

“THEY DON’T SING LIKE THEY USED TO:”

NEGRO SOLDIER’S RESISTANCE

TO JIM CROW IN 1898

by

EARL RAY LEVINGSTON JR.

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of
The University of Texas at Arlington in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements
for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS IN HISTORY

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT ARLINGTON

December 2007

Copyright © by Earl R. Levingston Jr. 2007

All Rights Reserved

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I must first give all glory and honor to God for ordering my steps and placing people in my life who have been so supportive in the completion of my Masters Thesis. Throughout the days and hours spent to complete the requirements for my M.A. thesis my mother, Iedieth Ray Levingston, father, Earl Ray Levingston Sr., and sisters, Errin and Iris Levingston, have given their immeasurable support and time. I offer my deepest thanks and gratitude to you all for accepting me for who I am and what I hope to become. It would be unthinkable not to give special thanks to Louis Alton Peter George III (B.M.B.) for treating me like a brother and giving me whatever I needed to achieve my goals; thanks Bro. I am also indebted to Annette Ireland, Bud Ireland, and Sequoia Ireland for accepting me into their family and providing me with a stable spiritual living environment while conducting extensive research in Washington, D.C. In addition, to the “Fellas” who shared meals, couches, and provided me with supportive phone calls, research tools, and inspiration, I will never forget you and I hope that some day I can return your acts of kindness and graciousness.

I would like to thank my thesis committee, chairperson, Dr. Joyce Goldberg, and readers Dr. Stephanie Cole and Dr. Stephen Maizlish. Your patience and efforts throughout this process have taught me the importance of quality research, scholarship, and striving for excellence. You are true educators and it has been a worthwhile

experience working with you. Thank you for your support and for always believing in me. Without your excellent tutelage, this important contribution to history would not have been possible.

November 13, 2007

ABSTRACT

“THEY DON’T SING LIKE THEY USED TO:”

NEGRO SOLDIER’S RESISTANCE

TO JIM CROW IN 1898

Publication No. _____

Earl Ray Levingston Jr., M.A.

The University of Texas at Arlington, 2007

Supervising Professor: Dr. Joyce Goldberg

By the turn of the twentieth century, Negro troops began to resist Jim Crow laws in an organized way. While some historians have mentioned these racially motivated disturbances, many have failed to seriously analyze and assess these clashes, which has led to the neglect of an important source of African-American resistance to racial discrimination in the post Reconstruction era. The purpose of this thesis is to address that failure. By briefly examining the evolution of Jim Crow policies at the turn of the century, by demonstrating how blacks struggled to serve in the U. S. army from 1673-1868, by illustrating the ambiguity within black America before and during the Spanish American War, and by examining several racially charged incidents involving African-

American soldiers in 1898, this thesis will show blacks as actors in the effort to promote racial justice and not just victims of violence and bigotry.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iii
ABSTRACT.....	v
Chapters	
1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
2. THE EVOLUTION OF JIM CROW.....	8
3. NEGRO SOLDIERS 1866 TO 1898.....	29
4. THE REGULARS.....	54
5. THE VOLUNTEERS.....	77
6. CONCLUSION.....	110
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	112
BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION.....	116

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Initially, I became interested in the experiences of African-American soldiers as an undergraduate history student at Bowie State University. While studying the establishment of the black “Immune” Regiments (Sixth through Tenth United States Colored Volunteer Infantry) during the Spanish American War under the guidance of Dr. Thomas Orum, I detected a pattern of behavior by black Regular Army and volunteer soldiers. Everywhere black soldiers were garrisoned in the Jim Crow South at the turn of the century, they clashed with white civilians, soldiers, and local authorities. At first, reports of clashes between white southerners and blacks soldiers seemed the same: African-American soldiers got paid, received a pass to the local towns, and became involved in drunken confrontations with whites. However, after further review of the actual conflicts, I discovered that these often-armed confrontations were more than just simple drunken brawls between men of two different races.

By the turn of the century, Negro troops began to resist Jim Crow laws in an organized way. While some historians have mentioned these racially motivated disturbances in narratives of the “old army,” historians have failed to seriously analyze and assess these clashes, which in turn has led to the neglect of an important source of African-American resistance to racial discrimination in the post Reconstruction era.

The purpose of this thesis is to address that failure. By briefly examining the evolution of Jim Crow policies at the turn of the century, by demonstrating how blacks struggled to serve in the United States army from 1673-1868, by illustrating the ambiguity within black America before and during the Spanish American War, and by examining several racially charged incidents involving African-American soldiers in 1898, this thesis will show blacks as actors in the effort to promote racial justice and not just victims of violence and bigotry.

Chapters one and two provide the setting and background information regarding black soldiers' resistance to Jim Crow laws in 1898 and how their attitudes toward second-class treatment formed. Chapter one is a very broad and general history of segregation in the South from 1865 until 1898. In order to examine resistance to Jim Crow, one must first understand segregation in the South and the elements that allowed it to become a systematic social order that promoted white superiority and black inferiority for over one hundred years. After the Civil War, the liberation of four million slaves threatened the well-established social structure in the South, which at one time considered blacks as subhuman chattel. Although the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth amendments promised federal protection of basic civil liberties for blacks, gradually, well-entrenched southern racial mores would supersede federal law. To ensure that blacks remained a permanent underclass, white southerners used disenfranchisement to prohibit black participation in the political process and used segregation to further demonstrate blacks' inferiority.

During the steady progression of racial segregation in the South, blacks were gradually excluded from public parks, theaters, hotels, restaurants, and other public facilities. Normally, African-Americans had alternative black-owned facilities to patronize, however, blacks and whites had to share public transportation. In order to maintain southern customary treatment of blacks, transportation companies adopted a system that could accommodate both races. First and second-class railcars became a method to segregate public transportation. While whites paid more for first-class tickets, they rode in the comfort of well-maintained railcars. For blacks, second-class cars were less comfortable and often kept in substandard conditions. Initially, this discriminatory compromise seemed to work. However, as a new generation of more resilient and "uppity" Negroes developed, public transportation became hotly contested territory.

As blacks began to advance economically and politically over the decades, an entire generation of blacks who had not been slaves began to challenge southern discriminatory practices. This new generation's refusal to accept second-class treatment led to resistance to blatant acts of discrimination. Their refusal to accept the southern racial customs that existed before they were born led, in fact to legal segregation enforced by the federal government.

To combat Negro assertiveness, white southern lawmakers initiated legislation that would create two separate worlds in the South, one white and one black. During the 1890s, southern states adopted laws to separate every aspect of life. The most important court decision during the late nineteenth century was Plessy v. Ferguson

(1896). The precedent set by this court decision, which initially only legally segregated trains, eventually resulted in the legal segregation all public facilities.

Violence and intimidation also became standard practices to uphold white southerners' domination of the black population. White southerners intimidated, assaulted, and killed those who deliberately or inadvertently challenged traditional southern racial customs. The vicious custom of lynching became the ultimate protector of Jim Crow and southern racial customs. Therefore, black soldiers garrisoned in the South at the end of the nineteenth century entered an environment already hostile to them.

Chapter two looks at the historical experiences of black soldiers until the Spanish American War. While many whites protested the use of blacks in the military, manpower needs eventually overwhelmed racial biases. Prior to 1866, blacks in the military mostly served in non-combat roles. However, as the federal government made provisions for the enlistment of four black regiments one year following the Civil War, black soldiers finally found the opportunity to serve their country in combat essential roles. The Ninth and Tenth cavalries and the Twenty-fourth and Twenty-fifth infantries, the black regiments added after the Civil War, would be sent to duty in the Far West until 1898.

Black soldiers who served in the frontier territory faced many obstacles and difficulties. For thirty-three years, black soldiers served with distinction at desolate locations in Utah, the Dakotas, Arizona, Wyoming, Kansas, the Indian territories, and Texas. Black units were ordered to desolate locations specifically as replacements for

worn-out white volunteers. Often frontier life meant substandard living conditions, poor nutrition, and hazardous duty. Because many frontier posts were constructed before the Civil War and deserted during the Civil War, black soldiers who served in the West had to rebuild their living quarters in addition to various other duties such as escorting wagon trains and stagecoaches, protecting construction workers, travelers, farmers, and settlers from hostile Native Americans. Often black soldiers also took on the daunting task of assisting local authorities serving as peace officers to apprehend “malcontents” who wreaked havoc on the western frontier. The hard life and difficult duties faced by black soldiers in the Far West influenced their attitudes toward second-class status and racial customs that awaited them upon being garrisoned in the Jim Crow South at the end of the nineteenth century.

Chapter three analyzes African-Americans’ position on the war with Spain and black soldiers’ resistance to Jim Crow and discriminatory practices in Tampa, Florida, at the end of the nineteenth century. Leading up to the Spanish American War of 1898, members of the black community divided on the issue of black participation in the war. Black newspapers and members of the affluent African-American community expressed their perspectives on black participation in the war in newspaper editorials, and letters. Some African-Americans believed that involvement in an armed confrontation with Spain could immediately improve their conditions in the United States. However, many did not support African-American participation in the Spanish American War due to their second-class status in the United States.

In late April of 1898, black soldiers stationed in the Far West received orders for temporary garrisoning in Central Florida before deployment to the Caribbean theater of war. White residents of Tampa and Lakeland, Florida could not have been mentally prepared for the entrance of 4,000 armed, trained, combat-hardened, confident, aggressive, black soldiers into their community. As components of traditional Southern customs, blacks were forced to use segregated facilities and had to exhibit total submissiveness to whites or face life-threatening consequences. Black soldiers who entered Florida at the turn of the century, had seen real combat, had chased down renegade Native Americans, and had protected white civilians for thirty-three years on the western frontier. When faced with second-class treatment, threats, and insults in Florida they rejected such humiliations and resisted in an organized way. Black soldiers' refusal to accept Jim Crow and southern racial mores erupted into violent clashes between white civilians, soldiers, and local authorities in the Tampa area during May and June of 1898.

The final chapter analyzes the racial experiences of African-American state volunteer units during the Spanish American War. As a result of President William McKinley's second call to arms, Congress authorized the creation of state black volunteer units. Although the majority of these units would never leave the United States, the system of organized resistance established by black regulars in Florida continued throughout their service that ended in 1899. During the Spanish American War, black state volunteers were garrisoned in areas of the South where Jim Crow and southern racial customs were regularly enforced. Unlike the black Army Regulars

garrisoned in the Tampa area, most black state volunteers had not served in the hostile conditions of the Far West and came primarily from the South. Nevertheless, they too resisted racial discrimination and Jim Crow policies.

Black volunteers faced discrimination within the military and resisted discriminatory practices. While the black volunteers from North Carolina and Alabama encountered violent attacks by white volunteer units from the South, the Sixth Virginia Colored Volunteers earned the most attention of all state volunteer units during the Spanish American War. Due to the insulting and humiliating replacement of their black officers by white officers, the black state volunteers from Virginia refused to follow orders in protest of what they considered blatant discrimination. After being transferred to Fort Haskell, in Macon, Georgia, some members of the “Mutinous Sixth” organized resistance to Jim Crow policies in Macon by destroying all places of business that refused them service.

African-American soldiers resisted Jim Crow and southern racial customs during the late nineteenth century. During the thirty-three years following the Civil War, the South gradually created an institutionalized system that promoted white superiority and sought to make African-Americans a permanent part of an underclass. At the same time, after the Civil War African-Americans gained the opportunity to participate in the military during peacetime and began to advance economically, socially, and politically. These two events created a population of African-American men who would no longer accept southern racial customs and who would actively and sometimes violently resist Jim Crow laws.

CHAPTER 2

THE EVOLUTION OF JIM CROW

The black soldiers who served during the Spanish American War grew to adulthood in a unique place in time. In order to understand their choices and actions as soldiers, we must first understand where they came from, or what influenced their sense of themselves as Americans, as soldiers, and as men. For this group, this understanding can only emerge from a careful re-examination of the nature of politics and society in the South during their developmental years. These years, roughly 1865 to 1890, were the very years white southerners created a race-based society not only highly discriminatory, but also carefully calibrated to ensure a black man's initial sense that they could do nothing about it because white control, if not "natural," was at least incontestable.

Jim Crow policies, and the violence often associated with enforcement of segregation, became firmly entrenched as a part of southern culture and created a racially hostile environment by 1898. Systematic separation of the races in the South evolved gradually from social customs to laws in the thirty-three years following the Civil War. In 1828, Thomas Rice, a minstrel show actor, created a caricature of a black man who amused white audiences by portraying negative and exaggerated stereotypes of blacks. By the end of the nineteenth century, the name of Rice's caricature, Jim

Crow, had become the designation for the new order of white domination Negroes faced after slavery.¹ “Jim Crow” ultimately defined a social order constructed by whites to ensure the separation of races and black inferiority.

As the South began to rebuild economically and politically after 1865, few people anticipated the social upheaval that would follow. For white southerners after the Civil War, four million freed blacks presented an enormous problem for the social structure of the South. At the conclusion of the American Civil War, the Union initially allowed Confederate legislative bodies to remain in power or appointed ex-confederate officers to state administrative positions. Establishment of laws to control recently emancipated slaves in the form of Black Codes became the immediate goal of these postwar governments. Black Codes established a familiar status for freedmen that comforted Southern whites.

The Black Codes of 1865 restored slavery, perhaps not in name but in action. They allowed Negroes to marry, own property, and make contracts. The restrictions placed on freedmen, however, far outweighed their rights. As a part of Black Codes, Negroes could not testify against whites, serve on juries, or enter certain towns and cities without permission. Codes also forced blacks to work for whites under suspiciously disadvantageous terms. Anyone who refused a labor contract could be fined or even sold into forced labor for one year as a part of the Black Codes of 1865. Often, white southerners falsely accused freedmen of crimes or vagrancy and forced them into involuntary labor. Blacks were excluded from public parks, theatres, hotels,

¹ Richard Wormser, Rise and fall of Jim Crow, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2003) , XI.

restaurants, insane asylums, poor houses, and orphanages. This new, but obviously old, form of subservience varied from state to state, with some regions adopting more restrictive laws than others.² Those men who would later serve their country as soldiers were, at this point, not truly free. But they were not alone in seeing this state of affairs as wrong.

Less than a year after the Civil War, Northern Republicans became outraged by the deteriorating conditions of blacks in the South. Many Republicans argued that conditions in the South for African-Americans, as represented by the Black Codes, did not correspond to what they had hoped for during four bloody years of war. Despite President Andrew Johnson's objections, Republicans drafted the Civil Rights Act of 1867. This was the first federal legislation by the Radical Republicans aimed at nullifying the oppressive Black Codes. By 1867, Congress had passed three more Reconstruction Acts that made the state and local governments established by the Johnson administration temporary.³

By the end of 1868, Republicans controlled all the Southern states.⁴ With this shift in power, black men enjoyed new freedom for the first time. The Republican party gained control of Congress by promoting suffrage not only for ex-slaves but for poor whites as well. After the adoption of the Civil Rights Act of 1867 and the Fourteenth Amendment, Republicans sought political control of the South by winning at the polls. The new governments would be composed of Negroes, northern Republicans called

² Howard Rabonowitz, Race relations in the Urban South 1865-1890, (New York: Oxford University Press), 34-35.

³ Leon Litwack, Trouble in Mind (New York: Alfred A. Knopf Press, 1998), 229.

⁴ Wormser, Rise and fall of Jim Crow, 19.

Carpetbaggers who relocated to the South in search of opportunity, and southern Republicans disparagingly called Scalawags. As a result, some blacks held elected state offices in every southern state during Radical Reconstruction.⁵ But this freedom was not to last though its impact on the consciousness of blacks is an important part of this analysis

After six years of Republican control of southern legislatures, the Democrats seized the majority in Congress. One year earlier, state legislatures in Virginia, Tennessee, Georgia, and Texas fell under the control of white Southern Democrats. During this phase of Reconstruction, called Redemption, southern Democrats expelled most Negroes, Carpetbaggers, and Scalawags from the Southern political scene. State after state fell in line, often employing violent tactics to remove Radicals from office and intimidating Negroes who pressed their political rights.⁶ If this required stuffing ballots boxes or murder, southern Democrats did not hesitate. They resorted to any method to regain “Home Rule.” Near the end of his presidency in 1876, President Ulysses S. Grant simply refused to send troops to assist those facing violence and oppression in the South.⁷

Southern Democrats used many techniques to regain power and dominate politics in the South. They employed several different methods of disenfranchisement, including electoral fraud, poll taxes, literacy tests, restrictive voter registration, and violence. Electoral fraud was regularly practiced including throwing out votes of the

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Edward Ayers, The Promise of the New South (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 7-9.

⁷ Ibid.

opposition, stuffing ballot boxes, or counting as votes for Democrats those that had been cast for any other party. While this tactic had occurred in the South before the 1860s, it resurfaced with great intensity after 1868. To prevent electoral fraud, Congress appointed inspectors to oversee state elections but with insignificant results. In Kentucky, appointed officials were indicted for refusing to accept black votes or refusing to count black votes. This type of Federal intervention in the 1860s provoked southern states to legally adopt disenfranchisement policies by the late 1880s. Georgia initiated a poll tax in 1871 that forced all voters to pay a fee to participate in elections.⁸ Although the fee normally did not exceed two dollars per year, many blacks could not pay. In many rural communities in the South, black tenant farmers did not receive cash wages. Bartering or store credits served as forms of payment and therefore many blacks did not use cash and could not pay poll taxes. Federal law actually prohibited poll taxes, but state and local laws did not. Clearly, the purpose of poll taxes was to exclude those who could not afford to vote, primarily black males.

Literacy tests constituted another form of disenfranchisement. Although opportunities for blacks to obtain an education after 1865 increased, still between forty percent and sixty percent of the black population remained illiterate. White Southern Democrats capitalized on this deficiency to keep blacks out of the political arena. Often passing a literacy test meant reading from the Constitution and demonstrating comprehension of the passage read. The subjectivity involved in a white poll worker

⁸ Wormser, Rise and fall of Jim Crow, 74.

determining blacks' "understanding" of a particular constitutional passage sharply decreased their chance of gaining voting rights.

Southern states used other unfair voter registration strategies to exclude black electoral participation. Voter registration offices in the South required frequent re-registration, long terms of residency in the district, and provided for registration only at obviously inconvenient times during the workday. Even when blacks qualified to register by meeting all the conditions, registrars at their own discretion could simply deny blacks the right to vote. Leon Alexander, a coal miner in Alabama, recorded his experience. According to Alexander, the registrar at the county courthouse initially did not acknowledge that he was in the office. After washing his hands several times, the registrar gave Alexander a voter registration application. As Alexander attempted to fill out the form, the registrar "balled it up and threw it in the waste basket."⁹ Only after the coal miner's white union representatives escorted him into the office and threatened the registrar did Alexander have an opportunity to complete the application. During the late nineteenth century in Alabama, blacks required two white registered voters to witness their voter registration forms.¹⁰

Of all the different forms of disenfranchisement blacks faced after 1868, physical intimidation was the most prevalent. Blacks who voted or attempted to vote became victims of violence. Throughout the late nineteenth century and beyond, vigilante organizations formed to intimidate blacks and, more importantly, to restrict them from the right to political participation.

⁹ Ayers, The Promise of the New South, 227-280.

