RACIAL BORDERS: BLACK SOLDIERS AND RACE RELATIONS ALONG THE RIO GRANDE, 1866–1916

by

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African Americans comprised almost 10 percent of the United States Army's strength between 1866 and 1898, participating in all major functions of western military service: Indian pacification, border control, protection of civilian communities, and so on. Although the saga of military conquest has been told many times, the social ramifications of employing former slaves and free Blacks to acquire and secure western lands has been ignored in the historical literature. In the sparsely-populated communities along the Texas-Mexico border, African American soldiers were a ubiquitous presence from the end of the Civil War to the United States' entry into World War One.

During the antebellum era, hundreds of runaway slaves from east Texas found sanctuary in Mexico, while in the Civil War, many black Union soldiers entered Mexico and acculturated to Hispanic culture. The number of black soldiers in border garrisons averaged close to 1000, and in some months approached 2000, prior to 1885. Once Blacks joined the western Army, their relationship with border peoples began to deteriorate. Charged with enforcing American authority and protecting elite
interests, black soldiers became hated symbols of Anglo aggression.

After 1898, African American newspapers advocated military service as a "self-help" opportunity which might win for Blacks an expanded role in their country's new conquests. As Mexicans displaced blacks labor in Texas' developing system of commercial agriculture, a pattern of interracial hostility arose that became vicious once black soldiers returned to the border. At Brownsville, Rio Grande City, Laredo, and other towns, black soldiers and Hispanics engaged in violence. By the time of the Mexican Revolution and the American "Punitive Expedition," the two groups regarded each other as enemies, despite a shared experience with white racism. Their history emphasizes the need to consider interaction between peoples of color rather than with the dominant group alone.
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<td>JAG</td>
<td>Judge Advocate General’s Office</td>
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<td>RG</td>
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EXPLANATION OF TERMS

A frustrating challenge to any writer on race relations is the choice of language to describe the racial context of his or her subjects, how to convey historical meanings while also meeting modern sensitivities, and--particularly for this study--how to use racial terms in a way that does not over-emphasize "race" as the fundamental or exclusive part of an historical actor's identity. As explained in the introductory chapter, the very process of engaging in dialogue about "race relations" implies the centrality of race in social conflict, even though I conclude that race alone holds little power for explaining relationships along the Texas-Mexico border. While I acknowledge this caveat, it seems impossible to proceed without some type of provisional terminology which contemporary readers can recognize.

I have chosen to use the words "Black" or "African American" when referring to persons of African descent. Where "blackness" is used as an adjective rather than a noun (e.g. "black soldiers"), it will not be capitalized. For the sake of equivalency, I have done the same for the noun "White," used interchangeably with the word "Anglo" to describe a non-Hispanic person of European descent.
"Hispanic" refers to any individual from a Spanish-speaking culture; however, since this term often is too broad, I sometimes use "Tejano" or "Mexican American" to describe Hispanics living within the political boundaries of Texas or the United States. "Mexican" in most cases will refer to a citizen of Mexico; readers will hopefully know from the context when the term describes an ethnic affiliation and not a political one.

My use of military terms also requires some explanation. The phrase "buffalo soldier" technically describes Blacks who served in cavalry units during the post-Civil War western campaigns. In recent years, however, the term has been expanded with racial pride to include not only infantrymen but all African Americans who served in the Army. Although purists will probably object, I have chosen to use "buffalo soldier" in its current colloquial meaning. Finally, my capitalization of the word "Army" indicates a shortened usage of the official "United States Army." As in my use of "black," when the word is employed as an adjective (e.g. army leaders), the capitalization is dropped.
INTRODUCTION
BEYOND BINARY RACIAL THEORY

From the end of the Civil War to the United States’ entry into the great World War, African American soldiers served in an imperialistic army. Stationed in the West up to 1898, black soldiers protected white communities, forced Native Americans onto government reservations, patrolled the Mexican border, and broke up labor disputes in mining areas. Their role in helping to seize western lands left them well-prepared for the next stage of American expansion overseas, fighting in Cuba, the Philippines, and Mexico prior to 1917.

Although the role of the United States Army in western conquest has received considerable attention in military histories as well as in popular culture, the Army’s first black regulars generally have been ignored—at least until recently. Some historians drew attention to their activities in the 1960s, but not until Colin Powell’s visible involvement in the "buffalo soldiers" monument at Fort Leavenworth were they rescued from obscurity. Even prior to its 1992 dedication, the Leavenworth project accompanied a veritable explosion of celebratory memorabilia, which now includes an abundance
of museum displays, documentaries, reenactment societies, and newspaper and journal articles.

Yet not all have been enthusiastic about proclaiming black soldiers' contributions to western settlement. When the United States Postmaster General announced a "buffalo soldiers" commemorative stamp in 1994, representatives of the American Indian Movement demanded both the stamp's withdrawal and a public apology.¹ Even more emotionally charged was an incident described by Baltimore Sun correspondent M. Dion Thompson while on a western tour. Approached by an inquisitive elderly Indian woman at the site of a Wounded Knee cemetery, Thompson explained with pride the reason for the trip, whereupon the woman replied:

"Buffalo soldiers." She spat out the words and slapped her steering wheel. "Buffalo soldiers and the white man killed my people. My ancestors are up there! And I don't appreciate you being here. Why don't you go look at Abraham Lincoln's grave?"

For Thompson, the encounter produced not only shock but confusion: "... she was gone, leaving me with a dull, sick, guilty feeling at the pit of my stomach. Were my heroes oppressors? Is the cavalryman on the stamp

shooting at an Indian? . . . Ours is a tangled history."² In one moment, Thompson apparently grasped the frustrating irony which permeates the topic: that African American males—no strangers themselves to persecution—aided the subjugation of Indian and Hispanic peoples throughout the West.

How and why such a process occurred presents potential questions of great significance, illustrating the complicated, even paradoxical nature of American race relations. Although western expansion often has been told as a story with easily identifiable heroes and villains, the model of white oppressors and dark-skinned resisters creates a deceptive picture of a polarized racial struggle that characterized American conquest. The United States Army employed former slaves, Irish and German immigrants, and even Indian scouts and auxiliaries to dispossess native peoples, with white and black settlers following behind and occupying recently acquired lands. Too often, scholars minimize the way that native tribes fought each other long before immigrant intrusion, and formed alliances with advancing Whites against traditional enemies. The Battle of Little Bighorn, after decades of Sioux expansion on the Northern Plains, was

²Thompson, "Visiting the world of Buffalo Soldiers," Baltimore Sun, April 21, 1996, Travel Section, 1-2.
not as much a classic fight between Whites and Indians as a war between two imperialistic powers--former allies even--for territorial control.\textsuperscript{3}

A more accurate account of western conquest has been hindered by the lack of an effective model which explains the West's racial complexity. In part, this reflects western historians' long struggle to liberate themselves from the shackles of Frederick Jackson Turner's frontier thesis. Turner gave race and ethnicity little place in his worldview, regarding with mild curiosity the histories of people of color but making no move to incorporate them into his model. Indians and Hispanics appear in his accounts as part of the "savage wilderness" that Americans fought and conquered, and in so doing, shaped themselves.\textsuperscript{4} Recognizing the more sophisticated quality of race relations studies in other regions, revisionists--especially those of the last generation--


have produced a range of new works which examine the experiences of minority groups in the West.⁵

Unfortunately, such studies often rely on dichotomous models of racial categories which are more suited for White-Black communities of the South than they are for the West. Indeed, the presence of several racialized groups in the West—each with varying constructions of "self" in opposition to "other"—challenges the way that scholars customarily think about "race." For instance, Indians' concept of "whiteness" had less to do with color than with religion, language, customs, and habits of subsistence. From that perspective, buffalo soldiers appeared as "white" as any white man. Nor did the concept of "Indian," itself a Eurocentric term, have any meaning to the hundreds of diverse peoples who occupied the region prior to European exploration. Where do Hispanics fit into this scheme?

In the nineteenth century, Mexicans were both natives and immigrants, not completely accepted by either Anglos or Indians. Include a sizable Asian presence of Chinese and Japanese laborers, and we have a whirling cacophony of voices and peoples who fall on neither side of the color line, certainly not black but not really white. The inadequacies of the bipolar division paradigm have been aptly summarized by Yehudi Webster: "The problem is not that nonblack nonwhites have been left out of racial studies. They do not belong there in the first place. Racial studies were developed to chart the place and fate of the Negro in white society."6

Even the terms that scholars use to describe the region's occupants illustrate the problems they face when trying to comprehend western conquest through binary models. African American historians, like many African Americans, have little trouble defining "Blacks" in opposition to "Whites," a term which may include Italians, Arabs, or Mexicans. But open a book on Chicano, Asian, or Native American history and the meanings of "otherness" change entirely. The term

"Mexican American," as well as the more politically-charged "Chicano," suggests an identity of southwestern Spanish-speakers who share a history of Anglo oppression. These terms may be sufficient until we ask the question "What is an Anglo?" One authority on borderlands culture defines the Southwest’s small African American population as basically "Anglo" in its group patterns, having more in common with "Whites" by virtue of a shared language. Confusion increases when we then turn to a work on Blacks in Texas and see "Anglo" utilized there to denote only persons of white color.

Each term, of course, changes according to subject position, carrying its own unique history and serving its own purpose. The point in conflating them is not to recommend the imposition of some tyrannical consistency, but to show the problems scholars must confront if they hope to unravel the "tangled history" that Thompson perceived in a Wounded Knee cemetery. From the perspective of an African American historian, buffalo

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7Webster, The Racialization of America, 114-21.


soldiers may appear as forgotten heroes; it seems doubtful that a Native American or a Chicano historian would feel the same. As long as the history of each group is studied in isolation, this disparity can be avoided. But that would be a great loss, especially since many scholars evidence a willingness to transcend the traditional approach that comes from examining a minority group's interactions with the dominant group alone. The trick lies in constructing a theory and methodology that can incorporate not just two but several racialized groups within the same narrative, exploring not only how "nonwhites" interacted with "whites," but also how they came to define themselves as one or the other. In other words, an examination is required of how minority groups lived, loved, and fought with each other.

Recently, Sherry L. Smith has challenged new Western historians to re-tell the story of the Army in the West by using the innovative new methods of social history.¹⁰ With that challenge, the time appears right for an appraisal of the buffalo soldiers and their complicated legacy. The first step in this endeavor requires understanding the limitations of "race" for explaining

how minorities interact. Try as they might, historians and reformers find little evidence of a "rainbow coalition" in our past where peoples of color cooperated in interracial camaraderie. Several reasons exist for minority-on-minority conflict. Persons construct their identities based on class, gender, ethnic, and nationalistic roles which may alienate them from people with whom they share racial interests. Black soldiers, for instance, participated in Indian and Hispanic dispossession in part as racially-motivated actors, but also as agents of the United States Army. Therefore, we must discover how their national loyalties intertwined with their racial ones, how they behaved not merely as African Americans, but more important in this case, as American soldiers. W. E. B. Du Bois described this duality of citizenship and blackness as "two unreconciled strivings, two warring ideals" which characterized African Americans' history. Did military service represent for these soldiers an attempt to reconcile the two, to achieve their full potential both as black men and as American citizens?

Surprisingly, both Du Bois and his contemporary Turner suggested in their respective models some clues as

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to how such a question might be answered. Turner’s "frontier," as a mobile line of civilization, defined America’s national character; Du Bois described "the veil" as a racial line that defined the Janus-faced nature of American society. Although neither Turner nor Du Bois meant to address the complexity of western race relations, both located the defining meanings of national and racial identity, respectively, on the geographical and conceptual peripheries, what we might otherwise term "a border." Contemporary borderlands studies emphasize borders as unique zones of cultural convergence, with more extensive ethnic mixing and migration than the relatively homogenous national heartlands. "Border" in this sense represents a barrier, a geographic demarcation between nations and peoples, but also a permeable exchange, a region open by varying degrees to foreign influences.

When applied to racial studies, "border" assumes a different meaning: as the perceptual edge of racial identity. Aware of how peoples have intermixed across time, scholars now reject the classification of humankind into distinct biological groups and instead speak of "race" as a social construct, part of a process of "racialization" where races are created not by nature but by human history. Despite American culture's insistence on neat labels, biracial and multiracial persons continually engage in "border crossings," defying attempts at color line categorization. Even sympathetic scholars have difficulty acknowledging this, for the very act of maintaining dialogue about "race relations" implicitly reinforces racial grouping as a social reality. Du Bois, who at times wrote of the


14 I cannot improve on the words of David G. Gutierrez, who claims "too few seem to recognize that framing these questions in this manner (once again) encourages a reproduction of modes of analysis which virtually guarantee that the categories minority and majority - and the asymmetrical relationships of power that they imply - will continue to persist, and be reinforced." Gutierrez, "Significant to Whom? Mexican Americans and the History of the American West," Western Historical Quarterly 24, 4 (November 1993): 519.
veil as an iron-clad division, acknowledged that individuals do not fit into scientific delimitations of categories. Here, "border" constitutes not a place but an idea, an artificial separation of groups, based on a combination of ethnic and physiological characteristics.

These two definitions of "border," while not completely reconcilable, do share some similarities. Both are artificial creations that draw parameters for how individuals and groups define "self" in opposition to "other," and both can be and are created simultaneously. As such, borders may be defined in terms of dual meaning, both as a separation of polities and as an indicator of racial and national identity. Here the role of military service becomes crucial, for defining a border means more than two states agreeing on a geographic boundary; it also demands the exercise of national authority--most often through military power--to enforce that boundary, and to attach the respective loyalties of residents on both sides to their own. As a result, states generate a "nation-building" process which demands the drawing of clear distinctions between citizens and foreigners, a more virulent process on the periphery than the interior. In what Benedict Anderson calls "imagined communities,"

national identity may be constructed on the basis of language, natural boundaries, or primordial tribal differences, as well as through the histories of peripheral communities far removed from the territorial center.\textsuperscript{16}

Social historians also have explored the approach of defining national character through the experiences of marginalized groups, people on the racial peripheries who are removed from the cultural mainstream.\textsuperscript{17} The idea of race, like ethnicity, certainly can exist independently from the state, but can also emerge from this process of nation-building as a deliberate mode of stratification that justifies one group's dominance over another.\textsuperscript{18}


\textsuperscript{17}For a useful example, see Gary Y. Okihiro, \textit{Margins and Mainstreams: Asians in American History and Culture} (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1994).

Therefore, as states limit or expand their authority by defining new borders, they also set new terms for defining national identity, and consequently may create new racial hierarchies as well.

United States history has been told many times as the continual abrogation and redrawing of the nation's territorial boundaries. Whether in the Appalachian mountains, on the Forty-Eighth parallel, or at the Nueces or Mississippi Rivers, few frontier occupants acknowledged and honored the legitimacy of political boundaries, pushing themselves into zones of ethnic and national confluence that placed their lives and their governments in precarious situations. According to Clarence Clendenen, "the borderlands between different people are the historic scenes of violence and disorder; . . . In such regions violence ceases only after populations have increased and governments with power enough to enforce order have come into existence."\(^1\)

Clendenen's point can be expressed another way: that the violence of border collisions necessitated the increase and exertion of sufficient governmental power to enforce effective order. Hence, the process of transforming a

border from a vague, arbitrary line into a precise, legitimate division of authority and identity encouraged, and was made possible by, the development of nationalistic states.

The history of the United States' border with Mexico illustrates this connection. Twenty years after the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo established the Rio Grande as the official boundary, border dwellers felt themselves little affected by this decision of their distant governments. More than 1500 miles long, the Rio Grande proved a poor choice for a physical demarcation between nations, revealing how little the treaty's framers knew of the region and its geography. During the summer heat, the river becomes an insignificant trickle, unable to provide suitable irrigation or to discourage illegal crossings. Its shifting and erratic channel often produces a capricious change of course, which left nineteenth-century surveyors confused as to whether the actual boundary lay at the mathematical line defined in 1848, or if it changed according to natural avulsion.  

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20Brownsville Evening Ranchero, July 22, 1876. Article V of the Treaty declared the river's "deepest channel" to be the actual political boundary. In the 1850s, when the United States Topographical Corps surveyed the length of the Rio Grande, interpretive differences arose between engineers as to whether the boundary changed accordingly whenever the channel shifted. See William H. Goetzmann, Army Exploration in the
Border culture and demography appeared to emulate nature's basic disregard for territorial separation. Well into the late 1860s, Spanish language, customs, and familial practices predominated in the region north of the river. Attached to their clans and local communities, few border dwellers—living on the periphery where the reach of both governments was weakest—knew or cared about the treaty's provisions that granted American citizenship, seeing national identities as purely legalistic and even meaningless distinctions. Commercial lines into both countries lay open, with merchants, raiding parties, and revolutionaries crossing back and forth with little trouble. By 1870, the proximity of railroads and the demoralizing effects of continual warfare had brought a wave of crime and violence which gave the Rio Grande a reputation for lawlessness that persists to this day.

This could not have occurred without the respective national crises that rendered both governments impotent on their mutual border: in the United States, a bloody sectional war over secession and slavery; in Mexico, a

American West, 1803-1863 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), 153-208. By the 1870s, both sides agreed on an interpretation that the precise boundary lay astronomically at the deepest channel as of 1848, thereafter serving as a perpetual line.
prolonged defense against Maximilian and his foreign invaders. The end of these struggles launched a decades-long period that saw a redistribution of military power from core to periphery, changing the border from an artificial line into a representation of national sovereignty. During the decade that followed Appomattox, the United States Army both crushed indigenous resistance and served as the essential peace-keeping force on the American side of the Rio Grande, displacing local civil authorities. Likewise, the ascent of Porfirio Diaz in 1876 precipitated an era of gradual centralization in the Mexican state and a policy of cooperation with American forces that allowed both sides to assert control over the border’s chaotic factions. Diaz’s accomplishment provided a three-decade respite and encouraged discontent which turned against him in 1910, thereby launching another wave of border conflict. In all, the half-century prior to World War One marked an important transition in the development of two modern states that projected their domination over the Rio Grande region.


Scholars continue to grapple with the consequences of borderland conquest for racial and class structures. Anglo invasion provided the necessary sense of "otherness" that Mexicans needed to replace their local loyalties with broader ones. The very concept of "Mexican" may have emerged less from internal nationalism than from outside oppression. As one Arizona resident put it, "We are all Mexicans anyway because the gueros (blondes, or Anglos) treat all of us alike." David Montejano's perceptive work, *Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas*, asserted a primary link between racial hierarchies and the unequal distribution of economic development. Although constituting a distinct ethnic group, Mexicans became identified as a "race" once prejudice and discrimination accompanied Anglo control of the farming and ranching labor system. Montejano viewed changes in race relations as a result of evolving class structures, themselves determined by local economies,

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the Mexican state, see Paul J. Vanderwood, *Disorder and Progress: Bandits, Police, and Mexican Development* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1981).

politics, and patterns of land ownership. The appeal of Montejano's analysis rests on its compatibility with the concept of "race" in Latin societies as an indicator of class status, whereby social and material advancement can "lighten" a person to a higher place on the racial hierarchy. This model, however, leaves several unanswered questions, ignoring non-economic causes of prejudice and the activities of several competing racialized groups. How does the presence, for instance, of Indians and Blacks in this region challenge historians to clarify distinctions of "Mexicans" as a nationality, a race, or both?

Addressing these distinctions, and understanding how military activities helped to define them, seems relevant, especially since the Rio Grande's early fluidity as a political border also applied to its inhabitants' racial identities. Although certainly not immune to factionalism, border residents prior to the 1870s lacked definitive concepts about "race" and

"nationality." Some groups, in fact, manipulated these very abstractions to perpetuate their freedom. For example, the black Seminoles, a branch of the Seminoles in Indian Territory, entered Coahuila in the early 1850s and lived for decades by aiding both the Mexican and American armies against raiding tribes. Casting themselves at various times as either Indian or Black depending on circumstances, the black Seminoles were one of several groups that relied on the border's national and racial permeability to maintain cultural autonomy, a strategy that became unworkable by the early twentieth century.\(^{25}\) Border consolidation entailed the establishment not only of a definitive political boundary, but also of an imposed system of racial, national, and class categories that made future "crossings"—figuratively and literally—quite difficult.

In this process of nation-building, the role of the military has been crucial. Nations rely on their armies for two primary, related functions: first, for defense, and second, for the element of symbolic unity that

\(^{25}\)The most thorough recent study of the black Seminoles is Kevin Mulroy's *Freedom on the Border: The Seminole Maroons in Florida, the Indian Territory, Coahuila, and Texas* (Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 1993).
amalgamates diverse groups into a unified whole. By linking people of various racial, ethnic, religious, and class interests in common national endeavors, armies can ameliorate internal division even while creating discord between groups which might otherwise become allies. New formations of "us and them" accompany the use of military power in defining national territory and identity.

The United States has witnessed this phenomenon many times, especially among African Americans since 1865. As historian Oscar Martinez has recognized, "military service has been one of the most significant avenues for acculturating members of minority groups to American culture." While there are some examples of minorities who achieve upward mobility through military service, the Army's recruitment of members who are not representative of the national majority also has been fraught with tension, particularly when servicemen are employed in settings that cause national and racial loyalties to collide. During the 1965 Dominican Republic invasion, rebel forces tried to persuade black troops to turn and fire instead on their white officers (even though, as has been pointed


27 Martinez, Border People, 262-63.
out, they might better have focused on Hispanic soldiers). During the urban uprisings of the late 1960s, National Guard commanders expressed concern that black recruits would not fight other African Americans in inner-city ghettos.28

Nor have these fears been without some merit. Civil rights activists often perceive military service as an imperialist manipulation to "co-opt" the enemy and prevent multiracial alliances. Eldridge Cleaver (before his abandonment of Islam) wrote about the deployment of black soldiers in Vietnam:

> If through stupidity or by following hand-picked leaders who are the servile agents of the power structure, black Americans allow this strategy to succeed against them, then when the time comes and they need this help and support from around the world, it will not be there. All of the international love, respect, and goodwill that black Americans now have around the world will have dried up.29

Although Cleaver pinpointed the essential irony of the situation, he exaggerated the "international goodwill"

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toward African Americans. The employment of Blacks and other racialized groups in the cause of national expansion existed long before the Vietnam War. Having fought in all of their country's conflicts, African Americans joined the fight to extend federal control over western lands, comprising nearly 10 percent of the United States Army's strength during the three decades before the Spanish American War. And as Thompson's encounter on the Sioux reservation illustrated, such service made friendship between Blacks and other people of color less likely.

The history of how black soldiers helped to secure American control over its southern border offers an opportunity for studying how interracial rivalries develop. By doing this, we can enhance our understanding of what western expansion contributed to the creation and maintenance of new color lines, and how the interaction of minority groups even helped to form those lines. Such an endeavor requires recognition that although national power shaped the border, the remnants of this process are most visible at local levels. The use of military might and the federal Army's employment of Blacks brought old

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racial conflicts into a new arena: the social climates of western communities. Black soldiers' receptions throughout the West varied, depending on the number of troops, the Army's relationship with civilians, a subregion's racial culture, and the presence or absence of other "nonwhites."\footnote{Thomas D. Phillips, "The Black Regulars," in Allan G. Bogue, Phillips, and James E. Wright, eds., The West of the American People (Itasca, Illinois: F. E. Peacock Publishers, 1970), 138-43.}

In the case of the Rio Grande, the significance of military presence, particularly of a black military presence, might be best explained through a brief population analysis (see appendix to introduction). Despite the inaccurate nature of census-taking on the frontier, data from all border counties between Brownsville on the Gulf Coast and El Paso in west Texas provide some broad but useful demographic outlines. During the period from 1860 to 1920, when the region saw gradual integration into larger national and capitalistic networks, the border underwent a transition from a sparsely settled ranching area to a commodity-based agricultural zone with several nascent cities. Few African American civilians settled along the Rio Grande. Black Texans remained in the state's eastern cotton belt, with their numbers rising slightly after 1890 at a rate...
lower than that of the general population. (see Table I) Railroad construction, the need for farm labor and, after 1910, the Mexican Revolution, all hastened migration into southern Texas. None of this was possible without a heavy dependence on military protection. A line of almost a dozen federal forts stretched along the border, bringing thousands of soldiers from diverse ethnic and regional backgrounds into close contact with Hispanic and Indian natives.

Many of these soldiers were black. Fearing the consequences of placing them near white communities, army officials adopted an informal policy of sending black troops to distant, unsettled areas, far from any civilian populace which might object to their presence. The Rio Grande, with its population regarded as "nonwhite," appeared to fit this criterion well. Regimental and post returns show that during black soldiers' first ten years of border service, their numbers never averaged less than 1000, and during months of heightened activity often approached 2000. (see Table II) Comprising between 3 to 7 percent of the border's American population during the 1870s, black servicemen withdrew from southern Texas by 1885. After the Spanish American War, black regiments returned to the border from time to time, part of an
effort to quell revolutionary rumblings in northern Mexico and enforce American neutrality.

Plains Indians are credited with originating the term "buffalo soldier" to refer to members of the black cavalry units, but the phrase since has been used colloquially as a synonym for all African Americans who served in the western Army. A subject of great fanfare in recent years, the study of black regulars in the West has been overshadowed by the topic's many "contribution" aspects and its cries of "we were there too." As a consequence, the more serious questions concerning their impact on western race relations have gone ignored. Besides their official military duties, black troops exerted a social influence far out of proportion to what their numbers might indicate.

A small handful of scholars have attempted to assess these effects. Nearly half a century ago, Texas historian J. Evetts Haley denounced the federal Army's use of buffalo soldiers as an early system of black rule:

The prestige of the Army and the well-being of Texas suffered from the fact that Fort Concho and other frontier posts were garrisoned with Negro troops. It was unfortunate on the one hand because colored troops were neither apt frontiersmen nor good soldiers, and doubly unfortunate on the other

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because the ingrained attitudes, social customs and prejudices so strong in the South were often violent in Texas.

In view of the harsh antipathies that inevitably follow devastating war, it is likely that Negroes were designedly garrisoned in the South as further humiliation for its people. But when they were placed there in the role of military police and protectors of the peace, bitter insult was added to irreparable injury. It was like rubbing salt into the wounds of fiercely proud, rebellious and individually unconquerable people... Thus Negro troops came to be garrisoned among the most resentful frontiersmen in the most important posts in Texas.\[33\]

Despite Haley's sympathy for white Texans (contrasted with his prejudicial tone toward Blacks), he managed to convey the stern consequences of army practices. Texas was both a western state and a southern one. While the cult of the Confederacy enjoyed less popularity there than elsewhere, Texas shared the same attitudes toward federal domination as did the Deep South. The sight of uniformed Blacks represented the epitome of Yankee tyranny and provided a visible reminder of southern defeat. Because of the need for border defense, Texas was the only former Confederate state where federal troops continued to serve after Reconstruction's end, thereby straining military-civilian relations even further. Fearful that the presence of black troops might

turn black civilians "uppity," Whites seldom bothered to conceal their hatred of buffalo soldiers, leading to many violent episodes.

