

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 73 & 75-77.

<sup>8</sup> Chad L. Williams, *Torchbearers of Democracy*, 85.

Logan, from Columbus, New Mexico, white Houstonians immediately resented their presence, because the soldiers seemed disinclined to accept the social order there. In addition, they accused the troopers of gambling, drinking, and womanizing, arguing that they lacked basic morality. This growing tension led to clashes between the white Houstonians and soldiers of the Twenty-Fourth Infantry. On August 23, 1917 this tension erupted into violence. Private Alonzo Edwards came across two white policemen, Rufus Daniels and Lee Sparks, in the process of arresting an African American woman named Sara Travers. The two policemen verbally and physically assaulted Mrs. Travers and Private Edwards came to her defense. Edwards questioned officer Sparks about his handling of Travers, and officer Sparks responded by pistol-whipping him. When another black soldier, Charles Baltimore, later asked officer Sparks about Edwards whereabouts “Sparks struck Baltimore over the head and fired several shots at the unarmed soldier as he attempted to flee.” Baltimore was captured and placed in jail, but rumor quickly reached Fort Logan that Baltimore had been killed.<sup>9</sup>

Baltimore’s comrades were incensed, and when Baltimore returned to camp “alive, but with his head bound in a white cloth,” and “bore visible evidence of his abusive treatment,” their anger intensified. The abuse of Sara Travers and the subsequent beatings of Edwards and Baltimore might have finally triggered the riot, but again it was the anger and frustration over constant ill treatment that caused such an explosive reaction. More than one hundred men from the Twenty-Fourth Infantry “left Camp Logan and proceeded down San Felipe Road and into downtown Houston.” They fired a

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<sup>9</sup> Chad L. Williams, *Torchbearers of Democracy*, 32-34.

number of shots from their rifles, and some of them “attacked white residents with reckless abandon.” The Houston police was the target of many of these troopers, and when the violence finally ended, fifteen people laid dead, four of them Houston police officers, and two soldiers. Historian Chad L. Williams explains the focused nature of the attack in his work, *Torchbearers of Democracy*.

[The soldiers] did not lash out against their superior officers, nor did they engage in completely indiscriminate violence and random acts of property destruction. What occurred on the fateful night of August 23, 1917, was a rebellion, a desperate revolt against the racial order, which had for too long degraded the manhood and dignity of black soldiers, and its perpetrators, embodied by the white residents of Houston and its police officers in particular.

After an investigation and a trial that included sixty-three defendants, fifty-eight soldiers were found guilty of “mutiny, assault, and murder.” Thirteen of the men received sentences of death, which were carried out on December 11, 1917, at Fort Sam Houston.<sup>10</sup>

Another contentious question that faced African Americans during the Spanish-American War and World War I was the commissioning of African American officers. In 1898 black Americans faced a United States Army that resisted their inclusion in the officers ranks. As the federal government pressed black volunteer regiments into service, the demand for black officers for black regiments became even more forceful. The issue created much debate, and led to editor John Mitchell, Jr.’s, “No officer, no fight!” campaign, which stressed that if black soldiers were to be segregated from the Army,

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 35-38; Adriane Lentz-Smith, *Freedom Struggles*, 73. Lentz-Smith mentions that in addition to the thirteen condemned men, most of the other defendants received life sentences in federal prison. “In more rounds of courts martial early the next year, the Army tried another ninety-three men. They issued eleven more death sentences and eighteen more jail terms.”

then they should be led by men of their own race as well. The result was neither uniform, nor completely satisfying for African Americans, but they did manage to force many state governors to relent and allow considerable opportunity for African American men to command soldiers in the ranks.

As with the Spanish-American War, during the First World War the War Department held that African Americans lacked the mental ability, intellect, and self-control to make good officers. However, military leaders eventually relented to African American protest and political pressure and agreed to create a black officer training school in Des Moines, Iowa. The idea of a segregated officer training school was unpopular among many African Americans, but they ultimately gave in to the reasoning put forth by men such as W.E.B. Du Bois who argued, “We must choose between the insult of a separate camp and the irreparable injury of strengthening the present custom of putting no black men in positions of authority.”<sup>11</sup> The recruitment of African Americans to the school met with some setbacks as men from black colleges were often turned away for being too young after the War Department placed the minimum required age to enroll in the school at twenty-five. Even with the setbacks it must be noted that of the 1,250 men who entered into training at Des Moines six hundred and thirty-nine men earned commissions.<sup>12</sup>

Although more African Americans earned commissions in World War I, and it seemed that white soldiers were more disposed to accept them, these officers faced the same challenges that confronted their predecessors from the Spanish-American War. African American officers from both wars faced hostility from their superiors, and were

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<sup>11</sup> As quoted in Chad L. Williams, *Torchbearers of Democracy*, 41.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 42-46 & 49-51.

constantly in danger of being dismissed. Both conflicts saw the use of officer examination boards as a tool to oust black officers and favor whites, as with the Sixth Virginia Volunteer Infantry during the Spanish-American War.