Most notoriously for blacks who may have fought back, the Ku Klux Klan intimidated, assaulted, and sometimes murdered those who sought to change the nature of race relations in the South through the political process. Secrecy, elaborate initiations, hazing, costumes, and rituals had constituted elements of the original Ku Klux Klan. Much later, an original member pointed out, "The Klan was designed purely for amusement."¹¹ In less than one year after its inception, however, the Klan transformed from a conservative, fun loving, group of pranksters to a secret society of masked vigilantes and murderers. The bullying of freedmen, long a Southern pastime, soon dominated their operations. As their numbers grew, at least one charter member asserted, "A rash, bad, imprudent group of men had gotten into the order and were beginning to commit acts of violence."¹² Physical intimidation of blacks by the Ku Klux Klan soon became a regular occurrence. The operations of the Klan attracted white southerners from all walks of life. Judges, mayors, sheriffs, farmers, and convicted criminals eagerly joined the Klan to promote white supremacy, white southern racial mores, and ensure racial segregation.¹³ The Klan's first targets consisted of black political leaders and black voters. Then ordinary blacks, who may have unwittingly or deliberately broken a de facto Southern law, soon became targets as well. Klansmen beat, whipped, and murdered blacks who tried to vote. Klan members participated in rampages of violence and destruction. Burning churches or schools, lynching entrepreneurs or teachers, and driving black owners from their land were all

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Allen Trelease, White Terror, (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), 4.

¹² Ibid. 4-7.

¹³ Ibid.

tactics used by the Klan to instill fear in the black community. Splinter organizations such as the Red Shirts and the Knights of the White Camellia permeated the South upholding the standards of white supremacy and black inferiority initiated by the Ku Klux Klan.

The major contributing factor to the end of Reconstruction and a return to discriminatory practices in the South was the Compromise of 1877.¹⁴ This event thwarted any hopes on the part of blacks that the federal government would return again to aid them. In the presidential election of 1876, Democrat Samuel J. Tilden appeared to win the election. He was but one electoral vote short of victory and led by 200,000 popular votes. However due to racial clashes at the polls, the electoral votes of Louisiana, South Carolina, and Florida remained in dispute. The Republicans, who controlled the Electoral College, vowed to elect Rutherford B. Hayes by disallowing Democratic votes from the three disputed states. While southern Democrats threatened to filibuster in Congress until Tilden was declared the victor, Americans feared the country was once again on the verge of a Civil War. To solve the disputed election, southern Democrats and Republicans struck a bargain. Democrats agreed to recognize Hayes' election if the president promised to remove federal troops from the South and endorsed the election of Democratic candidates in Louisiana and South Carolina.¹⁵ Federal protection for blacks was clearly at stake. The *Charleston Mercury* seemed prophetic when in 1869 the paper declared: "The constitutions and governments will

¹⁴Richard Wormser, *Rise and fall of Jim Crow*, 33-32.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

last just as long as bayonets which ushered them into being keep them in existence and not one day longer.”¹⁶

For many years scholars have debated the origin of the social order known as Jim Crow. A considerable number of historians agree that rigid Jim Crow policies--segregating housing, public facilities, and transportation--did not become widespread in the South until numerous Supreme Court decisions between 1873 and 1898 nullified the Civil Rights Act of 1867. After rulings in cases such as United States v. Reese (1873), United States v. Cruikshank (1876), Hall v. de Cuir (1877), Louisville, New Orleans, and Texas Railroad v. Mississippi, Plessy v. Ferguson (1896), and Williams v. Mississippi (1898), Jim Crow policies expanded to every state in the South.¹⁷ Other historians contend that segregation and the rise of Jim Crow began in the South immediately after emancipation.¹⁸ They believe the separation of the races began as a voluntary action by both races for different reasons, and at least one has concluded, “There is no clear or concise reason the separation occurred.”¹⁹ Interestingly, “segregation was not entirely the work of whites.”²⁰ Scarred from slavery and a changing economy, countless Negroes who held contempt for their former masters sought to disassociate themselves from whites. After the Thirteenth Amendment, ex-slaves’ withdrawal from former masters was a personal decision and action perhaps meant as a symbol of their legal right to freedom. Initially, blacks may have chosen separation from white Southerners in order to underscore the termination of their former

¹⁶ Ibid, 21.

¹⁷ John David Smith, When did Southern Segregation Begin.(Boston: Bedford/St. Martins, 2002,) 54.

¹⁸ Ibid, 61.

¹⁹ Ibid, 62.

relationships, to look for lost family members, or to find employment in other places, especially southern cities.²¹ This influx of Negroes to Southern cities from 1866 to 1869 also contributed to the establishment of Jim Crow. In order to maintain racial purity and facilitate white domination, whites began enforcing the separation of races. Jim Crow became a constant reminder to African-Americans of the era of their racial inferiority, and separation seemed the only solution for whites who believed that they were incapable of relating to blacks whom they considered inherently inferior. Separation gradually grew into an “institution” that became an integral part of Southern culture.

Most interesting for realizing how even the process of resistance could contribute to the oppression is the way "separate cars" legislation functioned. Some historians believe that the discriminatory practices of the railroads in the South actually led to passage of Jim Crow laws.²² While blacks subjected to segregation in schools, churches, hotels, restaurants, and other public facilities often had alternative black-owned facilities to patronize, both races had no choice but to share use of the railroads.²³ In order to accommodate white passengers who refused to associate with blacks, railroad companies adopted a system of discriminatory practices. As railroads rapidly expanded in the 1880s, connecting new towns and cities, the number of black travelers also increased. Black resistance to riding in second-class cars sometimes led to violence and ultimately to legislation that legally supported Jim Crow. At first,

²⁰ Ibid, 64.

²¹ Ibid, 65.

²² Ibid, 85.

²³ Ibid, 87.

railroad carriers claimed they were just attempting to protect and shield “ladies” from second-class cars. However, subjection of Negro women to second-class railroad cars eventually led to a series of court cases brought by blacks who challenged segregated accommodations for white and black women. Initially a compromise occurred by changing the name of the “Ladies Car” to the “Front Car” and allowing well-dressed, respectable black women to ride in these. By the 1880s, however, laws and financial interests eliminated even this compromise.

At first blacks traveling from North to South could purchase “Parlor” tickets and ride in comfort. As years passed, however, blacks’ ability to buy first-class tickets or enter first-class cars eroded. Whites clearly did not desire to travel in the same railroad car with blacks, no matter how much they had paid for a ticket. However, so-called “uppity” blacks often resisted second-class treatment on trains and some Negroes purchased first-class tickets where available. As a result, they were sometimes forcibly ejected from their seats and sent to the “colored section” of the train or forcibly removed from the train. During the 1880s, a young black man traveling from Nashville to Louisiana to accept a position as a University President purchased a first-class ticket. Upon crossing the Mason-Dixon Line, the conductor required him to move to the colored section of the train. Refusing the order and claiming his right to the first-class seat he had purchased, angry whites surrounded him and threw him from the moving train.²⁴ Discrimination and violence in parlor cars even affected those who did not resist. Emmanuel Love, a leader of First African Church of Savannah, purchased first-

²⁴Wormser, Rise and fall of Jim Crow, 88.

class tickets for himself and a church delegation. A representative from the East Tennessee, Virginia, and Georgia rail companies assured the Reverend that first-class accommodations would not be a problem. Pastor Love believed that due to the size of his entourage, they would have a first-class car all to themselves. Much to the surprise of the religious group, whites entered their reserved car. A black porter who worked in that car warned the black travelers that trouble lay ahead. Evidently someone telegraphed the next station and alerted whites to the situation. Upon arrival at the next stop, fifty angry white men armed with clubs, pistols, and other blunt objects assaulted the black church delegation.²⁵ From the 1880s until the Plessy v. Ferguson decision of 1896 that set the precedent that legalized segregation, blacks who attempted to ride in first-class facilities often faced violence, and this lesson undoubtedly shaped outlook of the young black man of the era. The racial discord on the trains of the 1880s soon moved into the cities as blacks filtered in from rural areas.

When black men and women migrated to cities to find jobs, they encountered racial segregation. In southern cities and towns, large numbers of blacks and whites found themselves in close contact with each other. In response, whites had to find new methods of “controlling” blacks. Parks, restaurants, water fountains, waiting rooms, and every other public facility that blacks and whites inhabited simultaneously seemed to require racial separation.²⁶ Some factories did not allow black and white workers to share the same workspace. In addition to the movement of blacks into cities and towns, a younger generation of black urban workers who did not recall the restrictions and

²⁵ Ibid.

limitations of slavery seemed to compound the need for whites to increase and further widened race relations.²⁷

Thus, why young blacks of the era learned of the cost of resistance, they also learn about its possibilities. As education became more available to blacks, and some blacks managed political participation during Reconstruction, a larger black middle class developed. This middle class, of educated and economically prosperous blacks, questioned and even dared to resist southern discriminatory customs. A white woman who had previously been a slave owner noticed and commented that, “They don’t sing like they use to. Every year it seems that they are losing more and more of their good humor. Sometimes I feel like I don’t know them anymore. They have grown so glum and serious that I am free to say I’m scared of them.”²⁸ Many white southerners echoed this sentiment.

The refusal of blacks to remain subservient and docile during the late nineteenth century resulted in legislation to enforce segregation.²⁹ First, ex-slaves merely challenged customary segregation. However, as economic, political, and social changes took place during Reconstruction, a new generation of blacks moved onto the scene. By the 1890s an entire generation of blacks who had not faced the mental and physical rigors of slavery began to question, challenge, and finally resist de facto segregation.³⁰ “By the 1890s whites perceived the behavior of uppity blacks a growing threat.”³¹

²⁶ Ayers, Southern Crossing, 40-41.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Wormser, Rise and fall of Jim Crow, 61.

²⁹ Smith, When Did Southern Segregation Begin., 155

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

Fearing that younger blacks, this new generation, would prove resistant to customary southern discrimination, every southern state passed more restrictive Jim Crow legislation between the 1880s and 1915. Sam Gadsden, a native of South Carolina, summed up what must have been the view of many whites: “The white people couldn’t master these Niggers anymore so they took the task of intimidating them.”³²

In order to combat the rising threat of Negro assertiveness, legislation and white vigilantism dominated southern race relations by the end of the nineteenth century, and this is the climate in which black men who sometimes joined the military came of age. Especially during the last two decades of the nineteenth century, southern lawmakers made clear that the answer to a new generation of blacks who refused to accept second-class treatment was legal segregation. By the end of the century and into the twentieth century, all Southern states adopted or reinstated laws to separate the races.³³ Tennessee led the way in 1881 by passing legislation separating blacks and whites on trains. In the next seven years, Florida, Mississippi, Texas, Louisiana, Alabama, Arkansas, Kentucky, and Georgia followed by adding similar restrictions.³⁴ While Jim Crow policies varied from state to state, blacks and whites could no longer share space on trains. As Negroes became more frequent travelers, whites who supported segregation demanded action. After rail segregation, Georgia raised the bar by segregating the entire train station and even local streetcars.³⁵

³² Ibid.

³³ Jerrold Packard, *American Nightmare*, (New York: St. Martin’s Press) , 90.

³⁴ C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1971), 92-92

³⁵ Ibid.

Slowly but surely, the South became totally divided along racial lines. The 1890s would bear the fruits of the seeds that white supremacists planted after the removal of federal troops. By the end of the 1890s, even the mere suggestion of equal treatment under the law for blacks had disappeared. As disenfranchisement continued in the name of controlling the political arena, racial customs, new legislation supporting segregation, and Supreme Court decisions, all solidified Jim Crow.

Due to years of deteriorating race relations, by the 1890s white racial attitudes and customs in the South became institutionalized. Harry Crews, a white southerner, reflected on being reprimanded by his mother for breaking an obvious southern norm. According to Crews, one day he referred to a black man as “Mr. Jones” in front of his aunt. Noticing the “error,” the young man's aunt immediately explained to him that the black man was a nigger and told him that, "you don't say Mr. Jones you say Nigger Jones."³⁶ White racial attitudes in the South dictated all aspects of culture. Even names and gestures reflected the distinct superiority of one race above the other. Negroes in the South had to refer to white men as Mr., Sir, Captain, or Boss. In contrast, black men were addressed as Boy, Jack, George, or Nigger. Custom did not allow the races to shake hands, walk together, or fraternize in public.³⁷ Also according to custom, if whites and blacks were walking on the same sidewalk, blacks had to give way and let white people pass first. In addition, blacks learned never to look directly in the eyes of a white person. The slightest breach of these customs could result in violence or possibly death.

³⁶ Ayers, Southern Crossing: a history of the American South, 1877-1906, 88.

Although the establishment of customary segregation existed prior to the 1890s, during this era southern states rewrote their state constitutions to cover almost every aspect of life, legally creating two separate and distinct worlds. Schools, barbershops, restaurants, theaters, cemeteries, and all other places where blacks and whites could share space were targeted by southern lawmakers.³⁷ Jim Crow solidified segregation but lynching enforced white superiority. With the law firmly on their side, white southerners took enforcement into their own hands by violently punishing all those who resisted.

Of all segregation legislation of the 1890s, Plessy v. Ferguson (1896) constituted the most significant victory for Jim Crow. As black railroad travelers became more frequent and segregation became more prevalent, the railroads became hotly contested areas of controversy throughout the South. In order to resolve the conflict, states passed laws separating railcars. With the support of northern attorneys, Homer Plessy challenged the constitutionality of segregation on trains in Louisiana. In 1892, Plessy, who was 7/8 white, intentionally sat in the white section of an East Louisiana Railroad train. Upon being asked to move, and refusing, Homer Plessy was forcibly ejected from the train and arrested. Four years after his arrest, a Supreme Court decision against Plessy set a precedent that legally permitted segregation on trains and subsequently all public facilities. The verdict concluded that, "separate but equal facilities would

³⁷ Ibid, 89.

³⁸ Ayers, The Promise of the New South, 136.

stimulate aggressions, more or less brutal and irritating, upon the admitted rights of colored citizens."³⁹

The lack of support for constitutional rights by the Federal Government devalued black Americans' citizenship and civil rights. Nearly two years after the Plessy v. Ferguson decision, a reported twenty-five blacks lost their lives in Wilmington, North Carolina, as the result of white terror. During the 1890s, Wilmington, located in the eastern part of North Carolina, had reached a state of reasonable racial harmony. However, when the Populist party and black Republicans joined to defeat the white Democrats in 1896, the once prosperous port town erupted in violence. After the Democrats' defeat in 1896, Democrats seethed for two years, festering in defeat, vowing to regain control of the state in the next elections. In 1898, the Democratic party in North Carolina launched a campaign based on white supremacy. Daniel Schneck, leader of the Democratic party, reported that the slogan of the party would consist of one word, "Nigger."⁴⁰ Other party members asserted, "North Carolina is a white man's state that white men will rule it, and they would crush the party of Negro domination beneath the majority so overwhelming that no other party will ever get to attempt to establish Negro rule here."⁴¹ As a part of their campaign strategy, the Democrats claimed that white women were in danger from black males. Responding to this campaign, white women, wearing white dresses, marched

³⁹Florette, Henri, Black Migration: Movement North 1900-1920, (New York: Anchor Press, 1971) , 13.

⁴⁰ Richard Wormser, Rise and fall of Jim Crow, 84.

⁴¹ Ibid.

throughout the streets holding up signs that said, "Protect Us."⁴² This event would have loomed large for any young black man of the time.

Black newspaper editor Alex Manley refuted the Democratic party's claims about the black threat to white womanhood. As tension built leading to the election, whites came out in record numbers to support the Democratic party. After winning the election, a white mob burned down Alex Manley's newspaper office. Whites began shooting blacks on the streets and blacks of all ages and genders became victims of mob violence. While the official number of fatalities was twenty-five, many more may have been lost as their corpses were dumped into the Atlantic Ocean.⁴³ After the riot, no one was arrested and the Federal Government did not offer support to the terrorized black community of Wilmington.

The end of the nineteenth century witnessed an outbreak of mob violence against blacks. During the 1890s, many white southerners believed that blacks were dangerous and claimed they had a natural propensity for crime. Southern newspapers reported daily accounts of mischief by blacks. If no episodes of illegal behavior could be found locally, newspapers printed crimes that blacks had allegedly committed in other areas.⁴⁴ The practice of lynching and extra-legal public humiliations such as flogging, hanging, mutilation, burning, and execution, returned with a vengeance during the 1880s.⁴⁵ From 1889 to 1918, 3,324 blacks and whites died as a result of vigilante style mob violence. During the same period, 2,834 of all lynchings happened in the

⁴² Ibid, 84-85

⁴³ Ibid, 86.

South.⁴⁶ In the North, Midwest, and Western frontier, eighty-five percent of all lynch victims were white. Only nine percent of the 2,834 lynching victims in the South were white.⁴⁷ The New South became so closely related to racial lynching that author Mark Twain sarcastically suggested the renaming of the country as “the United States of Lynchdome.”⁴⁸

Lynching became the primary means of enforcing southern discriminatory practices. The brutal routine allowed white southerners to command high levels of intimidation through violence and terror. For blacks who intentionally or accidentally crossed the line of southern racial customs, mob violence replaced legal adjudication. Lynching was most prevalent in areas where large numbers of Negroes resided. Often those who did not have a white person to vouch for their character became scapegoats for alleged theft, murder, or disrespect. The most common charge against black lynching victims that of a crime against white women.⁴⁹

Often whites believed that all black men secretly lusted for something they could never have, a white woman. Assuming that black men were also docile and cowardly, white southerners presumed that black men hunted the most defenseless and preciously guarded component of southern culture, white women. Accusations that a

⁴⁴ Edward Ayers, *The Promise of the New South*, 153.

⁴⁵ W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *Lynching in the New South*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993,) 3.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 21.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*.

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, 1.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*,49.

black man had “intentions” toward a white woman could end in a violent, brutal, death.⁵⁰

The recollection of murder of an unnamed black man, found in the diary of a white South Carolinian, exemplifies the cruel and chilling reality of lynching. A Negro in South Carolina accused of assaulting a white woman became the source of amusement and rage for a white community. If known in advance, the infraction, date, time, and place of the lynching might even appear in the newspaper. The murder of the alleged criminal drew large crowds to see “Southern” justice in action. After a severe beating and subsequent hanging, the dead corpse was shot numerous times, then burnt to a crisp. Afterwards, spectators cut off parts of the charred dangling body for souvenirs that regularly decorated homes and local business establishments. The mutilated body remained on public view as a visual reminder of the cost of allegedly committing a crime against Southern racial mores.⁵¹

Segregation was an integral component of southern society enforced by violence. It created a hostile racial environment by 1898. From voluntary action by both races to white southerners determining that something had to be done to ensure separation and racial dominance, Jim Crow evolved following the Civil War. In addition, a new generation of African-Americans, some educated, some prosperous, some neither, began to question the validity of white superiority. This perceived threat of resistance to customary southern discrimination by whites initiated a hard-line, violent, enforcement of segregation. Mob violence became a reminder to those who

⁵⁰ Edward Ayers, The Promise of the New South, 153-155.

intentionally or allegedly violated southern racial mores. The failure of the local, state, or the national government to protect the rights of black citizens allowed the expansion of de facto separation into full-blown legal segregation by the end of nineteenth-century, producing two separate worlds, one black and one white. For many blacks, especially those who remained in the South, Jim Crow became a way of life that forced them to accept second-class status. The Army, they hoped, might give them a way out.

⁵¹ Ibid.

CHAPTER 3

NEGRO SOLDIERS 1866 TO 1898

Throughout U.S military history, African Americans have played an important and vital role. Although the racial prejudices of military policymakers often led them to oppose the participation of blacks in military conflicts, the need for manpower eventually overwhelmed their racial biases. That manpower requirement, however, did not prevent discrimination or unfair treatment, such as the predominant but not exclusive use of black troops in non-combat military roles. In spite of being used primarily to perform menial tasks, black Americans eagerly volunteered for military service, hoping their sacrifices might lead to political, if not social, equality.