Aware of these dangers, army commanders attempted when possible to station Blacks beyond "Anglo" settlements, mostly along the Rio Grande. This practice, however, also failed to reduce racial turmoil. While black soldiers and Hispanics mixed peacefully on occasion, mistrust and violence characterized their relationships. Consider the remark of Brigadier General Edward O. C. Ord in 1877: "the use of colored soldiers to cross the river after raiding Indians is, in my opinion, impolitic, not because they have shown any want of bravery, but because their employment is much more offensive to the Mexican inhabitants than that of white soldiers."^34

Tejanos on the American side of the river shared the antagonism of Mexican citizens toward black soldiers. Over a fifty-year span, altercations occurred in places like Laredo, El Paso, and Rio Grande City. The 1906 Brownsville affair, which resulted in the dishonorable

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discharge of 167 black infantrymen and outraged black opinion nationwide, often has been attributed to southern Whites' prejudice. Previous studies, though, fail to account for Brownsville's predominantly Spanish-speaking population, or the shooting's origins in patterns of anti-Black discrimination practiced by local Mexicans and Tejanos.\(^{35}\) In one historian's view, "Lower-class Hispanics . . . through emulation, convenience, or conviction, shared the southern white prejudice against blacks."\(^{36}\)

For those familiar with William Willis' "divide and conquer" thesis, it becomes quite easy to explain this picture of two minority groups fighting each other as the work of a frightened but powerful white majority that used military service as a way of preventing racial coalitions between people of color.\(^{37}\) But this conspiratorial explanation, while perhaps satisfying


those who see race relations through a binary lens, exaggerates race as a feature of identity by ignoring its intersections with class, nationalism, and other determinants. By assuming a common interest between Blacks, Indians, and Hispanics built only on a shared experience of racial exploitation, scholars impose a "nonwhite" homogeneity that excludes the possibility of aversions--autonomous from Whites--that may have arisen from each group's respective sense of difference. Black soldiers acted not as manipulable pawns but as voluntary participants in the subjugation of Indian and Hispanic peoples throughout the West. Some of them probably recognized the irony and approached their tasks with trepidation. Yet the fact remains that several thousand African American males enlisted and many reenlisted, becoming both victims of, and accomplices in, their country's racial and imperialistic policies.

This scenario might leave contemporary scholars a bit puzzled because it contradicts their traditional view of how they think minorities should act. But aside from exposing the flaws of dichotomous models about oppressors and oppressed, what new lessons would the story of black soldiers on the Mexican border teach? We could talk easily about a triangular relationship rather than a binary one, where Blacks, Whites, and Hispanics lived in
constant contact. Yet that ignores the presence of a fourth "racial" group, Native Americans, who—as in the case of the black Seminoles—could be classified as any of the other three depending on military and diplomatic necessity.

Obviously, any theory that attempts to deal with the border’s many racial complexities in their entirety faces limitations, and this study is certainly no exception. Rather than promise an overarching approach, it may be preferable to treat the Rio Grande as a region in transition, where the tightening of national definitions of "American" and "Mexican" also created a new set of relationships based partly on race. Put another way, "conquering" the border—meaning the exertion of federal control for the purpose of securing future capitalistic development—also meant "racializing" it, drawing boundaries that, while not precisely delineated, allowed some groups to become allies by defining others as enemies.

These questions can be addressed through the story of African American soldiers stationed on the Texas-Mexico border between 1866 and 1916. The end of the American Civil War brought new opportunities for national service to black males. Although Blacks had fought in all of their country’s previous wars, they never had
served in the peacetime regular Army. Most who enlisted never anticipated the rigors of western military life nor endured them out of any sense of heightened patriotism. But over the next half-century, African American soldiers evolved, like the Army itself, into members of a professional institution, finding in military service a route toward advancement and citizenship. By the time of the first world war, black soldiers had become an early prototype of civil rights activist, demanding respect and equality from fellow Americans whom they were obliged to protect.

This embrace of national identity, found through an internalization of the values of flag and uniform, came at a price. Military service during the age of imperialism meant an expansion of racial oppression—akin to what Blacks had felt for centuries—to other dark-skinned peoples. The specter produced confusing thoughts: to racist Whites, suspicion over Blacks’ loyalty, their possible defection, and what rights they might demand in return for their service; to the black private or noncommissioned officer, the moral headache of seeking justice at home by subjugating others abroad; and to the Mexican, Filipino, or American Indian who resisted foreign aggression, the uncertainty of whether skin or
uniform color should be more determinative in identifying the enemy.

Few places demonstrate this curious and even tragic situation better than the Rio Grande, where black soldiers played an instrumental role in extending American hegemony and engaged in open conflict with native populations. Black troops' relationships with these groups rarely were consistent. At times appearing to recognize some mutuality, they could mingle amicably, becoming friends, doing business, or even intermarrying. During periods of crisis, however, black soldiers joined hands with white Texans to suppress any Indian or Mexican effort that threatened American control. Their border service ended during the Mexican Revolution of the 1910s, when the United States Army marshalled thousands of troops in Texas to prevent civil war from spreading north. As part of Pershing's Punitive Expedition of 1916, black soldiers participated in an attack on Mexico's national sovereignty, earning them the further scorn of a frontier populace that castigated white and black troops alike as "gringos."

This study focuses on the experiences of black servicemen, but it also aims at revealing how their relationships with the border's many diverse peoples co-evolved with military activity. Buffalo soldiers,
therefore, may appear less as the central actors than as the prism through which race relations are viewed. Since black soldiers approached the Rio Grande and its people as American citizens and interacted mostly with Hispanics living in Texas, most of the research and narrative focuses on the American side of the border. Events in Mexico did, however, shape much of the context for the American military's activities, and so discussion of those events has been included where necessary. The focus on the American side is not intended to slight a possible trans-border emphasis which might reveal different conclusions. Several assumptions are implicit in this study, not the least of which is that there is a certain connection between the racial composition of an invading force and local patterns of race relations. But this assumption may be necessary for achieving the larger goal: understanding how national and racial loyalties intertwine to affect the process by which groups distinguish friends from enemies, and, through their confrontations with these "others," come to define themselves.

Such an appreciation will contribute to a fuller, richer portrait of race relations in the American West, a diverse and multicultural region that, in the words of Richard White, "without the experiences of its
minorities, ... might as well be New Jersey with mountains and deserts." But even more important are the challenges to comprehend, and then to overcome, America's tradition of racial conflict, a legacy that flares just as brightly in the present as in the past. In 1992, Americans watched the Los Angeles riots with awestruck intensity, presuming the rage and violence to be driven by black hatred of white privilege. This explanation, fully consistent with the traditional binary view of race in America, was reinforced by media images of white trucker Reginald Denny's brutal beating at an intersection. Few journalists thought it relevant to report that nearly 30 other persons also were assaulted on the same corner, including Vietnamese, Japanese Americans, Mexicans, and the adopted Caucasian son of African American parents.

By refusing to probe these complexities, social analysts replaced a complicated picture of multiracial hostility and competition with a simplified version of white-versus-nonwhite confrontation, a mistake that

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38 White, "Race Relations," 397.

historians repeat all too often. If a more informed and conscientious vision is to be created, scholars must recognize and deal with the concurrent presence of many overlapping narratives, identities, and relationships. W. E. B. Du Bois himself acknowledged this later in life by declaring: "When fifty races look each other in the eye, face to face, there arises a new conception of humanity and its problems . . . "\(^{40}\) This dissertation attempts to answer how at least some of those races, and two nations, faced each other on a border called the Rio Grande.

## APPENDIX TO INTRODUCTION

### TABLE I

**U.S. POPULATION IN TEXAS BORDER COUNTIES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Black Pop.</th>
<th>Black Ratio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1860</td>
<td>17,689</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>1.0 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1870</td>
<td>30,432</td>
<td>1,712</td>
<td>5.6 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1880</td>
<td>56,208</td>
<td>2,323</td>
<td>4.1 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1890</td>
<td>85,096</td>
<td>1,566</td>
<td>1.8 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1900</td>
<td>111,657</td>
<td>3,026</td>
<td>2.7 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1910</td>
<td>181,541</td>
<td>3,033</td>
<td>1.6 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920</td>
<td>279,925</td>
<td>3,644</td>
<td>1.3 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: *U.S. Bureau of the Census, Eighth Census of the United States, 1860 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office); Ninth Census of the United States, 1870; Tenth Census of the United States, 1880; Eleventh Census of the United States, 1890; Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900; Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910; and Fourteenth Census of the United States, 1920. The Texas counties include Cameron, Hidalgo, Starr, Zapata, Webb, Maverick, Kinney, Val Verde, Terrell, Brewster, Presidio, Jeff Davis, Hudspeth, El Paso, and Tom Green. Several counties were divided and/or consolidated during this period, altering the accuracy of these figures.*
APPENDIX TO INTRODUCTION

Table II

AVERAGE ANNUAL NUMBER OF BLACK SOLDIERS ON MEXICAN BORDER
1867-1884

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of Black Soldiers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1867</td>
<td>935</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1868</td>
<td>1,322</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1869</td>
<td>1,469</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1870</td>
<td>1,871</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1871</td>
<td>1,643</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1872</td>
<td>1,398</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1873</td>
<td>1,665</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1874</td>
<td>1,558</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1875</td>
<td>1,338</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1876</td>
<td>1,134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1877</td>
<td>1,112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1878</td>
<td>931</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1879</td>
<td>1,020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1880</td>
<td>669</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1881</td>
<td>303</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1882</td>
<td>391</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1883</td>
<td>506</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1884</td>
<td>600</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Regimental Returns, Thirty-eighth Infantry, AGO, M665, roll 293, RG 94, NAMP; Regimental Returns, Thirty-ninth Infantry, AGO, M665, roll 294, NAMP; Regimental Returns, Fortieth Infantry, AGO, M665, roll 295, NAMP; Regimental Returns, Forty-first Infantry, AGO, M665, roll 296, NAMP; Regimental Returns, Twenty-fourth Infantry, AGO, M665, rolls 245-247, NAMP; Regimental Returns, Twenty-fifth Infantry, AGO, M665, rolls 254-256, NAMP; Regimental Returns, Ninth Cavalry, AGO, M744, rolls 87-89, NAMP; Regimental Returns, Tenth Cavalry, AGO, M744, rolls, 95-97; Post Returns, Fort Bliss, AGO, M617, rolls 116-117, NAMP; Post Returns, Fort Quitman, AGO, M617, roll 985, NAMP; Post Returns, Fort Davis, AGO, M617, roll 297, NAMP; Post Returns, Fort Stockton, AGO, M617, roll 1229, NAMP; Post Returns, Fort Concho, AGO, M617, rolls 241-42, NAMP; Post Returns, Fort McKavett, AGO, M617, roll 687, NAMP; Post Returns, Fort Clark, AGO, M617, roll 214-215, NAMP; Post Returns, Fort Duncan, AGO, M617, roll 336, NAMP; Post Returns, Fort McIntosh, AGO, M617, rolls 681-683, NAMP; Post Returns, Ringgold Barracks, AGO, M617, rolls 1020-1022, NAMP; and Post Returns, Fort Brown, AGO, M617, roll 152, NAMP. Figures are derived from the numbers of soldiers from black companies stationed at each post, with an average total figured for the year.
Civilization began along the rivers and its fortunes have been linked to them ever since. So it has been with the Rio Grande. Rising on the continental divide and fed by streams from the southern Rocky Mountains, the great river flows south to southeast and onto the rugged Big Bend country, where it angles north and then southeast again. Joined by the Pecos River, its valley widens as it approaches the Gulf of Mexico, the final destination of an 1800-mile journey. Like all nature, its various names and meanings are defined only by the humans who inhabit its banks and tributaries. Spanish-speakers call it Rio Bravo (bold river), or more precisely, Rio Bravo del Norte (bold river of the north). For most of its course, the river flows through extremely dry country, leaving ranchers and farmers to compete for its meager resources. Before the coming of the railroad, strangers entered a region inhospitable to travel and long-distance communication, with the heat and aridity causing settlers to cluster around scarce water sources. As late as 1873,
officers required guides to reach established communities, traveling on primitive roads through unmapped areas.¹

Despite the forbidding landscape, humans have lived here for centuries. Unlike the Nile and other thoroughfares that stimulated social cooperation and unity, the Rio Grande and its surrounding terrain encouraged fragmentation, and reliance on one's tribe or immediate locality. Indigenous peoples lacked the unifying sense of ethnic identity that Europeans homogeneously called "Indian." With their loyalties attached to family, clan, and village, indigenes engaged in prolonged warfare over territory and subsistence rights long before the imposition of modern nationalistic states.

Spanish and Mexican settlers of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries continued this preference for local "patria chica" identity.² Hispanic settlers in Texas occupied the province farthest removed from the capital of Mexico City and, like most frontier people, came to depend more on themselves and their local

¹author not named, February 24, 1873, Inspector General's Reports, RG 159, NA.

institutions than the distant federal government. Even after Mexican independence from Spain in 1821, northerners in the Rio Grande area found "nationality" a far weaker basis for identity than their traditional alliances built on religion and family.\(^3\)

Questions about cultural identities—how they change, how they help people relate to institutions, and how they lead to cooperation or conflict—frame some of the most important issues addressed by social historians. The history of black soldiers stationed on the Rio Grande between 1866 and 1916, as well as the peoples they encountered, is in many ways a history of evolving identities. During this time, the border region joined a global system of international politics and commerce, a system strengthened by federal military power. Sociologist Stuart Hall posits that identities are constructed through difference, functioning as points of identification which emerge from the play of specific modes of power.\(^4\) Hall's point is illustrated by the way that the United States and Mexican governments tried to


assert control over their mutual border in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Military activity encouraged the formation of new identities based on nationalism, class and race. By becoming politicized, the Rio Grande acquired spatial meaning as a division of polities, denoting both a change in political jurisdiction and a demarcation of national citizenship. As new national loyalties developed, so did concepts about race and its meaning.

Anglo domination in the late nineteenth century, aided by the United States Army, contributed to a growing sense of national awareness among border peoples, which in turn contributed to the Mexican Revolution. That great upheaval sought many goals, one being the elimination of United States interference in Mexican affairs. The history of revolutionary fervor in border states like Tamaulipas, Chihuahua, and Sonora suggests a strong connection between "foreign" interaction and nationalistic pride. In order to understand how these

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changes occurred, it is first necessary to examine the diverse groups who lived along the Rio Grande prior to the military interventions of the 1870s, how they reacted to the Army's presence, and how the Army and its black soldiers helped to undermine old relationships by creating complex new ones.

The term "multiracial," as it applies to the Rio Grande before 1870, can in fact be misleading, for it projects contemporary usage of "race" into a time when the word carried a different meaning. While few scholars to date have examined Indian ideas about "race," one study claims that eastern tribes formed a concept of "redness" as early as the eighteenth century in order to distinguish themselves from "Whites." For their part, Hispanics recognized variations of "whiteness" relevant to ancestry, distinguishing between Spaniards, mestizos, and people with high proportions of "Indian blood." Some evidence indicates that these distinctions carried less significance in peripheral border areas. The town of Eagle Pass, Texas, according to a resident of the early 1850s, saw Indians, Euro-Americans, and Mexicans living

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"Nancy Shoemaker, "How Indians Got to Be Red," American Historical Review 102, 3 (June 1997): 625-44."
and working together with no sign of racial bias. The claim of one borderlands historian that the Hispanic northern frontier was less homogeneous than its Anglo-American counterpart supports the picture of a racially open society.

Only with the arrival of Anglos in the 1820s did the term "Mexican" begin to carry specific meaning as an ethnic designation. The Mexican government, hoping to encourage settlement of its northern frontier, invited Americans to apply for land grants and to establish colonies in Texas. Anglo settlers who arrived there—both those who launched the 1836 revolution and those who came later—brought with them certain biases regarding Hispanics, some of which scholars can safely describe as racist. But often, these biases arose more from cultural differences, such as religious and political customs, than they did from ideas about Anglo-Saxon supremacy. To American pioneers steeped in Protestantism and democratic government, Mexico resembled its parent Spain, a country they perceived as a land of despotism and Catholic

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superstition. Anglo settlers sometimes inherited from their colonial ancestors a belief that Spaniards occupied the lowest rung of the European hierarchy.9

Sentiments like these—reflecting a heritage of Old World prejudices—persisted into the late nineteenth century, but they appeared strongest before the Mexican American War and the rise of Manifest Destiny. Reginald Horsman has suggested that these Anglo-Hispanic cultural differences became the prototype for a nascent racist ideology that justified American expansion.10 By the late 1840s, when the United States seized vast portions of land in the Southwest, Americans had begun to see Mexicans no longer as the mere products of inferior institutions, but as inferior beings.

While racism helped to justify American acquisitions after 1848, its influence should not be overstated. The emerging social structure of southern Texas represented an accommodation between Anglo and Hispanic elites that rendered ethnic and racial divisions secondary to class. Despite their prejudices, American newcomers formed


marriage alliances with leading Spanish and Mexican families, creating a biracial upper class that by the 1870s controlled the politics and commerce of Rio Grande communities. This strong tradition of mestizaje (mixing) requires scholars, when describing Anglo attitudes towards Hispanics, to distinguish between ethnocentrism and racism. The extent to which American immigrants to southern Texas accustomed themselves to Mexican religion, language, and culture suggests "Hispanicization" of new arrivals and not a hegemonic Anglo takeover.

Americans' opinions about Hispanics rested in part on the latter's supposed kinship with other "nonwhite" groups like Blacks and Indians. Early immigrants to the Southwest, many of whom came from southern plantation systems, had difficulty accommodating Hispanics and Indians into their conventional binary scheme of Whites


12 Robert J. Rosenbaum suggests that Anglos modified their racial views with a perennial American optimism that created a "melting pot" mentality: dark-skinned peoples, with the right leadership and institutions, could be assimilated. Rosenbaum, *Mexicano Resistance in the Southwest*, 12-15.


and Blacks. Those groups contained no conspicuous negroid features, although certain "dark" elements appeared detectable. The term "greaser," which was applied to both Indians and Mexicans as early as the 1830s, denoted a person of swarthy, dirty appearance, evidence of racial impurity. According to this thinking, Hispanics once were "white" but through generations of admixture with red and black peoples, had acquired the habits of lesser races and came to resemble them physically and socially. Later generations of border residents and policymakers would feel the consequences wrought by this lowering of Indians and Hispanics on the racial scale— the "negroification" of the Rio Grande's original inhabitants.

This easy dichotomy of "whites" and "nonwhites" reflected only the biases of Anglos who inherited their colonial ancestors' fear of an Indian-Black alliance. Most worries about camaraderie between "nonwhites" had little basis in reality. Mexicans usually took grave offense when referred to as "Indians," considering it a term of reproach which linked them to barbarism and savagery. If a dichotomy existed at all among border people, its line was drawn not by race or skin color, but

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15Ibid., 8, 14-23.
by culture: seasonal mobility versus sedentary agriculture, European versus indigenous language, affiliation with a national state, and so on. By those criteria, Mexicans shared more in common with arriving Americans than they did with Comanches and Kickapoos.

Border residents of the mid-nineteenth century did not lack concepts of "race," but their understanding of it lacked the fixed, essentialist meaning that it would hold a few decades later. Like "nationality," the term remained fluid and open, allowing people to move from one category to another. The black Seminoles may be the best example of a group which exploited the border's racial and political arbitrariness--engaging in literal and metaphorical "border crossings"--to achieve their goal of tribal autonomy. As former slaves who sought the protection of Seminole Indians in Florida, they formed an ethnic subgroup, living among the Seminoles but seldom intermarrying with them. After the Seminoles' failed war with the United States and their subsequent removal to Indian Territory, Blacks experienced conflict with other tribes, particularly the slave-owning Creeks. In 1850, several hundred black Seminoles left Indian Territory for the Mexican border state of Coahuila. There, they received land grants from the Mexican government in
return for protecting the region from other Indians.\textsuperscript{16} Having adopted the customs and language of Native Americans, they temporarily managed to preserve their freedom and cultural distinctiveness through employment as mercenaries.

Despite their contemporary classification as "Blacks," the black Seminoles represented the Rio Grande’s pre-racialized and pre-national culture, and so defied easy categorization. This ambiguity became more difficult to maintain and would disappear over the next several decades. No government as of the mid-nineteenth century yet possessed sufficient strength to wrest control from the area’s true rulers: nomadic tribes who crossed the Rio Grande at will. But Mexico and the United States would repeat the practice of using groups like the black Seminoles to establish military control.

American expansion gave Hispanics living in Texas ample reason for resenting the arriving Anglos. Many Tejanos had joined the 1836 revolution only to watch their rights and property revoked following Texas independence. The United States’ annexation of Texas, 

and the establishment of the Rio Grande as the official border in 1848, rendered many Hispanics a dispossessed class on lands they had helped to settle. While the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo promised protection of native Mexicans' property rights, Hispanic landowners found themselves cheated by Texas courts, while hundreds of others—refusing to tolerate Anglo encroachment—retreated across the Rio Grande and established new towns like Matamoros and Nuevo Laredo. 17

Anglo-Hispanic relations varied along the border according to sectional characteristics. The Lower Rio Grande Valley, stretching from Laredo to Brownsville, contained the highest rates of violence and banditry. (see appendix to Chapter One, Map I) Anglos blamed this phenomenon on the schemes of Mexican leaders in Tamaulipas, particularly men like Juan Cortina who led anti-Yankee activity from his base in Matamoros. 18 But in the central and western frontier areas that surrounded Del Rio and El Paso, Americans reported a more friendly


18Jerry Thompson, ed., Fifty Miles and a Fight: Major Samuel Peter Heintzelman's Journal of Texas and the Cortina War (Austin: Texas State Historical Association, 1998). This useful collection of letters by the commander of the U.S. Army in the Lower Valley covers the Army's attempts to subdue Cortina in 1859-60.
and peaceful population of Mexicans. Here, Indians threatened Anglos and Hispanics alike.\textsuperscript{19}

Politically, the Lower Valley also differed from west Texas. During debates over admission in 1850, the United States Congress entertained several appeals to reduce or divide Texas. Brownsville residents at the time requested that the Lower Valley be admitted as a separate state. White voters in east Texas supported the Confederacy during the Civil War, unlike the pro-Union western frontier which attracted more immigrants, voted Republican, and enjoyed a more sedate relationship with Mexicans, if not with Indians.\textsuperscript{20}

Sectional variations shaped the way that all groups interacted with the African American population. Most Blacks lived in the eastern part of Texas, having first arrived as slaves in the 1820s. Although several free Blacks participated in the rebellion against Santa Anna, the Republic of Texas, in its 1836 constitution, adopted a clause which forbade their further admission. This action, however, represented a mere symbolic effort to


\textsuperscript{20}William L. Richter, \textit{The Army in Texas During Reconstruction, 1865-1870} (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 1987), 141-42.
counteract Mexico's anti-slavery laws. In a state where males outnumbered females, Anglo men frequently sought available marriage partners among Hispanics, and, to a lesser extent, among Blacks.²¹

Although African Americans congregated in the cotton belt, their presence was not an oddity elsewhere, especially not on the sprawling ranches of central and southern Texas. Trustworthy slaves often made the transition from field hand to cattle drover, and many black males—slave and free—became expert horsemen and stock handlers. Like soldiering, the physical demands of ranch work left little room for the usual racial mores, offering black cowboys a better chance for equality and dignity. One study estimates that Blacks and Mexicans comprised up to one-third of all cowboys on the great herd drives from 1866 to 1880.²² Interracial cooperation in Texas seemed possible, at least within the masculine world of the trail crew.


The historical record speaks clearly of a significant black presence in all facets of western settlement, from ranching, gold-mining and fur-trapping, to town and community-building.\(^2\) Scholars now face the next step of examining how Blacks interacted with other racialized groups, a topic already explored in some multiracial studies of the Southeast. Despite oral traditions of "instinctive sympathy" between Indians and African American slaves, Indians killed Blacks as indiscriminately as they did Whites or members of enemy tribes, even helping to suppress slave insurrections or finding employment as slave-catchers.\(^3\) Just as Whites blurred the distinctions between other groups based on color, nomadic Indians saw little difference between Whites, Blacks, and even sedentary Indians; all lived in permanent dwellings, wore strange clothing, and used manufactured implements. Given the religious and cultural differences, nomadic Indians approached African


Americans the same way they approached Whites and Mexicans: with considerable distrust.\textsuperscript{25}

On the Rio Grande, the peculiarities of frontier settlement encouraged some rare instances of Black-Indian cooperation. The black Seminoles allied for a time with Lipan Apaches in Coahuila, while Whites sometimes sent slaves on dangerous assignments since they believed Indians would not attack them. In one incident near Fort Clark, an assorted band of Indians, Mexicans, and Blacks attacked a party of teamsters. The border region attracted scores of exceptional individuals—mostly loners and renegades—who possessed sufficient brazen fortitude to seek protection among Indian tribes instead of with white society. Black Texans, who lived less under the overseer's lash and acquired greater independence than slaves in the Deep South, seemed more willing to risk their lives by seeking out such relationships.\textsuperscript{26} Despite numerous exceptions, no discernible pattern emerges which permits generalizations about Black-Indian relations. Indeed, to assume either

\textsuperscript{25}Porter, "Relations Between Negroes and Indians Within the Present Limits of the United States," \textit{Journal of Negro History} 27, 3 (July 1932): 287-367.

\textsuperscript{26}Porter, "Negroes and Indians on the Texas Frontier, 1834-1874," \textit{Southwestern Historical Quarterly} 53, 2 (October 1949): 151-63.
friendship or hostility based on racial empathy or antagonism would be to exaggerate race's importance.

African Americans did, however, make common cause with Hispanics, whose lifestyle and culture seemed more familiar to them than that of Indians. The antagonism that characterized buffalo soldiers' post-1870 relations with Mexicans contrasts with the overall friendly tone of Black-Hispanic interaction during the antebellum period. In the late 1840s, Whites traveling on the Santa Fe trail and the southern gold routes to California noted with disgust that Blacks enjoyed great favor with Mexicans. On one occasion, a party of migrants entered a ranch house occupied by poor Hispanics, who offered their sole chair to a black man. This caused the white diarist to write: "It is notorious that the wooly-headed, thick-lipped African is regarded with more favor and affection than an American by the peons."27

White Texans harbored suspicions about a possible Black-Mexican alliance. After Mexico's liberation from Spain, the country ended slavery in 1829, partly for humanitarian reasons, but also with the expectation that American Blacks would colonize the northern frontier. During Mexico's 1831 Senate debates, representatives

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hoped that by providing sanctuary to fugitive American slaves, they could encourage a Black presence which might check the flow of Anglo settlement. The Mexican government's firm stand against slavery also contributed to the Texas revolution of 1836 and to its subsequent decision not to recognize the Republic of Texas.