During the First World War something similar took place with the 372<sup>nd</sup> United States Infantry, an African American regiment with a cadre of black officers. Colonel Herschel Tupes, the regiment's white commanding officer, utilized examination boards to oust black officers from his command. Though it was acceptable to utilize the officer board as a tool to occasionally show someone's unfitness for command, Tupes used it to target large numbers of African Americans. Tupes' racism is evidenced in a written request to General Pershing, the commanding general of the American Expeditionary Force, asking for the transfer of all of the black officers out of his command. He justified the request by indicating,

*First.* The racial distinctions which are recognized in civilian life naturally continue to be recognized in military life and present a formidable barrier to the existence of that feeling of comradeship which is essential to mutual confidence and esprit de corps.

*Second.* With a few exceptions there is a characteristic tendency among the colored officers to neglect the welfare of their men and to perform their duties in a perfunctory manner. They are lacking in initiative also. These defects entail a constant supervision and attention to petty details by Battalion commanders and other senior officers, which distract their attention from their wider duties, with harmful results.<sup>13</sup>

With these comments in mind, it is significant that as many as seventy-seven black officers from the 372<sup>nd</sup> were transferred out of the command during this period of

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<sup>13</sup> Arthur E. Barbeau & Florette Henri, *The Unknown Soldiers*, 128-129. Barbeau and Henri mentioned that twenty of the first twenty-one examinees were removed.

examination.<sup>14</sup> The actions by both Lieutenant Colonel Croxton and Colonel Tupes show a blatant disregard for their African American officers, and an inability to assess their subordinates in a fair way engaging instead in prejudice and stereotyping.

A related example of the Army's discrimination against black officers in both wars is represented by the case of Charles Young. Young was one of the few black graduates from West Point, and in both wars he was passed over by military leaders. In 1898 Lieutenant Young was the only active black officer in the U.S. Army, serving as a professor of military science at Wilberforce University. Prior to the Spanish-American War, the Army assigned him to Wilberforce because the military had a history of placing a black officer as instructor there, and it was a convenient way to get him out of the way and ease the tensions of white officers and soldiers who did not wish to serve with Young.<sup>15</sup> During the Spanish-American War he was not recalled by his regiment, the Ninth Cavalry, instead he was later placed in command of a black volunteer regiment, the Ninth Ohio Volunteers by Ohio's governor.<sup>16</sup> Although he was promoted to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel in the volunteers, it was a temporary rank, and when the war ended, he returned to the regular army at his former rank of Lieutenant.

Almost twenty years later, as the United States geared up for war in Europe, Charles Young was still an army officer. He had earned the rank of Lieutenant Colonel, outranking many white officers, and was in line for a command as the military was expanded. However, to the dismay of Young and the outrage of the African American

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<sup>14</sup> Chad L. Williams, *Torchbearers of Democracy*, 132.

<sup>15</sup> Marvin Fletcher, *The Black Soldier and Officer In the United States Army, 1891-1917*, (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1974), 91.

<sup>16</sup> Willard B. Gatewood, Jr., *Black Americans and the White Man's Burden*, 69.



public, the army officials declared him physically unfit for duty due to high blood pressure based on the results of a physical exam conducted in 1917. Lieutenant Colonel Young insisted that he was healthy, and to prove it rode his horse from Wilberforce, Ohio to Washington, D.C., a distance of 350 miles. His demonstration failed to impress army officials and he was forced to retire. However, due to the protests by African Americans across the nation, who felt that he was treated unfairly, the army officials eventually relented and recalled Young to duty and gave him assignments in Illinois and Liberia, but never placed him in command of combat troops in France.<sup>17</sup>

Another commonality between the Spanish-American War and World War I was the exposure of the missionary rhetoric emanating from the nation during both periods to highlight American hypocrisy. During the Spanish-American War African Americans strenuously rejected Rudyard Kipling's notion of "The White Man's Burden," and the racialized language of the civilizing mission that went with it. Their contention was that the white Americans were being hypocritical in proclaiming their fitness to export "civilization" overseas, while its own citizens acted in an inhumane manner toward African Americans and other peoples of color. African Americans pointed to the repression in the South, characterized by lynching, segregation, and disenfranchisement, and wondered how a nation that proclaimed to be so "enlightened" could treat its own citizens in such a manner. During the First World War, President Woodrow Wilson gave African Americans the idealistic ammunition needed to emphasize American hypocrisy