Blacks participated in military service in North America as early as the Colonial era. After being kidnapped and enduring the middle passage, some African slaves were forced into military service to help protect against Native Americans, who sometimes violently resisted European encroachment. Colonists feared renegade Native American attacks, but the omnipresent threat of a large-scale slave rebellion also loomed in areas where the servile population outnumbered whites. An alliance between slaves and Native Americans could have presented a formidable military adversary for the British. To offset the possibility of such an alliance, colonists fomented hostility between Native Americans and slaves. In return for tracking capturing, and returning runaway slaves,

members of indigenous tribes were rewarded. Conversely, slaves who killed or captured renegade Native Americans were sometimes promised their freedom. Therefore, black militia members came to associate battlefield heroics with freedom. Colonists eventually became concerned about the idea of slaves associating killing with freedom. If a person held in bondage gained freedom for killing a Native American, might he be tempted to strike a blow for liberty by killing his master? The fear of slave retaliation actually resulted in British legislation that prohibited the use of Negroes as soldiers. However, the New England and middle colonies often ignored this law of legal exclusion and happily enrolled blacks during military campaigns such as King George's War (1740-1748), the French and Indian War (1754-1763), the American Revolution (1776-1783), and the War of 1812.¹

At the beginning of the American Civil War, Union policymakers did not foresee a military role for Negroes, free or enslaved. As the war continued, however, the need for able bodies overwhelmed racial biases. President Abraham Lincoln's prewar priority had been to preserve the Union at all costs. By not issuing a federal prohibition against slavery and by not using blacks in the military, Lincoln believed the Union could more readily be preserved. It was common belief among government officials that the Civil War would be a short conflict and upon its conclusion the rebels would be rapidly and easily readmitted to the Union. If slavery was abolished or if Negroes served in combat roles against the insurgents, Union observers predicted the war's extension into a long bloody affair. By 1863, Lincoln realized the war had

¹ Bernard C. Nalty, Strength for the Fight: A History of Black Americans in the Military, (New York:

already lasted far longer than Union officials had predicted and manpower shortages would now force the North to actively recruit blacks.²

Although an obvious need for manpower led to the admission of Negroes into the military, there would still be obstacles stemming from racial discrimination that would limit the participation of blacks in combat. Regardless of their role primarily as laborers, African-American participation in the Civil War led to the establishment of four all black Regular Army units in 1866. The Ninth and Tenth cavalries and the Twenty-fourth and Twenty-fifth infantries would have to wait until the Indian Campaigns of the late nineteenth century to prove their valor in combat.

By the end of the Civil War, the U.S. Army still faced manpower shortages that continued to encourage enlistment of black soldiers. During the Civil War, black enlistment had swelled to over 200,000. However, from 1866 to 1898 the entire U.S. Army never surpassed 25,000 men. In 1866, Congress sought to build the Army to 54,304 enlisted men and officers, though this goal would not be reached before the Spanish American War in 1898. After the passage of the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth amendments, Congress established six all-black units that would later be reduced to four regiments. By the end of 1866, those six regiments became the Ninth and Tenth cavalries and the Twenty-fourth and Twenty-fifth infantries.³ All of the new Regular Army black units would be sent to the Far West to replace overextended volunteer units.

The Free Press, 1986),12.

² William Freehling, The South vs. The South (Oxford: University Press,2001), 87

³ Art Burton, Black, Buckskin, and Blue: African American Scouts and Soldiers on the Western Frontier (Austin: Eakin Press, 1999), 135.

For soldiers designated for duty in the Far West, a logistical nightmare awaited them. Success while in these conditions was undoubtedly empowering. Eight years after the entry of black troops into frontier territory, General Philip H. Sheridan, Commander of the Missouri Division, commented on manpower shortages during the 1870s. Just in his theater of operations, the beleaguered officer reported, 99 tribes consisting of 192,000 Native American were roaming an area covering 1,000,000 square miles.⁴ General Sheridan contended that his orders to defend this enormous territory with 17,819 men appeared incongruous. By 1878, Sheridan had requested more men to bolster the Missouri Division, which expanded to seventy-three garrisons but covered all the territory from Canada to the Rio Grande River. With a depleted force of 13,468 men, the ratio of one man to every 120 miles obviously did not meet the needs of General Sheridan's Division. The Missouri Division did not face manpower shortages alone. The Department of Texas and the Dakotas only provided one man per seventy-five miles.

In addition to manpower shortages, combat on the western frontier differed significantly from traditional combat operations.⁵ The irregular tactics employed by Native Americans tribes contributed to a serious military reevaluation of tactics and strategies. During the Civil War, most combat maneuvers had consisted of large groups of soldiers fighting pitched battles using firing lines and artillery. Native American warriors often attacked in smaller groups using hit-and-run tactics.⁶ West Point

⁴ Arlen Fowler, The Black Infantry in the West 1869-1891, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999), 4-5.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid, 5-6.

graduates trained in combat strategies using large columns and head-on assaults could not defeat the swift, accurate tribesmen. Although Native Americans were among the first adversaries faced by American soldiers after the Civil War, troops garrisoned in the Far West regarded them as the best horsemen they had ever seen. Native Americans used small fast ponies that could be maneuvered easily by the slightest pressure applied by their knees. Indigenous warriors with the advantage of using both hands launched accurate volleys with rifles and other weapons. Tribesmen also knew the territory they attempted to defend, giving them a tactical advantage in long marches or providing opportunities to move from defensive to offensive positions quickly.⁷ Major George A. Forsyth convinced General Sheridan that soldiers in the Far West needed training in irregular warfare to match their elusive enemies.

With the promise of a meager sixteen dollars a month, travel, and adventure, freedmen eagerly relished the opportunity of Army enlistment. While there is little evidence to explain exactly why blacks desired to enlist, the available literature consistently suggests that blacks often associated military service with opportunity. Sergeant Samuel Harris reported, “a stint in the Army could possibly lead to the security of a government job after finishing his term.”⁸ Private Charles Creek admitted, “I got tired of looking at mules from sunrise until sunset, thought there must be a better living than this.”⁹ Even though black soldiers experienced discrimination and racism, the military still promised greater security and a stable income.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Gerald Astor, *The Right To Fight*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: DaCapo Press, 2001), 44.

⁹ Ibid.

Black troopers destined for the Far West faced many obstacles and difficulties. Along with outdated combat tactics and an elusive enemy familiar with the climate and terrain, they faced desolate outposts, poor nutrition, and substandard billeting. During the Indian Wars of the 1880s, black units occupied, defended, and served at isolated locations such as Utah, the Dakotas, Arizona, Wyoming, and Kansas. Initially, black units began their service in Texas and obtained orders moving them farther west. Prior to 1870, black troops had served in Texas primarily due to a belief that people of African ancestry were immune to the heat and to contemporary diseases such as Yellow Fever, Malaria, and Cholera.¹⁰ However, at the beginning 1870s, black units were ordered to desolate outposts specifically as replacements for worn-down white volunteers. Some officers and enlisted men complained of long excursions to isolated areas. The leaders of the Twenty-fourth Infantry believed that due to the race of their unit, they “were forced to serve at stations remote from civilizations, and would never obtain orders for a garrison close to a highly populated area.”¹¹ While there are no records of any official decree that suggested a military decision to isolate blacks, at least one officer asserted that race contributed to the location of black troopers.

Brigadier General Christopher C. Augur, Commander of the Department of the South in 1879, used race relations to block transfer of the Twenty-fourth to his department. While General Augur praised the Twenty-fourth for its long, excellent service on the Rio Grande, he believed that transfer to the Department of the South

¹⁰ William Dobak, and Thomas Phillips, The Black Regulars 1866-1898, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press,2001), 96-97.

¹¹ Ibid.

would cause public discord. According to the General, “because of the local residences’ racial prejudices, maybe a person might insult a group of black soldiers. If this happened there would certainly be trouble. For these troops are easily excited and thoroughly united on a question or insult to their race.”¹²

Desolate outposts for soldiers, black or white, often meant poor nutrition. Army-issued frontier chow consisted only of flour, bacon, lard, hard tack, and coffee. Even these basic items often reached posts only after much delay. Many of the soldiers stationed in the Far West felt compelled to spend their own money to buy rations from post traders. For the lucky ones, a nearby farm, if available, might sell dairy products. Due to the poor diet of soldiers in the Far West, some suffered from scurvy.¹³

Black soldiers on the western frontier also dealt with substandard living conditions. Many frontier army posts were constructed before the Civil War. Old dilapidated barracks housed those who risked their lives in service of the United States. In 1881, Captain R. P. Hughes, of the Third Infantry, described the living conditions at Fort Hale, Dakota Territory. According to Hughes, the living quarters were clean, however, the tumble down log huts serving as barracks stood in poor condition.¹⁴ He finished his report by begging for immediate improvement to the “wretched” accommodations.¹⁵

Black and white units remained segregated but shared garrisons in the western frontier during the Indian Wars. To keep violence between black and white soldiers to a

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid, 50.

¹⁵ Ibid.

minimum, some white officers chose to limit contact between soldiers of different races. Moreover, confrontations involving black and white soldiers never received official attention. There were several skirmishes between the races between 1869 and 1888. In 1888, at Jefferson Barracks, Missouri, for example, two prostitutes with two black soldiers refused to accommodate two white soldiers. The disgruntled white recruits then reported the women to the post provost for trespassing. After the women's removal from post, angry black recruits assaulted white soldiers with stones, clubs, and bottles.¹⁶ The violent attack concluded with two men being admitted to the post hospital.¹⁷ Surely racial clashes took place at other mixed posts, however, nothing specific was reported beyond the usual fistfights between soldiers.

Contact between white civilians and black soldiers on the western frontier was limited. While there is no evidence of military regulations prohibiting the garrisoning of black soldiers near white civilians, from 1866 to 1898 extraordinarily few black units served near populated areas.¹⁸ The Ninth and Tenth cavalries' operations forced them to remain highly mobile. Whether hot on the trail of Native Americans and Mexican desperados or escorting cargo, black cavalrymen's combat operations limited their daily contact with white locals. However, the Twenty-fourth and Twenty-fifth infantries received orders to duty stations close to rail lines and rivers for easy mobilization.¹⁹ Although these duty stations gave them access to highly populated areas, their contact with whites was nominal. Still, white civilians complained about having black infantry

¹⁶ William Dobak, and Thomas Phillips, The Black Regulars 1866-1898, 100.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Fowler, The Black Infantry in the West 1869-1891, 9-10.

units garrisoned so close. Nevertheless, government officials gave precedence to manpower shortages rather than to civilian complaints. Between 1866 and 1898, small numbers of black soldiers lived in close proximity to San Antonio and Brownsville, Texas, Kansas City, Salt Lake City, Minneapolis, and Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.²⁰ Yet these duty assignments often escaped the less mobile infantrymen. The majority of black infantrymen served in extremely remote locations. Desolate locations for infantry units ultimately meant garrison duty, which undeniably meant menial labor.²¹ Infantry units in the West returned to the Old Army's idea of using blacks as laborers rather than as combat soldiers. They repaired railroads, constructed new barracks, installed telegraph lines, and performed other essential non-combat tasks.²²

The few reported incidents involving black troops did not resemble the totality of the black experience in the West from 1866-1898. Fort Davis, Fort Concho, Suggs, Wyoming, and Fort Leavenworth, all reported racial clashes between black soldiers and white civilians, but almost all involved the same elements: women, gambling, heavy alcohol use, and weapons. These appeared consistent with the cause of clashes between all soldiers and civilians regardless of race. In spite of these few clashes, literature about black soldiers and race relations in the West from 1866-1898 suggests favorable attitudes towards their presence.

Racial attitudes toward black people on the western frontier differed from the treatment of black civilians in the North and South. In frontier areas, black people rarely

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ William Dobak, and Thomas Phillips, *The Black Regulars 1866-1898*, 102.

²¹ Astor, *the Right To Fight*, 47.

made up enough of the population to be considered any kind of threat. Clearly, acts of prejudice and racial discrimination existed in the Far West, but Native Americans, Mexicans, and Asians may have suffered more overt and violent discrimination due to the size of their communities.²³ Due to the limited number of patrons, businesses in the Far West could not afford to pass up customers regardless of race. The owners of local brothels, saloons, restaurants, and other businesses rarely excluded free-spending black soldiers.²⁴

Black soldiers' mission on the western frontier forced whites to tolerate and even articulate gratitude toward black soldiers because they protected white frontiersmen. The most urgent responsibilities for black troops in the west consisted of: "1. Controlling hostile forces, escorting wagon trains and stagecoaches, building forts, railroads and installing telegraph lines. 2. Guarding water sources, railroad construction workers, and property. 3. Protecting and escorting settlers, travelers, immigrant workers, farmers, miners, and cattle."²⁵ In conjunction, protecting settlers from renegade Native Americans, cattle wrestlers, corrupt politicians, train and stagecoach robbers, unscrupulous government contractors, and other malcontents in the West fell under the jurisdiction of federal Negro troops.

In the late summer of 1866, the Ninth Cavalry began accepting recruits for the new all black units created by Congress. General Philip H. Sheridan, Commander of

²² William Dobak, and Thomas Phillips, *The Black Regulars 1866-1898*, 115.

²³ William Katz, *The Black West*, (Seattle: Open Hand Publishing, 1987), 214.

²⁴ Fowler, *The Black Infantry in the West 1869-1891*,

²⁵ Art Burton, *Black, Buckskin, and Blue: African American Scouts and Soldiers on the Western Frontier*, 137.

the Department of the South, initially accepted already enlisted volunteers for the fledgling regiment. After volunteers received a discharge from their respective units, Sheridan incorporated them under his command. Scores of volunteers transferred to Regular Army units. At its inception, most enlisted members in the Ninth Cavalry came from New Orleans and surrounding areas.²⁶ Housed in old cotton presses, the Ninth Cavalry became acquainted with military life in the Regular Army.

After the makeshift camp suffered from a Cholera outbreak, the Ninth moved to Greenville and Carrollton, two suburbs of New Orleans.²⁷ The men drilled daily, learning the importance of precision, attention to detail, discipline, and organization. The majority of enlisted men were uneducated and came from deprived backgrounds. They struggled in their early phases of training to master military courtesy, drill, and ceremony.²⁸ Although the men made significant progress, by March of 1866 they could hardly be considered a militarily proficient regiment. Nevertheless, companies L and M received orders for duty in Brownsville, Texas, where they would remain for several years. The remaining ten companies went to an encampment outside of San Antonio for more training.²⁹

By June 14, 1866, the entire regiment received assignment to Fort Stockton and Fort Davis, Texas, near the Pecos River.³⁰ The operational function of the Ninth in Texas consisted of protecting mail and stagecoach routes between El Paso and San

²⁶ John Carroll, The Black Military Experience in the American West (New York: Liveright Press, 1971),66.

²⁷ Ibid, 67.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

Antonio, protecting civilians from Native American raiders, and upholding law and order in the disorderly frontier region. At this point, their superiors deemed the regiment well-equipped, well-trained, well-organized, and completely prepared for duty in the extreme frontier territory. Companies A, B, E, and K arrived at Fort Stockton in July of 1867. Upon arrival, Colonel Edward Hatch, commander of the Ninth, found the pre-Civil War post unlivable. Now, in addition to the primary mission of protecting travelers and new landowners, the Ninth was given the added responsibility of rebuilding the dilapidated fort.

The remainder of the regiment would fair no better at Fort Davis. Companies C, D, F, G, and H of the Ninth Cavalry arrived at the remote and sparsely-populated area in July of 1867. Due to the abandonment of Fort Davis during the Civil War, the Mesquero, Apaches, Kiowa, and Comanche warriors dominated the region. The Mesquero and Apaches came from the Guadalupe Mountains plundering cattle, stagecoaches, wagon trains, and travelers. From the North, the Kiowa and Comanche consistently caused so much trouble for settlers they warranted government intervention. As Fort Stockton, so Fort Davis lay in ruins. The reconstruction and reactivation of the post took almost three years before it could serve as a permanent base for scouting and patrol operations. While at Fort Davis, the Ninth Cavalry also mapped the surrounding area and guarded railroad surveyors whose employers worked to join East and West by rail.

³⁰ Carroll, The Black Military Experience in the American West, 111.

Soldiers at both Fort Davis and Fort Stockton engaged in combat with renegade Native Americans. Initially the soldiers at Fort Davis saw more action. The first scouting missions dispatched from Fort Davis could find only horse trails of their elusive adversaries. Troopers knew that Native Americans had been there but they could never catch them. However, in September of 1868, they finally clashed. In a scouting detachment led by Lieutenant Patrick Cusak, companies C, F, and K came upon a group of 200 Native Americans who had been raiding near the fort. In the skirmish that followed, between twenty and twenty-five Native Americans died and the Ninth Cavalry suffered two casualties as well. The black soldiers captured over 200 head of cattle and all of the warriors' provisions and equipment.³¹

The Ninth Cavalry's first victory in the face of hostile Native Americans led to a series of successful engagements against the enemy. For two years, cavalrymen of the Ninth augmented by twenty-six men from the Fourth Cavalry and twenty-six Tonkawa scouts, launched four successful expeditions against Apache and Comanche camps.³² In October 1869, a 150 member strike-team defeated 500 tribesmen, killing fifty and wounding countless others.³³ In another combat operation soon after, Captain Henry Carroll, who led troops in defense of a supply train, praised the combat skills of the Ninth. Captain Carroll reported that his men preformed "with bravery and excellent behavior."³⁴

³¹ William Dobak, and Thomas Phillips, The Black Regulars 1866-1898, 117.

³² Charles Kenner, Buffalo Soldiers and Officers of the Ninth 1867-1898: Black & White Together (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press 1992),

³³ William Dobak, and Thomas Phillips, The Black Regulars 1866-1898, 120.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

A combined detachment from Fort Davis and Fort Stockton again proved Negro soldiers' valor in combat. In a fifty-three day expedition, the Ninth Cavalry searched the Guadalupe Mountains for hostiles. Their forced marches brought them to several Mescalero camps. Although the enemy retreated further into the mountains, the Ninth captured forty horses and destroyed large quantities of Mescalero provisions.³⁵ Mission commander, Major Albert Morrow, explained how his forces "marched until their boots had to be replaced with makeshift moccasins."³⁶ Morrow contended that even with the adverse conditions of the long expedition where troops endured small rations and a very limited water supply, black cavalymen remained well disciplined and exhibited good morale.

After 1870, the Ninth Cavalry was relegated to escort and patrol duty and therefore did not have the opportunity to repeat their previous successes in combat. However, the *San Antonio Herald* printed rave reviews of their early campaigns in Texas. The *Herald* wrote of the soldiers' bravery, endurance, and courage facing the enemy. The article concluded: "the colored soldiers compare favorably to any soldiers in the world."³⁷ After nine years in Texas, the Ninth Cavalry received orders for transfer to New Mexico.

During the winter of 1875 and spring of 1876, the Ninth Cavalry headquarters moved to New Mexico.³⁸ While the mission of the Ninth included tasks similar to those in Texas, the district of New Mexico proved to be much more challenging. During the

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ William Dobak, and Thomas Phillips, The Black Regulars 1866-1898, 123.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Billington, Buffalo New Mexico's Soldiers, 1866- 1900,

mid-1880s cattleman, contractors, lumbermen, and settlers desiring more Apache territory pressured government officials to remove the Apache entirely from the region.³⁹ By 1875, Congress had established a reservation in San Carlos, Arizona, for the displaced Native Americans. The site established in San Carlos was barren, desolate, and despised by its new inhabitants. Consequently, tribesmen often fled the wasteland reservation and attacked frontier settlements. Led by war chiefs Victorio, Nana, Skinya, and Geronimo, Native American warriors sought to regain their ancestral lands.⁴⁰ Although the skilled and elusive Native American horsemen periodically escaped, Ninth Cavalry companies stationed at Fort Bayard, Fort McRae, Fort Stanton, Fort Wingate, Fort Union, Fort Seldon, and Fort Garland earned several awards and citations for courage under fire against the Apaches.⁴¹

After fourteen years of continuous service in New Mexico and Texas, in 1881 the Ninth received orders to intervene between Native Americans and settlers in Oklahoma. This time their assignment consisted of protecting Native American lands being encroached upon by white settlers. The reputation of the Ninth for its military successes preceded them to their reassigned duty post of Fort Still, Fort Supply, and Fort Reno. With little or virtually no use of force, the Ninth successfully evicted the white settlers known as “Boomers.”