Slaveowners had genuine cause to fear Mexico's anti-slavery policy, for thousands of runaway slaves sought freedom between 1829 and 1865 by attempting to cross the Rio Grande. To many Blacks, the words "border" and "Mexico" meant freedom and opportunity for those brave enough to risk crossing the desert and eluding slave catchers and Indians. Texas officials estimated that by 1855, more than 4000 black fugitives had entered northern Mexico, filtering through the communities of Eagle Pass and Piedras Negras. Tejanos often aided runaway slaves, hiding them in homes and churches until they could be shepherded into Coahuila or Tamaulipas. By the mid-1850s, several Texas counties had passed laws

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prohibiting Mexicans from communicating with slaves. In Colorado County, Anglos hanged three Blacks and evicted all Mexicans after uncovering a supposed plot to kill local Whites and fight their way to the border.\textsuperscript{30}

American politicians tried to negotiate extradition agreements for runaway slaves, but the Mexican government remained defiant. Cooperative Mexican officials, however, could be found for the right price. Many of the first illegal violations of Mexican sovereignty by Americans involved the pursuit of black fugitives. In one case near the village of Mier, an American smuggler known only as "Captain Jack" employed a free black Mexican named Melchor Valenzuela to steal a skiff. After Mexican authorities arrested Valenzuela, he confessed and was released on bail--only to be kidnapped by Captain Jack and another American who had crossed the border, seized him at gunpoint, and carried him north to be sold into slavery.\textsuperscript{31} During the 1850s, the problem of runaway slaves grew so intense that on at least two occasions, Texas Rangers, on the pretense of tracking Indians, entered Mexico in order to capture fugitives. One of

\textsuperscript{30}De Leon, \textit{They Called Them Greasers}, 49-52.

these missions saw a scheme led by Ranger John Ford to join with Mexican revolutionaries, capture Matamoros, and establish an independent, pro-slavery republic in the Lower Valley.\textsuperscript{32}

As a collision ground between cultures, the Rio Grande stood at the nexus of a series of power relationships between various groups, for whom it constituted different meanings at different times.\textsuperscript{33} Turner's analogy of the frontier as a "safety valve" toward freedom and opportunity might best be applied in this case to African Americans, who benefited from the proximity of Mexico. Indian tribes and outlaw gangs also enjoyed the protection which the border offered. Especially in the Rio Grande Valley, lower-class Mexicans rallied behind violent extralegal factions. These groups could continue to dominate the area as long as the United States and Mexico proved unwilling or unable to violate an international boundary for pursuit of criminals and stolen property.

\textsuperscript{32}Tyler, "Fugitive Slaves in Mexico," 1-12; and Smallwood, \textit{Time of Hope, Time of Despair}, 20-21.

The American Civil War further delayed the exercise of national control and brought new opportunities for minority groups. In 1862, Union leaders toyed with a proposal by Kansas Senator James Lane to authorize a tricolor brigade of Whites, Indians, and Blacks that would protect western territories.\textsuperscript{34} In Texas, most Tejanos refused to support the Confederacy, but consistent with the class divisions of Hispanic society, those who did espouse the Confederate cause became trusted allies of wealthy Whites with whom they formed important economic and political connections. In 1867, one editor declared that Mexicans must join German and Irish immigrants in forming a "white" political party to oppose the Blacks.\textsuperscript{35} Indian tribes showed no consistency in serving either side, breaking into pro-rebel or pro-Union factions, or switching factions by trying to align themselves with the winning side.\textsuperscript{36}

The Civil War gave to eastern Blacks a chance to use military service as a means of achieving citizenship and


\textsuperscript{35}San Antonio Express, November 1, 1867. See also De Leon, They Called Them Greasers, 57-59.

\textsuperscript{36}Porter, "Relations Between Indians and Negroes," 353-58.
equality. During the antebellum period when only Whites could serve, Blacks interpreted the wearing of a uniform and the carrying of weapons as an indication of trust, a responsibility to tote an equal share in the burden of defense. A common spiritual heard in slave quarters opened with the line "Do you think I’ll make a soldier?" Even slave revolts could become military affairs, with rebellious slave men organizing themselves through soldier-like discipline. The importance of armed self-defense is evident in slaves' story of how George Washington, on his deathbed, supposedly advised his wife: "Martha, Martha, let me charge you, dear, never to trust a nigger with a gun." Like other nineteenth-century Americans who saw firearm ownership as a prerequisite for liberty, many black males interpreted their future prospects for equality and freedom within militaristic values.


Although African Americans had served in all of their country's previous wars, the 1863 emancipation and subsequent enlistment of freedmen into Union service provided the first substantial use of Blacks in a military capacity. The United States Colored Troops (USCT) comprised more than 10 percent of Union forces, one of several factors that tipped the scale to the North's favor during the last two years of the war.\textsuperscript{40} While this presented an advantage to Union leaders before 1865, the presence of black soldiers in the occupied South—where they sometimes outnumbered white troops—became a matter of grave concern during Reconstruction. Generals Ulysses Grant and Philip Sheridan shared southerners' worries that armed black men did more to threaten peaceable relations than to alleviate them. In Louisiana, discharged Blacks, unlike Whites, were not allowed to purchase their rifles for fear of exacerbating civilian tensions.\textsuperscript{41}


In Texas, black soldiers outnumbered white soldiers by three to one up to January 1867, a ratio that resulted in part from federal Reconstruction but also from affairs on the border. Mexico's Liberal government at this time struggled against an attempted invasion by France's Napoleon III and his puppet Maximilian. Trying to intimidate Mexican expansionists and suppress border raids, the United States Army stationed over half of all its Texas troops on the Rio Grande. Hundreds of black servicemen crowded into Brownsville and surrounding areas, where they met Spanish-speaking people for the first time. A USCT officer at Edinburg remarked in 1866, "The Mexicans are without much prejudice against the negroes on account of color, and if let alone by the whites would give no trouble." Black Civil War veterans enjoyed friendship with locals and even expressed sympathy for the Liberals' cause. Some discharged black soldiers, as well as several deserters,


43 Jenkins to AAG, District of the Rio Grande, April 7, 1866, Letter and Order Book, 19th United States Colored Infantry, RG 94, NA.
even crossed the river and joined the juaristas in the northern army of Mexico."

The beginning of Reconstruction and the juaristas' execution of Maximilian in 1867 preceded a decline in the friendly relationship between Blacks and Hispanics. Runaway slaves, dispossessed Mexicans, resistant Indian tribes, and white outlaws long had flocked to the Rio Grande, where they could avoid federal authorities on both sides simply by crossing to and fro. But by 1870, Mexico and the United States could afford to allocate more military resources to protect their mutual border. By recruiting minorities into this endeavor, both countries created a new set of relationships which eroded the possibility of interracial alliances.

Neither nation, however, found the recruitment of troops for border control an easy matter. Mexican officials admitted with frankness to American diplomats in the 1870s that their depleted national treasury and their country's internal instability meant that protection of the northern frontier received low priority. The Mexican government reserved its best troops and most experienced officers for suppressing...

"Testimony of Captain Lewis Johnson, Twenty-fourth Infantry, December 4, 1877, Texas Border Troubles, 45th Cong., 2nd sess., H. Misc. Doc. 64, 142."
insurrections in central Mexico, leaving the Rio Grande region under the care of local caudillos.\textsuperscript{45} The Mexican army often gathered recruits by cleaning out the prisons or impressing peons into service. Once these troops arrived in the Lower Valley, they deserted in large numbers, taking refuge in border communities, or joining the roving population that terrorized ranchers and farmers.\textsuperscript{46} Those who stayed in uniform endured miserable living conditions, a feature common to most nineteenth-century armies. In 1879, Mexican regulars stationed at Piedras Negras, complaining of hunger and no pay for five months, launched a mutiny that caused American forces at nearby Fort Duncan to be placed on alert.\textsuperscript{47} When a Mexican band arrived in San Antonio to entertain American troops, the Mexican commander requested that a guard of American soldiers be placed over his men to prevent them from deserting.\textsuperscript{48}

\textsuperscript{45}Relations of the United States with Mexico, xiii-xvi.

\textsuperscript{46}Ord to AGO, May 24, 1876, AGO-LR, M666, roll 198, RG 94, NAMP.

\textsuperscript{47}Albert Tirpe to Capt. Hood, June 8, 1879, Fort Duncan, Post Records, RG 393, Pt. 5, NA.

Certain similarities stand out in the Mexican and American frontier armies. Soldiering in both countries was a dirty, low-class job performed by men who had few alternatives. Recruits were considered the dregs of society: displaced industrial workers, uprooted peasants, even criminals on the run who lived under aliases. Both armies suffered from high desertion rates, especially along the border where escape simply meant fording the river. Mexican and American officers sometimes cooperated in tracking, arresting, and confining deserters from the other side. Both also faced the problem of imposing national supremacy on well-entrenched local powers. Mexican commanders' habit of raising funds through the prestimo system—a local duty on livestock, jewelry and other possessions—encouraged rebellions in the northern states.49

The American military faced similar problems. One year after Appomattox, the United States Army stood at a fraction of its Civil War size, less than 60,000: a number insufficient for suppressing resistant western tribes and dissident border factions. Unlike Mexico, the United States, however, could draw on freedmen and recent immigrants to replenish its army's ranks. Former slaves

49"Relations of the United States with Mexico, 169."
appeared especially attractive as possible recruits, at least to Radical Republicans. In July 1866, Congress approved a final bill that increased the size of the regular Army and allowed for the establishment of six new regiments to be composed exclusively of Blacks.  

Three years later, Congress reorganized and consolidated the infantry regiments, leaving two regiments of infantry (the Twenty-fourth and Twenty-fifth) and two of cavalry (the Ninth and Tenth). Blacks henceforth would constitute a proportion of the regular Army equivalent to their Civil War numbers: about 10 percent of strength up to 1870, and 9 percent (more than 2000 men) through the Spanish American War.

Since the 1790s, federal law, as well as most state militias, had restricted enlistment to Whites. Blacks even had been barred from government jobs such as mail delivery. Reconstruction leaders may have seen black military service as a political hammer to hold over the South’s head, but more likely, they passed the act with


51Coffman, The Old Army, 365-71.

the intent of elevating former slaves into useful and productive citizens. The 1866 legislation mandated the appointment of a chaplain to each black regiment—not a requirement for white units—and emphasized the teaching of literacy to black recruits.\textsuperscript{53}

Regular Army officers had little confidence in the ability of Blacks to become good soldiers. Many commanders believed in black inferiority, or felt that reserving a special place in the Army for minorities altered the institution's basic purpose. General William T. Sherman wrote in 1877:

The experiment of converting them into soldiers has been honorably and in good faith tried . . . and has been partially successful; but the army is not and should not be construed a charitable institution.\textsuperscript{54}

Black troops often received poor equipment, supplies, food, and stations. This did not necessarily result from racial discrimination, since white troops were no better equipped. Budgetary and manpower limitations meant that racial prejudice could play little part in decisions about allocation of resources. The demands of military service, like those of the cattle trails, discouraged

\textsuperscript{53}Congressional Globe, July 28, 1866.

formation of color lines to the extent of those in the larger society. Army policymakers could ill afford conformity to civilian racial mores, but they were very attuned to public opinion. Blacks and Whites, though they worked together in the field, served in segregated regiments.

Like any institutional attempt to define "race," recruiters struggled to identify "blackness" and, by mistake, allowed some enlistees to "pass" into white regiments. George Goldsborough, for example, served two years with the white Seventh Cavalry before joining the Tenth. 55 Stationed at Fort Duncan in 1878, Lieutenant John Bigelow recorded cases known to his black orderly of men who had "crossed over" from black to white regiments, or had done the reverse, in order to hide a past life. 56 In another instance, a private from the Tenth Cavalry applied for transfer to a white regiment, claiming that after his parents' death, he had been raised by a black family, and, being dark-complexioned, assumed himself to be black. Despite a medical report which concluded that the soldier could have been either mulatto or Caucasian,

55Kinevan, Frontier Cavalryman, 94-95.  
56Ibid.
the War Department denied the private's application on the grounds of insufficient evidence.\textsuperscript{57}

Despite Sherman's opinion as to the military's proper function, the post-Civil War Army acted very much as a type of experimental model for ethnic relations. European immigrants, mostly Irish and Germans, constituted more than half of all recruits up to 1875. Recruiting officers focused their efforts on northern cities, hoping to reach the largest available population pool. This held true for black recruits as well. Few hailed from the Deep South, recording their origins as from Kentucky, Virginia, New York, or Pennsylvania. The average American soldier was single, illiterate, about twenty-five years old, and likely to be either black or a foreign-born white person. Nativists sometimes questioned the loyalty of such an ethnically mixed Army. These complaints declined by the 1880s, as the Army gradually professionalized, reenlistments became more common, and better educated and older men began to fill the ranks.\textsuperscript{58}

\textsuperscript{57}Marvin E. Fletcher, \textit{The Black Soldier and Officer in the United States Army, 1891-1917} (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1974), 61-62.

\textsuperscript{58}Coffman, 329-32; Robert M. Utley, \textit{Frontier Regulars: The United States Army and the Indian, 1866-1891} (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1973), 23-28; and Robert Wooster, \textit{Soldiers, Sutlers, and Settlers:}
African Americans were not the only minority group sought for enlistment. If military service could assimilate Blacks to American culture and values, then recruiting Native Americans could mean the effective co-opting of an enemy. Since Indians themselves often assisted American military expansion, the first meetings between soldiers and Indians usually occurred as allies rather than as combatants. Indian scouts and auxiliaries served the United States for a variety of reasons, not the least of which was regular pay. Many saw the Army as a useful weapon against their traditional tribal enemies. For some Indian males, combat provided an arena which satisfied their warrior culture’s demands on masculine roles.  

The United States and Mexico both attempted to befriend hostile groups and draw them into their service as a way of asserting border control. Such efforts, however, could backfire. In a situation similar to that of the black Seminoles, the Kickapoos left their reservations in Indian Territory in 1863 and settled in

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Garrison Life on the Texas Frontier (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 1987), 59-60.

Coahuila, where they received government assurances of permanent residence in exchange for protecting towns and ranches. By 1870, however, clashes with Texans drove them into a series of raiding expeditions east of the Rio Grande. One Texas newspaper suggested that, rather than attempt an expensive extermination campaign, Uncle Sam might enlist the Kickapoos as scouts and soldiers.60 Perhaps convinced of the wisdom of that course, Congress in 1871 appropriated $25,000 to return the Kickapoos to their reservations in Indian Territory, dispatching Interior Department agents to negotiate an agreement. Although the Mexican government favored the proposed relocation, the plan failed, partly due to the profitable trade in stolen goods and livestock that the Kickapoos enjoyed with local power-brokers.61

More successful was the United States Army's recruitment of black Seminoles. Following the defeat of the Confederacy and the end of legalized slavery, several maroon bands favored the prospect of returning to the United States. A group led by John Kibbetts met with officials at Fort Duncan in 1870 and agreed to assist in the suppression of opposing tribes. Over the next four

60San Antonio Express, April 7, 1870.
61Relations of the United States with Mexico, xii.
decades, the Seminole Negro Indian Scouts (official name) patrolled the Rio Grande, participating in major campaigns and performing various routine duties. Numbering no more than 50, the Scouts provided effective service through their knowledge of border geography and their ability to speak the regional lingua franca. By 1876, other maroon groups from Texas and Mexico joined the Scouts at their Fort Duncan base. In anticipation of eventual resettlement, Kibbetts' original band moved to Fort Clark and supplemented the Scouts' meager salaries by raising crops and doing laundry for officers and enlisted men.62

The black regiments developed a rapport with the Seminole Scouts, affirming assumptions that officers who led buffalo soldiers also could command "black Indians." White commanders like Major Zenas Bliss of the Twenty-fifth Infantry and Lieutenant John Bullis of the Twenty-fourth worked closely with the Scouts. Historians can only speculate on the reactions of eastern recruits to seeing fellow Blacks who rode about in Indian regalia and spoke an unfamiliar language.

Despite their cultural distinctiveness, the black Seminoles constituted anything but a closed ethnic group. Descriptive records reveal a membership that included Texas freedmen, runaway slaves, Blacks born in Mexico, mulattoes of German and Irish ancestry, former black servants of white officers, and even buffalo soldiers who rode with the Scouts after their expiration of enlistment. Charles Hughes, who served with the Ninth Cavalry from 1866 to 1871, later joined their ranks, as did William Worthington, who deserted his regiment and reenlisted with the Scouts under a new name.63

The black Seminoles appear to have typified border peoples who regarded "race" with ambiguity. Ancestry mattered little in determining who gained acceptance. Outsiders could join the group through a variety of associations, but marriage to a Seminole woman provided the quickest route. Unlike regular soldiers, the Scouts attracted the service of married men who settled their families on military posts. Their ambiguous racial status unfortunately became a drawback once they re-entered Texas as federal employees. The 1870 agreement promised them resettlement in Indian Territory, but this

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63 Descriptive Book of Seminole Negro Scouts, March 1894-April 1905, Fort Ringgold, Post Records, RG 393, Part 5, NA.
promise remained unfulfilled as the decade wore on. Interior Department agents argued that the Army had no authority to commit funds for relocating Blacks and claimed that the Scouts and their families, being descendants of slaves, belonged under the jurisdiction of the Freedmen's Bureau.64

Army leaders from the highest commands denounced this bureaucratic squabbling, demanding either fair compensation for the Seminoles or that the entire band be moved to Florida at state expense. General Philip Sheridan implored the Indian Bureau to "deliver justice to a deserving people whose service has been, and can still be made so valuable to the government."65 Department of Texas commander Edward O. C. Ord and Colonel Edward Hatch, commander of the Ninth Cavalry, solemnly warned that if the Army's agreement with the Scouts was not honored, the Seminoles would return to Mexico and create a desert haven for outlaws, renegade tribes, and military deserters of all races.66 No pleas could prompt any federal agency to accept responsibility,

64Mulroy, Freedom on the Border, 132-51.

65Sheridan, second endorsement, August 23, 1875, to Headquarters of Army, Secretary of Interior, Indian Division, Special Lists, Miscellaneous files, entry 663, Seminole Negroes, 1870-75, RG 48, NA.

66Ibid., Hatch to AAG, Dpt. of TX, August 9, 1875.
However, and the Scouts remained in service at Fort Clark until their eviction in 1914.

Such treatment reflected public apathy about the regular Army and the financial constraints under which it worked. In 1869, an appropriations act reduced its size from the 1866 total of 54,000 to less than 38,000, a number that continued to drop during the next decade. These low numbers, and the public's declining support for the western Army, challenges the usual picture of a hegemonic "white" military which overwhelmed the region by sheer force. That picture holds true to an extent. But considering the Army's ethnic makeup and how its scarce resources were scattered over vast areas, successful conquest also depended on the military's ability to transform potential enemies into allies. Establishing federal authority over the Rio Grande meant more than an exertion of raw power; in addition, it meant entering a complex theater of negotiations in order to manipulate long-standing rivalries and stimulate new ones.

Black regulars entered this arena following several years of service in Kansas and Louisiana. By July 1870, the Twenty-fourth and Twenty-fifth Infantries, over 600

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Utley, Frontier Regulars, 15-18.
men total, had been distributed along the Rio Grande. The Ninth Cavalry had preceded these regiments in Texas by three years, arriving in San Antonio in March 1867 and dispersed to various forts thereafter. Of the four regiments, the Tenth Cavalry saw the least action in Texas, not arriving until the mid-1870s. The total number of black soldiers between April 1867 and April 1871 increased from 148 to 1,968. All border garrisons where they were stationed neighbored civilian communities. (see appendix to Chapter One, Map II)

Problems soon arose with the new troops. Low recruitment standards, hurried training, and lack of discipline contributed to an April 1867 mutiny in three Ninth Cavalry companies. A local newspaper warned against recruiting and arming freedmen without sufficient preparation. Like all Confederate states, occupied Texas already held a large number of Union troops, mostly in its cotton districts. Unlike the rest of the South, Texas had a long frontier of settlement and an

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68Regimental Returns, Thirty-eighth, Thirty-ninth, Fortieth, and Forty-first Infantries, AGO, RG 94, rolls 293-296, NAMP; Regimental Returns, Twenty-fourth Infantry, AGO, M665, rolls 245-247, NAMP; Regimental Returns, Twenty-fifth Infantry, AGO, M665, rolls 254-256, NAMP; Regimental Returns, Ninth Cavalry, AGO, M744, rolls 87-89, NAMP; and Regimental Returns, Tenth Cavalry, AGO, M744, rolls 95-97, NAMP.

69San Antonio Express, May 8, 1867.
international border area that demanded additional garrisons. Only here, where South and West collided, did the Congressional Army of Reconstruction overlap with Sherman’s frontier Army. White Texans recognized the necessity of the latter but found the former’s presence particularly noxious, and regarded all federal troops—especially Blacks—with hostility.

As black soldiers poured into Texas during the late 1860s, they entered a region almost unprecedented for its levels of lawlessness and racial violence. With a state population of about one million, more than 1000 persons were murdered annually from 1865 to 1870, a fourth or more of these being black. The Ku Klux Klan operated east of the Trinity River, intimidating or killing black citizens and even Union soldiers. Comparing the problems of east and west Texas, General Sheridan remarked with great perception that: "It is strange that over a white man killed by Indians on an extensive frontier, the greatest excitement will take place but

over the killing of many freedmen in the settlements nothing is done."\textsuperscript{71}

For many former Confederates, striking at the United States government and its black recruits represented both a symbolic action to avenge Southern defeat and a political one to reestablish state supremacy. In the fall of 1866, Governor James Throckmorton demanded the arrest of two black soldiers—accused of a killing in Victoria—who sought protection from the Freedmen’s Bureau. Throckmorton convinced army officials to turn the accused men over for trial, but by that time they already had been discharged. With Texans demanding the Blacks’ removal and a return to civil government, the Army could not have picked a worse time to assign the Ninth Cavalry to Texas. Sheridan informed Throckmorton that as long as Reconstruction forces were not harassed, the Ninth would be stationed far from where they might offend the dignity of white Texans.\textsuperscript{72}

The battle of competing jurisdictions between state and federal authorities, which characterized


\textsuperscript{72}Richter, The Army in Texas During Reconstruction, 63–67.
Reconstruction in Texas, also affected the activities of the frontier Army. As American ranchers and developers entered the region, they ignited tensions with Indians, maroons, and outlaw gangs to whom the border presented a safety zone because of its scarce law enforcement. Mexico, United States, and Texas authorities struggled to assign responsibility for border control even while thwarting each other's efforts. Conflict between state of Texas authorities and federal forces at times overshadowed the central drama of Indian and Mexican pacification. As successors to an independent republic, white Texans harbored long-standing fears about a permanent standing army in their midst, fears that the recent war and the color of the new troops did nothing to relieve.

Texans would have to endure considerable social turmoil before they would concede the need for more federal forces, and only then under certain legal constraints. By the late 1860s, violence in west Texas and the Lower Valley began to overcome concerns about Yankee occupation. Near Fort Concho (present-day San Angelo), an alliance between the Comanches and Kiowas interrupted stagecoach traffic and threatened local ranchers, particularly adventurous cattlemen who trailed their herds west through the Llano Estacado (Staked
Plains) to buyers in New Mexico and Arizona. Kickapoos, Lipans and Potawatomis also traversed the area, waging war on buffalo hunters and local villagers.\textsuperscript{73}

Similar conditions prevailed in the Lower Valley, although violence there carried a nationalistic tinge peculiar to the region's demography and the internal character of the Mexican state. Public order in Mexico depended on the government's ability to recruit bandits and other violent elements into its service.\textsuperscript{74} During the French occupation, the Benito Juarez government relocated north to El Paso, absorbing dissident border groups into its cause. As Mexico's internal war subsided, rural gangs which had fought Maximilian--now aligned with local strongmen like Juan Cortina--resumed their plunder of border towns and American stock-raisers.

Bitterness toward American encroachment became an important factor in the Lower Valley, as the area remained Hispanic in character. Of the region's 27,000 residents in 1870, enumerators counted more than 16,000 as foreign-born and more than 9,000 as having at least

\textsuperscript{73}Depredations on the Frontiers of Texas, 43rd Cong., 1st sess., H. Ex. Doc. 257, 1873-4, 16-25.

\textsuperscript{74}Paul J. Vanderwood, Disorder and Progress: Bandits, Police, and Mexican Development (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1981).
one foreign-born parent.\textsuperscript{75} American officials worried that the chief problem of maintaining peace—when less than 10 percent of the population was defined as "white" (or at least non-Mexican)—lay simply in how to identify the enemy:

It is a general and notorious complaint on the part of our officers of justice that our population of Mexican origin are not prompt to give information against raiders and cattle-thieves, and that they are reluctant to testify in the courts against them, and that, when questioned on the subject, they too often reply with their expressive shrug of the shoulders, and the inevitable quién sabe with which they avoid direct testimony.\textsuperscript{76}

Mexican bandits maintained homes and families on both sides of the border and even claimed citizenship in both countries. Relatives and associates protected outlaws with their secrecy, while those who sympathized with American ranchers understandably were reluctant to risk their lives by identifying guilty parties.

"Nationalistic" does not quite describe the attitudes of border Hispanics toward Anglos at this time. Although their allegiances remained local and community-based, most Mexicans and Tejanos also feared attacks by bandits. But American expansion increased their

\textsuperscript{75}Relations of the United States with Mexico, 77.

\textsuperscript{76}"Report of the Permanent Committee, appointed a meeting of the citizens of Brownsville, Texas, April 17, 1875," ibid.
collective animosity toward *gringos*. Awareness of shared problems--violation of Mexican sovereignty two decades earlier, the subsequent loss of lands--stimulated a feeling of common interest and identity among Hispanic residents. In some ways, Anglos' failure to distinguish between Hispanics made this shift possible. In 1875, Governor Edmund J. Davis explained to the War Department that "Americans are apt to make no discrimination among Mexicans," and recounted how a company of state troops had killed more than 100 innocent Mexicans in retaliation for cattle thefts. Davis admitted that such brutality strengthened loyal followings among the actual raiders. When the Mexican consul at San Antonio complained of these outrages to the state government, Davis informed him that such deeds "were in accord with well known customs," and that his fellow citizens "might avoid the same by returning to Mexico."  

As Davis described, white Texans seldom waited for legal redress in dealing with marauders. Vigilante activity remained strong into the 1880s, with vengeance usually falling on innocent Tejanos. When situations did arise that demanded the intervention of legal authorities, white Texans expressed preference for state

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"Davis to War Department, June 29, 1875, AGO-LR, consolidated file #1653, M666, roll 198, RG 94, NAMP."
and local troops, who were thought to possess "more practical experience" than federal regulars at fighting undesirables. Attitudes like these made possible the reorganization of the Texas Rangers in 1874. Having been disbanded during Reconstruction, the Rangers' reestablishment--along with other companies of state militia--represented a decisive step by state officials to deal with frontier hostilities on their own, minus the intruding presence of the federal government. 78

The United States Army not only confronted resistant Mexican and Indian populations, but also tackled the messy political task of restraining white Texans. In the absence of federal action, Texas appeared likely to raise a military force of its own that would cross the border, wage retaliatory war, and provoke a diplomatic crisis. The Galveston News, reflecting expansionists' growing ambitions, called for an invasionary force that would march into Mexico and establish a protectorate over the northern region. 79 Only a minority of Whites, however, held these jingoistic attitudes. Most, recognizing that war would prove destructive to commercial interests,


supported military efforts to establish peace on the border, and therefore extended to the regular Army a half-hearted welcome. But Anglo Texans also feared the threat to state sovereignty that federal intervention implied. Delegates to the 1878 state constitutional convention drafted a resolution demanding "the interposition of the U.S. government to promptly deal with Cortina and his outlaws." In a move to reassert state supremacy, the resolution also demanded compensation for all losses and injuries, including financial expenses, that Texas had incurred in maintaining its own defense. 80

In all of the literature about western conquest, the conflict between federal and state authorities has received little attention. Texans regarded membership in a local militia like the Rangers as an honor. By contrast, regular army soldiers became the frequent butts of jokes, insults, and—especially for buffalo soldiers—physical assaults. The American public as a whole cared little for federal troops but westerners had special reasons to dislike them. The Army's activities seemed to define it as a biased champion of foreigners and non-whites: employing Blacks and immigrants, escorting

80 Relations of the United States with Mexico, 148-50.
Indians through hostile civilian territory, preventing white settlers' encroachment on reservation lands, and blocking Texans' efforts to form illegal punitive expeditions into Mexico. Despite its frequent image as an oppressive institution, the United States Army in the West served as a regulator of social conditions, thrusting itself between vigilantes and state and municipal authorities on the one side, and people of color on the other, to declare for the federal government its right to intervene in local race relations.