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<sup>17</sup> Edward Wakin, *Black Fighting Men in U.S. History*, (New York: Lothrop, Lee & Shepard Co., 1971), 107-108; Also see, Chad L. Young, *Torchbearers of Democracy*, 46-49.

when he proclaimed that the United States entered the war against Germany in order to make the world “safe for democracy.” According to historian William G. Jordan, the black press used Wilson’s words’:

To highlight the gap between Wilson’s wartime ideals and the treatment of African Americans; draw parallels between the war against autocracy in Europe and their war against racial oppression at home; paint the oppressors of blacks, especially white southerners, as enemies of America no less than Germany and the Central Powers; lay claim to being part of the America that upheld true democratic principles and was the source of Wilson’s war aim; and most important, make a convincing case that the government should take action against lynching as a war measure.<sup>18</sup>

The postwar period following both wars witnessed similar patterns as well. African Americans faced increased violence in the years immediately following both wars, were maligned or omitted in the narrative of each conflict, and felt compelled to offer their own counter-narratives to challenge general disregard for the service they rendered in the conflicts. A disconcerting trend during and immediately following the Spanish-American War was the intensification of racial violence. Lynching and racial violence were prevalent after World War I as well. Prior to 1917 there was a decline in lynching, but as black soldiers entered the U.S. Army in large numbers, whites in the South worried about the influence army life would have on African Americans, and racial violence and murders increased. In 1918 sixty-two Americans were lynched, and fifty-eight were black, and in 1919, the year the soldiers returned from France, eighty-three people were

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<sup>18</sup> William G. Jordan, *Black Newspapers & America’s War for Democracy, 1914-1920*, 73.

lynched, and seventy-seven were black.<sup>19</sup> Other race-based assaults took place as well, some of them directed at returning African American veterans still in uniform. The uniform symbolized their service and legitimated African American demands for equal rights. It also reminded whites of fears that African American veterans might be more inclined to resist their discriminatory treatment in the South. One attack was directed at Reverend George Thomas, who served as a First Lieutenant and chaplain in the war, on November 2, 1919, in Dadeville, Alabama, and took place “for no other reason than” that he “wore Uncle Sam’s uniform.” According to Reverend Thomas, the assailant had “assaulted at least one other black ex-soldier for the same reason.”<sup>20</sup>

Additionally, the mounting racial tension after World War I led to at least twenty-five race riots in 1919. A notable element to these riots was that black soldiers, who had just returned from war, often actively resisted whites’ attacks.<sup>21</sup> From April to October 1919 as many as 120 people died in race riots in the North and South. Riots erupted in “Charleston, South Carolina; Longview, Texas; Washington, D.C.; Chicago; Omaha, Nebraska; and Philips County, Alabama.” In the Chicago riot alone, five hundred people were injured and thirty-eight killed. Of the dead, twenty-three were black and fifteen were white, showing the determination of African Americans to fight back.<sup>22</sup>

How the service of African American soldiers was remembered was equally important to African Americans in the aftermath of both conflicts. After the Spanish-American

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<sup>19</sup> Arthur E. Barbeau and Florette Henri, *The Unknown Soldiers*, 176.

<sup>20</sup> Chad L. Williams, *Torchbearers of Democracy*, 237.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 246.

<sup>22</sup> William G. Jordan, *Black Newspapers & America’s War for Democracy, 1914-1920*, 149.

War, African Americans openly complained when they believed they were being unfairly represented in the histories of the war. They faced a number of challenges. African American veterans returning from the war in Cuba were left out of some victory celebrations, because southern veterans did not want to march with them.<sup>23</sup> In addition, African Americans struggled against being omitted or maligned in the narratives produced after the war. Theodore Roosevelt's infamous article in *Scribner's* in 1899 essentially described members of the black regulars as acting cowardly under fire.<sup>24</sup> These accounts forced African American historians to offer counter-histories in an attempt to include the voice of black troopers. Histories such as Edward A. Johnson's *History of Negro Soldiers in the Spanish American War*, Theophilus Gould Steward's *Buffalo Soldiers: The Colored Regulars in the United States Army*, and Herschel V. Cashin's *Under Fire with the Tenth U. S. Cavalry* were written to confront and counter the marginalization of African Americans in mainstream histories covering the Spanish-American War.<sup>25</sup>

African Americans veterans of World War I underwent the same exclusions and struggles to be remembered after their war. Not only had little changed as a result of the Spanish-American War, but black Americans again engaged in a fight over memory as white Americans tried to minimize their participation in the war in Europe. As with the

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<sup>23</sup> *The Washington Bee*, September 10, 1898.