Following their success in Oklahoma, the Ninth Cavalry received orders that would bring them to the Utah territory.⁴² Companies B and E traveled 650 miles by

³⁹ Charles Kenner, Buffalo Soldiers and Officers of the Ninth 1867-1898: Black & White Together, 89.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ William Dobak, and Thomas Phillips, The Black Regulars 1866-1898.

⁴² Monroe Billington, New Mexico's Buffalo Soldiers, 1866- 1900, 79-80.

train and horseback to an area in eastern Utah where the Duchesne and Urnita rivers meet. This sector of the Utah territory had been designated for the erection of a new post. In a non-combat related mission, troops B and E were called upon to assist black infantry units in the construction of a new garrison.⁴³ Following the construction of the fort, the Ninth spent time in Utah and Nebraska, returning to their role as guardians for railroad construction crews and settlers. Companies B and E remained in this role until they were recalled to rejoin their regiment in the Dakota Territory in 1891.⁴⁴

The Ninth Cavalry, along with over half the army, moved to the Dakota Territory to quell a threat of Sioux rebellion in 1891.⁴⁵ During the “Ghost Dance Campaign,” Sioux and other Plains Indians adopted a belief that the ghosts of their ancestors would return and help them recapture the land they once ruled.⁴⁶ As their vision of Native American dominance spread, white settlers in the Dakotas feared for their lives. In its last campaign in the West, the Ninth Cavalry, along with a large concentration of Regular Army forces, established encampments near Sioux Reservations. This show of force caused the outnumbered and outgunned indigenous tribes of the Dakotas to flee their reservations in fear of a massacre.

Black cavalymen served in many different capacities during their twenty-nine years on the western frontier. Black troopers fought Native Americans using new and unconventional warfare. The aggressive nature of chasing down renegade indigenous warriors and engaging them in combat transformed the soldiers of the Ninth from

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Kenner, Buffalo Soldiers and Officers of the Ninth 1867- 1898: Black & White Together. 147-49.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

menial laborers to real warriors. Hardened by combat with Native Americans, these men went wherever they were sent, including the American South, filled with confidence. There is no evidence that they anticipated nor feared armed or physical confrontations with white civilians who might seek to take away the dignity and pride they had earned while serving in the United States military.

Their roles as authority figures and protectors of whites contributed to the Ninth Cavalry's incomprehension and ultimately resistance to discrimination in the South. Black cavalymen in the West were often called upon to assist local authorities. This was a new role for African-Americans but not one they felt awkward about. When approached by local authorities in the South, it is reasonable to believe that black cavalymen considered local authorities subservient to the federal authority extended to them while serving in the Far West. Moreover, due to twenty-nine years of service in the West, some who enlisted in the Ninth did so as men who had never been slaves or who came from regions that displayed even slightly more progressive attitudes towards blacks. It is realistic to assume that the Ninth Cavalry's experiences in the West contributed to some expressions of resistance to Jim Crow at the turn-of-the-century.

Along with the Ninth Cavalry, the Tenth Cavalry, also designated for black recruits, came into existence in the fall of 1866.⁴⁷ However, recruitment for the Tenth differed from the rapid organization of the Ninth. The areas surrounding Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, the post designated as headquarters for the Tenth Cavalry, did not have a large Negro community. To find recruits, Colonel Benjamin H. Grierson,

⁴⁷ Carroll, *The Black Military Experience in the American West*, 77.

newly appointed commander of the Tenth, traveled to urban areas further east to find Negro recruits.⁴⁸ It took from February until July of 1867 to fill eight companies of the Tenth Cavalry. By October 1867, four additional companies formed bringing the regiment to its full strength of twelve companies.⁴⁹

In contrast to the lackluster accommodations in Texas and the Far West, Fort Leavenworth had remained in service during the Civil War.⁵⁰ Green Negro recruits arrived at a serviceable duty station. However, discrimination relegated black troopers to less than appropriate living quarters. General William Hoffman, Commanding General at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, notoriously disdainful of black troopers, garrisoned the Tenth on low ground and a swampy section of the post.⁵¹ Due to the wet and humid conditions of their encampment, several members of the Tenth became ill with Pneumonia and Cholera. Even after Grierson's numerous complaints of the poor conditions, Hoffman refused to move the black troops or construct walkways to keep the men's feet dry.⁵²

Hoffman's discriminatory practices were not limited to poor living conditions. Although the troops of the Tenth were only in their initial transition from civilian to military life, the commanding general constantly complained about their untidy quarters, tardiness, poor training, and other lapses of military bearing. General Hoffman insisted also that black soldiers remain, at all times, a minimum of ten to

⁴⁸ William Leckie, The Buffalo Soldiers: A Narrative of the Negro Cavalry in the West, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2003), 12.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Ibid.*

fifteen yards away from white soldiers. Under his orders, Negro soldiers could not even march in view of white units. If in sight of a white unit, black troops had to remain at the position of parade rest.⁵³ The discriminatory treatment of the Tenth did not please Colonel Grierson. To promote fair racial practices among his unit, the commander did not allow his officers to refer to the Tenth as a “colored regiment.” According to Grierson, the regiment was simply the Tenth Regiment of Cavalry United States. Although he complained about the Tenth’s treatment to department headquarters, there are no known responses to his complaints.⁵⁴

By May of 1867, the Tenth Cavalry received reassignment to Fort Gibson, Indian Territory.⁵⁵ As companies organized, they were parceled out to Fort Hays, Fort Harker, and other temporary encampments along the Smoky River. Their mission would be to protect the Kansas Pacific Railroad, which had been under constant attack by local renegade tribesmen.⁵⁶ The transfer from Fort Leavenworth marked over twenty years of frontier defense for the Tenth Cavalry.

Combat for the Tenth began in the summer of 1867. Due to the Cholera epidemic at Fort Leavenworth, the depleted forces of the Tenth Cavalry were routed in their first engagement. On August 1, 1867, a band of Cheyenne warriors killed seven civilians in a raid of a settlement thirteen miles northeast of Fort Hayes. When reports of the attack reached Fort Hayes, two officers and thirty-four members of Troop F of the Tenth tracked the hostiles. While on the banks of the Saline River, around 300

⁵³ Ibid

⁵⁴ Leckie, The Buffalo Soldiers: A Narrative of the Negro Cavalry in the West, 154.

⁵⁵ Carroll, The Black Military Experience in the American West, 177.

⁵⁶ William Leckie, The Buffalo Soldiers: A Narrative of the Negro Cavalry in the West, 21.

Cheyenne opened fire on the small detachment of men. After six hours of continuous combat, short on ammunition, the soldiers fought their way through the attackers who had encircled them.

The initially unsuccessful engagement of the Tenth did not become the pattern for the regiment. After several more engagements with the Cheyenne, headquarters of the seasoned troopers moved to Fort Riley and then Fort Gibson, Indian Territory.⁵⁷ Armed with orders to defend the railroad, the Tenth would not fail. During the winter campaign of 1868-1869, the Tenth successfully protected the railroad and settlers from the Arapahos, Comanche, and Cheyenne. By January of 1869, the Tenth Cavalry destroyed one of the most powerful bands of the Cheyenne. Due to their ferocious fighting style and their thick curled hair, the name “Buffalo Soldiers” was bestowed upon them by their adversaries. Soon thereafter, the unit adopted the name and even added the emblem of a buffalo to the unit crest worn on their uniforms.⁵⁸

As a result of their new-found success, the entire Tenth was reassigned to the Indian Territory. The early part of 1869 saw the army’s policy of defending settlers from Native Americans shift to pacification of the indigenous tribes of the West. While there were still bands of renegades who resisted American expansion, some tribes simply surrendered. Reservations for Native American communities had been established, but due to fear of bad behavior by tribesmen, they needed escorts to their own living areas and protection from encroaching settlers.⁵⁹ For six years, black

⁵⁷ Ibid, 28.

⁵⁸ Carroll, *The Black Military Experience in the American West*, 271.

⁵⁹ William Leckie, *The Buffalo Soldiers: A Narrative of the Negro Cavalry in the West*, 245-247.

cavalrymen escorted tribesmen from fledgling settlements to reservations. During this time, the Tenth became an army of occupation in addition to regaining escort duty. The black troopers of the Tenth also constructed new headquarters for the regiment at Fort Sill. Charged with keeping tribesmen on reservations and keeping whites out, the Tenth Cavalry served at several posts in the Indian Territory.⁶⁰

As the Indian Territory became pacified and Native Americans began to accept reservation life, military officials moved the headquarters and changed the mission of the Tenth Cavalry. During the spring of 1875, headquarters of the Tenth once again was transferred to Fort Concho located in west Texas.⁶¹ While cavalrymen continued to “control Indian movements,”⁶² defending against Mexican revolutionaries and outlaws was added to the duties of the Tenth. The presence of the U.S. Army helped reduce the level of crime. The greatest achievement of the Tenth at Fort Concho, however, was scouting uncharted territory. While in west Texas, cavalrymen scouted over 34,420 miles of unexplored terrain that allowed preparation for maps containing water sources, mountain ranges, and areas prime for settlement.⁶³

The Tenth Cavalry was on the move again by 1885. This time their mission took them to Arizona. For the first time in their eighteen-year history, all twelve companies of the Tenth Cavalry traveled together from Camp Rice to Bowie Station, Arizona.⁶⁴ Upon arrival at Bowie, the regiment began deployment to different forts within the Department of Arizona. Troops D, E, and K. saw the most action of the

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Carroll, The Black Military Experience in the American West, 84.

⁶² William Dobak, and Thomas Phillips, The Black Regulars 1866-1898, 189.

⁶³ Ibid.

regiment during their participation in the Geronimo campaign. Spending most of their time with Apache scouts searching for the famous warrior Geronimo, various companies of the Tenth constantly remained on a hard chase enduring the harshest of conditions.⁶⁵ In 1891, the Tenth was transferred and endured the frigid conditions of the Dakota Territory. As part of the largest concentration of U.S. soldiers in the West during late the nineteenth century, the Tenth transferred to the Dakotas to participate in the “Ghost Dance Campaign.”⁶⁶ Companies of the Tenth received assignment to Fort Assiniboine, Montana, Fort Key, Montana, and Fort Buford, North Dakota. Although the presence of such a large number of black soldiers quickly ended all ideas of a large-scale Sioux rebellion, the Tenth continued to serve with distinction while stationed at the most desolate and isolated of military installations.

As with the Ninth Cavalry, the mission and experiences of the Tenth Cavalry in the Far West likely contributed to soldiers' later confusion about the Jim Crow South at the turn-of-the-century. Members of the Tenth Cavalry performed many different tasks in over twenty years of service in frontier country. Of all black cavalry units in the West, the Tenth Cavalry participated in the most successful combat operations. Filled with courage forged in battle, Tenth cavalrymen would be unlikely to accept second-class treatment or in the Deep South while preparing for deployment to Cuba in 1898.

Unlike the Ninth, whose recruits mostly came from the South, the majority of the Tenth Cavalry's recruitment took place in urban areas that likely had more

⁶⁴ Leckie, *The Buffalo Soldiers: A Narrative of the Negro Cavalry in the West*, 239.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 252.

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, 253-253.

progressive racial attitudes towards blacks. Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, the post designated for the initial headquarters for the Tenth Cavalry, did not have a large black population. To fill the regiment, blacks were recruited from places like St. Louis, New York, Baltimore, Detroit, and other urban centers above the Mason-Dixon line. After service in the West, where contact with whites remained limited, the Jim Crow customs of the South provided racial scenarios that many men of the Tenth may have only heard of. Armed and battle tested, the Tenth's black cavalrymen were unlikely to submit to such discrimination passively.

The Twenty-fourth and Twenty-fifth infantries served in the West at the same time as black cavalry units. Originally the Thirty-eighth, Thirty-ninth, Fortieth, and Forty-first infantries were established as a part of the government's initiative to recruit blacks for military service.⁶⁷ Due to low enlistments, however, the regiment reorganized into two units, the Twenty-fourth and Twenty-fifth infantries. The new all-black infantry regiments' recruits came primarily from Louisiana and North Carolina and soon received orders taking them to Texas.⁶⁸ The Twenty-fifth Infantry helped to maintain order in cities where Reconstruction era violence warranted government troops.⁶⁹ Three years later, the Twenty-fifth Infantry would join fellow black infantryman in Texas.

At Fort Stockton and Fort Davis, Texas, the role of black infantryman would be clearly defined. While black cavalrymen spent large amounts of time in the field,

⁶⁷ Gerald Astor The Right To Fight, 43.

⁶⁸ John Nankivell, The Buffalo Soldier Regiment: History of the Twenty- Fifth United States Infantry, 1869-1926, (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press,2001), X.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

infantry regiments remained in garrison. Therefore, cavalrymen did not participate in daily menial tasks. Fatigue duty and general post details fell to the infantry.⁷⁰ Cooking, cleaning, and other chores on the western frontier became the responsibility of the all-black Twenty-fourth and Twenty-fifth regiments. Infantrymen often relished the opportunity for field duty. Occasionally infantry units provided support for cavalry units that had more opportunities to engage the enemy due to their mobility.⁷¹ As seen with black cavalry units, black infantry units served at outposts in New Mexico, Arizona, the Indian Territory, the Dakota Territory, and Montana.⁷²

Because the Twenty-fourth and Twenty-fifth infantries remained in garrison, there were more opportunities for them in the Far West to have contact with local whites. While the two black units reported a few instances of discrimination, for the infantry units there were relatively few and these did not apparently receive any national attention. Similar to racial clashes between black cavalrymen and white civilians, alcohol, women, gambling, and name calling usually ignited tensions between black infantryman and local civilians.

By the time they left Montana in 1898, the role of black infantrymen had totally changed. By the 1890s, black infantrymen in the West assumed the responsibility of assisting local authorities in growing labor struggles in the region.⁷³ Black soldiers played a crucial role in suppressing labor strikes. Quite often, during the mining strikes of the 1880s, martial law was declared and the Twenty-fourth and Twenty-fifth

⁷⁰ Fowler, The Black Infantry in the West 1869-189, 179.

⁷¹ Astor, The Right To Fight, 47.

⁷² William Katz, The Black West, 216-218.

infantries served as peacemakers.⁷⁴ Infantrymen protected company property, strikebreakers, and their families. Townspeople who favored order to lawlessness welcomed black infantryman. Subsequently, those who chose to participate in public discord did not appreciate being under the authority of anybody, especially Negroes wearing the uniform of the United States.

Although black infantrymen served primarily as laborers, their final deployment in Far West placed them in a position of authority over whites. It is reasonable to deduce that role promoted at least some ideas of equality and led them to ignore, shun, or discount traditional southern racial mores. These infantry units were the first mobilized for the Spanish American War. Key West, Florida, would be the initial mobilization station for the Twenty-fourth and Twenty-fifth regiments. Infantryman twice clashed with local authorities claiming unjust arrests and fines while in Key West. Black infantrymen, who were arrested for alleged crimes, were freed by their comrades from local jails. This new-found confidence and their military experiences influenced the attitudes of black soldiers returning from duty in the West and alarmed white Southerners who were reluctant to have large numbers of socially conscious armed black men in their presence.

⁷³ Nankivell, The Buffalo Soldier Regiment: History of the Twenty Fifth United States Infantry, 1869-1926, xiii.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

CHAPTER 4

THE REGULARS

African-American soldiers who mobilized in the South in preparation for deployment to Cuba resisted southern racial customs and Jim Crow. After years of isolation on the western frontier, black soldiers were briefly garrisoned in the South during the initial phases of full legal segregation. For the soldiers of the Ninth and Tenth cavalries and the Twenty-fourth and Twenty-fifth infantries, the southern racial climate of 1898 contrasted drastically with their experiences in the Far West. Signs denoting racial separation as well as rigid southern racial customs became a source of conflict for combat-hardened black soldiers. Consequently, many white southerners, thoroughly entrenched in their own way of life, could not have been prepared for confident, assertive, armed black men who aggressively disapproved of customary second-class treatment of Negroes.

African-Americans reacted to the outbreak of the Spanish American War of 1898 with ambiguity. Blacks across the United States knew fully of enslavement, disenfranchisement, peonage, and violence faced by Negroes globally. Although the Cubans' struggle against Spanish cruelty elicited sympathy from some African-Americans, a number of black Americans concluded that their own second-class citizenship in the United States superseded Cuba's liberation from Spain. The possibility of African-American military participation gave them reason to further

analyze the conflict between black Cubans ninety miles from the United States and the Spanish Empire.

Black newspapers expressed strong views concerning African-American participation in the conflict. Some editors held to the belief that black participation in an armed conflict with Spain would gain blacks the respect of whites and thereby enhance their status in the United States. Some editors hoped that white-American contact with black Cuban rebels might even diminish racial prejudice in the United States. Historian Willard B. Gatewood called this contact a “healthy influence for whites.”¹

Throughout the pro-war publications of the black media, messages of loyalty and patriotism were used to influence blacks to rally under one flag. In the article, “Sink All Differences Until the War is Over,” one editor suggested that although the United States was racially divided, this would not be the right time to settle that “well-known score.”² According to this editorial in the *Indianapolis Freedman*, “the situation regarding the races is well known and needs no rehearsing at this time.”³ Instead of demonstrating division, the writer contended that the conflict should join the two races for one common goal. He believed that people who promoted racial prejudice should be held responsible, not the government, and warned African-Americans that it was unpatriotic and impolitic to “strike back” during a national crisis.⁴

¹Willard B. Gatewood, *Black Americans and the White Man's Burden, 1898-1902*, (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1975) 17.

² *Indianapolis Freedman*, March 19, 1898.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

While the *Indianapolis Freedman's* editorial preached unity among all Americans, the editor of the *Iowa State Bystander* specifically considered what African-Americans might gain from participating in the war. In "Loyalty Will Be Rewarded," the writer contended that even though Negroes in the United States still faced racial injustice, participation in the war would improve their status. The editorial suggested that it would be unrealistic for African-Americans to concede that they were not true Americans and he further explained that, "this is our country by adaptation and importation."⁵ Moreover, African-Americans had labored, fought, and died for the United States and therefore they had a duty to defend its policies. He challenged "big able bodied colored men," who refused to enlist feeling that they "have no country to fight for," to volunteer regardless of how they felt, claiming that their loyalty would not go unrewarded.⁶

In an article that appeared in the *Washington Bee* on May 7, 1898, a writer asserted that if African-Americans proved willing and active participants in the war, they might have an effect on racial discrimination and the plight of African-Americans. In a letter published in the same paper titled, "Negroes Should Be Patriotic Despite Mistreatment," the writer, attorney Thomas L. Jones, insisted that African-Americans should display the same patriotism they always had despite racial and social injustices.⁷ Jones recognized that while the U.S. government did not use federal troops to enforce laws protecting blacks, the United States still was the home of African-Americans and,

⁵*Iowa State Bystander*

⁶Ibid.