White settlers' distrust of the federal government, therefore, often rested on the Army's perceived role as the protector of indigent or vicious groups. An 1870 incident in northwest Texas reveals the conspiratorial views with which Whites regarded the Army-Indian relationship. More than 300 settlers in northwest Texas signed a petition charging government agents at Fort Sill with providing arms and supplies to reservation Indians, which they then used in raids of pillage and murder. Supposedly, Indians would drive their stolen cattle back to protected territory, where soldiers waited to drive out any posses following in pursuit. When Fort Sill officials failed to respond, the Texas adjutant general

authorized the petitioners to raise their own emergency company of militia, to be mustered and armed at state expense.\footnote{Organization of Frontier Forces, Executive Order, November 1, 1873, Appendix, TX-AGO, Biennial Reports.}

For their part, officers held little respect for local authorities. When questioned by Congress about the advisability of employing Texans in their own defense, Brigadier General Ord replied that aside from guarding jails, "State troops are not necessarily right on the border." Ord admitted that locals knew the country well and provided excellent service in tracking raiders, but that the brutality with which they treated Mexicans only led to trouble. Ord also complained about the legal restraints on federal authority which limited the Army's effectiveness and left it dependent on civil officers. Since federal soldiers could not legally make arrests in Texas, they required the accompaniment of state troops. Soldiers who injured Texas citizens in the course of their duties sometimes faced lawsuits or even arrest by civil sheriffs and deputies.\footnote{Texas Frontier Troubles, 11-13.}

Texas politicians had to strike a delicate balance between justifying the Army's presence and maintaining the appearance of state sovereignty. This meant drawing
a clear line between civil and military jurisdictions. Although the sparse population of the American West encouraged a gradual increase of military power, the primary responsibility for keeping order lay with civil authorities. In legal terms, this meant that only sheriffs or state militias could deal with Texans who robbed and killed other Texans. Only when a situation became so desperate as to require declaration of martial law could the Army intervene—an alternative that Texas' political situation made nearly impossible. By the late nineteenth century, military intervention in domestic disturbances had grown more common. But as of the Reconstruction period, federal law still restricted army action to dealing with foreign invasion or with extreme cases of disorder perpetrated by non-American citizens.

Questions of "citizenship" thus became more important, for by these criteria, the Army in Texas could act only to protect American territory from "aliens"—which, in the context of border control, translated into "Indians and Mexicans." In the Lower Valley, this challenge of distinguishing "Americans" from "Mexicans" became daunting, since more than half of its residents were Mexican-born and at least 90 percent were of Mexican ancestry. Few residents took the Rio Grande seriously as a boundary of national authority and identity, except for
the manner in which crossing it thwarted effective law enforcement. Known as "the roving population," the criminal elements who assailed the cattle empires could and did, depending on circumstances, claim both countries as home.

Since this ambiguity did not satisfy the legalistic rigidity required to ascertain civil versus military jurisdiction, Texas officials took pains to trace the origin of the violence to Mexico proper. When Congress suggested in 1875 that Texas shoulder a greater burden of border defense, Governor Richard Coke replied that foreigners alone had instigated the raids, and thus required the Army's attention. In a scathing letter to President Grant, Coke absolved the population north of the Rio Grande of any wrongdoing, calling them "a docile, tractable people" with many excellent citizens. If "Texas Mexicans" did cooperate with foreign criminals, wrote Coke, they did so from ignorance or from understandable doubt as to the willingness of the American government to protect them.84 With great care, Coke placed responsibility for border control on the United States without abrogating any right of Texas to

defend its provincial interests. As a consequence, his correspondence provides an early textual distinction between "Mexican" and "Mexican American."

Assigning blame and determining the national origins of the raiders perhaps seems a trivial matter that concerned only policymakers. But this attempt to distinguish, and to insist on clear definitions of American and Mexican identity, became the first step in the politicization of the Rio Grande. The United States Army would not act if it determined the trouble had been caused by American citizens who happened to speak Spanish and were of non-Anglo descent. Such thinking did not square with the ethnic and political realities of southern Texas and northern Mexico in 1870. But during the following decade, dichotomous models of citizenship would be imposed on the border region and would help to transform it fully as much as the invading military forces.

Concerned that the concentration of troops on the Rio Grande would leave other western lands unprotected, the United States Congress conducted several lengthy investigations of border affairs in the 1870s, trying to assess a proper sharing of accountability between Texas, Mexico, and its own frontier Army. Predictably, investigators insisted on stronger action from the
Mexican government, charging it either with "effete" inability to control its northern border, or with stimulating violence through its maintenance of the zona libre. The Free Zone, as it was called, ran the length of Mexico's border from the Pacific Ocean to Brownsville, and had been established to protect Mexico's northern merchants from American customs duties. Texas businessmen despised the zone, claiming that it encouraged robbery by creating an available market for stolen goods. Indian tribes enjoyed the benefits of the Free Zone, where they could market and purchase plundered goods. Impoverished Mexicans who occupied marginal lands could obtain stolen cattle at a cheaper cost than if they had raised their own. Indians from the Free Zone freely wandered and conducted business in Mexican and even American towns, gaining the acceptance and protection of Hispanics in places like Laredo and Eagle Pass.

The apparent ways that these groups interacted caused some Whites to view Mexican and Indian violence as the same problem, and increased their habit of associating the two groups as racial brethren. Lieutenant Colonel William Shafter declared of the Rio Grande region in 1878: "On the whole, it is not a

85Depredations on the Frontiers of Texas, 14.
desirable country for white people." 86 American authorities overlooked the frequency of Indian attacks on Mexican villages, and pointed to the tribes' habit of retreating into the inaccessible mountainous regions of Chihuahua to evade capture. Although this land was unmapped and occupied by people who resisted any national encroachment, groups like the Lipans and Kickapoos who found shelter there came to be classified as "Mexican Indians," and, as such, were understood to be Mexico's problem. 87

In answer to American charges of negligence and even conspiracy with regard to Indian and bandit raids, Mexico conducted its own investigation in 1873. A special commission convened in Matamoros and traveled the border for months, inviting Americans and Mexicans to come forward with claims of robbery and assault. No Texans approached the commission with complaints of cattle theft, but the commissioners did solicit comments from the American and Mexican consuls in Brownsville and San Antonio. Comparison of Mexican findings with those of American investigators reveals a perceptual chasm between


87 Ord, December 7, 1877, ibid., 1-2.
the two countries. The Matamoros commission found Texans' complaints about cattle stealing to be groundless, concluding that most of the thievery and violence was committed not by Mexican citizens, but by "American Indians" and American outlaws disguised as Indians. Laden with suspicion and anger towards Anglos, the commissioners' report summarized decades of alleged American atrocities dating back to the 1840s. These charges included claims about bands of former Confederates who terrorized and robbed peaceful villages, and enriched their herds at Hispanics' expense. Reversing Texans' charges about the zona libre, the commission accused Anglo ranchers of trafficking in stolen goods, most of which came from Comanche raids into Mexico.88

Curiously enough, the commission's findings echoed conclusions drawn by white Texans: that the United States Army encouraged Indian attacks on settlers. American soldiers supposedly conspired with hostile Indians to ravage border communities in order to provide the United States with a pretext for invading Mexican soil. The report provided an overview of American Indian policy,

88Report of the Committee of Investigation Sent in 1873 by the Mexican Government to the Frontier of Texas, Texas State Archives.
noting how the federal government placed natives--through relocation on reservations--beyond the reach of local authorities. This policy, the commissioners believed, was designed to recruit "savages" into national service where they could be employed against the Mexican people: "Indians are not by nature this manipulative and devious; they were taught this by evil civilized men." The Matamoros commission claimed that in the 1860s, Union leaders--beset with Confederate insurrection--made peace with tribes in Texas by offering them a license to plunder south of the Rio Grande. What other function did American forts--which never acted to protect Hispanic interests--serve, if not as bases of operation for foreign invasion?

Indifference, neglect, and duplicity at once have characterized many of the officers who have held command in the Federal forts and outposts. From their very encampments they have seen the Indians from the reservations on their way to Mexico, and they have not hindered them. They have seen the savages return laden with an immense booty, and have not tried to recover it, even when they have seen Mexican troops reach the Rio Grande in pursuit.

The claims of the Matamoros commissioners--fantastic in their conspiratorial notions--seem to make sense within the context of years of duplicitous acquisition of

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89 Ibid., 307.

90 Ibid., 432.
Mexican lands by Americans. Their conclusions, of course, reveal less about the Army's activities and its relationship with Indians than about how the Mexican commissioners perceived them. Generals Ord and Sherman denounced the report as "astonishing" in its assertions of raids instigated by white Texans, or of a supposed Army-Indian conspiracy. While Sherman did concede that many Anglos associated with Indian and Mexican gangs, he denied that American stockmen or soldiers schemed to organize hostilities that would ignite war between the two countries. Sherman might have added, however, that many white Texans also saw the Army as a disruptive force. And, as in the case of the petitioners from northwest Texas, a minority of Anglos believed—as did the Matamoros commission—that the causes of the region's bloody violence somehow lay at the doorsteps of the American federal government.

Perceptions like this, which hampered civilian-military relations, also muddied investigators' attempts to construct an accurate explanation of the border and its problems. "The roving population" belonged to neither country, transcending policymakers' ideas about racial and national categories. Border violence arose

91Sherman, September 30, 1877, and Ord, December 5, 1877, Texas Border Troubles, 22-25, 77-83.
from the inability of either government to enforce its will in an effective manner, attracting and encouraging extralegal factions. As fugitive slaves and nomadic hunters had done for decades, revolutionaries and outlaws sought the Rio Grande for the sanctuary it offered from national authority. This refuge would disappear as a result of military campaigns after 1870.

The United States Army did stimulate diplomatic turmoil by its very presence, though not in the sense that the Matamoros commission meant. Armed conflict between Anglos, Tejanos, Mexicans, and Indians did not lessen the mutual antagonism that all groups shared toward the approaching American forces. Some of this hostility rested on racial and ethnic prejudice, provoked by the use of Blacks in military service. But the Army as an institution also represented federal authority, an unwelcome intrusion into the provincial world of the Rio Grande. With black servicemen at the forefront of this invasion, the consequences of civil-military interaction on future race relations would be powerful and far-reaching.
TEXAS POSTS
ESTABLISHED
1846-1898

SOURCE: Robert W. Frazer, Forts of the West (Norman:
University of Oklahoma Press, 1965), 141.
Fiction often accomplishes what history--limited by the availability of empirical evidence--cannot: speculate on the human reactions and inner turmoil wrought by the workings of the past. In his 1980 novel, *The Wolf and the Buffalo*, west Texas writer Elmer Kelton explains the military clash of cultures through the eyes of two men: Gray Horse, a Comanche warrior who assumes the medicine of the wolf after his vision quest; and Gideon Ledbetter, a black slave who leaves his former master's home after emancipation, joins the Army, and is sent to Fort Concho, Texas, where he stays for several years. In one scene, Gideon tries to dissuade his friend and fellow cavalryman Big Dempsey from deserting the Army and joining Gray Horse's people against the Whites:

"Them Indians ain't our friends."
"We'll make them our friends, me and you. We'll help them run the white folks clear back to their cotton plantations. Then we'll be free, Gid, really free. Won't be nothin' out here but the Indians and the buffalo and us. Won't be nobody callin' us nigger, not ever again."
"We ain't no wild men," Gideon argued. But on reflection he decided Dempsey always had been, in his own way.¹

Prior to the Army's arrival, the border attracted "wild men" like Dempsey: outlaws, runaway slaves, and Mexican rebels who sought protection and freedom, some even gaining acceptance among its native peoples. Such is not the fate for Dempsey. After knocking Gideon unconscious and stealing several horses, he heads for the Comanches' camp and finds a group of angry males who have discovered the remains of a village destroyed by buffalo soldiers:

Clearly nervous but determined, the big black soldier rode up and stopped so close that Gray Horse could almost have touched the horse's nose. The man raised his right hand, palm out.

"I am a friend," he said. "My name is Dempsey." . . . The man's words meant nothing to him. They were no more than the growling of a camp dog.

Dempsey said, "I have come to join up with my friends the Comanches. We'll fight the white people together. Looky here, I've brought horses. They're a gift for my friends." . . .

Gray Horse said, "I think he wants to give them to us."

Bear laughed without humor. "He will give them to us. All four of them."

After killing Dempsey and riddling his body with arrows, Gray Horse and Bear stand over his corpse:

"I wonder what he was trying to tell us."
"No matter. No white man says anything I want to hear."
"He is a black man."
"They are the same."\(^2\)

Kelton presents Big Dempsey as a character preoccupied with race. Seeing in another dark-skinned people a possible ally against his oppressors, Dempsey becomes blinded to the cultural chasm that separates him from the Comanches, illustrated by his incapacity to communicate. Were he to notice this gap, he might discover more similarities with Whites than he realizes.

Kelton's fiction may offer some intriguing insights into buffalo soldiers' situation. Whatever they may have shared with other people of color, most black soldiers learned to regard Indians and Mexicans as "the enemy," the alien "others" whom they were employed to fight. Army life subordinated individuality to conformity and replaced contemplation with loyalty. Even so, some men like Big Dempsey did exist, deserting and finding refuge if not among the Comanches then with the black Seminoles, or crossing the border and escaping into Mexico. Like the United States Colored Troops who mixed amiably with Brownsville Mexicans after the Civil War, Blacks had no

\(^2\)Ibid., 263-64.
reason for animosity toward Hispanics and Indians based on race.

But as members of opposing military forces, all groups came to distinguish one another as belonging to different nations. The national and racial fluidity of the Rio Grande region, made possible by its frontier character that permitted some interracial relationships to develop, began to deteriorate after 1870. As the United States and Mexico exercised dominion over their mutual boundary, black soldiers helped to end resistance to national authority, whether from Indian tribes, Hispanic herdsmen, or states-rights Texans.

Several challenges awaited American military leaders in Texas, not the least of which was defining "citizenship" in the ambiguous world of the Rio Grande. As explained previously, federal intervention could be justified only on the basis of violence perpetrated by "foreigners," thus requiring a legal distinction between "American" and "Mexican" that carried no meaning among people in the border vicinity. Army officials like Major John F. Wade of the Ninth Cavalry suspected that "Americans" (people north and east of the river) initiated most of the trouble.\footnote{Wade to Hatch, April 28, 1875, AGO-LR, M666, roll 196, RG 94, NAMP.} General Philip Sheridan...
reported to the Secretary of War in 1875 the presence of "American citizens on our side of the Rio Grande, of Mexican birth, who believe they still belong to Mexico." Furthermore, the Rio Grande sometimes would change its course "and leave a slice of Mexico on our side of the river, and in some cases with inhabitants, . . . . With an international line in such a muddle, I can readily see how hard it will be for officers to perform a duty so delicate, . . . ." Sheridan concluded, as did most commanders, that the answer lay in stronger military garrisons, less for actual boundary enforcement than as a reminder of the United States' presence. With all the confusion, establishing national authority appeared to be the Army's most important task.

By 1869, the Department of Texas included the districts of the Rio Grande, Pecos, Brazos, and Presidio. Posts lay about one hundred miles apart: Fort Brown at Brownsville, Ringgold Barracks (Rio Grande City), McIntosh (Laredo), Duncan (Eagle Pass), Clark (Brackettville), with Forts Stockton, Davis, Quitman, and Fort Bliss (El Paso) located in west Texas. (see appendix to Chapter Two, Map III) North and east of the Big Bend country, in central Texas, lay Forts McKavett

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"Sheridan to Secretary of War, July 7, 1875, AGO-LR, M666, roll 197, RG 94, NAMP."
and Concho, which usually held large garrisons of black soldiers. Together, the eleven posts formed an 800-mile defensive line. With 10 to 20 percent of the regular Army stationed in Texas, nearly every officer could expect to be sent there sooner or later. Fort Davis, a regimental headquarters on the San Antonio-El Paso road, held the largest garrison of black troops, more than 400 by mid-1870. Between 1867 and 1885, companies from every black regiment would be stationed at Davis at one time or another.

The official number of troops serving in Texas—more than 4000 by 1870—exceeded the actual number available for field duty. Standards, which varied through the years, required an overall enlistment of 1000 men per cavalry regiment and 500 for infantry. Because of inadequate recruitment and high desertion rates, regiments operated far below those numbers in reality. Non-combat assignments, such as hospital nurses and construction and mail guards, further reduced the effective forces by about one-third. While Sherman tried to maintain an equal ratio of infantry and cavalry, the

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5For information on individual posts, see Robert W. Frazer, *Forts of the West* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1965), 139-64.

6Post Returns, Fort Davis, AGO, M617, roll 297, NAMP.
border's 1400-mile expanse necessitated a greater proportion of the latter; a cavalry company could move from 60 to 80 miles on a good day if the horses' grain held out, twice the speed of an infantry detachment. Although a cliche, the phrase "learning to fight like an Indian" well describes cavalrymen's activities: handling and caring for horses, gauging the number and movement of enemies, and locating pastures and water sources that in the desert meant life or death.

All parties, in adopting equestrian combat, gained knowledge of Rio Grande geography, history, and culture. Such knowledge made possible the manipulation of local relationships that could bring victory. For example, the Kickapoos had migrated into northern Mexico from Kansas a decade earlier. At the urging of the Mexican government, they helped to defend the region from Kiowas and Comanches, an arrangement that worked well until white Texans attacked their camps in the early 1860s. Declaring a retaliatory war, the Kickapoos became masters of inter-group alliances, aligning with Lipan Apaches, Mexican outlaws, and even white renegades. In their

first confrontation with black soldiers in December 1867, a combined force of all four groups attacked a Ninth Cavalry encampment east of Fort Stockton in a three-hour fight that killed 20 raiders and three black privates.8

Army officials distinguished different causes for problems in the Lower Valley and the Indian violence of west Texas. But in both cases, the border's proximity made diplomatic negotiations with the Mexican government necessary. Here the weakness of national authority became evident. Local strongmen who controlled northern Mexico profitted from the Kickapoos' illicit trade, and even provided them a refuge by maintaining armed forces to discourage pursuit from American troops. Already facing a hostile local population, United States Army officers explored ways of extending their influence to the other side of the Rio Grande. In October 1870, Colonel Edward Hatch submitted a plan to take his entire Ninth Cavalry across the border, in cooperation with Mexican national forces, and strike the Kickapoos at their base camps. The Mexican Congress considered the

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8Post Returns, Fort Stockton, December 1867, AGO, M617, roll 1229, NAMP; and Regimental Returns, Ninth Cavalry, AGO, M744, roll 87, NAMP.
proposal for several months before rejecting it, refusing American soldiers entry even in cases of "hot pursuit."

Mexico's decision to withhold permission for border crossings did not deter American fort commanders from proceeding anyway. Black servicemen participated in numerous illegal crossings, part of their normal duties of destroying Indian villages. In August 1872, a company from the Ninth Cavalry, en route to Fort Stockton, discovered a fresh trail which they followed into an indigenous camp. Finding only families and no warriors, they burned twenty tipis and all of their contents, except for several war bonnets which the soldiers wore while returning to the post. 10

Episodes like this raise inevitable questions about the morality of Indian warfare. Writers sometimes carelessly charge the frontier Army with atrocities and systematic genocide, perhaps as a corrective to its former celebratory depictions. Influenced by racial Darwinism, some military men expected Indians to become extinct, while a minority even advocated extermination as a suitable goal. Racist attitudes, however, neither


10Regimental Returns, Ninth Cavalry, August 1872, AGO, M744, roll 87, NAMP.
shaped nor characterized army policy. Most officers and soldiers adopted the more ethnocentric view that Indians, while entitled to certain rights, must submit to American authority and assimilate to its "superior" culture.\textsuperscript{11} Soldiers displayed contempt for Indians' "barbaric ways," but remained wary and respectful of their fighting abilities. The Army, in limiting Indians to reservations and demanding their subordination, also assumed the task of protecting them from murderous frontiersmen. The 1864 Sand Creek Massacre, when the Colorado state militia slaughtered peaceful Cheyennes and Arapahoes, delivered a macabre reminder about the consequences of leaving Indian control in the hands of local Whites.\textsuperscript{12}

While black soldiers seldom recorded their feelings on the morality of Indian warfare, they—like many white soldiers—probably found that the demands of their job collided with the dictates of conscience. Nevertheless, black troops participated fully in the Army’s waging of


\textsuperscript{12}Berkhofer, \textit{The White Man's Indian}, 147-49.
"total war." By attacking Indian villages, they struck at noncombatants who either fell in the heat of battle, or watched their homes and foodstuffs be destroyed.

Sergeant Jacob Wilks had been born a slave in Kentucky, escaped on the underground railroad, served with the Ninth Cavalry, and, as an old man in 1927, gave an interview to Frontier Times Magazine. Wilks described how he and his company raided an Apache camp near Fort Davis in the mid-1870s:

We charged pell mell into the encampment, killing old and young and but few escaped. Several prisoners were taken among whom was an old chief - the most ancient looking individual I ever saw. He might have been feigning extreme decrepitness, but he gave us the impression he was utterly helpless. He was too old and venerable in appearance for us to kill; we did not care to be encumbered with him as a prisoner, so we placed a ham of venison and an olla of water near him and left him alone to fare the best he could. We gathered up the spoils, such as we wanted to carry away, destroyed the rest, and with the large herd of captured horses, we started on our return to Fort Davis.\(^\text{13}\)

This incident paled beside the one that Wilks then witnessed:

Among the prisoners taken was a beautiful Apache girl whose age we took to be about seventeen years. She proved to be a most vicious, intractable prisoner and sought every occasion to inflict injury on her captors. . . . Several times this girl was

foiled in the act of reaching and trying to seize the trooper's pistol . . . . The men reasoned and agreed among themselves that it was better to kill this prisoner than to take the risk of one or more of their number killed by her, and the morning following this agreement, she made another attempt to get possession of the trooper's pistol and was promptly shot, and nothing was said about it, although it was expected that the offender would have to face courtmartial [sic].

We have no way of knowing how well Wilks' account represents the behavior of black soldiers towards Mexican and Indian captives. But his remembered experience typifies military attitudes in the post-Civil War period: hostiles would be spared if possible but those who refused to submit would be crushed.

The same degree of force could not be employed against white Texans who also resisted federal authority. Convinced of army incompetence and suspicious of any threat to Texas autonomy, former Confederates launched several raids into Mexico, sometimes wearing blackface or Indian disguises. One of the most notorious raids occurred in late 1872, when a band of 15 to 20 Texans crossed to the Rio Grande's west bank near Fort Clark and murdered a group of villagers at Resurreccion. At first, Texas newspapers denounced the vigilantes, but by the spring of 1873, the San Antonio Herald reported that the

14Ibid., 338-39.
village actually had been attacked by Seminole Indians and Mexican bandits.  

The convoluted nature of border violence, which so frustrated attempts to assign blame, also permitted observers to see whatever enemy they desired. Such incidents not only intensified racial prejudice but also frustrated the Army’s role as a peacekeeping force, because Indians and Mexicans failed to distinguish between civilian vigilantes and American soldiers. In December, Lieutenant Patrick Cusack took a Ninth Cavalry detachment to Resurreccion and requested a conference with the alcalde in hopes of obtaining information about the recent raid. Holding the Army and not the Texans responsible for the attack, the villagers turned Cusack and his men away.  

Hispanic suspicions about military complicity with vigilante raids seemed to be confirmed by Colonel Ranald Mackenzie’s invasion of Mexican territory in the spring of 1873. (see appendix to Chapter Two, Map IV) Mackenzie led troops from the Twenty-fifth Infantry and six companies of the Fourth Cavalry (white), as well as

\[\text{Report of the Committee of Investigation Sent in 1873 by the Mexican Government to the Frontier of Texas, Texas State Archives, 422-26.}\]

\[\text{Cusack to Post Adjutant, Fort Clark, December 2, 1872, Selected Documents, LR, RG 94, NA.}\]
the Seminole Scouts, across the river southwest of Fort Clark. Heading forty miles into Mexico, his men struck the Kickapoo village of Remolino on May 18. With most of the warriors absent, Mackenzie’s force of about 500 killed 19 Indian men, captured 40 women and children (as well as Castillitos, a Lipan "chief"), and seized about 50 horses and mules for return to Texas. Avoiding confrontation with the Mexican authorities, Mackenzie retreated to Fort Clark and sent the Kickapoo prisoners to reservations in Kansas. While black soldiers played only an incidental role in Mackenzie’s 1873 expedition, the Seminole Scouts, who had no great love for the Kickapoos, played a central one. The recovered horses which could not be identified were distributed to the Scouts as a reward, a pleasant revenge for the days when Kickapoo raiders attacked the Seminoles’ own villages and stole their stock.

Government spokesmen and civilian newspapers hailed Mackenzie’s raid against noncombatants as a success. A

17Mackenzie to AAG, Dpt. of TX, and Augur to AAG, Mil. Division of Missouri, September 30, 1873, LR, RG 94, NA; and Regimental Returns, Ninth Cavalry, April 1875, AGO, M744, roll 88, NAMP; and Report of the Committee of Investigation Sent in 1873 by the Mexican Government to the Frontier of Texas, 422-26.

Congressional investigating committee later stated that the action brought "a period of peace to the border," while the San Antonio Express declared:

General Mackenzie and his comrades in arms have returned from the shores of the Rio Grande, crowned with imperishable laurels of bloodless victory. Like the brave old Roman who came, saw and conquered, they did not have to fight to conquer, nor stoop either.\(^{19}\)

Mackenzie's operation convinced the dispersed Kickapoos to abandon their war with Texas and to return to cultivating their lands in Mexico. In addition, it impressed upon other tribes that the border no longer offered an escape from American retaliation.\(^{20}\) But the attack did great damage to United States-Mexican diplomatic relations. Mexican ministers, with great vigor, protested the invasion as an "audacious assault" on the sovereignty of Mexico soil.\(^{21}\) For the duration of the decade, diplomats struggled to negotiate a reciprocal treaty that would permit mutual cross-border pursuit.

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\(^{19}\)San Antonio Express, August 22, 1878; and Report on the Relations of the United States with Mexico, 45th Cong., 2d sess., H. Doc. 701, xiii-xvi.