<sup>24</sup> Theodore Roosevelt, *The Rough Riders*, (Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 2006), 85-86.

<sup>25</sup> Edward A. Johnson, *History of Negro Soldiers in the Spanish-American War and Other Items of Interests*, (Raleigh: Capital Printing Company, 1899); T. G. Steward, *Buffalo Soldiers: The Colored Regulars in the United States Army*, (Amherst, New York: Humanity Books, 2003); Herschel V. Cashin and Others, *Under Fire With the Tenth U. S. Cavalry*, (New York: Arno Press, Inc., 1969).

Spanish-American War, black soldiers from World War I were omitted from some parades and other forms of recognition. For example, African American soldiers were left out of the Bastille Day Parade, in Paris on July 14, 1919. The parade was a celebration of the end of the war and had representatives from all of the allied forces, but African American soldiers were not part of the American contingent. They were also left off of the mural in the *Panthéon de la Guerre*, which depicted an image of the war's main participants. The mural represented France's African colonial soldiers, but at the request of the U.S. War Department it did not include African American soldiers.<sup>26</sup>

The histories published immediately after the war often marginalized the role of black soldiers, or denigrated their service. Reminiscent of Theodore Roosevelt's attack on the honor of the African American veterans of the Battle of San Juan Hill, Major General Robert Bullard criticized the character of the black soldiers of the Ninety-Second Division in World War I in *Personalities and Reminiscences of the War*, published in 1925. General Bullard rose through the ranks during the war, culminating in his being given the command of the Second Army in October 1918. He devoted an entire chapter of his book to the Ninety-Second Division, one of two African American combat divisions sent to France. He discussed their failings and represented them as rapists and cowards. He failed to blame the white officers of the division for the command's trouble, but argued that the problems lay with "the mental and constitutional inferiority of black

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<sup>26</sup> Chad L. Williams, *Torchbearers of Democracy*, 299-300; Also see Robert B. Edgerton, *Hidden Heroism: Black Soldiers in America's Wars*, (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 2001), 120-121.

men.” Bullard wrote, “the Negro, it seems, cannot stand bombardment.”<sup>27</sup> These depictions of black soldiers in World War I were immediately challenged. Adam E. Patterson, a veteran of the war who served as a Major and member of the Army’s judge advocate corps, issued a response in the June 13, 1925 edition of the *Chicago Defender*. He stressed, “there are so many discrepancies and misstatements contained in General Bullard’s article that they border on the ridiculous.” Patterson went on to claim that Bullard was a southerner who harbored deep-seated prejudice against African Americans, and that his memoir misrepresented the roles of black soldiers.<sup>28</sup>

As in the years after the Spanish-American War, African American historians also felt the need to offer counter histories of World War I. Histories such as, W. Allison Sweeny’s *A History of the American Negro in the Great World War*, Kelly Miller’s *Authentic History of the Negro in the World War*, and Emmett J. Scott’s *Official History of the American Negro in the World War* typically emphasized the courage, loyalty, and sacrifice of African Americans in the conflict.<sup>29</sup> This postwar battle over memory was a critical element in their overall efforts for racial uplift. To be omitted was to have their service forgotten by whites and African Americans, which was something these writers were determined to prevent.

Analyzing the African American experience surrounding both the Spanish-American War and World War I reveals similar trends in both conflicts. The fact that black Americans rallied to the flag, asserting their patriotism, in hopes that it would endear

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<sup>27</sup> As quoted in Chad L. Williams, *Torchbearers of Democracy*, 319-320.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 322.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, 307-309.

them to whites and bring them better treatment indicates that little changed as a result of their service in the Spanish-American War. This is further demonstrated when one sees how the War Department and white Americans treated black soldiers and reacted to the idea of black officers. The aftermath of both wars revealed institutionalized racism at work as white Americans worked to deny African Americans use of either war experiences as a foundation for progress. By omitting them from the history, or criticizing their service, white Americans effectively marginalized black Americans' assertions that they had earned the right to equality. Both wars also saw an increase in intimidation and violence in the South as white southerners worked to preserve their racial norms, showing a stubborn resistance to change.

Even though little seemed to change as a result of the Spanish-American War, or World War I, one must remember that African Americans did not give up, but continued the struggle for equal rights. Each war in which African Americans participated added to their sense of place, fueled their determination to find justice, and bolstered their resilience to continue the struggle to honor the sacrifices of those who came before them. The feeling of moral outrage at being marginalized served to inspire African Americans, sparking a level of militancy that made their voices increasingly louder and more insistent. Though significant social change was decades in coming, African American never gave up the fight.

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