⁷*Washington Bee*, May 7, 1898.

as during the Civil War, blacks should support the nation as citizens thereof. Finally, Jones claimed that African-American participation was essential for racial growth and influence both abroad and within the United States. By participating in the war with Spain, “wrongs perpetuated upon us will be avenged, and our national honor will be vindicated.”⁸ Jones expressed hope that African-American participation would be applauded by the world, “to accord you honor and distinction, which shall be due to all of her loyal sons.”⁹

In conjunction with various black newspapers, Booker T. Washington, often considered one of the most influential black Americans at the turn of the century, was also a proponent of African-American participation. Washington initially sang patriotic chants and championed black participation in the war. In a letter to the Secretary of the Navy, John Davis Long, Washington offered to recruit African-Americans for military service.¹⁰ He wrote: “the Negro is in a position to render services to our country that no other race can.”¹¹ Due to the sub-tropical climate of Cuba and the threat of tropical maladies, Washington continued, “Blacks were accustomed to hot climates and diseases therefore, they could offer great assistance in combat.”¹² To assist the War Department, Washington claimed he could raise 10,000 loyal, brave, strong black men who craved the opportunity to show their loyalty to the United States. He underscored African-

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Booker T. Washington Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington DC.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

American participation as a means to demonstrate black gratitude for the sacrifices made by others to secure the freedoms and rights of the Negro in America.¹³

In a second letter to the War Department, Washington complained that all of the volunteer units being mustered only accepted white recruits. He pointed out that the governors of many states, with the exception of Alabama, which had 172 black volunteers, declined to accept black volunteers in the first call to arms by President William McKinley.¹⁴

Some black Americans believed military service could immediately improve their conditions in the United States. Military service offered a steady income and the possibility of government employment after a stint in the military. Moreover, some blacks believed it possible that after serving in the military, prospective employers might view a good service record as a positive reference for black men. After all, military service required certain levels of self-discipline and obedience. These attributes had the potential to curtail negative conceptions about blacks as workers. At the end of the nineteenth century, especially in the South, many whites perceived blacks as ignorant, untrustworthy, lazy, and rebellious. Blacks who supported African-America military participation in the Spanish American War perceived participation as an opportunity to prove themselves worthy of the rights and respect they believed they were due by 1898.

Some African-American editors, however, opposed black involvement in the conflict. Antiwar proponents quickly asked why blacks should devote their energies to

¹³ Ibid.

oppressed people abroad when they themselves were still oppressed. Some even complained about northern blacks who wished to dedicate themselves to liberating the Cubans but who were not taking any appropriate actions to help African-Americans facing Jim Crow policies or being lynched in the South. In a newspaper article, “Negro’s Main Enemy is Southern Lynchers,” the author wrote that the African-American’s true adversary at the turn of the century was not the Spaniard but “those fellows who shoot and burn and hang and otherwise kill our fellows in the South.”¹⁵ An editorial that appeared in the *Salt Lake City Broad Ax* asserted that African-Americans must first “pick the mote from thine own eye, then thou canst see clearly to pluck the beam from thy brothers eye.”¹⁶

The editors of the *Iowa State Bystander* also believed that African-Americans must have protection at home before going abroad to assist others. In an editorial entitled “White Man’s Cruelty Equals Spain,” the Iowa newspaper expressed the belief that there should be a war, but just not in Cuba. The editorial denounced the war with Spain until such time as blacks in the United States were protected. The author emphasized the unjust, vigilante mob-style murdered of over 500 blacks since 1865. He highlighted limited opportunities for black Americans and their denial of civil liberties. He could not believe that the U.S. government had the nerve to speak of Spanish cruelty.¹⁷

¹⁴ Booker T. Washington Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington DC.

¹⁵ *Salt Lake City Broad Ax*, April, 1898.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Iowa State Bystander*, 1898.

In accord with black newspapers that did not support African-American participation, several private citizens and even black soldiers wrote letters to black newspapers disapproving of black participation in the war with Spain. On June 4, 1898, three days before the first African-American soldiers left for Cuba,¹⁸ the *Kansas State Ledger* printed an article entitled, “Negroes Should Not Serve Until Civil Rights Are Protected.” Robert P. Jackson, a businessman from Chicago, noted significantly that since President William McKinley issued the first call to arms, those African-Americans who proved willing to fight did not live in the South. He asserted that blacks from the South have not and should not enlist until their rights and privileges are recognized and upheld. In a letter to the paper, he pointed out that scores of blacks have been lynched since McKinley took his oath as President. He closed by accusing the War Department of not protecting black soldiers who were forced to ride in Jim Crow trains en route to Tampa.¹⁹

A black chaplain from the Ninth Cavalry wrote a letter to the *Cleveland Gazette* expressing his views on African-American participation in the war. In an article entitled “Is America Any Better Than Spain,” George Prioleu, a member of the Ninth Cavalry stationed in Tampa, expressed discontent with the treatment of blacks in the United States generally, and especially in the South. In his letter, Prioleu wrote that African-American soldiers, preparing to offer their lives for their country, could not even purchase goods over the same counter as whites.²⁰ He contended that Americans

¹⁸ Regimental Returns RG 94, Tenth Cavalry, National Archives, Washington, D C.

¹⁹ *Kansas State Ledger*, May 8, 1898.

²⁰ *Cleveland Gazette*, May, 13, 1898.

were talking about “fighting to free the poor Cubans,” while the Negro in the United States remains a slave.²¹ The chaplain of the Ninth Cavalry compared the brutality of the Spanish towards the Cubans to the treatment of black Americans by white southerners.

For African-Americans who did not support participation in the Spanish American War, their second-class status in the United States was a glaring reminder of how far they had not come in the thirty-three years following the Civil War. While the Radical Republicans of the 1860s sought to change the culture of the South and the treatment of black Americans, the reestablishment of home rule and lack of support by the federal government contributed to the second-class status of blacks in the United States. By 1898 in both the North and South, discriminatory practices had become the norm. Although some regions of the country practiced discrimination more overtly than others, the Supreme Court decision of Plessy v. Ferguson (1896) legitimized the call for legal segregation. Therefore, the ability to treat blacks as second-class citizens was sanctioned by the federal government. In instances of discrimination, disenfranchisement, and vigilante mob violence against blacks, the federal government did not intervene. African-Americans who did not support the war with Spain felt justified in not supporting a government that did not defend them. Nonetheless African-Americans filled recruiting stations in a second call to arms after being omitted from the first call to arms by President William McKinley.²²

²¹ Ibid

²² Willard B. Gatewood, Black Americans and the White Man's Burden, 1898-1902, 38-40.

In 1898, the Ninth and Tenth cavalries and the Twenty-fifth and Twenty-fifth infantries served as the only black regular army units.²³ One year after the conclusion of the Civil War, Congress granted African-Americans the right to serve in the military during peacetime.²⁴ The new all-black component of the U.S. Army consisted of the Ninth and Tenth cavalries and the Thirty-eighth, Thirty-ninth, Fortieth, and Forty-first infantries. In 1869, the Department of the Army combined the infantry regiments into the Twenty-fifth and Twenty-fifth infantries, thereby reducing black Regular Army units from six to four.²⁵ These units served as the only Regular Army black regiments until 1944.

Most of the soldiers mobilized for the Spanish American War came from volunteer units who did not muster into federal service until the summer of 1898, hence black army regulars were among the first regiments activated for the war.²⁶ Before the official declaration of war, the Buffalo Soldiers were dispatched to staging points located in the Jim Crow South. Previously garrisoned in the far West, the Ninth and Tenth cavalries and the Twenty-fourth and Twenty-fifth infantries had little or no contact with whites. A large number of these soldiers did not come from the South and had not experienced the Jim Crow policies that reigned supreme in the former Confederacy.²⁷ As these black soldiers loaded troop transports in Utah and Montana,

²³ Theophilus Steward, The Colored Regulars in the United States Army, With a Sketch of the History of the Colored American, and an Account of his services in the Wars of the Country, From the period of the Revolutionary War to 1899, (New York: Arno Press) , 20

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Gatewood, Black Americans and the White Man's Burden, 1898-1902) 91-93

²⁷ John Bigelow Jr, Reminiscences of the Santiago Campaign, (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1899), 36-37.

they soon would become well aware of the attitudes toward African-Americans below the Mason-Dixon Line.

En route to staging points located in Florida and Georgia, African-American soldiers were initially well received. Anti-war proponents even took note of the patriotic spirit exhibited by civilians in transit to Florida and Georgia. *The Kansas American Citizen* noted, “the sight of black soldiers going to die for their country ignited sparks of patriotism that have lain dormant for years.”²⁸ The black chaplain of the Ninth Cavalry, George Prioleu, commented in the *Cleveland Gazette* about the reception of African-American troops: “All the way from northwest Nebraska this regiment was greeted with cheers and hurrahs. At places where we stopped, the people assembled by the thousands. While the band of the Ninth would play some national air, the people would raise their hats men, women, and children would resound with hearty cheers. The white hand shaking the black hand.”²⁹ However, as the trains moved further south the mood and the attitudes towards blacks in service dramatically changed.

Upon crossing into the South, white crowds along rail lines severely diminished in number and black civilians did not even approach the trains. The glee and patriotic fervor changed to looks of astonishment and disbelief. Black soldiers noticed waiting rooms, restrooms, and passenger cars labeled with the words “colored” or “white only.” Non-commissioned officer Frank Pullen of the Tenth Cavalry wrote, “we were ‘niggers’ as they [whites] called us with contempt.”³⁰ Customary southern bigotry toward

²⁸ *Kansas City American Citizen*, April 22, 1898.

²⁹ *Cleveland Gazette*, May 21, 1898.

³⁰ Willard B. Gatewood, *Black Americans and the White Man's Burden, 1898-1902*, 45.

Negroes and racial discrimination become more obvious, prevalent, and confrontational once black regiments reached their destinations of Florida and Georgia.

When examining racially repressive states in the South, Florida should not be ignored. “Extreme residential segregation, racial hostility, incidents of severe police brutality, and lack of economic opportunity all contribute to a racial climate that is constantly on the rise in Florida.”³¹ In 1861, nearly half the population of Florida had been slaves. After passage of the Reconstruction amendments in 1866, more than a few Florida plantation owners still had to be forced by federal troops to release their former slaves. By the turn of the century, the racial climate in Florida was so appalling that the penalty for killing a Negro was a mere \$250.00 fine and one minute in jail. Between 1889 and 1918, a reported 178 blacks were lynched. Tampa, Florida, located in the central region of the state, mirrored the state pattern. At the turn of the century, Tampa was known as part of the New South, loaded with economic potential. A thriving Cuban cigar industry supported by a tropical climate and seemingly endless opportunities made Tampa one of the South’s most unique and fastest growing cities. Tampa’s black population rapidly multiplied over the last decade of the nineteenth century. This large increase in the Negro population became a source of white anxiety and trepidation that led to more stringent racial restrictions.³² The entry of a sizeable force of armed blacks who would resist customary southern racial traditions was a recipe for disaster.

³¹ Walter Howard, “Family, Religion, and Education: A profile of African American Life in Florida 1900-1930,” *The Journal of Negro History* 79 (Winter 1994): 3-4.

³² *Ibid.*

Upon arrival in Tampa, Sergeant James Alexander of the Tenth Cavalry described Tampa and its surrounding areas as a “hot-bed of rebels.”³³ Nevertheless, during the first weeks of May 1898, over 4,000-armed black soldiers arrived.³⁴ Military officials chose Tampa as a staging point for troops en route to Cuba in order to accustom the regiments to a climate similar to that thought to exist in the Caribbean theater. The staging point in Tampa did not have billeting for soldiers, so all regiments in Tampa needed to create temporary campsites, which caused logistical nightmares. In addition to “logistical snarls at every turn,”³⁵ the War Department ordered each regiment to add 750 green recruits. Initially, the units in Tampa were supposed to establish temporary campsites in the city, however suitable camp space was limited. As a result, only the Ninth Cavalry and Twenty-fourth and Twenty-fifth infantries remained in Tampa. The Tenth Cavalry, along with several white units, traveled to nearby Lakeland, Florida, to strike camp. The presence of black soldiers immediately led to controversy and complaints in Tampa and Lakeland.³⁶

For white southerners, black soldiers were an anomaly. Since the Civil War, black soldiers had not been stationed in the South. The attitudes of black soldiers who served in the Far West did not match the subservience of black civilians who had never left the South. Many black southerners may have internalized their second-class status because they knew no other way of life. As a part of traditional Southern custom, blacks had to exhibit total submissiveness to whites. If Negroes intentionally or

³³ *Illinois Record*, June 1, 1898.

³⁴ Willard Gatewood, “Negro Troops in Florida, 1898”, *Florida Historical Quarterly*, 49, (1970), 2.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

accidentally crossed the line of southern racial mores, they invariably faced violence and sometimes deadly consequences. Therefore many Southern blacks, living under a constant threat of death, displayed attitudes of docility and fear. Black soldiers, however, had participated in combat operations on the frontier. Chasing down renegade Native Americans, escorting stagecoaches, evicting whites who encroached on Native American lands, and living in difficult circumstances likely conditioned their attitudes. Faced with threats, insults, and unfair treatment, they were less inclined to docility and restraint. Large numbers of armed black men in Florida did not fear confrontation with whites. Whether whites perceived these soldiers as a threat remains undocumented but certainly a reasonable conclusion.

Before being transferred to the Tampa area, the Tenth Cavalry served at Fort Assiniboine, Montana, located in the Rocky Mountains near St. Mary's Lake.³⁷ The Tenth Cavalry patrolled the Blackfoot Reservation for renegade Native Americans in preparation for reservation settlement that was to begin on April 15, 1898. Before Fort Assiniboine, the Tenth Cavalry had been stationed at Fort Apache in the Arizona Territory and in the Dakota Territories.³⁸ During their time in Arizona, the Dakotas and Montana, there is little mention of clashes between black soldiers and white civilians. Nearly all of their interactions were with Native Americans or others who followed the

³⁶ Gatewood, Black Americans and the White Man's Burden, 1898-1902, 47.

³⁷ Hershel Cashin, Under Fire with the 10th U.S. Cavalry. (New York: Arno Press, 1969), 12.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

regiments to provide goods and services to soldiers.³⁹ Upon arrival in Tampa, armed, seasoned combat veterans were not explicitly told to respect southern racial customs.

A few days before entering Tampa, a story in the *Tampa Morning Tribune* caused a sense of panic and uneasiness among locals. According to the article, a group of Negro soldiers had used force in Key West to secure the release of a comrade who had been taken into custody.⁴⁰ This story, and several others like it published by the *Tampa Tribune*, fueled negative conceptions of black soldiers among locals. The *Tampa Morning Tribune*, along with many other papers across the South, gave front-page coverage to any incident, no matter how big or how small, involving black troopers.

In a letter published in the *Baltimore Ledger*, an unnamed Negro infantryman stated, “Prejudice reigns supreme here [Florida] against the colored troops. Everything done here is chronicled as Negro brazenness or outlawry. An ordinary drunk brings forth scare headlines in the dailies.”⁴¹ During a confrontation in Tampa, after a local proprietor refused service to a Negro soldier resulting in the troopers closing the bar, the incident was described as “a nigger riot.”⁴² African-American soldiers’ rejection of second-class citizenship elsewhere in the South ignited a powder keg of violence and public disorder in the Tampa area.

Numerous white southerners in 1898 believed that blacks could be dangerous and had a natural propensity for crime. At the end of the nineteenth century, it was

³⁹ Ibid

⁴⁰ Gatewood, “Negro Troops in Florida” *Florida Historical Quarterly* 49, (1970),3.

⁴¹ *Baltimore Ledger*, June 4,1898.

common for southern newspapers to report daily accounts of alleged mischief by blacks. If no episodes of wrong doing could be found locally, newspapers printed crimes that blacks allegedly committed in other areas. Thus, there is evidence that prior to the arrival of black troops in Florida, southern newspapers intentionally sought to create negative perceptions of blacks by reporting factual or false information about the criminal activities of Negroes.⁴³ Exaggerated accounts of incidents involving blacks, reported in newspapers, added to preconceived notions about black soldiers even before their arrival in Florida.

The first clash between African-American soldiers and white civilians in the Tampa area ended with the death of one white civilian, and the arrest of two members of the Tenth Cavalry. According to the *Morning Tampa Tribune*, on Monday evening, May 16, 1898, a group of men from the Tenth Cavalry went into a Forbes Drugstore and ordered soda water. The proprietor informed the African-American soldiers that only whites could make purchases in the drugstore. Reportedly, the soldiers became “quite abusive.”⁴⁴ Several minutes later, the same group of men went next door to an adjoining barbershop and requested a shave. After being refused service, the men left the shop and began firing their pistols into the window of the barbershop. From there, the soldiers ran around the corner shooting wildly and in their spree of terror shot and killed Joab Collins, “a peaceable white citizen.”⁴⁵ The mayor of nearby Bartow, Florida, heard of the commotion and telegraphed the mayor of Lakeland offering the

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Gatewood, “Negro Troops in Florida” *Florida Historical Quarterly* 49, (1970), 3.

⁴⁴ *Tampa Tribune*, 18, 1898.

service of 1,000 able-bodied men, armed and equipped, and for a while it looked like the “cowboys of Polk County” would avenge the death of Collins. Justice and calm prevailed after the military police arrested Private James Johnson and Private John Young for the murder of Joab Collins.⁴⁶

Four days after this skirmish that left one man dead, the *Illinois Record* printed an entirely different rendition of the story. Sergeant James Alexander of the Tenth Cavalry, who was present during the clash between soldiers and civilians, wrote to report that a group of soldiers from his unit after being released from duty, entered the business district of Lakeland, a few miles from Tampa. The soldiers went into a Forbes Drugstore and asked to purchase sodas. The attendant refused to serve them, responding that “he did not want their money and to go where they sold drinks to blacks.”⁴⁷ An argument between the soldiers and the attendant ensued. Joab Collins, a local barber who was known for harassing blacks, entered the drugstore and said, “you damn niggers better get out of here and that damn quick or I will kick you black sons of bitches out.”⁴⁸ Collins then went next door to his adjoining barbershop and got his pistols. Before he could fire, Collins was fatally wounded after being shot five times. Alexander, an eyewitness to the affair, claimed that the next day the *Tampa Tribune* reported something totally different than what had actually occurred. The Sergeant stated that, “The *Tampa Tribune* reported that a colored soldier asked permission from his superior to go into town which the officer refused to grant. Thereupon, the soldier

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ *Tampa Tribune*, May 19, 1898.

⁴⁷ *Illinois Record*, June 12, 1898.

grew abusive and shot at the officer and hit a comrade.”⁴⁹ It is surprising and important that the Regimental Returns, official records of troop strength, equipment and daily events, contain no reports of anyone being shot or arrested on May 16, 1898.⁵⁰

A white officer from the Tenth Cavalry, John Bigelow Jr., later wrote in his memoirs about this incident and the treatment of African-American stationed in Florida. Bigelow came from a prominent New York family. His father was a lawyer, author, editor, publisher, and diplomat.⁵¹ As a child and young adult, John Jr. had lived in Paris and Germany for eight years. After graduating from West Point in 1877, he was assigned to the Tenth Cavalry at the rank of lieutenant. Bigelow’s retelling of the events in Lakeland verifies Sergeant Alexander’s account. In addition, he also analyzed the strained relations between black soldiers and white Floridians. Bigelow asserted that the negative reception of African-American troops by local whites was caused by these whites’ need to blatantly remind black soldiers of their inferior status in the South. “If the people here would just treat blacks as humans even while refusing them service, many clashes could be avoided.”⁵² Bigelow contended, “white southerners have so much contempt for Negroes that they always must call them niggers in their customary southern tones.”⁵³

For black soldiers stationed in Florida at the end of the nineteenth century, it would be reasonable to believe that after being insulted, threatened, and refused service,

⁴⁸ *Illinois Record*, June 12, 1898.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ Marcos Kinevan, *Frontier Cavalryman: Lieutenant John Bigelow with the Buffalo Soldiers in Texas* (El Paso, Texas: Texas Western Press, 1998) 37.

⁵² Bigelow Jr, *Reminiscences of the Santiago Campaign*, 36-37.

a confrontation of some sort would be sure to follow. These soldiers previously served in a region of the country that permitted them the same use of facilities as whites. In the desolate locations where blacks served, proprietors of businesses could not afford to refuse patrons based on their race. In Florida, refusal of service to black soldiers signaled disrespect, dishonor, and second-class status that Negro soldiers had no experiences with and obviously rejected. Moreover, service in the Far West limited contact between black soldiers and white civilians. Threats or insults, especially involving weapons, might easily incite retaliation by men who daily faced the rigors of combat on the western frontier.