Black regulars' participation in such affairs began to increase. In April 1875, Colonel Benjamin Grierson established the Tenth Cavalry's headquarters at Fort Concho. Part of a decisive effort to eliminate Indian attacks, Grierson assembled the largest military force ever to invade the Staked Plains of west Texas. The Twenty-fourth Infantry's Lieutenant Colonel William R. Shafter commanded this army of six Tenth Cavalry companies, plus two from the Twenty-fourth and another from the Twenty-fifth. Accompanied by a supply train of more than 60 wagons and its own herd of mules and cattle, the force of 650 black soldiers headed west from Concho in mid-July. During the next four months, Shafter's force intercepted scattered Indian bands and destroyed a number of encampments, prompting or forcing many natives to return to reservations. The expedition also produced reliable maps of the terrain, complete with locations of water-holes that proved useful in subsequent campaigns.22

As similar operations followed for the next three years and illegal crossings into Mexico became frequent, black soldiers and their officers grew more involved in the messy political affairs of Tamaulipas and Coahuila. There, revolutionaries plotted against both the central Mexican government and American capitalists. In December 1876, an American citizen named Mose Kelley, a merchant with stores on both sides of the river, received threats from insurrectionists at Presidio del Norte, 97 miles south of Fort Davis. The cause of Kelley's problems with the rebels is unclear, but he felt sufficiently endangered to request military protection. Answering his call, Colonel George Andrews and a 20-man detachment from the Twenty-fifth Infantry, Company K, arrived at Presidio to find Kelley detained on the Mexican side. Demanding Kelley's release, Andrews and his men fired several cannon shots into the town. Andrews' action produced the desired effect, obtaining Kelley's release and driving home the point that the United States Army would protect American business interests.23

For Indian and Hispanic peoples, interventions of this type blurred the distinctions between American

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troops, state and local authorities, and the Anglo
ranchers and merchants who enjoyed the protection of
both. English-speaking Texans, despite their resentment
of the federal Army, grudgingly came to understand that
its success would be favorable for their future
prosperity. On occasion, settlers extended grateful
appreciation to federal authorities, even to black
soldiers. During a scouting expedition in west Texas,
Lieutenant Henry O. Flipper from the Tenth Cavalry met a
family of settlers living in a dugout. The wife had
recently been appointed postmistress but, "being in a
condition," could not travel to Fort Worth for her oath
of office. Producing papers which showed that any
officer could administer oaths, Flipper swore the woman
into her new position. "Tickled to death," the family
expressed their gratitude by inviting Flipper to supper,
which he accepted with joy as a change from his usual
stale fare.24

Such displays of generosity, however, were rare.
Most white Texans regarded the Army as a necessary but
unwelcome intruder, preferring to look to state and local
forces for protection. Officers even shared some of

24Henry Ossian Flipper, Negro Frontiersman: Western
Memoirs of Henry Ossian Flipper, Theodore Harris, ed.,
(El Paso, Texas Western College Press, 1963), 6-7.
these sentiments, complaining about the Army's steady transformation into a national police force. Through the 1870s, troops enforced congressional Reconstruction and suppressed labor strikes, placed at the disposal of state officials who could use them in any emergency where civil forces were absent or unreliable. The Posse Comitatus Act of 1878 halted this trend, forbidding the employment of the Army to execute laws without express authorization from Congress. This legislation forced state and territorial governments to devote increased resources to their militias. Western violence increased after the 1878 Act as the Army removed itself from frontier peacekeeping.  

In Texas, the transition from federal to state protection began earlier, with militias acting on their own against Indian and Mexican raiders through the 1870s. Army and state forces seldom cooperated, sharing a relationship that was tenuous at best. Texans, like many Americans, often held the assumption inherited from colonial times of local militias as the bastions of liberty, serving as an obstacle against the tyrannical 

instincts of centralized standing armies.\textsuperscript{26} Beneath these suspicions of the Army as a potential threat lay a frontier attitude that viewed government policies toward Indians and Mexicans as naive attempts to negotiate with savages.\textsuperscript{27} Similar to the charges of the Matamoros commission, Governor Richard Coke blamed the federal reservation system for providing Indians with sanctuary, and claimed that marauders responded only to brute force, which state troops—unlike regulars—understood and did not hesitate to employ.\textsuperscript{28}

No single event typifies these sentiments better than the reorganization of the Texas Rangers. First established in the 1820s, the Rangers served as a paramilitary force until their disbandment during Reconstruction. By 1874, the replacement of "carpetbagger" Edmund J. Davis by Democratic Governor Coke brought renewed support for a "Frontier Battalion" of Rangers. During the next two years, Ranger companies reported dozens of engagements, enjoying license that one


\textsuperscript{27}Berkhofer, \textit{White Man's Indian}, 147-49.

\textsuperscript{28}Governors' Papers, address to 14th legislature, January 1875, Texas State Archives.
historian calls a "campaign of terror" against Indians and Mexicans.  

The viciousness of Ranger activities, and their peculiar relationship with the Army, has been detailed in border Tejanos' folklore, as recorded by Americo Paredes:

When he has to kill an armed Mexican, the Ranger tries to catch him asleep, or he shoots the Mexican in the back.
If it weren't for the American soldiers, the Rangers wouldn't dare come to the Border. The Ranger always runs and hides behind the soldier when real trouble starts.
Once an army detachment was chasing a raider, and they were led by a couple of Rangers. The Mexican went into the brush. The Ranger galloped up to the place, pointed it out, and then stepped back to let the soldiers go in first.

Federal commanders disdained the Rangers' methods. Ord explained several times that if the United States wanted war with Mexico, state forces could be relied upon to start it. Even Texas adjutant generals doubted the Rangers' effectiveness. An 1875 report stated that as peacekeeping authorities, "local forces are improper since their only qualifications are their ability to

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30Cited in Samora, et al., Gunpowder Justice, 41-42.
speak Mexican and read the law." In 1881, complaints about bad management and drunkenness earned the frontier battalion a negative evaluation from the state adjutant general's office. But in the end, the evaluation recommended their continuance because the Rangers had killed more Indians than the entire Tenth Cavalry.  

Black soldiers and Rangers collided over the implementation of Indian policy. During the winter of 1878-79, a state battalion under Captain G.W. Arrington patrolled the northwest Panhandle to drive scattered Indians back to their reservations in New Mexico and Indian Territory. Arrington, a former Confederate who had fought for Maximilian in Mexico, led a party of 17 Rangers through the deep snow. Arrington's men--their tempers flaring--overtook a camp of Kiowas and killed one person before being stopped by a detachment from the Tenth Cavalry, Company A. Their leader, Captain Nicholas Nolan, declared that federal treaties permitted the Kiowas to hunt on Texas soil, and so guaranteed them government protection. Two other scuffles between angry Rangers and Nolan's company occurred in January, finally leading to a bitter verbal clash between Arrington and

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32 W. H. King, TX-AGO, Biennial Reports, 1881, 23-33.
Colonel John Davidson, nicknamed "Black Jack" for his years with the Tenth. Castigating the Army and its black soldiers, Arrington promised that his men would kill any Indians they encountered, forcing Davidson to station extra troops in the Panhandle. In response to a rumor that Davidson intended to arrest him, Arrington wrote a series of harsh letters to his superiors threatening to place the matter before the legislature and have the Army withdrawn.  

In the Lower Rio Grande Valley, black soldiers and their officers enjoyed a more cordial relationship with state authorities. There, the primary harassment came from municipal and county officials, who represented the prejudices of their Spanish-speaking constituents. In December 1874, upset at the way professional gamblers from Rio Grande City relieved his men of their earnings, Colonel Edward Hatch put one of them in the guardhouse and then ordered him off the post. As a result, the Starr County grand jury indicted Hatch for false imprisonment, forcing him to retain a lawyer.  

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33Arrington to TX-AGO, June 18, 1879, AGO-LR, RG 94, NA. For a biography of Davidson by one of his descendants, see Homer Davidson, Black Jack Davidson: A Cavalry Commander on the Western Frontier (Glendale, California: Arthur C. Clarke Co., 1974).

34AG to Secretary of War, January 7, 1875, Selected Documents, AGO-LR, RG 94, NA.
A fatal shooting during the following month not only compounded Hatch's problems and those of the men in his command but further disturbed the peace in southern Texas. On January 26, 1875, a party of Mexicans from the Solesis ranch exchanged shots with black cavalrymen who were patrolling for illegal crossings of cattle. Two soldiers died in the attack, leaving Sergeant Edward Troutman and Privates Charley Blackstone and John Fredericks to escape back to Ringgold Barracks. The following day, Ninth Cavalry soldiers, acting on Hatch's orders, arrested 27 people found at Solesis and discovered another man dead and two wounded. A coroner's jury later determined the dead man to have been killed by the same party which had fired on the soldiers. The district court later indicted several suspects, all of whom were turned loose except for one who was tried and promptly acquitted. In April, Troutman, Blackstone, and Fredericks—in court to testify about the ambush—were arrested and indicted for killing the dead Mexican found at the ranch. In addition, the court indicted Hatch and another officer on a charge of burglary stemming from an order to retrieve arms and blankets stolen from the murdered cavalrymen. The three enlisted men, unable to
raise $500 each for bail, remained in the Rio Grande City jail for weeks.35

In order to secure the men's release, the Army had to obtain an immediate change of venue. In Hatch's view, Starr County's Hispanic populace left little hope for assembling an impartial jury that could judge American soldiers accused of killing a Mexican. Investigators suspected the men's accusers to be the same people who had ambushed them, probably taking direct orders from Cortina or some other Mexican caudillo.36 Even white Texans attacked Hatch and his soldiers for arresting the inhabitants of the ranch without a civil officer present. One newspaper denounced Hatch's actions as careless in that he had not confirmed his men's story before acting.37 James Ware, the judge who had issued the indictments, defended his actions to Governor Coke on the basis of a detailed report which claimed that the attack had been initiated by the soldiers. As for Starr County's impartiality, Ware wrote that only two Mexicans sat on the grand jury--one a wealthy rancher, the other a

35Relations of the United States with Mexico, 143.


37San Antonio Express, July 15, 1875.
merchant and active Republican—and that the rest were intelligent and responsible citizens employed by the Army at Ringgold. 38

By mid-June, the Solicitor General’s Office had the soldiers’ case moved to the East Texas federal district court, which in December of 1875 acquitted Hatch, French, Troutman, Blackstone, and Fredericks. Justice still eluded the black cavalrymen, however. Forced to obtain legal counsel at their own expense, the defendants spent months trying to collect compensation but policies forbade payment of attorney fees already incurred. Stationed at Fort Stockton in April 1876, Private Blackstone killed Fredericks in a quarrel over responsibility for the legal costs. A month later, Hatch’s lawyer somehow claimed $100 of government reimbursement. 39

The consequences of the January shootings at the Solesis ranch extended far beyond the soldiers’ legal and financial problems. Solesis, also called El Grulla or Las Grullas, lay between a large lagoon on the Texas side

38James A. Ware to Richard Coke, June 1, 1875, AGO-LR, file #1653, M666, roll 197, RG 94, NAMP.

39Hatch to AG, April 4, 1876, AGO-LR, M666, roll 198, RG 94, NAMP; Solicitor General to Secretary of War, June 14, 1875, AGO-LR, M666, roll 196, RG 94, NAMP; and Regimental Returns, Ninth Cavalry, May 1876, roll 88, M744, NAMP.
and the main channel of the Rio Grande. This bit of disputed territory had been created by a change of river channel during the years since the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. Although American commanders regarded it as part of Texas, locals considered the ranch to be part of Tamaulipas. From the latter's perspective, the black troops had killed Mexican citizens on Mexican soil. By early March, stories reached Ringgold Barracks that a body of 75 to 100 armed men had congregated at ranches in the contested zone. Juan Cortina supposedly had sent confidential letters to friends requesting them to be prepared with arms and horses. Rumors circulated that some rebel movement in Tamaulipas was afoot, or, worse, that Cortina planned a raid into Texas as retaliation for the killings.

The assembly's purpose became clear within a few weeks. On March 26, two parties of raiders rendezvoused near Edinburgh and rode northward, robbing and burning stores and ranches in their path. It was the most daring strike by Mexican outlaws yet into American territory, reaching the vicinity of Corpus Christi, over 130 miles

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"Hatch to TX-AAG, March 10, 1875, in Relations of the United States with Mexico, 118-19.

"Lucius Avery, U.S. Commercial Agent, Camargo, Mexico, to Hatch, March 6, 1875, ibid."
north of the border. The city’s outlying areas became depopulated as rural people fled to other towns for protection, bringing work and commerce to a halt. Bandits killed two Anglos and, at a village named Chocolate, hanged two Mexican laborers from a tree. At Roma, Texas, a Ninth Cavalry company prevented a remnant group from robbing the customs-house. Residents in the Corpus Christi area captured and hanged some of the raiders, while Mexican cavalry arrested a small band near Matamoros. But most of the outlaws escaped into the countryside, made possible, Hatch charged, by sympathetic locals who kept the outlaws informed of his troops’ whereabouts. While plunder appeared to have been the raiders’ main objective, revenge for Hatch’s actions also had entered into their plans. According to the American consul at Monterey, the attack "can be explained on no other ground than that they wish to treat Americans as Mexicans from Las Grullas were treated by our military authorities." 

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43 Relations of the United States with Mexico, 120-22.
The attack on Corpus Christi provoked other acts of vengeance, this time by white Texans and their state troops. Vigilantes raided the Mexican village of La Para and killed several innocent persons, while in June a group of Rangers under Captain William McNally intercepted 16 Mexicans in the Palo Alto area driving a herd of stolen cattle. Rangers killed all but one of the rustlers, displaying their bodies "like cordwood" in the Brownsville square."

Finding new support for an expansion of state troops, Texas adjutant general William Steele assembled a force of more than 1000 men, an action that Ord believed would only drive more Mexicans to Cortina's side and precipitate a declared war. Federal authorities responded to the crisis by moving additional cavalry and infantry companies to Fort Brown. At Secretary Belknap's recommendation, President Grant even directed naval vessels to head for Fort Brown and to be available at the commander's discretion."5

Despite the strengthened defenses at the mouth of the Rio Grande, officers found themselves less and less able to control the situation. State laws did not permit

""Affairs on the Rio Grande," 6-13; and Relations of the United States with Mexico, 135-37.

"Ord to AAG, June 3, 1875, Relations of the United States with Mexico, 132-33; and Ord to Belknap, June 15, 1875, ibid., 135-37."
them to act as policemen with the authority to arrest Texas vigilantes, while international laws restrained them from crossing the border to capture Mexican criminals. This harassment of the Army and its black soldiers reflects the growing fear and animosity that border people felt toward the military. From the perspective of Indians and lower-class Hispanics, the Army defended the interests of Anglos and wealthy elites; from the view of white Texans, the Army endangered local authority through its exercise of national power.

Given the large proportion of black soldiers, this conflict increasingly came to be cast in racial terms. On June 16, Mexican bandits attacked a station-house of the Texas and California Stage Company, threatening the black station keeper. Stalking a Ninth Cavalry detachment, the outlaws said they "did not care for black soldiers" and intended to ambush and kill them before robbing the stage line. 46 Military leaders soon recognized that both Hispanics and Anglos objected to the Army's presence more strenuously, and resisted federal authority more often, when the occupying troops were black. During the affair in Starr County, Secretary Belknap warned Governor Coke that he would withdraw the

Army altogether if civil persecutions did not cease. To drive the point home, Ord commanded Hatch to transfer the Ninth's headquarters to Fort Clark (Brackettville) by late spring, removing all the outlying companies around Ringgold. This was a vacuous threat because Ord already had recommended a white regiment to replace the Ninth.  

Civil officials at Brackettville proved no more friendly than those in Rio Grande City, involving Hatch and his men in another legal fiasco. Although Kinney County had a jail, a sheriff, and two deputies, authorities at Fort Clark had agreed to assume responsibility for the county's civilian prisoners. On October 17, two inmates escaped from the fort prison, presumably by bribing two sentinels who deserted on the same day. The county grand jury ordered Hatch to submit the names of the officers of the guard, which he twice declined to do. For this refusal, Judge James Ware—who also had tried the case in Starr County—indicted Hatch under Texas Common Code, Article 1937, which provided that any sheriff or officer having legal custody of prisoners, and permitted their escape, was subject to two to ten years' imprisonment. Restraining his anger, Hatch denied that the civil court held jurisdiction over the

47Relations of the United States with Mexico, 132-33.
guardhouse or any military institution; to admit another interpretation would have meant placing the Army under the control of local authorities. For a third time, Hatch hired an attorney to defend himself against civil charges, a burden he now bore to protect his men from abuse, stating: "If indictments against the members of this guard had been formed, as they were colored soldiers, I have not a doubt that they would have received the full extent of the penalty." 48

Disgusted with Texans' treatment of black troops and hoping to provide the Ninth Cavalry with a respite after eight years of border service, Sherman ordered the regiment transferred to New Mexico in September 1875. By the time of his third indictment, Hatch already had begun to move his regiment out of Texas and into a more hospitable environment. During the following year, the Eighth Cavalry, a white regiment that marched from New Mexico to trade places with the Ninth, received official permission to engage in cross-border pursuit.

Although the color of the new regiment may have made this change of policy more feasible, the reason originated more from revolutionary activity in Mexico itself. In November 1876, General Porfirio Diaz's forces

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48 Hatch to AAG, October 29, 1875, AGO-LR, M666, roll 197, RG 94, NAMP.
ousted the administration of Sebastian Lerdo de Tejada after months of factional fighting. Peace in the Lower Valley relied less on the United States Army or the Texas Rangers than on Diaz's success at accomplishing what American forces could not: forcing local and state authorities to submit to national power. Lerdo's administration had ignored the northern frontier, allowing Cortina and others free rein to stir trouble with Texans. After taking office, Diaz removed Cortina, an avid supporter of Lerdo, and began asserting iron-fisted control over the region. Mexican federales rather than local recruits soon patrolled the border, in part to suppress remaining Lerdista activity but also to win United States recognition of the Diaz government. In his subsequent 33-year administration, Diaz recruited bandits and other dissident factions into federal service, eliminating their threat to American capitalists by placing them under state control. Not only did this ease the stress on the American military, but it opened the doors to increased foreign investments. All of this

"Texas Frontier Troubles, 2-7."
established Diaz's claim to be "the man in charge" in Mexico.50

Few of these changes, however, appeared immediately foreseeable in 1876. As Lerdo and Diaz's forces struggled for power, border states like Nuevo Leon and Coahuila became hotbeds of revolutionary intrigue and violence, with rebels crossing into Texas for sanctuary. Tejano communities followed Mexican political events with a careful eye, taking sides and even offering assistance to their respective parties. Army leaders now obtained permission to arrest and confine foreigners who plotted insurrection on American soil. Under the guise of enforcing United States neutrality, post commanders could cross the river to pursue border gangs. The Lerdistas remained active on the Rio Grande well into 1877, supplementing their power through robbery and cattle rustling. Black soldiers participated in several operations against Mexican rebels. In August 1877, Major George W. Schofield, commanding Fort Duncan, led a party

of the Tenth Cavalry in surprising a camp of revolutionaries and capturing 44 men and 43 horses.\textsuperscript{51}

Ord's liberal use of border crossings also extended to Indian warfare. In the spring of 1876, he directed the Twenty-fourth Infantry's Lieutenant Colonel William Shafter at Fort Duncan to assemble a punitive expedition against Lipans and Kickapoos based in Coahuila. African American soldiers comprised most of Shafter's force, which included the black Seminole Scouts and companies from the Tenth Cavalry and the Twenty-fourth and Twenty-fifth Infantries. Shafter, recognizing the physical demands this assignment would make on his men, specified that only younger officers take part. Among the enlisted men, though, some ten-year veterans of the black regiments joined this decisive sojourn into foreign territory. From April to September 1876, the expedition attacked numerous bands of Lipans and Kickapoos. On July 30, a command under Lieutenant John Bullis, which included 20 Seminole Scouts and Company B from the Tenth Cavalry, assaulted a Lipan village near Saragossa, 30 miles inside Mexico. Soldiers killed more than a dozen warriors, destroyed over 20 lodges and their contents,

\textsuperscript{51}Ord to Townsend, August 8, 1877, AGO-LR, M666, file #1653, roll 200, RG 94, NAMP.
and captured four women and a child, as well as a herd of horses and mules.\textsuperscript{52}

Beset with internal division, Lerdist\'s government—its\ndown on the verge of collapse—expressed its indignation but could do nothing to prevent Shafter\'s activities. Even so, the 1876 expedition came dangerously close to collision with local Hispanics. William Muller, in his memoirs of the Twenty-fourth Infantry, later recalled that "the whole Mexican population rose against us."\textsuperscript{53} Army records, while revealing no retaliatory movement quite that grand, indicate that a force of about 100 mounted soldiers and civilians followed Bullis back to the border after the Saragossa assault. Mexican troops wavered between attacking Bullis\' men and "nudging" them in the direction of Texas, finally opting for the latter.\textsuperscript{54}

Individual Mexicans who sympathized with Americans put their lives and reputations at risk. One Coahuila resident, claiming to have been part of the group which

\textsuperscript{52}Sheridan to Townsend, October 2, 1877, AGO-LR, M666, file #1653, roll 201, RG 94, NAMP. See also Mulroy, Freedom on the Border, 126–27.


\textsuperscript{54}Anonymous statement to George Paschal, December 20, 1877, AGO-LR, M666, roll 203, RG 94, NAMP.
followed Bullis, later wrote to the commander at Fort Clark that Saragossa had been an open trading center for stolen property between Indian raiders and Mexican soldiers, and that horses used by Mexican cavalry carried Texas brands. The respondent insisted on anonymity, claiming he would have to leave his home if it became known that he had helped the United States. American troops usually employed Mexican scouts when crossing the river. In April 1877, Shafter learned that two of his Mexican guides had been arrested in Piedras Negras (across from Eagle Pass and Fort Duncan) for aiding Americans. After the local alcalde refused to release the men and cursed them as "traitors," Shafter's troops crossed the border at night, and by dawn, occupied the main plaza of Piedras Negras. Intending to free the imprisoned guides, they found the jail, as well as most of the town, deserted; locals apparently had been warned in advance and so had moved the prisoners earlier that evening. Shafter believed the guides had been taken to a jail in the interior and executed. Although his men returned across the river without firing a shot, their action further enraged the Mexican consul, who insisted on a reprimand for Ord and his subordinates as a lesson

55Ibid.
to Americans who invaded Mexican territory.\textsuperscript{56} Of course, Mexican federales made their own international crossings. In June, a party of Diaz followers rode into Texas pursuing 50 Lerdistas but a detachment from the Tenth Cavalry, Company E, arrested the band first.\textsuperscript{57}

Few persons knew at the time that these mutual violations of national sovereignty helped to construct new meanings about "the border." Before 1870, Indian tribes, ranchers, and townsfolk--both Anglo and Hispanic--fought over limited resources but seldom did these conflicts give rise to racial or national animosities. During the 1870s when two armies jockeyed back and forth defending their respective territories, residents began to view the Rio Grande as more than a river but also as a symbolic division between "us and them" which lent an orderly dichotomy to the region's chaos. Provincial loyalties did not disappear; many Hispanics resisted Diaz's centralizing tendencies, while white Texans continued to harass the Army and its black soldiers. But these divisions began to diminish as nationality grew

\textsuperscript{56} Mexican Border Troubles, 45th Cong., 1st sess., H. Ex. Doc. No. 13, v. 1, 1877-78, 58-59; Texas Border Troubles, 152-87; and telegram to Ord (unnamed writer), April 3, 1877, AGO-LR, M666, file #1653, roll 199, RG 94, NAMP.

\textsuperscript{57} Ord to AG, August 8, 1877, AGO-LR, M666, file #1653, roll 200, RG 94, NAMP.
more and more important in determining "sides." Now, former Confederates howled for federal intervention when "Mexicans" attacked their property. Likewise, even Diaz's Mexican opponents rallied to his banner every time "gringos" crossed the border and offended their growing national pride.

An executive decision in June 1877 brought these sentiments to a boiling point. Responding to years of military recommendations that his predecessor had ignored, President Rutherford Hayes gave Ord the discretionary authority to cross the Rio Grande for purposes of recapturing stolen goods and punishing lawbreakers. In military terms, the measure had little effect since the Army had been doing this all along. But with the American commander-in-chief giving his consent to such crossings, Mexican diplomats now lost the right of any appeal to presidential authority. The Mexican press likened Hayes' announcement to the declaration of another expansionary war, even suggesting the hand of ex-president Lerdo in trying to overthrow the Diaz regime. The Monitor Republicano, an independent Mexican paper, wrote

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59 Relations of the United States with Mexico, 250-53.
It is the general opinion that President Hayes needs to withdraw the public attention from the irregularities of his election, . . . We have wasted our political and social vitality; we have been destroying and annihilating ourselves, while our powerful neighbor has gone on prospering under the development of its just and liberal institutions, and the hour of peril has come, finding us more than ever exhausted of blood, and with only the vigor inspired in every Mexican by the love of his country, his nationality. 60

Hayes and Ord had specified that border crossings would continue only until Mexico proved capable of controlling its frontier. Yet this reassurance did little to placate a country which had fought a war with the United States 30 years before over what had also begun as a border scuffle. Pajaro Verde, a conservative Catholic paper, used Hayes' statement in a pan-Hispanic appeal to Latin American nations:

Are the people of the American Union ignorant of the fact that, in casting the gauntlet to the Republic of Mexico, they cast it to Latin America, and that at the proper time this republic will have on her side all the nations of the Old Continent of her tongue and race? . . . General Diaz has it in his power to raise, create, unify the national party, essentially Mexican, employing the powerful elements of which it is composed to give a severe lesson to the nation which in its satanic pride desires to make itself lord and master of the whole of America. . . . The present situation is one of national honor, and worthily have the Mexican people responded. In the presence of the common enemy all are brothers; the same sentiment impels all -

60Ibid., 244-45.
the defense of the flag, the integrity of the country.\textsuperscript{61}

A skilled manipulator of public opinion, Diaz used these expressions of nationalism to his political advantage, unifying divisive factions while casting himself as the sole protector of Mexico. By placing his northern forces at key points along the river, he could prevent robbers from crossing at either side, thus assuring the United States of his cooperation and rendering American intervention unnecessary. But to his countrymen, Diaz kept the threat of foreign invasion alive, emphasizing that his troops stood poised on the Rio Grande to repel foreign violations of national sovereignty.\textsuperscript{62}

Confrontations between Mexicans and African American soldiers—ironically, the armed enforcers of American aggression—now became a familiar sight. Crossing the Rio Grande in September, Captain Joseph M. Kelley’s company of the Tenth Cavalry, in pursuit of cattle thieves, was met by two Mexican citizens who warned that the cattle had been herded south, and that the troops would be attacked if they did not return to Texas.

\textsuperscript{61}\textit{Ibid.}, 246.

\textsuperscript{62}\textit{Relations of the United States with Mexico}, 242-43.
Falling back to the American side, Kelley and his men camped for the night. At dawn, a group of 40 Mexicans, some in uniform and some in civilian garb, began firing. The two groups exchanged shots for almost an hour, with both obtaining nearby reinforcements. Kelley reported no casualties; his men had killed three Mexicans and wounded two others.⁶³

Skirmishes like this, which helped to solidify Diaz's base of popular support, yielded mixed results for the Hayes administration. Democrats charged that the President's belligerent Mexican policy attempted to distract attention from his contested election by marshalling support for a border war. Texas politicians forgot their usual animosity toward federal troops and welcomed the Army's excursions into Mexico, some even advocating the seizure of additional territory. Impressed by Diaz's ability to maintain order, Hayes recognized his regime in April 1878 but refused to rescind the offensive crossing order.⁶⁴

As a show of force, Ord directed the Fourth Cavalry's Ranald S. Mackenzie to organize a new expedition. Mackenzie led companies from the Fourth,

⁶³ Texas Frontier Troubles, 28-29.

⁶⁴ Muller, The Twenty-fourth Infantry: Past and Present, 16.
Eighth, and Tenth Cavalries, the Twenty-fourth Infantry, and the Seminole Scouts—more than 1000 men—in a massive column that entered Mexico on June 12. Few Mexicans, or Americans for that matter, believed the operation had anything to do with locating outlaws or Indians. Black infantrymen at Fort Clark gossiped that Mackenzie intended to provoke Diaz into war. Returning on June 21, Mackenzie’s command had spent less than two weeks in Mexico but twice humbled the Mexican cavalry into retreat, and achieved its ostensible purpose of displaying American might.