On May 20, 1898, military officials imposed press censorship in the Gulf region.⁵⁴ According to an article in the *Tampa Tribune* on May 20, 1898, Frank Hernandez, son of the most prominent cigar manufacturer in Tampa, was arrested on suspicion of being a Cuban spy. Of Cuban descent, Hernandez had been caught photographing the military encampments in Tampa. Largely due to the fact that he was not a professional photographer nor affiliated with any media agency, and he was of Cuban heritage, he was charged with being a spy.⁵⁵ Soon thereafter, Hernandez was shadowed by military officials and caught while attempting to develop photographic plates. The *Tribune* claimed that after the arrest of Hernandez, the War Department imposed censorship of the press.

⁵³ Ibid,33.

⁵⁴ Office of the Adjunct General, file#209169, National Achieves, Washington, D C.

⁵⁵ *Tampa Morning Tribune*, May 20, 1898.

In addition, another unidentified story that took place on Tuesday of the same week, the War Department cautioned press representatives not to publish the story and even the Western Union Company received military instructions not to send any messages in regard to the story. Furthermore, the manager of the Western Union office alerted local press correspondents that censorship had been imposed and they “would not accept nothing unless passed by Lieutenant Jarvis Miley, the censor.”⁵⁶ The fear of press agencies leaking information related to troop strength, troop movements, or military strategies concerned U.S. military personnel.⁵⁷

The day prior to U.S. forces leaving for Cuba, the largest incident of racial civil disorder during the Spanish American War occurred. Due to the strict press censorship imposed, the details of the riot in Tampa are difficult to piece together. There were several different versions published, and there is no official military record of what actually took place. Nevertheless, the story leaked to the press and versions of what happened in Tampa on the night of June 6, 1898 circulated in newspapers across the nation.

According to the *Tampa Tribune*, in a story entitled “Inhumane Brutes,” on the night of June 6, 1898, a group of inebriated white volunteers from Ohio took a two-year-old black child from his mother in Ybor City, a commercial district in Tampa.⁵⁸ After the abduction, one of the drunken soldiers held the screaming child by the legs with one hand and spanked him. Then the soldier, holding the youth at arms length

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Index to Correspondence to the War with Spain, National Archives, Washington, D C.

⁵⁸ *Tampa Morning Tribune*, June 8, 1898.

with his head down, allowed several other white volunteers to fire live rounds at him, to see who could come the closest to the target without hitting him. Following a shot that went through the boy's sleeve, the soldiers returned the baby to his mother. Negro troopers who observed this degrading cruelty became enraged and responded in a chaotic frenzy of destruction and retribution. According to the *Tampa Tribune*, members of the Twenty-fourth and Twenty-fifth infantries began breaking windows and smashing furniture in the Francisco Ysern Saloon, stealing every bottle of liquor and shooting randomly. From there the soldiers went to the Café Cantante, Seminole Café, and a half dozen other saloons following the same pattern of stealing alcohol, smashing furniture, and shooting wildly. Houses of prostitution also became the targets of outraged black soldiers. The disorder lasted until well after daylight when a battalion of soldiers from the Second Georgia Volunteers received orders to mobilize and stop the riot. The *Tribune* stated that, "the Georgia boys meant business"⁵⁹ and successfully quelled the disturbance.

The account in the *Atlanta Constitutional* differed significantly. In this version, J.S. Jones, a captain in the local police, apparently attempted to arrest an intoxicated colored soldier in Ybor City. Using excessive force, the disturbance attracted the attention of nearby Negro soldiers. Before a patrol could arrive to assist Captain Jones, hundreds of colored soldiers surrounded the police officer and demanded the release of their brother in arms. Jones was overpowered and the prisoner was released.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Ibid

⁶⁰ *Atlanta Constitutional*, June 11, 1898.

Although the versions of the riot that took place on June 6, 1898 differ, clearly the reaction of black soldiers to the observed dehumanization of the child is believable. Upon arriving in the South, signs denoting racial segregation dramatically altered black troopers' perceptions of race relations based on their previous duty stations in the Far West. After being refused service and becoming the target of unwarranted racial insults, racial tension erupted. The abuse of the defenseless black child outraged black soldiers and caused them to organize resistance and rebel against second-class treatment. In the frontier region, black soldiers often served in the role of protector of those who could not protect themselves. Surely the attack on a vulnerable child by white soldiers could have provoked uncontrollable anger by black soldiers who themselves felt humiliated and so rejected this new racial climate.

However, the arrest of a black soldier could also have been a motive for black soldiers to resist second-class treatment in Florida. The difficult and dangerous tasks performed by black soldiers in the Far West instilled in them a strong sense of camaraderie and loyalty. In the event that a member of a particular unit became the object of unjust treatment, it was customary military training to always protect one's own unit. Bonds forged in adverse conditions are difficult to sever. Black soldiers placed in the adverse racial conditions of the South remained close and did not allow anyone in their unit to fall prey to inequitable treatment even if it meant clashing with local authorities.

Newspapers such as the *New York Times*, *Cleveland Gazette*, *Savannah Tribune*, *Richmond Planet*, and others all printed second-hand versions of the clash. Despite

different renditions of the actual causes of the riot, every newspaper reported that the Second Georgia Volunteer Infantry restored order to the city. A story printed in the *Augusta Chronicle* entitled, “Augusta Boys Called upon to Suppress Riot,” gave the most detailed account of how the riot ended. According to the published story, Colonel Richard Brown of the Second Georgia Volunteers, received orders to use Companies C, G, E, and H to put down a Negro riot in Ybor City.⁶¹ The troops became excited and cheered wildly as they prepared to enter the fray.⁶² One of the soldiers of the Second Georgia Volunteers stated, “Our own regiment gave us all sorts of instructions about killing niggers, telling us to bring down one for me, bring back a scalp.”⁶³ Before leaving, General Robert Henry of the Fifth Corps addressed the Volunteers from Georgia urging them to “do their full duty and if necessary, to shoot a man in uniform, to shoot him without discriminating. There was no wish to spare the offender who would have to abide by the consequences of their conduct.”⁶⁴ These soldiers apparently relished the opportunity to violently restrain black troops and the *Tampa Tribune* confirmed that, “the streets ran red with Negro blood.”⁶⁵ As a result of the riot, four African-American soldiers died, twenty-seven white and black soldiers were wounded and transferred to a hospital at Fort McPherson.⁶⁶

The pre-war experiences of black soldiers in central Florida significantly affected white and black Americans. Traditional southern racial mores were challenged

⁶¹ *Augusta Chronicle*, June, 10, 1898.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ *Tampa Tribune*, June 9, 1898.

⁶⁶ *Augusta Chronicle*, June 30, 1898.

by the mere presence of uniformed and armed blacks. White residents of Tampa were neither prepared for nor capable of submitting to a black man in a position of authority. Some residents asserted that, “the decision to include blacks in the war was a serious error because it made the Negro forget his place and presume that he was changed or benefited his social condition by wearing a blue coat.”⁶⁷

Although there is historical evidence of black resistance to white oppression before 1898 in the United States, the racially motivated events in Tampa were different. African-American regiments stationed in Florida were free, well-trained, armed, and not psychologically damaged by slavery. The incidents in Tampa demonstrated a more resilient, aggressive, confident Negro, one who refused to accept the degradations of Jim Crow Laws. The staging point of central Florida proved to be a difficult adjustment for the black regular army units at the turn of the century.

⁶⁷ Gatewood, Black Americans and the White Man's Burden, 127.

CHAPTER 5

THE VOLUNTEERS

Although black state volunteer soldiers came primarily from the South and did not endure the hardships of duty on the western frontier, they too organized resistance to discrimination in the South. According to the Records of the Surgeon General in 1897, eighty-eight percent of all black soldiers were under the age of thirty-one. It is reasonable to infer from this information that in 1898 the majority of black state volunteers were born after the Thirteenth Amendment freed the servile population in the United States.¹ An entire generation of blacks who had not faced the mental and physical rigors of slavery, who experienced some limited opportunities to advance economically, politically, and socially began to question, challenge, and finally resist segregation. Armed and trained black state volunteers were among this new generation of blacks who resisted southern racial customs.

During the Spanish American War, 7,000 black volunteers garrisoned in the heart of the Jim Crow South would never leave the United States.² For these raw recruits, the system of organized resistance to Jim Crow established in Florida by Regular Army soldiers continued throughout their time in service. In addition to

¹ M 998, The Records of the Surgeon General 1897, National Archives, Washington, DC

² Willard B. Gatewood, Black Americans and the White Man's Burden, 1898-1902, (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1975) 127.

rejection of customary southern discriminatory practices at winter encampments in Tennessee and Georgia, some black soldiers became the victims of discrimination within the military. White volunteers stationed with black volunteers brought southern racial attitudes with them. Colonel Robert L. Bullard of the Third Alabama Colored Volunteer Infantry commented, “A very strong prejudice toward blacks still exists. This is quite a different feeling from ordinary race prejudice. The colored man in uniform represents authority.”³ In conjunction with insults, physical abuse, and then second-class treatment within and outside of the military, black soldiers signaled discontent with the military's failure to allow blacks to join the officer corps.

Pre-existing black state militia units would be the first volunteer forces mobilized after the second call to arms in April of 1898. The Third North Carolina Colored Volunteer Infantry, the Third Alabama Colored Volunteer Infantry, and the Sixth Virginia Colored Volunteer Infantry expanded to regimental strength as a result of President McKinley’s request for an additional 75,000 volunteers. Soon after, black state volunteer units were established in Massachusetts, Illinois, Ohio, and Kansas. Due to the threat of tropical maladies in the Caribbean theater of war, the President also authorized Secretary of War Russell Alger, to organize an additional volunteer force of 10,000 men possessing immunity to tropical diseases. The Sixth through Tenth United

³ Robert L. Bullard Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C

States Colored Infantry designated as the “Immunes,” became the only black federal volunteers to serve in the Spanish American War.⁴

In addition to the initial concerns of black participation in the Spanish American War by some African-Americans, leadership of the black state volunteers became a key issue as well. By the end of the nineteenth century, Henry O. Flipper and Charles Young had been the only African-Americans to successfully graduate from West Point. However, black state volunteer militias in North Carolina, Virginia, and Alabama already had a full roster of black officers. Typically officers of state volunteer units received commissions by the governors of their respective states. Often appointees were affluent members of the black community or men who had served previously in the military. Upon mention that there would be a role for black volunteer units, the black press began a campaign to have black troops led by black officers.

During spring of 1898, a series of articles appeared in black newspapers demanding the commissioning of black officers. One of the first articles printed in the *Richmond Planet* on April 30, 1898, became the unofficial slogan for those in favor of black officers. In “No Officers, No fight,” one editor asserted that President McKinley requested the help of Virginia along with other states to provide volunteers for the war with Spain. Virginia previously had two battalions of black volunteer militia commanded by black officers.⁵ The writer contended that in order to prevent two black Majors, who out ranked other white volunteer officers from taking command, Virginia colored volunteer units should be enlisted into service without field and staff officers.

⁴ Gatewood, Black Americans and the White Man's Burden, 1898-1902, 127.

The editor continued by stating: “It is now proposed to place in charge of these troops white officers 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 state military officials to form a regiment in this state and promote Major J.B. Johnson to the rank of colonel.”⁶

On the same day that “No Officers, No Fight” appeared in the *Richmond Planet*, another article from the same newspaper entitled “Negro Officers Needed” called for black military leadership. In this article, the author suggested that Virginia should have a black regiment from the lowest enlisted to the highest-ranking officer. If qualified black officers could not be found, the new black officers should come from the ranks of the Regular Army. Moreover, if white officers were appointed to the black Virginia regiment, they would have taken higher salary positions from blacks and accepted all of the honor and glory for the accomplishments of the unit.⁷ On May 6, 1898, another version of “Negro Officers Needed” emerged in the *Kansas City American Citizen*. Again the question of black leadership was raised: “when the president calls for fifty thousand colored troops will these noble sons of Ham be officered by whites or blacks?”⁸ African-American press agencies did not promote the appointment of black officers alone. There is evidence that supports at least one black Army Regular and a few affluent African Americans who that petitioned for black officers.

⁵ *Richmond Planet*, April 30, 1898

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Richmond Planet*, April 30, 1898.

⁸ *Kansas City American Citizen*, May 6, 1898.

In July of 1898, non-commissioned officer J.L. Moore of the Twenty-fifth Infantry wrote to President McKinley requesting black leadership among African-American regiments. Moore's letter suggested that the admirable performance of black units on the western frontier was not recognized nor resulted in promotions of blacks to the officer's corps. Furthermore, the absence of African-American officers left blacks feeling inadequate while in the service of the United States. The non-commissioned officer also added that his letter reflected the opinion among the men in the Twenty-fifth.⁹ In a review of the Records of the Adjunct General's Office, this was one of the few letters that surfaced concerning black leadership. However, there was correspondence from some affluent members of the black community requesting the appointment of black officers.

Chase Meserve, a native of Massachusetts, who became the President of Shaw University in 1894, suggested a need for black representation in the officer corps. In an unannounced visit to an encampment of black soldiers at Camp Haskell, Georgia, Meserve applauded the effort of black soldiers. In a letter to President McKinley, the President of Shaw University praised the cleanliness, discipline, and order of the encampment. Due to Negroes' admirable service during the Civil War, he believed that the Spanish American War would be the perfect opportunity for blacks to prove themselves as officers. According to Meserve, blacks soldiers' demonstration of "bravery, courage and the very best fighting qualities"¹⁰ warranted their admission into the officer corps. He contended that since the conclusion Civil War, blacks

⁹Records of the Adjuncts General's Office, File #102363, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

opportunities to advance intellectually, industrially, and economically had increased greatly. African-Americans were more than capable of commanding companies and regiments. In a final plea to McKinley, Meserve stated, "I earnestly hope that you see your way clear to place a colored colonel over a colored regiment."¹¹ Due to his twenty-five year career as an educator of racially diverse student populations, Meserve, considered himself as an expert on race.

Beyond Meserve's letter, other affluent African-Americans believed that failure to appoint black officers could have negative political ramifications. In a letter from David Murray, an African-American Republican party representative and business entrepreneur from Washington, to Assistant Secretary of War, George Meiklejohn, Murray appealed to the federal government for black officers. He asserted that neglecting the inclusion of blacks into positions leadership in the army could be "disastrous for the party."¹² The Republican party representative noted that because he was too old for military service and his children were not eligible for entry into the army, his motives were selfless. Murray only wanted to see the success of the party. According to Murray, losing the support of black voters due to the omission of African-American officers was anything but trivial.

This sustained plea for black leadership was only one example of the "new generation" of African-Americans' challenge of second-class treatment in the United States. By the end of the nineteenth century, not only did some blacks want admission

¹⁰ Records of archives the Adjuncts General's Office, File #102363, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Records of the Adjuncts General's Office, File # 212874 National Archives, Washington, D.C.,

to the military, they wanted access to leadership positions within the armed forces. Many black newspapers used their publications to expound on African-Americans' ideas of equality within the military. While ambiguity regarding African-American participation in the Spanish American War may have existed within the black community, after the decision to use black volunteers became known, progressive African-Americans asserted that due to economic, educational, and political advancements, blacks were now primed for leadership roles in the military.

The success of black soldiers on the western frontier also contributed to African-Americans' desire to be considered for roles of leadership within the officer corps. While stationed in the Far West, black soldiers received many commendations for their service, yet positions as officers still remained out of reach. Because African-American soldiers never saw blacks in a role above a noncommissioned officer, they harbored feelings inadequacy and inequality. Moreover, denying blacks the opportunity to rise from the enlisted to officer ranks solely based on their race also confirmed that discrimination and racial prejudices of the civilian world were an acceptable practice within the military.

Although there is no measurable proof of the impact of the black press or the appeal of affluent blacks, several state volunteer colored infantry regiment either retained or gained black officers. The Third North Carolina Colored Volunteer Infantry was the only regiment outfitted with all black officers during Spanish American War.

The Third North Carolina was an all-black preexisting state militia established in 1869.¹³ As a result of President McKinley's second call to arms, the Third North Carolina expanded from three companies to a full regiment in the summer of 1898. Before arriving at Camp Poland, Tennessee, the men of the Third North Carolina had earned a reputation as an undisciplined group of ruffians for beating a train conductor after refusing his orders to sit in the "colored" section of a train en-route to Knoxville.¹⁴ Segregation and racial slurs towards black soldiers by white soldiers soon led to more serious and violent attacks. White commanding officers never openly addressed those minor incidents, therefore white soldiers may have sensed there would be no objection to physical assaults. The Third North Carolina Colored Volunteer Infantry would be the first to feel the wrath of white soldiers at Camp Poland.

On September 18, 1898, a few days after Third North Carolina's arrival at Camp Poland, black volunteers became victims of verbal and physical assaults by the all-white First Georgia Volunteer Regiment. According to a report from Major J.E. Delloyer, of the Third North Carolina, the men performed their normal routine of drill and ceremony after lunch. The First Georgia Volunteer Infantry, encamped adjacent to the black volunteers, threw rocks and one member yelled "Niggers are niggers I don't care what uniform they wear."¹⁵ After the black volunteers from North Carolina demonstrated great restraint by not retaliating, the shooting began. Some soldiers from the First Georgia fired a volley at members of the Third. Every time a member of the Third

¹³ Marvin Flethcher, "The Black Immune Regiments in the Spanish American War" *Journal of Negro History*, 10 (Spring 2004) 15.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

North Carolina ventured too close to the wooded area that separated the two units, someone from the First Georgia would fire at them. In a letter from Colonel James Young, the commanding officer of the Third North Carolina, to Colonel Jessup Babcock, Camp Commander, Young pleaded for protection from the attacks by the First Georgia Volunteers: “Dear Sir, the menacing conditions of being fired upon by the First Georgia Volunteer regiment require your immediate attention. I fear that if their no intervention, the situation may prove to be grave resulting in the loss of life.”¹⁶ As result of Young’s Letter, a company of the Second Ohio was detailed to protect the soldiers of the Third North Carolina. Amazingly, nobody from the Third was injured by the attacks, but First Georgia Volunteers were neither reprimanded nor punished for their actions. On the dates of the assaults, the regimental books of First Georgia did not report the incidents nor any type of adjudication. The initial tribulations of the Third North Carolina went virtually unnoticed and received very little publicity in the press.

The initial phase of military life for the Third North Carolina proved that blatant racial prejudice and discrimination were acceptable practices within the military. The combination of a regiment with all-black officers, refusal to follow local racial customs of segregation en route to Camp Poland, and being garrisoned in close proximity to a unit from the deep South made the Third North Carolina a likely target of verbal and physical abuse. Reports of “uppity” black soldiers, who refused to sit in their state sanctioned area of the train, reached Camp Poland before they did. Upon reaching Camp Poland, the Third, already labeled with a reputation for civil disorder, were

¹⁵ Regimental Returns, Third North Carolina, RG, 94, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

placed adjacent to a unit from a region where racial prejudice and discrimination were the norm. The verbal and physical assaults on the black volunteers from North Carolina by the First Georgia clearly demonstrated that these white soldiers brought their racial attitudes with them into the military. The military's refusal to take action against the First Georgia only perpetuated the acceptability of unequal treatment for blacks.

The Sixth Virginia Volunteer Colored Infantry, which had seventeen black officers, received the most attention of all black volunteers at Camp Poland due to the removal of their black officers and their subsequent reactions. In what military officials considered a mutiny, members of the Sixth Virginia resisted Jim Crow laws and discrimination within and outside of military jurisdictions. The Sixth Virginia Volunteer Colored Infantry expanded from a state militia with a few companies to regimental strength between July 9 and August 11, 1898.¹⁷ Although this unit originally began with all-black officers, white men would be ordered to replace them. This would become a great source of tension between the enlisted members of the Sixth Virginia and their white commanding officers because the men had been mustered in with the explicit understanding that black officers would lead them.

The Regimental Commander, Lieutenant Colonel Richard C. Croxton, wanted to replace black officers with white officers. Lt. Col. Croxton, formally a Lieutenant in the Regular Army, regularly reacted with hostility towards his black units and displayed disdain for black soldiers generally, black officers especially. In a letter to the

¹⁶ Records of the Adjuncts General's Office, File #207401 National Archives, Washington, D.C.,

¹⁷ Regimental Returns, Sixth Virginia Colored Volunteer Infantry, RG 94, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

Richmond Planet, Private John Allen of the Sixth Virginia, described Croxton as “haughty, arrogant and inexperienced.”¹⁸ Allen insisted that Croxton often yelled and cursed at the men for no apparent reason. In addition, the private also mentioned how black officers had been routinely reprimanded in front of enlisted men. Allen believed that Croxton’s actions were designed purely to embarrass, humiliate, and demean African-American soldiers.¹⁹ In another letter to the *Planet* by “Ham,” an unnamed soldier of the Sixth who used this name repeatedly in order to remain anonymous, he asserted that Colonel Croxton was “peevish, fretful and irritable who subjected his black officers to bouts of cursing after every regimental parade.”²⁰ Aside from verbal abuse, Lt. Col. Croxton wanted to replace the regiments black officers with white ones. This no doubt created a stir among the men of the Sixth Virginia that would lead directly to organized resistance to systematic discrimination.

In early September of 1898, Croxton complained to his superiors of incompetence by his black officers and requested their removal. Tardiness, sloppy paperwork, illiteracy were given as examples of incompetence by the beleaguered Commander. Lt. Col. Croxton added that he believed that more than half of his officers could neither read nor write. Therefore, he spent most of his time correcting their mistakes or performing their duties himself.²¹ According to an article printed in the *New York Times* on October 26, 1898, a delegation of affluent blacks from Virginia

¹⁸ *Richmond Planet*, September 29, 1898.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Richmond Planet*, September 17, 1898

²¹ Regimental Returns, Sixth Virginia Colored Volunteer, Infantry, RG 94, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

visited both the President and Secretary of War to report the acts of discrimination against the black officers of the Sixth Virginia. Members of this committee claimed to have witnessed the degradation of black officers in front of enlisted men on a review of the troops at Camp Corbin, Virginia, earlier in the month. The committee claimed that conditions in the unit were bad and getting worse.²²

After Croxton's first request for replacements yielded no changes, he ordered a board of examination in order to prove the inadequacy of the officers whom he deemed most incompetent.²³ Upon arriving at the winter encampment of Camp Poland, Tennessee, a review board was appointed by the Regimental Commander. Naturally Lt. Col. Croxton chose nine white officers and one black officer. The disproportionate number of white officers selected for the review board gave those who were being inspected the belief that the examination results had been predetermined, and certain dismal would be sure to follow. Therefore, before the inquiry, all of the black officers chosen for examination resigned.

On October 27, 1898, in a letter to the Adjunct General's Office, the remaining black officers requested that their colleagues be replaced with other blacks. The officers suggested that replacements could be found from the "rank and file of the Sixth."²⁴ They also reported that through various sources they had been notified that the new officers would be white, and they reported that this would cause serious problems with the enlisted men of the Sixth Virginia. The officers contended that the

²² *New York Times*, October 26, 1898.

²³ Regimental Returns, Sixth Virginia Colored Volunteer Infantry, RG 94, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

enlisted soldiers would become dissatisfied with the appointment of white officers because when they had enlisted in the Sixth Virginia they had been promised that most of the officers would be black. In addition, the officers stated “the men feel that the policy of black officers inaugurated as to this command should remain, and we fear if there is a change it will result disastrously to one of the best disciplined commands in the volunteer service.”²⁵ The black officers continued their plea by concluding that the enlisted men would be “unwilling to be commanded by white officers and object to do what they did not agree to.”²⁶ Moreover, some black officers of the Sixth Virginia believed there would be friction between the men and the new white officers and requested the muster-out of the 791 men “rather than submit to the change.”²⁷

Regardless of the blatant warning given if white officers replaced the recently departed black ones, the military elite took no action. On October 31, 1898, predictions became reality when the first of the newly appointed white officers appeared at Camp Poland. Lieutenant Jon W. Healy, a white officer, formerly a sergeant major in the Regular Army, became the first sign that white officers would replace their former black commanders. Later that day, more white replacement officers arrived, and the following changes were posted: Major E.E Cobell Second Battalion Commander, Captain R.L.E. Masurier Company D, Captain W.S Faulkner Company E, Captain J.W. Bently company G, Captain S.T. Moore Company H, 1st Lt. Jon W. Healy Company H, 1st Lt. AL Monclure, 2nd Lt. George W. Richardson Company G, 1st Lt. Edward T.

²⁴ Records of the Adjuncts General’s Office, File # 210410, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Ibid.

Walker Company C.²⁸ The next day when the new cadre of white officers took command, none of the enlisted men of the Sixth Virginia reported to duty. After coercion from the remaining black officers, the enlisted men of the Sixth Virginia reported for 9:00 drill.²⁹ General Willmont Bates, Commander of the First Corps, and his staff addressed the men. Brigade Commander Col. Robert Kuerts pleaded with the black enlisted men to perform their duties and to be good soldiers. He reminded them of their oath of allegiance to the United States Constitution and to follow the command placed before them by their superiors. Col. Kuerts warned the Sixth Virginia Colored Volunteer Infantry “to be careful as to the step you take for it may cost you your life; that there are enough soldiers in my command to force you into submission should you resist.”³⁰

After Kuerts’ request for obedience, he ordered the men to the position of “right shoulder arms.”³¹ Not one enlisted man in the Sixth responded to the basic command. In preparation for the worst, the Commander of the First Corp positioned two white battalions, the Thirty-first Massachusetts and Third Michigan nearby but out of sight. A black officer was then ordered to instruct the men to “stack arms.” After following the order to “stack arms” by the black officer, the two white regiments surrounded the volunteers from Virginia and marched them back to their company area under arms with no resistance from the unarmed black soldiers.³² By military law, the soldiers from

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸ Regimental Returns, Sixth Virginia Colored Volunteer Infantry, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid

³¹ Ibid

³² Regimental Returns, Sixth Virginia, Colored Volunteer Infantry, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

the Sixth Virginia Colored Volunteer Infantry could have faced a firing squad for disobeying direct orders during wartime. The record of events in the Regimental Returns of the Sixth Virginia Colored Voluntary Infantry does mention the refusal to follow orders by the unit. However, the court-martial records show no military arrests for the events of November 2, 1898.³³

Ham, the anonymous member of the Sixth Virginia who wrote to the *Richmond Planet*, and John Allen reported the events following the arrest and disarming of the Sixth Virginia Colored Volunteer Infantry. On November 5, 1898, a letter from Ham appeared in the *Richmond Planet*. Ham's letter was consistent with the regimental books that reported the refusal to follow a drill command, removal of weapons, and the arrest of the regiment.³⁴ He reported that after the arrest, Major J.B. Johnson, one of the African-American officers who had resigned, pleaded with the men to "obey all orders placed over them"³⁵ and told them that "there was nothing for them to do but accept the situation."³⁶ According to Ham, the soldiers of the Sixth decided to accept the situation and obey all orders thereafter. He then denounced a story printed in another Virginia regional newspaper, the *Richmond Dispatch*. An anonymous soldier from the Sixth Virginia Colored Volunteer Infantry had claimed that the *Richmond Dispatch* printed a story implying that the non-commissioned officers from the Sixth Virginia provoked the mutiny because they were not promoted to any of the vacancies, and begged for forgiveness from Lt. Col. Croxton for their actions. Ham wrote, "as to begging for

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ *Richmond Planet*, November 5, 1898.

³⁵ Ibid.

forgiveness, that has never been done and never will be.”³⁷ He believed that if the black non-commissioned officers had done what the *Richmond Dispatch* charged, they would have admitted guilt and subjected themselves to military adjudication. Furthermore, Ham suggested that because the non-commissioned had roles of leadership, it would have been unethical for them to organize a mutiny or influence enlisted men to disobey orders from superiors no matter what their race.³⁸

John Allen, a private in the Sixth Virginia also gave a similar depiction of the events of November 2nd in the *Richmond Planet*. Like Ham, Allen confirmed that the men refused a drill command in protest of the plot to appoint white officers to replace “incompetent” black officers.³⁹ Then, men were disarmed and placed under the armed guard of two all-white units. After a plea for good behavior and obedience by Major Johnson, the men chose to follow orders believing they would be released from their service obligation. However, Allen’s different version mentioned that while under confinement to their company area, rumors of a transfer of the entire regiment to Macon, Georgia permeated the camp. These rumors would come to fruition as the Sixth Virginia received orders for movement to Camp Haskell. On November 18, 1898, the Sixth Virginia, Third North Carolina and the Seventh and Tenth United States Colored Volunteer Infantry (Immunes) moved to Camp Haskell. For the members of the Third North Carolina and Sixth Virginia a change to a different setting seemed like the opportunity for a fresh start after a tumultuous time during the first phases of their

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ *Richmond Planet*, November 19, 1898.

military lives. However, these soldiers would find that attitudes towards African-American soldiers, especially those with a reputation for disorderly conduct, would remain consistent in Macon.

The Sixth Virginia Volunteers expressed the attitude of the "new generation" of blacks who resisted unfair treatment. While black leadership in the military became a significant topic before the enlistment of black volunteers, the replacement of black officers with white officers caused the Sixth Virginia to take action. The majority of the Sixth Virginia had not been slaves and had come to maturity during the rise of segregation. By not following a direct command to protest the replacement of their black officers, the enlisted men of the Sixth Virginia proved that they would not stand idle in the face of blatant discrimination. Although the men from the Sixth could have been put to death for their organized resistance, clearly it was worth the risk for them to make a stand. The courage and resiliency of these men possibly led to other subsequent actions of resistance to Jim Crow.

Businessmen in Macon, as in other small towns, campaigned for the establishment of military installations. Small cities and towns with military posts nearby often increased their business and economic opportunities, but not from Negroes, especially not from armed ones. Preconceptions about black soldiers permeated the South even before the colored volunteers arrived. White residents of Macon were well aware of the "riotous mood" and belligerence of Negro soldiers. Largely due to reports in the white media of Negro brazenness, locals contended that

³⁹ Ibid.

rowdy Negroes who would not respect their racially segregated practices could possibly have an unhealthy effect on the local Negro population. In August, white southerners in Georgia had already displayed their contempt and disdain for Negroes in uniform. According to the *Augusta Chronicle*, Private James Nicely of the Twenty-fifth Infantry was shot to death for requesting a soda in a segregated drugstore in Hampton. In Georgia, the racial overtones were so strong that military officials cooperated with city officials in Augusta to remind incoming black soldiers of Jim Crow policies while the Tenth Immunes were in garrison.

After a twenty-hour train ride from Camp Poland, African-American troops arrived at a place known as the "Huff." Camp Haskell was a newly established temporary military encampment a few miles outside of Macon. After speaking to some other soldiers in the black "Immune" regiments, who had been at Camp Haskell since early August, the new arrivals were told of the reputation they had attained due to the refusal to follow orders at Camp Poland.⁴⁰

On the very first day the newly arrived volunteers reached Camp Haskell, problems erupted. In the evening hours of November 19, 1898, a large Persimmon tree was pointed out to the new volunteers and they were told that a great social injustice had taken place. Not long before the black troops arrived, Will Singleton was hung, shot, and castrated on the large tree. In mockery of the event, Singleton's testicles were placed in an alcohol-filled jar and placed on display in a local saloon. After hearing the story, a group of soldiers from various black volunteer units, chopped down the tree.

Following the chopping down of the “hanging tree of Macon, “black soldiers went to a local park that had a sign saying, “no dog and Niggers allowed.” Black volunteers destroyed the sign and then assaulted the park representative when he tried to stop them. In the evening of this resistance, black volunteers went in to Jim Crow establishments in Macon and demanded service. When denied, the soldiers began smashing chairs, tables, and whatever else they could find. The local authorities in Macon then attempted to arrest the disgruntled African-American soldiers, however they were freed by their armed comrades and retreated to Camp Haskell.⁴¹ Having no names of any of the participants in the organized resistance, naturally white officials the blamed the “Mutinous Sixth,” a name given to the Sixth Virginia by a white newspaper. The entire Sixth was disarmed and placed under arrest again. To ensure that there would be no more trouble, the Thirty-first Michigan, and the Second Ohio were ordered to surround the encampment of the Sixth Virginia and, armed with Gatling guns given orders to fire indiscriminately if there were any signs of resistance.⁴²

Regimental Commander R.L. Croxton imposed restrictions on the black volunteers from Virginia as a result of the events that took place on the night of November 19, 1898. As a part of the conditions of the regiment’s arrest, the men could not leave the company area, possess arms, and all postal privileges were revoked. However, after the postal ban was lifted, “Ham” and another un-named soldier sent

⁴⁰ Fletcher, “ The Black Immune Regiments in the Spanish American War” *Journal of Negro History*, 10 (Spring 2004): 14.

⁴¹ Gatewood, Black Americans and the White Man’s Burden, 1898-1902 , 141

⁴² Ibid.

correspondence to the *Richmond Planet* describing the riot and conditions at Camp Haskell in its aftermath.

A letter dated December 1, 1898, but appearing in the *Richmond Planet* on December 10th from an anonymous soldier who identified himself as “Black Man,” explained the current condition of the Sixth Virginia. He began his report by mentioning that the Sixth Virginia had been under arrest for thirteen days and that nobody could leave the company area.⁴³ “Black Man” wrote that most of the men believed that restrictions imposed on the entire unit were not due to their recent resistance in Macon. He claimed that the thirty or forty men who took their rifles into town were tried, convicted, and fined by a summary court for their part in the riot.⁴⁴ The writer of the letter suggested that the arrest of unit was due to a previous rebellion at Camp Poland that the men had not yet been punished for. He explained how they were tricked into being disarmed. “Black Man” reported that the men of the Sixth Virginia turned in their Springfield rifles because they were told that they were going to be issued new weapons, Krag-Jorgenson magazines rifles. He described the arrest as unjust because no formal charges had been filed.⁴⁵

In another letter that was printed on December 10, 1898, Ham described camp life while under arrest. At the time of Ham’s letter, he reported that the Sixth Virginia had been under arrest for fifteen days, held under arms by the Tenth Immunes.⁴⁶ Ham believed that the Sixth Virginia would remain under restriction for another twenty days.

⁴³ *Richmond Planet*, December 10, 1898.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

Even while under arrest, however, Ham assured the *Planet* that the men were in “good spirits” often forming quartets and having singing competitions.⁴⁷ Rather than preparations for mustering-out, Ham reported that the unit had been inspected several times, inventory had been taken, and everything needed for foreign deployment had been supplied, with the exception of weapons. He heard a rumor that after the unit returned to active status, the men would be given a four-day furlough.

After nearly a month of restrictions, the Sixth Virginia gradually transitioned back into normal military life. In the middle of December, the Sixth was allowed to post their own guard and returned to regular mail privileges. The men were also allowed passes off post. In order to prevent any more major disturbances, however, military officials at Camp Haskell restricted the number of men who were allowed off-post passes.⁴⁸ By Christmas of 1898, members of the Sixth Virginia were given Christmas leave. The Sixth Virginia, along with all of the other black volunteers, mustered out service by March of 1899.⁴⁹ Still, they would not leave Macon without a reminder of the attitudes of whites toward blacks wearing the uniform of the United States. In a letter to the *Cleveland Gazette*, Pvt. Allen Peal, a member of the Seventh United States Colored Volunteer Infantry Immunes reported to readers of injustices faced by other African-American soldiers in Macon. In his letter, Pvt. Peal explained how African-American soldiers were often referred to as “coon” or “Nigger” and abused by civilian authorities. He commented that even in a court of law blacks, were

⁴⁶ *Richmond Planet*, December 10, 1898.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

treated with contempt and disrespect. For example, during the trial of a black soldier in Macon, Peal claimed to have heard the prosecutor begin by saying, “I’m going to show a nigger soldier”⁵⁰ and finished his argument by stating, “that he is the same as any nigger soldier.”⁵¹ Peal suggested that by these examples he hoped readers would understand that blacks in Macon were not treated fairly even when under the umbrella of the law. He also claimed that only since the arrival of black troops had separate accommodations been made to transport blacks. The Consolidated Railway Company hitched open-air trailers to trolleys “for the use of colored people.”⁵² However, African-American soldiers’ refusal to ride in the trailers resulted in the death of at least three black soldiers. According to Peal, a train conductor killed Elijah Turner of the Sixth Virginia because he refused to move out of his seat for a white person. To Peal’s surprise, the conductor was freed and won a verdict of “justifiable homicide.”

Civilian policemen continued to abuse black volunteers even after they had been mustered-out of service. In an article in the *Atlanta Constitutional* that appeared on February 1, 1899, members of the Third North Carolina and Eighth Immunes were allegedly shooting from a train en route to Atlanta. Upon arrival in Atlanta, the local police boarded the train looking for the shooters. The police then began clubbing the recently discharged soldiers. There were similar reports of African-American soldiers being beaten by civilian officers on trains in Nashville, and Griffin, Georgia.⁵³

⁴⁹ Regimental Returns, Sixth Virginia, Colored Volunteer Infantry, National Archives, Washington, DC

⁵⁰ *Cleveland Gazette*, December, 1898.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ Fletcher, “The Black Immune Regiments in the Spanish American War” *Journal of Negro History*, 10 (Spring 2004): 15.

After organizing resistance in protest to the replacement of black officers, the Sixth Virginia continued to resist racial discrimination after being transferred Camp Haskell in Macon. Before arriving at Camp Haskell, other black regiments were well aware of the rebellion of the "Mutinous Sixth" in Tennessee. After being told of a lynching and mockery of a local African-American, some members of the Sixth began demonstrating that they would not respect southern racial mores. The black volunteers from Virginia did not indiscriminately go on a rampage of violence and destruction. Their displays of aggression were calculated strikes against Jim Crow establishments. The hanging tree of Macon that volunteers chopped down was a glaring reminder to blacks of the consequences of challenging southern racial customs. In Macon, on the night of November 2, 1898, only places that practiced Jim Crow policies became targets of destruction and retribution.

The insights of Private Allen Peal indicated strong discriminate overtones faced by local black civilians, and black soldiers. Peal suggested that Macon was no different than any other southern town in regard to discrimination against blacks. Even before the arrival of black soldiers, racial slurs, segregation, and unfair legal practices were standard practice in Macon. By mentioning that the Consolidated Railroad Company made accommodations for soldiers by adding open-air hitched trailers for black soldiers implies that before black soldiers came to Macon perhaps local blacks did not have access to public transportation. Macon, as many other southern states, could not have been prepared for large numbers of armed black soldiers, especially those who would not respect pre-existing racial customs.

The Third Alabama Colored Volunteer Infantry would fair no better than other colored volunteer units. Although isolated from other black volunteers, members of the Third Alabama followed the pattern of refusing to accept blatant discrimination or tolerate violent attacks by white civilians and soldiers. The Third Alabama Colored Volunteer Infantry was one of the first African-American volunteer units to be mustered into service in May of 1898.⁵⁴ However, their early induction into military service was largely due to the fact that Alabama's state militias failed to fill their quota. According to President McKinley's first call to arms, Alabama was required to provide two regiments and one battalion of infantry "to be drawn from existing militia units." At that time Alabama only had three partial regiments and one colored battalion. Governor Joseph F. Johnston, a Civil War veteran, had just been nominated for re-election in April of 1898. The Populist party representative, with political aspirations on the line, went against southern racial mores by allowing appropriations for one black volunteer battalion.⁵⁵ African Americans in Alabama would be given the opportunity to demonstrate their patriotism as enlisted men but not as officers.