For the remainder of the year, American officers noticed a sizeable decline in lawlessness which they attributed to more strenuous police efforts on the part of the Mexican government, efforts they believed to be motivated by Mackenzie’s expedition. In fact, raids had begun to ebb a year earlier as Diaz consolidated his northern power in hopes of obtaining United States recognition. Hayes’ crossing order of June 1, 1877 created a stumbling block for diplomatic negotiations

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65 Ibid.


until its revocation in 1880. Two years later, after approval by the Mexican senate, the two countries agreed on a reciprocal crossing treaty. After decades of scuffles and saber-rattling, the United States and Mexico had reached an accommodation. Henceforth, the national power of both countries would dictate affairs in the Rio Grande region.

By the late 1870s, with both governments in a better position to focus attention on border control, American-Mexican military cooperation became possible. Military success always had depended on alliance-making, which in turn depended on how individuals identified with certain groups, and how groups defined their enemies. The new rapprochement closed the escape route long used by Indians and outlaws to evade federal authorities. When a band of Mescalero and Warm Springs Apaches led by Victorio bolted their reservation near Fort Stanton in 1879 and engaged in a year of pillage and murder through New Mexico, Chihuahua, and west Texas, buffalo soldiers from Grierson's Tenth Cavalry combined with Mexican troops under Colonel Joaquin Terrazas in a joint campaign. The alliance suffered numerous strains; commanders on each side claimed negligence and absence of effort by the other, and Victorio's Apaches still managed to obtain firearms and supplies from Mexican civilians.
But gone were the days when extralegal parties could cross the border at will, a right now enjoyed only by national armies within circumscribed conditions. By October 1880, black soldiers managed to drive Victorio's Apaches into Mexico where, cut off from water and a viable escape route, the Indians' threat was ended and Victorio himself was killed by Terrazas' cavalry.\footnote{For a complete discussion of the Victorio War, see Dan L. Thrapp, \textit{Victorio and the Mimbres Apaches} (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1974).}

The Rio Grande remained a violent place despite military control. The border continued to attract outlaws and Indian raiders during the last two decades of the nineteenth century, and even experienced a revival of rebel fervor by new anti-Diaz factions. Yet the scale of violence plummeted, as was evident in the Army's overall reduction of strength through the 1880s. At their peak in 1873, more than 1600 African American soldiers were stationed on the border; by 1880, the aggregate number stood at less than 700. This figure continued to decline until 1885 when the last black regiment left Texas. Similar reduction occurred among the white battalions. With peace came railroads, towns, and a growing Anglo population that soon outnumbered Spanish speakers. Someone who had left the region in 1865 and returned 20
years later would have concluded correctly that a transformation had occurred, which the efforts of black soldiers and their officers helped to make possible.

While the new order did bring temporary peace, it also brought new exploitation and inequality which made that peace tenuous. The El Paso "Salt War" helps to illustrate this transformation, for of all the Army’s official actions on the border, this episode in late 1877 originated from local Hispanics’ dissatisfaction with the expanding capitalistic system. About 100 miles east of the Texas city lay large salt deposits long used by residents not only of El Paso but also of its neighboring towns of Ysleta, Socorro, and San Elizario. As the area’s population increased after 1865, Anglo politicians

"Historians’ conclusions about the Salt War vary according to the writer’s generation and political stance. In 1961, C.L. Sonnichsen, in *The El Paso Salt War* (El Paso: Texas Western Press), delivered a romanticized version that praised the Texas Rangers for restoring order to a chaotic frontier, a work that completely ignored the role of the Ninth Cavalry. To Sonnichsen’s credit, he did acknowledge that Mexicans had been crossing the river and using the salt deposits for years prior to the imposition of an international boundary. By contrast, in a more recent study, Mary Romero claimed the war as a Chicano struggle against Anglo efforts to exploit natural resources on community land. Her analysis of the conflict’s origins has merit but excessively racializes the actors, ignoring the presence of Hispanics on both sides and projecting an activist "Chicano" consciousness on nineteenth-century residents of the El Paso area. Romero, "El Paso Salt War: Mob Action or Political Struggle?" *Aztlan* 16, 1-2 (1985): 119-43.
courted Tejano votes and formed local political machines. Factions polarized over taxation issues and privatization of the salt deposits.\(^7\)

One of these factions, known as "the Salt Ring," centered around the leadership of district judge Charles Howard. Acting on behalf of investors in Austin, Howard tried to secure ownership rights to the salt deposits, even though local Hispanics considered them communal property. Howard surveyed the deposits and posted notices that salt could no longer be taken without due payment, at least not until the courts determined who legally owned the deposits. Howard's political opposition coalesced in "the anti-Salt Ring" led by Antonio Barajo, a San Elizario priest, and Luis Cardis, a member of the state legislature. Cardis and Barajo led a strong Mexican and Tejano faction which opposed privatization of the mines, while Howard's group of Anglos and Hispanic elites represented El Paso's growing entrepreneurial class.

Like many participants in border politics, aggrieved parties resorted to violence for settling disputes. Aroused by Barajo, a Mexican mob attacked and "arrested"

Judge Howard in Ysleta and prepared to lynch him before Barajo intervened and had him escorted from the area, minus a $14,000 bond. A week later, on October 10, Howard found Cardis in an El Paso store, killed him with shots from a double-barreled shotgun, and retreated to Mesilla, New Mexico. Cardis' outraged supporters roamed the streets of El Paso and its outlying areas promising vengeance. By this time, Hatch had sent 20 cavalrmen under Lieutenant Louis H. Rucker to El Paso. Meanwhile, Howard had secured the services of several bodyguards, among them Wesley Owens, a former soldier who had served for five years with Grierson's Tenth Cavalry.\(^7\)

Hatch's previous conflicts with state officials had taught him the importance of legal caution. Realizing that the salt deposits were located in Texas and knowing that most of the rioting "Mexicans" were in fact American citizens, he hesitated to employ his troops, believing that the matter rested within the jurisdiction of civil authorities. When Governor Richard Hubble sent a company of Rangers to El Paso to answer the pleas of English-speaking residents, military intervention seemed almost unnecessary. Despite his previous difficulties, Hatch feared that state forces would be unable to provide

\(^7\)AGO-LR, M666, roll 196, RG 94, NAMP.
protection. Hoping that a show of federal force would discourage trouble, he instructed Rucker to protect government property and interfere only in the event of invasion by "Mexicans from Mexico." 72

Soon after the Rangers arrived, Howard secured their services in an attempt to regain control of the salt mines. On December 12, he set out with a Ranger escort to arrest trespassers at the deposits. Word of his action spread and a Mexican mob greeted the party at San Elizario. Wesley Owens, who accompanied Howard, later testified that more than 1000 armed men occupied the town, with another 300 surrounding San Elizario as guards. Having lived in the county for almost a year and knowing its residents, Owens thought that most of the gunmen came from Mexico. 73 In a battle that lasted through the following week, Howard and a local Anglo merchant named Charles Ellis were murdered and their bodies mutilated. Mexicans and Tejanos then began to riot, looting homes and villages with cries of "kill all

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72Mexican Border Troubles, 130; and E. R. Platt, AAG, to Commander, District of New Mexico, November 24, 1877, AGO-LR, M666, file #1653, roll 203, RG 94, NAMP.

73AGO-LR, M666, roll 196, RG 94, NAMP.
Americans" and "death to the gringos." Once Governor Hubbard requested military assistance, Hatch was free to act. Sending nine companies ahead, he arrived in El Paso on December 21 to find the rioting abated. Facing armed columns of black cavalrymen, the Mexican mobs dispersed, leaving eleven people dead.

The troops' arrival, however, did not halt all violence. On December 23, the local sheriff arrested two Mexicans, who arrived in Ysleta days after Howard's murder, and turned them over to the Texas Rangers. The Rangers then executed the "escaping" suspects in a nearby field. In several heated missives, Hatch charged the Rangers with committing a cowardly murder and demanded authority to arrest them. Thwarting retaliations by state troops and other Anglo Texans—lest they arouse new uprisings—now became the Army's chief priority. Hatch wrote "that if they [the Mexicans] have done wrong in killing Howard they are willing to give themselves up to the military and stand their trial, but they had rather die than fall into the hands of the Texans." Philip

74 Telegram, C. H. Kerber to Senators Cooke and Maxey, December 14, 1877, AGO-LR, M666, file #1653, roll 203, RG 94, NAMP.

75 Relations with Mexico, 282.

76 Ibid.
Sheridan and John Pope, Hatch's military superiors, ordered him to use all force necessary to prevent the Rangers from killing prisoners, and pressured Hubbard to prosecute the parties responsible for the Ysleta incident. Armed conflict between state and federal troops never erupted in El Paso, although black soldiers and Rangers would collide in the future.

The outbreak of the Salt War and the bloody response of the Rangers left the Army as the region's only legitimate peacekeeping force. Despite the anti-American contempt which fed the uprising, Mexicans knew the consequences of Texans' reprisals and realized that their best chances for justice in the new order lay with national, not state, authorities. White Texans, for their part, came to depend on military protection and protested when rumors arose of the Army's imminent departure:

For God sake, and the sake of humanity, . . . . do not allow the troops be removed from this county. . . . If the troops are moved from here we [Americans] will be compelled to leave our homes, . . . . We have a few officers who have left comfortable Posts in New Mexico, and their families, and wish to return to them, and they don't care what becomes of us, and our families, although we are taxed to

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"Pope to Sheridan, December 24, 1877, and Sheridan to Pope, December 25, 1877, AGO-LR, M666, file #1653, roll 203, RG 94, NAMP."
support them and their families in luxury— or is it for our protection we pay these taxes?"

A congressional investigation the following year confirmed what panic-stricken Anglos had concluded: that removal of federal troops would likely result in more bloodshed and a forced abandonment of the region by English-speaking Americans."

The Ninth Cavalry's role in the Salt War mirrored its own and other regiments' activities elsewhere on the border: that of an outside arbiter which tried to ameliorate local tensions but sometimes exacerbated them. True, the United States Army ultimately served the interests of imperialistic expansion. But its presence also prevented many Whites from treating Hispanics and Indians as harshly as they may have wanted. In the process, federal officials found their range of authority enlarged. By suppressing violence from Tejano citizens, the Army diverged from its historical and constitutional purpose of defending national borders against "foreign" invasion.

The growth of national authority did not occur without local hostility and resentment. Black soldiers,

78Wahl to Schleichter, March 10, 1878, AGO-LR, M666, roll 206, RG 94, NAMP.

79Relations with Mexico, xix.
who helped to broaden federal power throughout the region, often suffered those resentments to a greater extent than did white soldiers. As the character of Big Dempsey learns in Kelton's novel, black regulars' role as military agents in the new order gave Indians and Hispanics no reason to distinguish buffalo soldiers from "white" people. By the close of the 1870s, the United States and Mexican governments--first through maintenance of a strong military presence, and then through an accompanying concept of national citizenship--had become dominant features of life on the Rio Grande.
Federal Forts in Texas 1866-1890

Map III

MAJOR CAMPAIGNS AND INDIAN FIGHTS 1846-1890

Chapter Three

Crossing the River:
The Social Life of the Black Regular

The western Army claimed many achievements by the close of the 1870s. While resistance to military encroachment still continued in the Southwest and northern Rockies, most Indian tribes had begun their series of painful transitions to reservation life. On the Rio Grande, the United States and Mexico neared the final stages of a diplomatic entente, ending several decades of cross-border animosity and beginning a new thirty-year era of economic cooperation. For their role in these endeavors, African American soldiers—who helped to build the roads, capture the fugitives, protect the civilians, and perform countless other tasks which made conquest possible—might have expected, if not congratulations, then at least acknowledgement of their ability to fulfill military duties equally as well as Whites.

Thirteen years after congressional legislation permitted Blacks a place in the peacetime Army, however, the general public remained either apathetic or hostile
to the use of black soldiers. Military authorities still considered their use "experimental" and, while expressing grudging praise for black soldiers, also doubted their continued effectiveness once the need for western troops diminished. Black soldiers endured stations in remote western settings in part because of the Army's wish to avoid civilian tensions by placing them near white population centers. By 1879, however, even this practice began to be questioned. If quartered among "their own kind" and some local incident flared between Whites and "colored" civilians, then—as Brigadier General Christopher C. Augur thought—"it is doubtful if the restraints of a vigorous discipline could wholly prevent the colored soldiers from becoming involved - so strong with them is this question of the rights of their race."¹

On the Texas-Mexico border, where black civilians were scarce, officers entertained suspicions about Black-Mexican collusion. Most Whites who commanded black regulars minimized the extent to which their men "mixed" with locals. But on occasion, they admitted that Blacks had an exceptional "friendliness" with Mexicans which

encouraged desertions. By contrast, officers from white regiments, such as Lieutenant Colonel John S. Mason, often held black troops to be unfit for border service:

From the simple fact that the class of Mexicans along that frontier are generally of the lowest order, part Indians, and they fraternize with the negro more readily than with the white people; and the consequence is that there is great demoralization among the black troops, and it has extended to the officers to a certain extent. . . . there are a great many lewd women, and there are dance-houses and gambling-houses which are frequented by the men.

Fears about a multiracial coalition of Blacks, Indians, and Mexicans had accompanied the first Anglo settlers to Texas and remained a continuing source of anxiety through the post-Civil War years. After 1866, the induction of African Americans into military service forced army leaders to consider delicate matters of local race relations when issuing regimental assignments, facing questions they were ill-prepared to address. Could Blacks be trusted to fight other people of color? Or would Indians and Mexicans, like white southerners, resent a black military presence, and fight to resist opponents whom they perceived as inferior and unworthy?

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Testimony of Captain Lewis Johnson, Twenty-fourth Infantry, December 4, 1877, in Texas Border Troubles, 45th Cong., 2d sess., H. Misc. Doc. 64, 142-43.

Testimony of Mason, Fourth Infantry, December 7, 1877, ibid., 115.
Behind these questions lay the realization that black soldiers proved themselves very capable of defending "the rights of their race." As the conquest of the Rio Grande reached its final stage, policymakers noticed a change of demeanor in black servicemen, who refused to capitulate to racial discrimination. The same weapons which had opened the frontier to settlement could just as easily be turned on racist Whites. Faced with a shrinking need for his labor in the West and the beginnings of segregation enveloping the East, the black soldier faced a bleak and tenuous future.

The question of Blacks' racial loyalties, and the effects of those loyalties on their ability to perform military labor, was the most difficult factor—both for military leaders then and military historians now—to determine. Despite worrisome reports of camaraderie with Mexicans, numerous cases also arose of Hispanic discrimination toward black soldiers. The experiences of Colonel Edward Hatch and his men from the Ninth Cavalry, for example, revealed a current of Black-Hispanic hostility. During the border-crossing crises of the 1870s, American commanders sometimes remarked on the lack of respect shown to black troops by Tejanos. In 1876, Ord wrote:
An unfortunate condition of affairs arose between the colored troops and the native population, under which native Mexicans living on the American side were indisposed to cooperate with the officers of colored regiments. They were averse to having that sort of troops among them. For that reason, I gave order . . . that no patrols or small parties should be sent out from posts, except under command of a white officer, and as there are very few white officers available, this, in a great measure, prevented such patrols being sent.  

According to Ord, once Hatch’s regiment had been replaced with the white Fourth Cavalry, residents showed "zeal and activity" in cooperating with United States troops, permitting greater exertion of control over border gangs. When Ord requested the next step of replacing the Tenth Cavalry with a white regiment, Sherman responded with indignation:

The receipt of your private letter . . . alarms me. You ask for three more white regiments, when it has been all I could possibly do to prevail on the Secretary not to order Grierson’s Regiment to Louisiana, on the theory that the Louisiana thugs were worse than the Mexican banditti.  

The United States Army— with imprecision, imperfection, and reluctance— engaged complicated questions about the racial mix of their forces and the

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5Ibid., 177.

6Sherman to Ord, November 2, 1876, AGO-LR, M666, file #1653, roll 199, RG 94, NAMP.
subsequent effects on relations with civilian communities. By introducing black soldiers to the border region, it brought a catalytic new element into the class, national, and racial dynamics of Rio Grande communities. Arriving as conquerors on behalf of a distant federal government, African American servicemen became part of border culture, entertaining themselves in its saloons and brothels, conducting business transactions, and even marrying and raising children with local women. Through these liaisons, they participated in another type of "border crossing" which challenged their national and racial allegiances, and raised serious concerns not only for the Army in Texas but also for the continued prospect of black enlistment.

Racial prejudice dominated the lives and destinies of black servicemen. Adhering to the contemporary notion that Blacks could endure hot, torrid climates easier than Whites, commanders justified their lengthy border service on the grounds that white regiments might not withstand the summer outbreaks of malaria and typhoid fever which assailed the Texas posts. General William T. Sherman testified before Congress in 1877 that "the death-rate in that climate is greater among the white troops than among the black, and there was an implied understanding when we employed the black troops that they were better qualified
for Southern stations than troops of our own Anglo-Saxon race." Answering the suggestion that black troops be sent to the Dakotas, the Quartermaster General responded that such a move will prove to be the death knell of any colored regiment. That colored men will not enlist with prospect of going to that rigorous climate . . . for half the year I doubt whether they will be of any more value than an Army of Dormice [sic] or any other hybernating animals.

When white officers protested the transfer, plans took shape--but were never implemented--to detach the officers and relocate them to a more suitable region. This would have meant assigning a new or rotating leadership to the black enlisted men who remained behind.

It would be a mistake to exaggerate the importance of race as a factor in assignment of military forces. As a rule, financial expense influenced logistic and distribution decisions more than civilian or army prejudice. But the combination of white supremacy and resistance to federal Reconstruction made Texas an exceptional case among western states. Texas' white

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7Testimony of Sherman, September 30, 1877, *ibid.*, 20.


9G. W. McCrary, Secretary of War, March 31, 1879, *ibid.*, 130.
population jumped from half a million in 1870 to nearly 2,500,00 by 1900, as migrants arrived from the rural, poorer classes of the Deep South and Midwest. Although resigned to the reality of black freedom, few white Texans, new or old, acknowledged black political or social equality. These demographic changes did not aid Afro-Texans as a group. While Blacks' numbers did increase, their proportion of the state population declined from 31 to 20 percent during the period from 1870 to 1900. Besides the loss of political leverage created by this decline, black Texans faced growing competition for land and employment with each new wave of white immigration.\textsuperscript{10}

Consigned to a growing landless class of low-paid wage laborers, former slaves tried to resist these changes in various ways. In 1883, Blacks in Harrison County attempted to organize their own militia and protect themselves from racial violence. Local Whites, with the help of state forces, crushed the movement, but rumors of armed, uniformed Blacks provoked paranoiac

fears that lasted for months. White Texans feared the presence of black federal regulars, both for the individual threats such troops posed and for whatever "insolent" attitudes they might stimulate among black civilians.

The practice of stationing black soldiers on the border, where African Americans' population share dropped from 5.6 to 4.1 percent between 1870 and 1880, seemed to present little danger. (see appendix to Introduction, Table I) Black civilians in the Lower Valley, most of them males discharged from army service, depended on local military and ranching economies for subsistence. In west Texas, the black population consisted mostly of soldiers and laundresses attached to the developing military posts. One of these, Fort Concho, housed companies from all of the black regiments and served as the Tenth Cavalry's regimental headquarters between 1875 and 1882.

Civilian and military communities like these often began and developed like siamese twins. The first Tejano settlers near Concho came as day laborers for the fort, transporting supplies from San Antonio, or cultivating fields and cutting prairie grass for soldiers' food and

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animal forage. The burgeoning cattle industry and Concho's emergence as a military base brought rising numbers of Mexicans and Blacks through the 1870s. By the 1880 census, Hispanics comprised nearly one-fourth of Tom Green County's 3600 residents, with black soldiers comprising over one-sixth. The post office renamed the Tejano village of Santa Angela to San Angelo when it became the county seat in 1883. Residential separation soon developed in San Angelo, with two class-divided Hispanic barrios and a "black quarter" for discharged soldiers and their families.\textsuperscript{12}

Despite demographic and economic growth, the Fort Concho area never shed the traces of its frontier origins. Writer J. Evetts Haley estimated that in 1870 alone, Santa Angela--its population then numbering no more than 100--witnessed at least seven murders. Over the next decade, more than 100 killings reportedly occurred within ten miles of the post.\textsuperscript{13} Violent trends persisted after the establishment of civil law.

Assistant surgeon Samuel Smith, stationed at Concho in

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{12}Arnoldo De Leon, \textit{San Angelenos: Mexican Americans in San Angelo, Texas} (San Angelo: Fort Concho Museum Press, 1985), 13-45.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{13}J. Evetts Haley, \textit{Fort Concho and the Texas Frontier} (San Angelo: San Angelo Standard-Times, 1952), 271-73.}
the late 1870s, wrote his sister that Santa Angela harboured so many murderers and horse-thieves that officers never thought of leaving the garrison after dark, even though enlisted soldiers squandered their pay among "the human sharks who follow . . . the army like parasites." ¹⁴

Similar conditions prevailed in other west Texas locales. Brackettville began as a settlement for merchants, stock-raisers and gamblers who thrived on business provided by nearby Fort Clark. One account from an 1876 visit describes Brackettville's charged climate and habit of ethnic mixing:

We visited the town after supper, and you may imagine our surprise to find ourselves in the liveliest burg in west Texas, where the night life could only be compared to the saloons and gambling places that existed [sic] the early days of the gold excitement of California and the Klondike. It was pay day at Fort Clark, adjacent to the town, where thousands of United States soldiers were stationed, and such an assortment of humans I never saw before. There were painted Indians with feathered head-dress, Lipan and Seminole scouts, and Indians, with Mexicans, white and negro soldiers, desperados, and other characters, all armed and ready for a fight or a frolic, with a sprinkling of fair females, soliciting for the bar, where several bartenders were as busy as ants serving liquid refreshments.

Gambling devices of every description lined the floors of the saloon...\textsuperscript{15}

This description exaggerated both the number of soldiers stationed at Fort Clark (never more than 400), and the extent of "easy mixing" between various peoples. Black soldiers, like all military personnel, lacked the freedom to associate on a free and equal basis with whomever they wished. The Army constituted a system of institutionalized inequality, with work, status, and friendships determined by rank and assignment. Competition and even jealousy arose between regiments, and soldiers within the same company often ostracized outsiders. Racial segregation compounded these divisions. Although black and white soldiers worked at the same tasks, they held separate social events, attended school at different times, and quartered their families in segregated housing.\textsuperscript{16} Aside from excursions into town following paydays, civilian contacts were limited to fort employees: scouts, domestic servants, clerks, laborers and teamsters.

\textsuperscript{15}Vinton Lee James, \textit{Frontier and Pioneer Recollections of Early Days in San Antonio and West Texas}, (San Antonio: Artes Graficas, 1938), 79-80.

Because of the vast distances and warm climate which made food preservation almost impossible, military communities depended on neighboring civilians for supplying basic staples. Settlers near Fort Concho and Fort Davis provided vegetables, while border posts often purchased flour, beans, corn, and beef in Mexico. Diplomatic troubles with the Mexican government always threatened to end this supply. Partaking of Mexican food sometimes became black and white soldiers' introduction to Latin culture. One source suggests that Indians and Blacks cared little for Mexican cuisine, suspecting the hot peppers and chiles to be poisonous. With great sarcasm, Doctor Samuel Smith described "a regal repast" courtesy of "a Mexican greaser, (who) displayed his skill in concocting soup from broken marrow bones and canned vegetables."

Soldiers supplemented their diets by hunting wild game. William Branch, a private stationed at Fort Duncan, claimed "We gits meat pretty often" by acquiring deer, bear, rabbits, and wild cattle on overland marches.

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18 Acting assistant surgeon Samuel Smith to father, Camp Charlotte, Texas, July 4, 1879, cited in Neilson, "I Long to Return to Fort Concho," 163.
By hunting at night, troopers sometimes shot livestock by mistake and risked confrontations with local ranchers. Branch stated that officers would inspect the carcasses for brands: "When we bring him to camp, de captain say, 'Iffen de cow got iron burns de rancher gwineter shoot hisself a nigger scout.'"\(^{19}\)

Health matters remained a constant worry on military forts, one which provoked concern over the relationships between enlisted men and civilians. Army doctors, who provided the only trained medical care available in some areas, dealt with periodic outbreaks of smallpox, cholera, and various epidemic diseases. When such crises assailed the surrounding population, sick people gathered near army posts, as they did at Fort McKavett in September 1872 when the post surgeon issued medicine to more than 100 ailing citizens.\(^{20}\) Physicians grew frustrated with the ineffectiveness of quarantine methods, noticing how easily soldiers contracted contagious diseases from civilians. An assistant surgeon at Fort McIntosh complained in 1869 that even the strictest rules would not keep soldiers from visiting


\(^{20}\)Medical History of Posts, Fort McKavett, September 1872, entry 547, RG 94, NA.
"fandangos" in downtown Laredo, which he described as places "of a very low order."\textsuperscript{21}

The West, as a region, had a reputation for good health but primitive sanitation made any permanent settlement, military or civilian, hazardous. Most westerners—certainly Native Americans but soldiers included—stood a greater chance of death from disease than from violence. Of the nearly two dozen deaths reported at Fort Concho up to 1870, six resulted from gunshot wounds, while most of the rest died from diarrhea, dysentery, and typhoid fever.\textsuperscript{22} Military officials constructed their camps and forts in a hurried manner, with little regard for proper sanitation and waste removal. Fatigue, poor food preservation, and soldiers' general lack of concern for hygiene inflated these problems. Surgeons at Fort Davis tried in vain to enforce orders that required men to bathe at least twice a week. Physicians also made mistakes during stressful periods. Haley described an episode at Fort Concho when a Tenth cavalryman named Ellis fell ill, was pronounced dead by mistake, and later terrified witnesses by awakening during burial preparations. Subsequently known

\textsuperscript{21}Medical History of Posts, Fort McIntosh, April 1869, RG 94, NA.

\textsuperscript{22}Haley, Fort Concho, 317-18.
as "Dead Ellis," he became a familiar figure in the San Angelo area.  

While all regiments suffered high rates of disease, army surgeons singled out black troops as susceptible to contagion and illness, a combination of racial and medical thinking common to the nineteenth century. Aware of Indians' staggering losses to illness, Whites grew more confirmed not only in their assumptions about Indian inferiority but also in their belief that disease emanated from slovenly, uncivilized behavior, a belief they easily transferred to other people of color.  

Medical officials had blamed black soldiers for an 1867 cholera epidemic in Kansas, while at Fort McKavett, Texas, the post physician wrote that "carelessness in cooking and personal evacuations" by black troops had led to an outbreak of dysentery. The physician believed that the contrast between white and black soldiers had been "thoroughly, forcibly exemplified in this epidemic. As a rule negro troops yield to all impulses both mental and

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23Ibid, 323.

physical and 'tis almost impossible to teach them the mind is superior to matter."  