At the start of the Spanish American War, Alabama's only black militia unit was only a partial battalion, numbering 181 officers and men and headquartered in Mobile, Alabama.⁵⁶ Incumbent Governor Johnston's decision to allow blacks to serve in the war defied public opinion, but he would not further jeopardize his candidacy by appointing black officers to the Third Alabama Colored Volunteer Infantry. The

⁵⁴ Regimental Returns, Third Alabama Colored Volunteer Infantry, National Archives, Washington D.C.

⁵⁵ Willard B. Gatewood, "Alabama's Negro Experiment," *Journal of Negro History* 57 (Winter, 1972): 335.

Gilmer Rifles, Alabama's preexisting militia, already had a full roster of black officers.⁵⁷ The Birmingham Company made the commissioning of black officers a condition for offering their services to the governor and the state. Johnston initially agreed to commission blacks, however he relented on his decision after he was informed that the War Department opposed the appointment of Negroes above the rank of lieutenant. While initially the War Department had a policy against commissioning black officers, after de facto modifications were made to this policy, Johnston still did not commission any black officers for Alabama's African-American volunteers. Instead, Johnston outfitted what would become the Third Alabama Colored Volunteer Infantry with two more companies of eighty men and all white officers.

Due to the experimental nature of black troops in Alabama, Governor Johnston desired to make his Negro troops a success. Therefore, the government began a state-wide search for white men of the highest character to ensure maximum efficiency in the battalions. The appointment of lieutenants and captains was of extreme importance to the success of the "Negro experiment in Alabama" however the commander of these soldiers would prove to be an even more important selection. Robert L. Bullard, West Point graduate, captain in the Regular Army, and a native of Alabama, was appointed Major and Commanding Officer of the Third Alabama Colored Volunteer Infantry on May 23, 1898. The day before Bullard took command, the first signs of resistance by the Third Alabama took place.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Ibid, 336.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 335.

⁵⁸ Ibid, 335-337.

On May 29, 1898, members of the militia company from Montgomery assigned to the Third Alabama openly resisted the presence of white officers. A.C. Caffey, a black captain in the original Alabama militia, turned over his command to his white replacement. He instructed his disgruntled troops that “they had a patriotic duty to perform regardless of the color of the officer under whom they would serve.” Captain Caffey then requested that anyone who objected to the appointment of white officers “say so at once.” Twelve men verbally objected and were mustered out of service and sent home on the first available train.⁵⁹ Objection to the appointment of white officers by a dozen African-American soldiers was labeled as a mutiny in many newspapers throughout the South. The *Mobile Daily Register* defended the decision to appoint white replacements, contending that because the Third Alabama was only a battalion rather than a full regiment, it would be garrisoned with white soldiers. Under those circumstances, black officers could possibly have contact with white enlisted soldiers, who would neither respect nor follow the orders of a Negro, no matter his rank. Bullard, who was present, also commented on the events of May 29th. In his diary, Bullard stated: “The whole condition seemed very uncertain. The men were as wild and ready to fly as a flock of quail. Some how they settled down and quickly went to bed.”⁶⁰

Aware of dissention within his command, Major Bullard addressed his men the next day. He ordered his men to “behave themselves and avoid conflicts.”⁶¹ The Major of the Third Alabama Volunteer Colored Infantry then told the men to avoid at all cost

⁵⁹ *Mobile Daily Register*, May 30, 1898.

⁶⁰ Robert L. Bullard Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

the white soldiers who were encamped 100 yards. He felt that the best way to avoid clashes with white soldiers was to stay away from them. According to Bullard, in the event of any problem with white soldiers, they were not to respond in any shape or form. He assured the members of the Third they “would be protected,” and if well behaved, “all would be well.” Unfortunately for the Third Alabama, Bullard’s promises of protection could not be kept.

When the Third was transferred to camp ships in Anniston, Alabama, early in September, violence erupted. During the early fall of 1898, Mobile, Alabama was pummeled by seasonal heavy rain and humidity. The conditions made for swamp-like conditions. Fearing a Yellow Fever outbreak, newly promoted Colonel Bullard moved his entire unit to Camp Shipp in Anniston, Alabama. On September 8, 1898, the Third Alabama, boarded trains for Camp Shipp. In conjunction with news of a strong showing by African-American troops in Cuba, and virtually no report of mischief by the Third Alabama, thousands of people filled with curiosity came out to inspect the black soldiers. The *Birmingham New Age Herald* reported, “there is more and more interest being taken in colored troops.”⁶² Colonel Bullard was also pleased with the discipline and order of his troops in transition.

The arrival of the Third Alabama in Anniston, called a gem of the “New South,” would bring an abrupt halt to the “calm and harmony” and the positive reputation of the Third Alabama. Anniston, located in northeast part of Alabama transformed after the Civil War into an industrial town, concentrating its efforts in charcoal iron furnaces.

⁶² *Birmingham New Age Herald*, May, 31, 1898.

Although this transformation resulted in a slight increase of African-Americans, blacks made up less than ten percent of the population.⁶³

In the early years of Anniston it was not uncommon for blacks to live and work side by side with whites. Nevertheless, by the 1880s Anniston followed the postwar pattern of racial segregation. Even so, the *Anniston Hot Blast* suggested blacks in Anniston were not a part of the often-mentioned “Negro problem” in the United States. In fact the *Blast* went as far as to suggest, “the Negro and his sphere is the best laborer the community will ever have.”⁶⁴ While the editor of the *Anniston Hot Blast* surely did not speak for the entire white community, it is a safe assumption that Anniston experienced a type of racial harmony until the arrival of the Third Alabama Colored Volunteer Infantry.

Upon arrival at Camp Shipp, the Third Alabama was greeted with insults and threats by the white units already stationed there. The discontent displayed by the Third Tennessee, Second Arkansas, and the Third Kentucky fueled a clash between the Third Alabama, white soldiers and civilians. On September 10, 1898, during the Third Alabama’s first visit to the town of Anniston, one day after their arrival to Camp Shipp, members of the Third clashed with white soldiers and civilians. The local press contended that members of the Third Alabama attempted to obtain service from local businesses. Following the pattern of southern racial custom, Anniston was segregated and members of the black Alabama volunteer unit found themselves in the white business district instead of the section of town where blacks could receive services. In

⁶³ Grace Gates, The Model City of the New South, (Huntsville: Strode, 1978), 3.

newspapers such as the *Anniston Hot Blast Atlanta Constitutional*, *Birmingham Age Herald*, and *Mobile Register*, the story consistently concluded that white soldiers initiated a conflict by insulting blacks and suggesting that they were in the wrong part of town and must leave. Soon thereafter, a group of white locals became involved in the attempt to usher the soldiers out of that part of town. The verbal abuse and threats rose to a physical altercation that injured several black soldiers and several white soldiers. Provost guards ended the fray by separating the armed groups of men at gunpoint. From there, the Third Alabama was put into four columns and marched back to Camp Shipp.⁶⁵

In his diary, Colonel Bullard praised his men for maintaining military bearing in an unfortunate situation. He wrote that on the first night his men were allowed into town, a group of white civilians and soldiers assaulted them. He explained that his men were “green,” uneducated, and from the poorest economic backgrounds. In a storm of insults “midst a howling frantic mob attacking, and abusing them,” Bullard asserted that the men gathered themselves into formation and marched to the camp without retaliating. To the Colonel, the Third Alabama’s actions showed great “discipline and control.”⁶⁶ He claimed not ever to have seen that much restraint before and did not believe he would ever see it again. In addition, the Commanding Officer of the Third Alabama reminded the men that not all white volunteers despised the presence of black

⁶⁴ *Anniston Hot Blast*, June 20, 1898.

⁶⁵ Robert L. Bullard Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

soldiers and to “pride themselves on their discipline.”⁶⁷ The men would abide by the words of Colonel Bullard until continuous abuse by the white volunteers could no longer be tolerated.

The pattern of resistance to Jim Crow laws established by black soldiers during the Spanish American War remained consistent with the Third Alabama Colored Volunteer Infantry. Just like other black volunteer regiments, refusal of service due to race proved unacceptable. What is most interesting about the Third Alabama, as compared to other black units, is that volunteers from Alabama were the only black regiment garrisoned in Alabama. That this unit was not in close proximity to other groups of black soldiers implies that acts of resistance by black soldiers during the Spanish American War occurred autonomously. Moreover, some black acts of resistance to Jim Crow happened simultaneously.

On Thanksgiving night in 1898, the Third Alabama retaliated against white civilians and soldiers in what was the “riot of Anniston.” While the official report of the “riot” does not declare who struck first, Col. Bullard claimed that the riot that left one black soldier dead, one white soldier seriously wounded and several other civilians slightly wounded, was brought on by “accumulated grievances.”⁶⁸ Despite the lack of information found in the Regimental Returns of the Third Alabama, the *Atlanta Constitutional* reported the most detailed version of the riot in Anniston.

In the article, “Speedy Vengeance Demanded,” published in the *Atlanta Constitutional* the day after the incident, the writer laid-out a version of the events of

⁶⁷ Ibid.

November 24, 1898, claiming that “with murder in their hearts,” members of the Third Alabama caused the “greatest excitement that the town has ever known.”⁶⁹ Private William Gildheart of the Second Arkansas apparently was shot in the head by a black soldier and then stabbed in the back. After Gildheart was shot, members of the Third Alabama hid in a gully and shot at any white man who passed by. Based on reports of shots fired in the Negro quarter of town, the provost guard was dispatched to investigate. Upon arriving at Fifteenth Street, the provost guard noticed a group of black soldiers numbering between fifty and two hundred, who immediately opened fire on them. After the first volley fired by the black soldiers, provost guardsmen returned fire but had to retreat due to being out-gunned and out-manned. When they returned with reinforcements and more ammunition, they found that the members of the Third Alabama had disappeared. White soldiers who were in the city at the time of the incident gathered around the armory of the provost guard and requested rifles and ammunition. When their request was denied, the white soldiers began “crying like children.” Afterward, every weapon and cartridge of ammunition was stolen from local military armories. Armed white soldiers and citizens arrested any black soldier found on the streets on Anniston.⁷⁰ Other newspapers such as the *Anniston Hot Blast*, *Mobile Daily Register*, and, *Birmingham Age-Herald*, all reported similar versions of the affair.

In the immediate aftermath of the Anniston riot, some white Southerners condemned the idea of an all-black volunteer regiment in Alabama. Senator John Tyler

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ *Atlanta Constitutional* November, 25, 1898.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

(D) of Alabama maintained that blacks were not ready to be armed and serve as soldiers. According to Tyler, blacks were members of a "dependent race" and the South, specifically Alabama, was not prepared for black soldiers due to the current race relations between blacks and whites. Tyler continued his criticism by suggesting that arming Negroes made them the "peers of white men," and to believe that white Southerners could accept black soldiers the Senator declared, "race conditions had been greatly exaggerated."⁷¹ In addition to Senator Tyler, the editor of *Birmingham Age-Herald* echoed the call for the removal of black volunteers in Alabama. The editor cited other clashes that black soldiers had been involved in during the Spanish American War. However, the editor clearly had a disdain for black soldiers in general due to his belief that the only reason blacks entered the military was "to gain his ideal of freedom."⁷² While there were others who requested the disbandment of the Third Alabama, the War Department keep its original schedule and released the Third Alabama Volunteers from service in March of 1899.

Although black state volunteers came predominately from the South and did not have exposure to combat or the frontier lifestyle experiences like black Regular Army soldiers stationed in the Far West for over thirty years, they also refused to accept southern racial customs and segregation in 1898. The black state volunteers of 1898 were part of the "new generation" of African-Americans who had never been slaves and who had more opportunities for educational, economic, and political growth from 1865 to 1898. In strongholds of southern racial customs, black state volunteers did not

⁷¹ *Birmingham Age-Herald* November 25, 1898.

haphazardly destroy property or attack just any civilian. Their retaliation against second-class status and southern customary treatment was calculated strikes in the name of social justice. Residential areas and black business districts were spared. Black volunteers only shutdown areas of town that upheld Jim Crow laws.

⁷² *Birmingham Age-Herald* November 26, 1898.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

At the turn of the nineteenth century black soldiers-- Regular Army or volunteer-- refused to accept southern racial customs and resisted Jim Crow in an organized way. During the thirty-three years following slavery, white southerners created a race-based society to promote white superiority and to subject blacks to a permanent underclass. Although race relations went through gradual changes in the South between 1865 and 1898, by the turn of the century all aspects of southern society were invariably separated by race. Any challenge to the system of racial segregation or discriminatory practices often ended in acts of violence. Long before black soldiers entered the South in 1898, a hostile racial climate already existed.

The attitudes and reactions of black soldiers to second-class treatment and discrimination did not resemble that of most blacks who lived in the South. Southern racial custom required blacks to exhibit total submission to whites at all times. For many blacks who had never lived outside the South, subservience may have become internalized. To the contrary, Regular Army black soldiers who served at desolate locations in the Far West had limited contact with whites and were not accustomed to Jim Crow policies or southern racial customs. Their duties in the Far West included: protecting white civilians, combating renegade Native Americans, and serving in roles of authority. This duty and experience made them confident and assertive. Naturally,

when they arrived in central Florida, a place that had not seen black soldiers before, they resisted second-class treatment.

Although black state volunteers did not have the same experiences of black Regular Army soldiers stationed for over thirty years in the Far West, they also refused to accept southern racial customs and segregation in 1898. The black state volunteers of 1898 were part of the "new generation" of African-Americans who had never been slaves and who had more opportunities for educational, economic, and political growth between 1865 and 1898. The advancement of Negroes after the Civil War created a group of more assertive blacks who more assertively began to question and later resist their place in American society. While there were surely instances of individual blacks who defied southern racial customs and discrimination, black state volunteers consisted of large groups of armed men trained for the rigors of combat. Resistance to Jim Crow by these soldiers would seem to be almost a natural and reasonable response to deliberate acts of discrimination.

Many scholars have dedicated years of scholarship and research crediting those who fought for civil rights and equal treatment of African-Americans. The black Army Regulars and black state volunteers of 1898 should not be omitted from this group. These black soldiers were the ones who planted the seeds of resistance to southern racial customs and Jim Crow that would continue to grow and develop throughout the twentieth century.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources

Government Documents

Index to Correspondence to the War with Spain, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

Office of the Adjunct General, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

Records of the Department of War, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

Records of the Surgeon General 1897, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

Regimental Returns, RG 94, Third Alabama Colored Volunteer Infantry, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

Regimental Returns, RG 94, Third North Carolina, Colored Volunteer Infantry, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

Regimental Returns, RG 94, Sixth Virginia Colored Volunteer Infantry, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

Regimental Returns, RG 94, Tenth Cavalry, National Archives, Washington, D. C.

Manuscripts

Booker T. Washington Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

Robert L. Bullard Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Newspapers

Anniston Hot Blast, Anniston, Alabama.
Atlanta Constitutional, Atlanta, Georgia.
Augusta Chronicle, August, Georgia.
Baltimore Ledger, Baltimore, Maryland.
Cleveland Gazette, Cleveland, Ohio.
Birmingham New Age Herald, Birmingham Alabama.
Illinois Record, Springfield, Illinois.
Indianapolis Freedman, Indianapolis, Indiana.
Iowa State Bystander, Des Moines, Iowa.
Kansas City American Citizen, Kansas City, Missouri.
Kansas State Ledger, Topeka, Kansas.
Mobile Daily Register, Mobile, Alabama.
New York Times, New York, New York.
Richmond Planet, Richmond, Virginia.
Salt Lake City Broad Ax, Salt Lake City, Utah.
Tampa Morning Tribune, Tampa, Florida.
Tampa Tribune, Tampa, Florida.
Washington Bee, Washington, D.C.

Secondary Sources

Astor, Gerald. The Right To Fight. Cambridge, Massachusetts: DaCapo Press, 2001.

Ayers, Edward. The Promise of the New South. New York: Oxford University Press, 1992.

_____. Southern Crossing: A History of the American South, 1877-1906. Oxford: Oxford Press, 1995.

Bigelow, John Jr. Reminiscences of the Santiago Campaign. New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1899.

- Brundage, Fitzhugh. Lynching in the New South. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993.
- Burton, Art. Black, Buckskin, and Blue: African American Scouts and Soldiers on the Western Frontier . Austin: Eakin Press, 1999.
- Carroll, John. The Black Military Experience in the American West. New York: Liveright Press, 1971.
- Cashin, Hershel. Under Fire with the 10th U.S. Cavalry. New York: Arno Press, 1969.
- Dobak, William and Thomas Phillips. The Black Regulars 1866-1898. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2001.
- Fletcher, Marvin. "The Black Immune Regiments in the Spanish American War." *Journal of Negro History* 10 (2004): 1-15.
- Florette, Henri. Black Migration: Movement North 1900-1920. New York: Anchor Press, 1971.
- Fowler, Arlen. The Black Infantry in the West 1869-1891. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999.
- Freehling, William. The South vs. The South. Oxford: University Press, 2001.
- Gates, Grace. The Model City of the New South. Huntsville: Strode, 1978.
- Gatewood, Willard. Black Americans and the White Man's Burden, 1898-1902. Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1975.
- _____. "Negro Troops in Florida 1898". *Florida Historical Quarterly* 49 (1970): 2.
- _____. "Alabama's Negro Experiment," *Journal of Negro History* 57 (1972): 335.
- Howard, Walter. "Family, Religion, and Education: A profile of African American Life in Florida 1900-1930." *The Journal of Negro History* 79 (1994): 3-4.
- Katz, William, The Black West. Seattle: Open Hand Publishing, 1987.
- Kenner, Charles, Buffalo Soldiers and Officers of the Ninth 1867-1898: Black & White Together .Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992.

- Kinevan, Marcos. Frontier Cavalryman: Lieutenant John Bigelow with the Buffalo Soldiers in Texas. El Paso: Texas Western Press, 1998.
- Leckie, William. The Buffalo Soldiers: A Narrative of the Negro Cavalry in the West. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2003.
- Litwack, Leon. Trouble in Mind. New York: Alfred A. Knopf Press, 1998.
- Nalty, Benard. Strength for the Fight: A History of Black Americans in the Military. New York: The Free Press, 1986.
- Nankivell, John. The Buffalo Soldier Regiment: History of the Twenty- Fifth United States Infantry, 1869-1926. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001.
- Packard, Jerrold. American Nightmare: A History of Jim Crow. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2002.
- Rabonowitz, Howard. Race relations in the Urban South 1865-1890. New York: Oxford University Press, 1978.
- Smith, John D. When did Southern Segregation Begin. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2002.
- Steward, Theophilus. The Colored Regulars in the United States Army, With a Sketch of the History of the Colored American, and an Account of his services in the Wars of the Country, From the period of the Revolutionary War to 1899. New York: Arno Press, 1976.
- Trelease Allen. White Terror. New York: Harper and Row, 1971.
- Woodward, C. Vann. Origins of the New South. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1971.
- Wormser, Richard. Rise and fall of Jim Crow. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2003.

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Earl R. Levingston's foundation in education began in New Orleans, Louisiana. After completing secondary school, Earl enlisted into the United States Army serving on the home-front and abroad. Upon earning an honorable discharge he entered college earning a B.A in History from Bowie State. Since graduating Earl has taught multiple subjects and coached and mentored local inner-city young men. In addition to teaching in the U.S, he served as an English instructor in Guadalajara, Mexico. Following the completion of the requirements for a Master of Arts Degree at the University of Texas at Arlington, Earl will continue to strive for excellence academically and grow spiritually.