Besides disease, the Army confronted two major problems among its enlisted men: alcohol abuse and prostitution. Fights, murders, insubordination, desertions and all manner of crimes happened as a result of intoxication. Soldiers could obtain liquor from post traders or sutlers but as pressure from national temperance advocates increased, post commanders limited the availability of alcohol, and, by the 1880s, removed its presence altogether. This action encouraged soldiers to patronize civilian taverns. An 1880s War Department study determined that about 40 per 1000 soldiers had been hospitalized for alcohol problems, while an 1891 report showed a ratio of 7.6 suicides per 1000, both far higher than European armies. The desire for liquor could be overpowering, outweighing fears of court-martial and punishment. Soldiers often sold firearms and other army property to support their drinking habits. Heavy drinking appears to have been less common in the four black regiments, or at least was less of a factor in

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25Medical History of Posts, Fort McKavett, May 1870, entry 547, RG 94. For a discussion of the Kansas epidemic, see James Leiker, "Voices from a Disease Frontier: Kansans and Cholera, 1867, Kansas History 17, 4 (Spring 1995): 236-53.
disciplinary problems. Medical authorities at Ringgold Barracks even complimented black troops on their low rate of drunkenness, claiming that the soldiers did all of their drinking in company quarters.

Black soldiers appear to have outpaced Whites in the other major problem which plagued the Army: prostitution. With the establishment of military posts came the inevitable brothels or "hog ranches" that sprang up nearby. Some prostitutes catered only to Whites but the majority accepted all paying customers, regardless of race. Soldiers' patronage of such establishments—usually the least savory ones due to the troops' meager earnings—exposed them to a range of venereal diseases.

When not fighting epidemics, physicians devoted much of their energy to treating gonorrhea and syphilis, for some reason an acute problem on the Rio Grande. Even into the early 1900s, venereal disease rates for black soldiers

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26Don Rickey, Jr., *Forty Miles a Day on Beans and Hay: The Enlisted Soldier Fighting the Indian Wars* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1963), 156-68.

27Medical History of Posts, Fort Ringgold, Book No. 724, entry 547, 1873-76, RG 94, NA.

remained high, especially in Lower Valley towns like Brownsville and Rio Grande City.²⁹

The Army scrutinized the black regiments' proclivity to such vices. For the first few years, officers praised black troops and reported progress in their training, both as soldiers and responsible citizens. An 1870 Inspector General's report from Fort Clark noted "very good discipline" and "neat, clean quarters" in the Ninth Cavalry and black infantry companies.³⁰ Efforts to teach literacy met with success. George Mullins, chaplain of the Twenty-fifth Infantry, organized a school at Fort Davis which averaged an attendance of over 100 daily. By 1878, more than 160 black soldiers at Davis had learned to read and write, with 24 being assigned as regimental clerks and dozens of others reading and studying each night in their barracks. Mullins, a Kentuckian who entered the service convinced of Blacks' inherent inferiority, concluded their deficiencies to be

²⁹Medical History of Posts, Fort Davis, Book No. 9, 1873-82, Fort Ringgold, Book No. 727, and Fort Brown, Book No. 734, 1894-1906, RG 94, NA.

³⁰Inspector General's Reports, Fort Clark, August 28, 1870, RG 159, NA.
Defenders of black enlistment like Mullins—never a majority at any time—grew more scarce through the 1870s, as officers continued to express doubts that Blacks could be transformed into intelligent soldiers. Some officers never made the effort and preferred to assign black enlisted men to domestic labor; officers at Fort Bliss, for instance, apparently used black privates as personal servants. Complaints of lying, malingering, stealing, and misunderstanding instructions were common. General Edward Ord, a relative moderate on this question, believed that Blacks eventually would make efficient soldiers, "but since men who have been taught all their lives to obey seldom possess the necessary qualities for command," he recommended that their number of white officers be doubled. Ord based this judgement not on a belief in black inferiority but on his doubts about the type of black man that military service attracted.

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32Inspector General's Reports, Fort Bliss, February 1873, RG 159, NA.
claiming "The best men among the colored people are not disposed to enlist . . . but a great many of the worst men of towns are driven to enlist by the police authorities in order to get rid of them, . . . ."33

The issue of recruitment was central to the Army's black experiment. Questions of who enlisted and why they joined are of crucial importance, for it was from this group that observers extrapolated about the military possibilities of all African Americans, and, by extension, about their prospects for other types of service. Recruiting officers always struggled to fill the black regiments to capacity. Low reenlistment rates led to a suggestion in 1870 of a consolidation of the Twenty-fourth and Twenty-fifth Infantries, a recommendation that President Grant vetoed in favor of heightened recruiting efforts.34 By 1877, the black regiments still numbered far below the norm of 1200 for cavalry and 500 for infantry; the Ninth Cavalry counted 610, the Tenth, 1008, and the Twenty-fourth and Twenty-

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33Texas Border Troubles, 103.

34Townsend to J.J. Reynolds, April 18, 1870, and Reynolds to Townsend, May 16, 1870, scrapbook on Twenty-fifth Infantry, 1866-1926, entry 1805, RG 391, NA.
fifth Infantries, 354 and 408 respectively.\textsuperscript{35} Low enlistment numbers also led to poor quality because recruiters lowered their standards and signed up men who would have been unacceptable in white regiments. Captain John Clous of the Twenty-fourth Infantry believed that while "good colored troops" proved as fine and capable as the best white soldiers, they were quite difficult to obtain. In 1877, Clous claimed the quality of recent recruits to be "very poor," far below the quality of soldiers who had enlisted a decade earlier.\textsuperscript{36}

Clous may have exaggerated the decline, for early court-martial records reveal a plethora of charges brought against Blacks in the 1860s and early 1870s ranging from insubordination to simple carelessness. A black sergeant described the Twenty-fifth Infantry's Private Isaiah Bowie as "illiterate, dirty, worthless, untrustworthy," with comrades having to strip and bathe him on several occasions. For permitting three prisoners in his custody to go swimming in the Rio Grande, a general court-martial found Bowie guilty of neglect of duty. When questioned as to whether his poor performance

\textsuperscript{35}Secretary of War to Butler, February 5, 1877, \textit{The Negro in the Military Service}, vol. 7, M858, roll 5, RG 94, NAMP.

\textsuperscript{36}Texas Border Troubles, 130.
was due to obstinacy or lack of intelligence, however, Bowie's sergeant remarked that the man "was no fool" and could make a good soldier if he tried. Similar cases arose such as the one at Fort Duncan, when Private John Yousting allowed his prisoners to relax and play cards while he talked to some Mexican women. Yousting received 15-days' punishment of standing atop a barrel from reveille until noon, and carrying a 40-pound log of wood from noon until reveille.

Some black soldiers committed personal attacks on civilians, officers, and even one another. At Fort Davis, Sergeant Moses Marshall shot and killed Corporal Richard Robinson, while Robinson slept in his bed, for making disparaging remarks about Marshall's wife. At Fort Quitman in 1869, two Ninth cavalrymen, Leone Baquie and Buck Taylor, assaulted Lieutenant Robert Webb, striking him in the face with a butcher knife after he ordered them to leave a Mexican dance hall and return to their quarters. Finding Baquie and Taylor guilty of

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37 General Courts-Martial, Fort Davis, August 24, 1872, PP 2718, JAG, RG 153, NA.

38 General Courts-Martial, Fort Duncan, December 2, 1870, PP 1457, JAG, RG 153, NA.

39 Register of Baptisms, Marriages, and Deaths, Chaplain's Book of Records, Fort Davis, entry 32, Continental Commands, RG 393, Post Records, Part 5, NA.
assault and desertion, the court sentenced them to twenty years' hard labor. 40

The Army's use of such men, both Whites and Blacks, increased the resentments of neighboring civilians. In 1871, Mexican women employed at Fort Stockton charged a group of black soldiers with breaking into their house at night, driving them outside, and proceeding to loot the home until they were stopped by Henry Dickenson, a black civilian. Supporting the women's story, Dickenson claimed that two privates pointed their carbine rifles in his face and threatened "to blow his damned brains out" for interfering. 41 During the El Paso Salt War, ten black troopers robbed the residence of Pablo Mejillo, a San Elizario citizen, and carried out bundles of money, tobacco, and clothing. The thieves could not be punished since the witnesses—one Anglo and two Hispanics—proved

40General Courts-Martial, Fort Quitman, July 19, 1869, PP 775, JAG, RG 153, NA.

41The two privates convicted and sentenced were George Washington, Twenty-fifth, Company K, who received three years of hard labor and dishonorable discharge; and Robert Gregory, Ninth Cavalry, Company A, who received four years of hard labor and dishonorable discharge. General Courts-Martial, Fort Stockton, December 15, 1871, PP 2306, JAG, RG 153, NA.
unable to identify the guilty parties out of a garrison lineup.\textsuperscript{42}

Punishments for soldiers found guilty at general court-martials almost always involved dishonorable discharge and some combination of a forfeiture of wages and imprisonment. Flogging had been outlawed by this time but offenders could be branded, at least up to 1872; in most cases, however, higher courts disapproved sentences of branding.\textsuperscript{43} If court-martial records are any indication, then scarce must have been the soldier who felt safe from physical assault, or who did not live without being surrounded by criminal activity. The variety of charges brought against soldiers at Fort Concho alone seems astonishing: abusing officers with profanity; writing bad checks on post credit; wife-beating; breaking into the fort chicken coop; exposing genitalia on the streets of San Angelo; and harassing a

\textsuperscript{42}Testimony of Meregildo Montez, Gavino Villaneuva, and John P. Clarke, March 2, 1878, AGO-LR, M666, roll 451, RG 94, NAMP.

fellow soldier with the threat "I mean to kill myself a nigger."

These charges should not be interpreted, however, as characteristic of black soldiers' behavior. Officers held great power over enlisted men, who—if accused by their superiors of an infraction—found it less dangerous to admit guilt than to plead innocence, since the latter was taken as a defamation of the officer's character. As in white regiments, company commanders often selected as non-commissioned officers men who would employ strict methods to keep their fellows in line. At Fort Robinson, Nebraska, privates with the Ninth Cavalry described Sergeant Emanuel Stance as "dirty mean." When Stance's body turned up with four gunshot wounds, authorities concluded that he had been murdered by his own men. Friction with non-commissioned officers motivated so many violent episodes that it suggests black privates, who were accustomed to taking orders from Whites, stubbornly resisted subordination to black sergeants. The high

"Charges and Specifications for Garrison Courts-Martial, December 1875-June 1889, Fort Concho, Continental Commands, RG 393, Post Records, Part 5, NA.

frequency of court-martials does indicate a proportionate
tendency toward violence among African American soldiers
equivalent at least to that of white troops. Whether
this resulted, however, from the quality of enlistment or
from the perilous climate of army life remains a
difficult question.

Developments in African American society influenced
the availability and quality of black men for service.
Military enlistment always appears as a less attractive
option during times of employment and prosperity. During
Reconstruction, Blacks discovered new opportunities—
although temporary—which may have discouraged them from
joining the Army. At a time when former slaves were
enjoying the feel of recent freedom, enlisting for
service in the West might have seemed like signing
oneself back into slavery.46 As with Whites, army life
tended to draw rootless individuals who lacked or felt
disconnected from home and family. As Ord suspected,
many black men enlisted to escape criminal punishment or
to avoid sharecropping debts, taking new names upon
entering the service. With them, they brought certain
survival tactics which had originated in slavery:

46Leon Litwack, Been in the Storm So Long: The
Aftermath of Slavery (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1979),
292-335.
stealing and reselling property, feigning ignorance to lighten workloads, and adopting an air of subservience in the presence of strange Whites. Black recruits also brought a habit of carrying personal weapons like razors, another legacy of the antebellum era when slaves had to protect themselves from other slaves. One study of black southern homicide rates shows a propensity toward intraracial violence several times higher than interracial murders. Most Black-on-Black homicides involved the same profile of person likely to join the Army: young males prone to spontaneous action in defense of honor or some personal grievance, and able to release violent frustrations through "safe" channels rather than in a racially dangerous manner."

Complaints about the special problems inherent in black regiments, therefore, possessed some validity. Yet racial prejudice also compounded these difficulties, illustrated in the case of Henry Ossian Flipper, the first African American graduate of West Point. Flipper hardly represented the average black soldier. Born a slave in 1856, his family's political connections, combined with his extensive years of study and

discipline, paved the way for his West Point selection. Held with pride by Reconstruction reformers as an example of "the new Negro" that military service could produce, Flipper graduated in 1877 and joined the Tenth Cavalry, serving at Fort Sill and later Fort Davis in the aftermath of the Texas Indian wars."

Flipper's background, his education, his West Point credentials, and his officer status made him an exception among the Army's black regulars. Literate and privileged, he challenged Whites' prevailing assumptions about the capacities of Blacks for military service. It would be interesting to determine how those same qualities prepared him to deal with the Indians, Hispanics, and lower-class black soldiers who lived in the region. Regrettably, his memoirs mention little about such interactions. Instead, Flipper described the great courtesy shown him by white officers, indicating a general sense of camaraderie within the "elite club" of military society. During his assignment at Fort Sill, Flipper shared quarters with the family of his commanding officer, Nicholas Nolan, and even became friends with Nolan's sister-in-law, Mollie Dwyer, with whom he shared

horseback rides and other social outings that became a topic for local gossip. 

Flipper's initial acceptance by white officers, however, proved only temporary. Serving as quartermaster and commissary at Fort Davis, he was court-martialed in 1882 for carelessness and embezzlement of funds, a charge that Flipper blamed on racial prejudice and personality conflicts with commanding officers. His memoirs identify as persecutors Lieutenant Charles Nordstrom, who, Flipper claimed, competed with him for Mollie Dwyer's affections (and who in fact married her after Flipper's dismissal), and Colonel William Shafter, who had a habit of harassing subordinates whom he disliked. Acquitting him on embezzlement charges, the court-martial board convicted Flipper of conduct unbecoming an officer and issued a sentence of dishonorable discharge, an action which Flipper attributed to a racist conspiracy.

Judging from available evidence, Flipper's protestations of innocence seem rather self-serving. At the least, he had lied to his commanding officer and

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"Ibid., 2.

"Ibid., 19-20."
acted in a negligent manner with government funds.\textsuperscript{51} Army officials did not, in all probability, intend to discredit him on racial grounds. But neither did they hold Flipper or any other black soldier to a color-blind standard. African Americans entered the service on a probationary, contingent basis, scrutinized not simply for fighting ability but also for morality and personal conduct. White soldiers' flaws could be excused as personal failings but the actions of individual black soldiers reflected badly on the entire race. Army leaders resented the paternalistic duties which the 1866 legislation had imposed on them, and, as the ideal black recruit—honest, intelligent, obedient, celibate, yet for some reason unsatisfied with civilian life—failed to materialize, calls increased for the black regiments' abandonment.

Inseparable from these sentiments lay suspicions about black soldiers' loyalty and their apparent sympathy with other people of color. Prosecutors in Flipper's case charged him with planning to abscond with appropriated funds to Mexico, where his fluency in

Spanish opened to him a natural escape route.\textsuperscript{52} In fact, Flipper's post-Army life does reveal exceptional ease with Hispanic culture. From his dismissal in 1882 until 1919, Flipper worked as a mining engineer in Arizona, New Mexico, Sonora, and Chihuahua. In the 1890s, he translated Spanish land law for the United States Department of Justice, and authored articles and a book on the black experience in the Southwest. By the 1910 Mexican Revolution, Flipper had become a noted authority on political and economic affairs in northern Mexico, the result of a decades-long borderlands career initiated by his military service.\textsuperscript{53}

No other soldier attained a level of accomplishment and familiarity with Mexico comparable to Flipper's. But for black troops stationed on the Rio Grande, the proximity of a different country--where the social and political rules which normally governed their lives did not apply--offered adventures and enticements too compelling to resist. For all American soldiers, "crossing the river" carried a different meaning at night than by day. On one level, the Rio Grande represented a national border which they were employed to defend from

\textsuperscript{52}Ibid., 56-63.

\textsuperscript{53}Flipper, Negro Frontiersman, vii-ix.
outlaws, Indians, and revolutionaries, even if that meant invading Mexican territory. But after dark when last roll was called, the social life of the river's "other side" beckoned with lures of sex, gambling, and other temptations that young enlisted men came to expect as a feature of military life.

In an effort to limit soldiers' excursions across the river, post commanders issued specific orders forbidding Rio Grande crossings without permission. Such orders went easily ignored. For some like Felix Olevia, who jumped the river several times so that he could visit a Mexican woman, border crossings provided a brief if hazardous refuge from the drudgery of army labor.⁵⁴ Black soldiers understood that the border placed limits on American authority, which in some minds abrogated the usual respect owed to officers. Joseph Ross, a corporal in the Ninth Cavalry, was court-martialed for mutinous language, having expressed in the presence of several citizens that if he were on the other side of the river, a harassing commander "has no God damned business with

⁵⁴General Court-Martials, Fort Quitman, August 18, 1869, PP 775, JAG, RG 153, NA. First Sergeant Olevia, Ninth Cavalry, Company H, joined the 81st Colored Infantry in 1864 and according to his commanding captain, was considered one of the best non-commissioned officers in the regiment, "always well behaved and has a good character." Olevia was found guilty, reduced to ranks, and forfeited ten dollars of monthly pay for a year.
me, and by God, I would not take any orders from him or any other officer."^{55}

Border crossings could also become permanent. Runaway slaves in the antebellum era had fled to Mexico for the sanctuary it provided from American law. Likewise, for enlisted men who found themselves unable or unwilling to cope with the demands of military labor, the Rio Grande presented an opportunity for escape from a different type of bondage. Private Albert Steel—described by his commander as "worthless," unable to get along with his fellows, and complaining all of the time about the work being too hard—deserted at Fort Davis in June 1884. White soldiers seized the same opportunities. William Layton, rumored to be "involved in a disgraceful affair with a colored soldier" and fearing reprisals, deserted with another white private from his regiment.^{56}

Deserters abandoned the western Army for many reasons: loneliness, exhausting physical labor, threats from comrades, romantic entanglements—all contributed to a post-Civil War desertion rate higher than at any time in American history. More than 14,000 men deserted in

^{55}General Court-Martials, Fort Quitman, August 1, 1870, PP 1426, JAG, RG 153, NA.

^{56}Reports of Individual Deserters, 1883-1890, Fort Davis, Continental Commands, RG 393, Post Records, Part 5, NA.
1867, more than a quarter of the Army's total strength. In 1871, desertions climbed to over 30 percent following a reduction in enlisted men's pay. 57

To some degree, desertion rates were influenced by individual soldiers' relationships with surrounding civilians. Deserters seldom acted alone, deserting in pairs or relying on the assistance and sympathy of locals who shielded them from authorities. Defenders of the black regiments pointed with pride to their low desertion rates, made possible partly by buffalo soldiers' distinct appearance and their inability to gain acceptance in white communities. Even on the border, however, where Blacks could escape by blending into the Hispanic population, the number of desertions remained quite low. As Table I indicates, the proportion of black deserters on the Rio Grande never approached that of the Army as a whole. (see appendix to Chapter Three) If Black-Hispanic "friendship" existed to any significant extent, as some critics charged, then at the least, black desertion rates at border forts would have equaled if not exceeded those for the rest of the Army.

Exceptions, of course, existed. Mexico's proximity encouraged desertions by soldiers facing court-martial.

57Foner, United States Soldier Between Two Wars, 223.
Private Harry Mansfield, a New York native who joined the Tenth Cavalry at age eighteen, had been described as having "excellent character" and expressed on occasion his "great satisfaction" with the service and his belief that "no man had reason to desert his company." Ending his reputation as a teetotaler after five years with the Tenth, Mansfield tried liquor for the first time, became intoxicated, missed a roll call, and disappeared from Fort Davis. 58

Black soldiers and individual Hispanics sometimes collaborated on acts of theft or desertion. At Eagle Pass in 1870, a private from the Ninth Cavalry, Ross Moore, stole a carbine rifle from a fellow cavalryman and disposed of it to a Mexican named Juan. 59 A year later, Private James West, while guarding supplies at Fort Davis, sold more than 200 pounds of pork, flour, and other rations to local Mexicans for $26.00. 60

58Report of Individual Deserters, 1883-90, Fort Davis, Continental Commands, RG 393, Post Records, Part 5, NA.

59General Court-Martials, Fort Duncan, September 16, 1870, PP 1508, JAG, RG 153, NA. Private Moore was found not guilty of theft since Juan never appeared to testify. Moore was found guilty of desertion and punished with dishonorable discharge and a five-year confinement to hard labor.

60General Court-Martials, Fort Davis, January 18, 1871, PP 1712, JAG, RG 153, NA. West was found not guilty due to insufficient evidence.
Conspiracies of this type, however, while occurring often enough to alarm observers, lacked the frequency to establish a consistent pattern of friendship. Besides the fact that white enlisted men also joined in such schemes, Hispanics could just as easily become black soldiers' victims as their allies. In 1869, authorities at Fort Quitman imprisoned Private John Spillman for crossing the border and assaulting one Anastacio Torres, stealing his blanket and overcoat. In such instances, troopers escaped punishment since Mexicans and Tejanos showed reluctance to testify at a formal tribunal and accuse American soldiers of crimes. When Torres failed to appear as a prosecution witness, not even showing up to claim his property, the court-martial board found Spillman not guilty and released him for lack of evidence.\(^\text{61}\)

Criminals on both sides, regardless of race or nationality, seemed to find each other. But most African American soldiers had little more in common with local Hispanics than they did with Anglo civilians. As the Rio Grande's low number of desertions illustrates, the prospect of a permanent escape into Mexico and entry into

\(^{61}\)General Court-Martials, Fort Quitman, August 18, 1869, JAG, RG 153, NA.
Latino society appealed to few black servicemen even when they had the opportunity.

In part, the establishment of effective border control accounts for the closing of this option. American and Mexican officials, who began to cooperate in joint ventures against outlaws and Indians, also helped to capture the other side's deserters. In 1871, a court-martial board at Fort Bliss found Private James Harashaw, Twenty-fifth Infantry, guilty of desertion. Harashaw, who had enlisted as a Civil War volunteer in 1863, claimed that he had gone into Mexico for a "drinking spree," with full intent to return. Lasero Veisco, the El Paso police chief, found the missing soldier a day later on the Chihuahua road. When apprehended, Harashaw put up a fight, screaming in broken Spanish that he would be tried as a deserter if arrested by Mexican police. Veisco, who spoke no English, turned Harashaw over and collected the regular fee of thirty dollars, leaving Harashaw to face dishonorable discharge and a sentence of one year at hard labor.62

Like other groups who lost their autonomy because of military conquest, potential deserters found that crossing the border did not mean permanent escape from

62 General Court-Martials, Fort Bliss, October 25, 1871, PP 2284, JAG, RG 153, NA.
national authority. Nor did most even attempt such ventures seriously. Whatever their disenchantment with army life, few black soldiers considered abandoning their native country for Mexico, a land they no longer considered friendly or hospitable. This represented a notable change from the antebellum period, when Mexico’s reputation as a haven for black people had attracted runaway slaves. In part, the change resulted from a tightening of border control and a drawing of clear distinctions between "American" and "Mexican," which military people—in their constant attempts to identity the enemy—internalized more thoroughly than civilians. By the close of the 1870s, black soldiers and Mexican men had begun to occupy different sides of a spatial and conceptual boundary. Their common experiences with white prejudice seldom proved strong enough to overcome that division.

Some black soldiers did demonstrate an affinity for Hispanic women, however. A compelling force for all young men, romantic passion motivated many to abandon both their regiment and their home country. Private James Martin deserted at Fort Davis in 1883 to locate a Mexican girl at Presidio del Norte, a woman with whom he was "very much in love." Born in Canada, Martin had been described as "a bad character," confined more than twenty
times during his enlistment. By contrast, Charles Johnston from LaGrange County, Georgia, had so impressed his officers that they promoted him to sergeant and placed him in charge of rations at Fort Davis. Ignoring orders that required all enlisted men to obtain their commander's permission to marry, he wed in secret a Mexican woman with "extravagant tastes." In January 1884, Sergeant Johnston, intending to follow his wife's family into Mexico, absconded with money and valuables entrusted to him by his men, and managed to cross the border at Presidio del Norte before his arrest by Mexican police.

The examples of Martin and Johnston show that in some ways, gender relations proved just as or more important in black soldiers' lives than race relations. Although bachelors filled most of the Army's ranks, some black soldiers enjoyed the company of their wives, who found employment in the western forts as cooks, laundresses, or domestic servants to officers. The experience of African American women receives scant attention in military records, but apparently they filled

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63Report of Individual Deserters, 1883-90, Fort Davis, Continental Commands, RG 393, Post Records, Part 5, NA.

64Ibid.
valuable economic and familial roles. General Ord once claimed that most black noncoms could not afford to reenlist were it not for their wives' income. Ord even suggested that the number of laundresses in the black regiments be doubled because of the men's dependence on them. Scattered references indicate the presence of children, such as the son born to Sergeant John Harper and his wife Fanny at Fort Davis. Marital life, of course, was not always blissful. In October 1875, Private William Bulger complained to his company commander that his spouse had "taken up" with another man, a black sergeant. Sometimes, married and single female employees from "Suds Row" supplemented their incomes with prostitution, bringing the additional conflict of sexual competition into military communities.

Southern historians long have been aware of the explosive combination of race and sexuality. Especially in the post-Reconstruction decades, fears about black hypersexuality--reinforced by stereotypes of black men as


67Haley, Fort Concho and the Texas Frontier, 270-71.
bestial rapists of white women--motivated hundreds of violent lynchings. 68 To a lesser degree, a similar climate prevailed between white officers, their families, and black men stationed at the Texas posts. At Fort Davis in 1872, Corporal Daniel Talliforroro, Ninth Cavalry, broke into the bedroom of Mrs. Frederic Kendall. Mrs. Kendall testified that with her husand--a lieutenant in the Twenty-fifth Infantry--absent, she grew frightened when Talliforroro refused to leave, so she grabbed a pistol and shot him to death. Officers claimed that attempted rapes had occurred at other forts, and that the fearful atmosphere discouraged married men from leaving their families after dark or for any period of extended duty. 69

Black soldiers had to balance their sexual needs against the realities of this social climate. Many found the neighboring black females either unavailable or undesirable, while liaisons with white women--usually the wives or relatives of officers and civilians--proved risky. As a consequence, they turned to women from the surrounding Hispanic and Indian populations for sexual


favors. Indicated by the high rates of venereal disease, patronage of prostitutes became an ongoing problem on the Mexican border that lasted into the twentieth century. But other women, especially fort employees, could be approached as well.

Sexual propositions or encounters motivated several violent attacks. In 1878, Jose Perez, a resident of San Elizario, claimed that several black soldiers had entered his house and fired off a pistol, threatening to kill him "unless he gave them a girl to marry." At Fort Quitman, Francisca Ortiz, a hospital matron, brought charges against Private Charles Jackson for assaulting her with a stick and threatening to kill her. Jackson did not deny the charges at his court-martial, declaring "he would knock any woman on the head who would call him a son of a bitch, [and] that he had struck his mother because she had madded him . . . ." Convicted of conduct prejudicial to good order and military discipline, Jackson's punishment for his attack on Ortiz amounted to a forfeiture of $10.00 of pay (out of $13.00) for three

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70 Testimony of John P. Clarke, March 2, 1878, AGO–LR, M666, roll 196, RG 94, NA.
months, a pittance compared to punishments issued for desertion or insubordination.\textsuperscript{71}

Few instances have been recorded of Hispanic men's reactions to such incidents but the transcript of a court-martial at Ringgold Barracks in 1874—which involved a fight between Privates George McKay and James Holt--reveals some context.

The reason I [McKay] am accused of this [drunkenness and firing a weapon] is because Private James Holt has a Mexican woman that is very fond of me, and he accused me of persuading her to leave him. . . . We [she, McKay, and Holt] had been talking about Mexican women and I saye [sic] to her How is it that when a colored man marries a Mexican woman that the Mexican men don't like it and tries to kill him; and she say I don't know the reason but that is the truth. And there I said "It is best for Mexican men to marry Mexican women and colored men, colored women - and she says Yes that is the best way. Then Holt spoke up and says . . . "I heard McKay tell you that he never seen a colored man have a Mexican woman but what they did not have a falling out: and she says "No he did not say that." . . . Holt told me that I had said it, and called me a dirty liar, and he picked up an axe and threw it at me, . . ."\textsuperscript{72}

In some cases, Mexican bandits and cattle thieves tolerated and even encouraged liaisons between soldiers and Hispanic females, for by using women as spies, they could monitor the activities of American troops. In

\textsuperscript{71}General Courts-Martial, Fort Quitman, August 8, 1869, PP 775, JAG, RG 153, NA. Jackson belonged to the Forty-first Infantry, Company H.

\textsuperscript{72}General Courts-Martial, Ringgold Barracks, June 11-12, 1874, PP 4037, JAG, RG 153, NA. McKay belonged to the Twenty-fourth Infantry, Company K.
1875, during violence in the Lower Rio Grande Valley, one witness testified about the constant running of cattle across the river: "The reason that troops do not stop this, or attempt to, is that the colored soldiers have more or less Mexican women about camp, who - when the soldiers are going out - give information to their friends . . ."  

Black servicemen also formed relationships with Indian women. Troops stationed at Fort Duncan and Fort Clark—where the black Seminoles resided with their families—grew fascinated with the Scouts' daughters and sisters, women as dark as any black person but living and speaking as Indians. In 1871, John Kibbetts, the Seminoles' leader, complained that Private William Gairy illegally had "married" a woman of the tribe. Claiming to have received permission from his commander, Gairy got one of his friends to present himself as a preacher, and, in a mock wedding ceremony with the girl's parents and several Seminoles present, the couple exchanged vows. Gairy "made a polite bow to her then they both went into

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73 Statement of Charles Best, May 22, 1875, AGO-LR, M666, roll 197, RG 94, NA.
the tent and went to bed together." As punishment, Gairy was dishonorably discharged."

By their very nature, disciplinary records show only the shallow or deceitful side of soldiers' sexual relationships. But some couples formed long-lasting and apparently loving partnerships as well. In 1871, George Forniss of the Twenty-fourth Infantry married Cesaria Perazo in El Paso, a marriage that lasted until her death at Laredo in 1886. Following his discharge, Forniss remained on the border, found work as a tailor, and, in 1892, began living with Severiana Tijernia. The couple moved to Brownsville, and, for whatever reason, did not marry until 1903, by which time their daughter Josephine was ten years old. George Bentley settled near Fort Davis after leaving the Ninth Cavalry and married a Mexican bride by whom he fathered several children, most of whom died young. According to other black ex-cavalrymen, Bentley--during a campaign years earlier--had bayoneted an Indian baby and thereby marked his offspring with a curse. Despite the story, Bentley did produce children who survived infancy. Decades later, a

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74General Court-Martials, Fort Duncan, January 23, 1871, PP 1673, JAG, RG 153, NA.

75Pension File of George Forniss, SO 1301070, Records of the Veterans Administration, RG 15, NA.
historian of Fort Davis interviewed George Bentley, Junior, who remained in the area all of his life and himself married an Hispanic woman.  

War never has been a simple matter of hegemonic conquest. Warfare brings people from separate cultures into intimate contact, and, whether through sexual reproduction or cultural syncretism, creates new generations of persons who defy the borders that divided their parents. Black and white soldiers on the Rio Grande fathered children who contributed to a multiracial population. As one resident of Fort Davis in the early 1890s observed,

Fort Davis became a regular melting pot. Foreigners [immigrants in the army] married Mexican women; Negroes married Mexican women; and occasionally a white man who forgot that his skin was white [married Mexican women]. Mexicans do not draw the color line. I knew one Mexican woman who married a white man . . . while her aunt was married to a very black Negro. An Irish girl married a Jew, and her brother a Mexican girl. Fort Davis had a regular crazy quilt population.  

Frontier conditions sometimes drew the children of these mixtures into violent lives. George Goldsby, a


sergeant in the Tenth Cavalry, married a Cherokee woman named Ellen Beck who, in 1876, bore a son, Crawford. George deserted both the Army and his family two years later following a dispute with white Texans at Fort Concho. Crawford moved several times with his mother, attending Indian schools in Kansas and Pennsylvania before settling in Indian Territory. As a teenager, Crawford committed several murders that earned him the pseudonym "Cherokee Bill," before his capture and execution at Fort Smith, Arkansas in 1896. 78

Relationships between black soldiers and Indian and Hispanic women occurred with enough frequency to raise suspicions by officers of racial collusion. With hundreds of black troops stationed on the Rio Grande for two decades, it would be surprising if some soldiers did not grow to prefer Hispanic society and people over a return to the East. But this does not indicate a consistent pattern of either friendship or hostility. Most civilian-soldier relationships proved temporary, a consequence of the peripatetic nature of army life. Mexicans' refusal "to draw the color line" conferred

neither prejudice nor advantage to African Americans. Rather, border residents in the 1860s and early 1870s still occupied a pre-racialized culture where social distinctions rested more on community and class. This—like many other things—already was changing, with race and nationality becoming more relevant as indicators of status.

Black soldiers' periodic crossings of interracial boundaries—patronizing Mexican establishments, cohabiting with Hispanic women—may have arisen simply from a lack of alternatives, for to attempt these same actions among Whites involved considerable risk. Violent encounters with white Texans inflamed entire communities and created major problems for civil-military relations. In 1869, a timber contractor named John Jackson, upset with a black trooper's apparent interest in his daughter, ambushed and killed Private Boston Henry at Fort McKavett. With the help of friends and relatives in the San Saba area, Jackson eluded the law for months prior to his arrest. Forced to turn him over for civil trial, black soldiers and their officers watched with helplessness as a jury of Texans, despite overwhelming evidence, acquitted Jackson in June 1871.⁹⁹

⁹⁹Haley, Fort Concho, 264-70.
At Fort Clark, antagonism arose between local Whites and the black Seminole Scouts. In the spring of 1876, citizens of Kinney County complained that the maroons were attempting to expand their acreage past the military reservation onto private property. In May, a shooting which took the life of one Seminole and wounded another caused them to fear leaving the fort’s confines. Civil authorities in Brackettville suspected Adam Payne, a Seminole leader as well as a former Scout and Medal of Honor winner, to be involved in running stolen cattle into Mexico. On New Year’s Day 1877, a deputy sheriff shot and killed Payne at a dance. Officers at Fort Clark feared that this murder might prompt the Seminoles to return to Coahuila and unite with hostile tribes against the United States Army. 80

The most persistent pattern of recurring animosity erupted in the Fort Concho-San Angelo area, where white racism combined with Texans’ traditional resentment toward federal forces. The Texas Rangers, who had clashed with the Army before over Indian and Mexican affairs, contributed to much of the violence. In the

fall of 1877, Captain John Sparks and a company of his Rangers entered a saloon in Santa Angela and disrupted a dance where they found several men from the Tenth Cavalry enjoying a waltz with Tejana women. A party of black soldiers later returned to the saloon and opened fire into the crowd, killing a bystander. Failing to obtain an apology from Sparks for the Rangers' actions, Benjamin Grierson, the post commander, reported the incident to the state adjutant general and obtained Sparks' dismissal.\(^81\)

Captain G. W. Arrington, Sparks' replacement, surpassed his predecessor in contempt for the Army and its black troops. In February 1878, a group of cowboys and buffalo hunters accosted a black sergeant, cut the chevrons from his blouse, and forced him to leave a tavern. Sergeant George Goldsby (father of Crawford "Cherokee Bill" Goldsby) permitted the troops access to the company arms racks, where they seized carbine rifles and headed back to the saloon. A gunfight ensued that killed a soldier and a civilian hunter. Arrington then assembled a group of Rangers, went to Fort Concho, and marched across the parade ground to Grierson's office to demand Goldsby's arrest. During a heated verbal

\(^{81}\)Haley, *Fort Concho*, 274.
exchange, Grierson maintained that the Rangers lacked authority on a federal post, and forced Arrington to leave empty-handed. A civil court indicted for murder nine men from Company D of the Tenth Cavalry. One of these, William Mace, received a death sentence which later was overruled on appeal. George Goldsby eluded trial by jumping bond, leaving behind his Cherokee wife and infant.\(^{82}\)

Civil-military violence continued in the Fort Concho area until 1881. In that year, the murder of Private William Watkins by a local sheepherder once more enraged troopers into leaving the post and firing into buildings where they believed authorities sheltered the accused man. This action embroiled Grierson in further trouble with the Rangers. Captain Bryan Marsh of the Texas frontier battalion warned Grierson that any soldier entering the town would be shot on sight and suggested that the Rangers might even storm the post. On February 3, a printed handbill appeared on the streets which indicated the desperate levels that town-fort relations had reached:

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\text{We, the soldiers of the United States Army, do hereby warn cowboys, etc., of San Angelo and vicinity, to recognize our right of way as just and peaceable men.}
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\(^{82}\text{Ibid.}\)
If we do not receive justice and fair play, which we must have, someone must suffer, if not the guilty, the innocent. It has gone too far, justice or death. U.S. soldiers, one and all."

The high number of Blacks stationed at Fort Concho might suggest that this "manifesto"—like the violence which precipitated it—emanated from racial causes, an example of black activists asserting their rights against a hostile community. While racism did play an important role, the larger pattern of soldier-civilian friction that existed all across the West proved more important. White soldiers also experienced violent encounters with locals, especially as the need for military protection declined. A white infantryman had been murdered in San Angelo prior to the manifesto’s release. Grierson’s investigation revealed that a white private from the Sixteenth Infantry had written the document, while two others—one black, the other white—had printed it.

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"Report on Brownsville Affray, 410-13."
Violence between soldiers and civilians transcended neat models which can place the actors into racially divided groups. The Fort Concho example shows that civilian hostility could lessen differences between black and white soldiers by uniting them against common enemies. The same situation had occurred at Rio Grande City in 1875, when white officers and black enlisted men endured legal harassment from local Hispanics. At the same time, Anglo and Hispanic civilians discovered some rare common interests in their opposition to military encroachment.

Beset on all sides by civilian resentment, black servicemen developed a greater awareness of their own military identity. The Fort Concho handbill, which omitted any reference to race, based the soldiers' right to enjoy public spaces on their roles as United States soldiers. Later, African Americans would employ doctrines of racial equality to challenge discrimination. But in nineteenth-century Texas, buffalo soldiers' refusal to tolerate abuse owed more to their self-image as bearers of a military standard, demanding respect and fairness from the people they fought to defend.

New legislative actions challenged the possibility of continued military service for black males through the 1870s. As the era of Republican rule reached its end,
Democrats tried to eliminate the use of black soldiers to enforce federal law. With the support of General Sherman and the Secretary of War, opponents revived charges that recruiters could not fill the regiments to capacity. Critics wanted the elimination of racial segregation in the Army by allowing Whites and Blacks to serve in the same regiments. Opponents of this measure recognized that such an action would have banned African Americans from military service, for without special regiments reserved for Blacks alone, recruiters could have denied possible enlistees out of prejudice. Edmund Davis, whose term as governor of Texas owed much to black soldiers' efforts in quelling Mexican disturbances, wrote, "If they are mixed there will be so few colored men in a company that by the time you take out the cooks, officer servants, and teamsters which will be all colored you will never see a colored man either on parade or guard." 85

In 1878, Senator Ambrose Burnside brought these issues to the fore in an attempt to eliminate the word

85Davis to Ben F. Butler, December 7, 1876, cited in Nalty and MacGregor, Blacks in the United States Armed Forces, 117. See also J.D. Cameron, Secretary of War, to Butler, February 6, 1877, and Butler to Cameron, February 15, 1877, in Nalty and MacGregor, Blacks in the United States Armed Forces, 118-20.
"colored" from all army statutes. Burnside's bill proposed to allow black enlistment in regiments other than those designated as "colored." Despite testimony about the expense and poor quality of black recruits, the Senate rejected Burnside's proposal. Although their place in the peacetime Army continued, buffalo soldiers would always remain subjects of scrutiny and therefore remained open to possible disbandment.

Both critics and defenders of the black regiments found evidence on the Texas-Mexico border which supported their respective goals. In some places, Blacks got along well with the Hispanic populace; in other towns, under different circumstances, they confronted violence and discrimination. The question resisted then, and continues to resist now, the traditional descriptive patterns which treat the participants as racial actors. Since "race" at this time played little part in the structure of border societies, the Army's relationship with Rio Grande communities depended more on the respective ways that Anglos and Tejanos reacted to the military's presence and the accompanying imposition of

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86 For discussion of the Burnside Bill and other legislative attempts to cripple the black regiments, see Arlen Fowler, The Black Infantry in the West, 1869-1891 (Westport: Greenwood Publishing Company, 1971), 114-44.
federal authority. By the late 1890s, when black soldiers returned to the border after an absence of more than a decade, they discovered not only a populace which remembered their participation in that earlier conquest, but one which had begun to abandon its historical ambivalence about race, nationalism, and the meaning of both.
Appendix to Chapter Three

Table 1

Desertions in Relation to Aggregate Strength, 1867-1884

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Percentage of Total Army Desertions</th>
<th>Percentage of Black Desertions at Rio Grande Forts</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1867</td>
<td>26.0</td>
<td>8.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1868</td>
<td>16.4</td>
<td>4.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>1869</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
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Sources: Jack D. Foner, *The United States Soldier Between Two Wars*, 223; and Regimental Returns, Ninth and Tenth Cavalry, Thirty-Eighth, Thirty-ninth, Fortieth, Forty-first, Twenty-fourth, and Twenty-fifth Infantries. The posts included as "Rio Grande forts" are Bliss, Quitman, Davis, Stockton, Concho, McKavett, Clark, Duncan, McIntosh, Ringgold, and Brown.
Chapter Four

African Americans and Hispanics
in the Age of Imperialism

After almost twenty years of service, black soldiers departed the Rio Grande forts in the spring of 1885. By 1899, when other African Americans served on the border, the Army's responsibilities had shifted from Indian pacification and border protection to new imperialistic duties provoked by the Spanish American War and the acquisition of overseas territories. Historians tend to emphasize the disjuncture rather than the continuity of these stages, perceiving a clear demarcation between the closing of the North American frontier and the later age of hemispheric imperialism. Yet when considering the Army's role, an argument can be made for an uninterrupted succession of expansion, beginning with the conquest of western lands, and continuing through the 1890s with the United States' emergence onto the stage of global power.

Between the Civil War and World War One, United States military forces served as the vanguards of expansion, bringing American hegemony crashing into the communities of Native Americans, Hispanics, and
Filipinos. By the turn of the century, advocates of intervention in Cuba, the Philippines, and other places touted the doctrine of "white man's burden": the notion that Whites had the responsibility to raise darker, unfortunate races to higher levels of civilization. Claims about racial superiority probably did not outweigh the hunger for new markets and acquisitions as a motive, but it did help to provide American expansionists with a clean conscience by justifying the United States' new hemispheric power. By defining Hispanics and Pacific islanders as inferior, unfit for self-government, and in need of paternal guidance, American nationalism could cast its new empire as one built on altruism rather than economic and diplomatic self-interest.

The use of racial ideology in conquest was nothing new, for Anglos had held similar ideas about Indian "savagery" and Mexican "backwardness" during the post-Civil War campaigns. What was new, however, was the accreditation that racism received from the physical sciences, particularly the doctrines of racial darwinism that emerged from early anthropological theories and the later eugenics movement. "Scientific racism" sought "natural" explanations for the supposed failings of darker peoples, seeing both Blacks and Hispanics as indolent, hyper-sexual, and morally deficient. Although
elites asserted a need for benevolence and patience in dealing with nonwhites, popular racial views toward Blacks and Hispanics hardened and became vicious through the late nineteenth century. In Texas, Anglos, Mexicans, and even Blacks had intermarried during the antebellum years with apparent ease; by 1900, Whites were subjecting both groups to political disfranchisement, racial segregation, and, in some cases, ritualistic tortures and lynchings.

When scholars allow the traditional binary approach of racial analysis a central place in their understanding of these changes, it becomes a simple matter to collapse the history of imperialism and racism into a monolithic model of "whites" and "nonwhites," colonizers and

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colonized. But, as Stuart Hall points out, heroic views of subaltern "resistance," by representing subordinated groups as victims—and never accomplices—in the effects of power, prevents a deeper understanding about the dialectics of cultural struggle. 3 Although military expansion thwarted the autonomy of people of color and helped to strengthen doctrines of white supremacy, African American soldiers not only joined such ventures but even enjoyed the enthusiastic support of many black civilians.

Given how Blacks and Hispanics shared a common enemy in white racism, it might seem logical to expect camaraderie and even cooperation among the two dark-skinned groups. But such an assumption overlooks evidence produced by theories of a more "triangular" nature. In the 1970s, sociologist Edna Bonacich espoused her "Middleman Minority Theory," which suggested that in an oppressive racial climate, a partially-assimilated group often occupies a "middle ground" in the hierarchy which places it in conflict with the group at the bottom. Therefore, during times of racist oppression, rivalry between the middle and lower groups may parallel and even

overshadow the violence which both may endure from the group in power.4 Similar theories have been employed in recent years to account for urban friction between Blacks and Jews, and Blacks and Koreans. Jewish or Asian immigrant merchants—excluded from "white" privilege due to religion, language, or some other cultural barrier—enjoy enough of the benefits of "whiteness" to own businesses in black neighborhoods, where they incur the resentment of impoverished African Americans.5

Historians seldom attempt to apply such models to the past, especially to the late nineteenth century when the travails of western conquest, heightened immigration, and overseas expansion brought numerous racialized groups into contact. While the relationship between black soldiers and the Indians, Tejanos, and Mexicans with whom they collided in battle before 1885 showed no real pattern of either friendship or hostility, the period after 1899 did see a more consistent pattern of violence


between these groups. The causes of this rivalry can be overlooked if scholars focus on racial conflict alone, and ignore the nationalistic divisions that placed some minority groups into military service against others. In order to attain a more thorough understanding of how and why the relationship between African American soldiers and Hispanics deteriorated in border communities after 1899, it is first necessary to comprehend how spokesmen for black military service tried to utilize imperialistic expansion for racial advantage, and how the border itself was transformed in part as a consequence of that service.

For many people of color, the values of national identity and service to the nation-state presented a chance to gain the power and equal citizenship rights that white racism denied them. Mexicans living in border states often acquired such values through travel to the United States. As nativists have been quick to point out, politicization of the Rio Grande by no means prevented American capitalists from recruiting Mexican laborers. Like Italians, Irish, and other migratory workers, Mexicans followed the lines of capital to build American railroads, and to work in mines, factories, and commercial farms. This experience of travel abroad encouraged the development of national identity. Victor Clark, a federal investigator with the Department of
Labor, wrote in 1908 that Mexicans who had been in the United States for prolonged periods were "better workers" but not as tractable nor as easily-driven as peasants who had never left their villages. Mexican elites, Clark noted, worried that foreign travel exposed laborers to better conditions, and stimulated a vague ambition for social change. Northern Mexicans grew "restless under the old caste inferiority, ... [and] that doctrines of equality, but half comprehended, are awakening new ideas among the peasantry." By the time of Clark's report, northern Mexico already had begun to experience the throes of revolutionary fervor, fed by nationalism and anti-Yankee resentment.

In a similar manner, black soldiers became more assertive of their rights through their experience of national service. Military historian Jack Foner has described the racial solidarity and no-nonsense bearing that became common among black recruits after 1900. As Blacks gained confidence in battle, "they became less obsequious in manner, increasingly imbued with racial pride, [and] less disposed to accept discriminatory

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As the 1881 manifesto at Fort Concho illustrated, the frontier experience strengthened such attitudes. Black soldiers, assailed by hostile civilians, learned the importance of military loyalty and group unity, and perceived the utility of army service as a means of advancing their civil rights. As early as 1877, Chaplain George Mullins wrote of the men in the Twenty-fourth Infantry, "They are possessed of the notion that the colored people of the whole country are more or less affected by their conduct in the Army."

Whether Mullins exaggerated or whether the soldiers he observed had misread the situation, it seems unlikely that most black civilians in the 1870s knew much about the federal regulars, much less applauded their efforts. Buffalo soldiers, like the frontier Army itself, worked under a cloak of public invisibility. Prior to the 1870s, the eastern media devoted little attention to military activities in the West, except when it came to dramatic events like the Little Bighorn. Even black newspapers ignored the four regiments. The writings of prominent African Americans like Frederick Douglass and

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8Cited in Foner, ibid., 53.
Booker T. Washington show little or no mention of Blacks' western service.

This obscurity vanished by the turn of the century as spokesmen linked the interests of their race to that of American exceptionalism. H. E. Griffith, a black lawyer from Paris, Texas, wrote in the Austin Herald: "If to day [sic], the vile intruder from a foreign land, were to seek to plant his standard upon American soil, the negro would be expected to respond to the nation's call to go and help prevent such invasion."9 Sentiments such as those expressed in the Salt Lake City Broad Ax became common: "Remember you [black soldiers] must be better men in every respect than white soldiers in order to receive what is due you . . . . Be loyal to the flag . . . . Boys, give them the lie by showing that you are the best and bravest soldiers who follow the stars and stripes."10

Like all people, Blacks, Mexicans, and Tejanos confronted the tide of national chauvinism that peaked during the pre-World War One period. Just as doctrines about racial supremacy lessened class conflict among Whites, national rivalries disrupted possible alliances

9 The Herald, February 11, 1893.

10 Broad Ax, January 14, 1899. The quote is from a reprinted letter by J.A. Jones, Chattanooga, Tennessee.
among the racially oppressed. Blacks and Mexicans came to pursue separate goals, and defined themselves as separate peoples, during the age of imperialism. By the early twentieth century, when black soldiers reentered the border region, conflict between the two groups reflected a larger struggle for the "middleman" position of border society. Blacks sought to secure their rights as American citizens through national service; Mexicans replaced their allegiances toward village and province with a national ethnic identity, one which demanded a reformed Mexican state. Both of these developments deserve attention before turning to the reassignment of black soldiers on the Rio Grande.

When supporters of the black regiments began to align their interests with those of the United States military, they departed from a public tendency of apathy toward the Army and its activities. Americans in the post-Civil War years never saw their soldiers except during controversial affairs such as Reconstruction or labor strikes. In 1885, an eastern debutante expressed surprise upon meeting a colonel in the regulars, believing that the Army had been disbanded after
Isolated on the western frontier, the institution attracted little attention or fanfare, presenting a serious problem for recruitment efforts. Seldom did the black regiments fill their companies to capacity. In the 1870s, commanders in the Department of the Gulf noted that black civilians earned better pay and enjoyed more contentment in civil life where they could have their families nearby. The Army as a whole suffered from the same problem. From 1875 to 1898, its strength remained between 25,000 and 28,000, a fraction the size of armies in European countries with equivalent populations.

In the long run, public estrangement forced the Army to turn inward and revise its promotion criteria for the officer corps, a process which helped to establish the foundations for the modern professional Army. One reason why the middle class slighted the regular military was because of its association with the lower classes which filled the enlisted ranks. Editors of black newspapers

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13Coffman, The Old Army, 215.
often aspired to bourgeois values, with which the Army's laboring, largely illiterate recruits were at odds. But by the 1890s, military service began to join law and medicine as a profession, evidenced by an expanded military school system that taught advanced courses on theory and warfare. West Point served as the new prototype, exercising control over access to commissions. Graduation from an accredited academy became more and more a requirement for entering officer ranks. Since appointments depended on social and political connections, the United States Army began to resemble the European aristocratic system.14

The type of functions the Army performed also strengthened the trend toward elitism. Military forces intervened in labor strikes, championing the forces of order and capital and drawing them closer to the propertied classes. This alliance with business elites strengthened the Army's public image, preparing the military for the crucial role it would play in the

wars and conservative movements of the twentieth century.  

Since professionalization often barred the poor and uneducated from advancement, internal changes of this sort—at first glance anyway—appear to have provided few benefits for black servicemen. Beset by a proliferation of Jim Crow laws, African Americans endured a new wave of racism in the 1890s which again raised doubts about their fitness for military service. The patriotic rallies of 1898 and the Army’s more favorable image brought increased white enlistment and a consequent lessening of Blacks’ earlier high proportion of military representation.  

Other evidence, however, suggests that a rise in the black regulars’ prestige accompanied the Army’s popularity. Before 1890, most career military men considered command of a black regiment beneath them. With the new emphasis on professionalism, more West Point graduates opted for service with the Ninth and Tenth


Cavalries, indicative of those regiments' improved reputations and high success rates. Some officers who led black companies went on to have successful careers. Captain Richard H. Pratt, who served with the Tenth Cavalry, established one of the first Indian industrial schools at Carlisle Barracks, which later became a prototype for Haskell Institute and others. Two decades after leading black regulars into cross-border campaigns against Indians and Mexican rebels, William Shafter became a major general and led the 1898 American invasion of Cuba.

The apparent success of "the black experiment" even inspired more ambitious efforts to assimilate Indians into American life through military service. By the 1890s, Secretary of War Redfield Proctor, impressed with the black regiments, authorized the establishment of regular companies consisting of Native Americans. One general wrote "if the results of recruitment shall prove as good as they have with the colored element, they will be a success." At its peak in 1892, however, fewer than


800 Native Americans were employed as regular soldiers. In 1895, dwindling numbers caused the project to be abandoned. General Hugh Scott blamed the failure on officer prejudice, and on Indians' unwillingness to sacrifice their individualism to the discipline of army life.¹⁹

Whatever new respect black regulars may have gained within the Army itself, commanders still hesitated to station them in populated eastern areas where their presence might provoke civilian problems. As of 1891, only one black company served east of the Mississippi River. Even the availability of western stations became problematic as the civilian towns surrounding the forts filled with white settlers. For some companies, this meant prolonged assignments on Indian reservations. During the 1890 Ghost Dance uprising in South Dakota, the Ninth Cavalry remained in the field longer than any other regiment, prompting a lament from a black private who wrote "we poor devils and the Sioux are left to freeze."²⁰

¹⁹Coffman, The Old Army, 259-60; and Foner, The United States Soldier Between Two Wars, 129-31.

²⁰Quoted in Foner, The United States Soldier Between Two Wars, 132-35.
The few recorded accounts of their experiences by buffalo soldiers themselves focus more on cooperation with Native Americans than on conflict. Caleb Benson, who served for nearly 30 years, recalled an 1879 battle with Ute Indians. Interviewed by his local newspaper more than 50 years later, Benson claimed that white soldiers smeared mud on their faces to avoid becoming targets: "People may think it isn't true, but the Indians never shot a colored man unless it was necessary. They always wanted to win the friendship of the Negro race, and obtain their aid in campaigns against the white man."  

Military records, though possibly biased by Whites' perceptions, describe less friendly Black-Indian encounters. In 1899, more than a dozen men from the Twenty-fifth Infantry, stationed at the San Carlos reservation in Arizona, attacked a small camp of Tonto Apaches and assaulted four Indian males, one of them a policeman. Officials described the assault as a retaliation for the arrest of some black infantrymen who had visited the Apache camps and made improper proposals to the women. Reporting "very bad feelings" between the

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21 Quoted in Thomas R. Buecker, "One Soldier's Service: Caleb Benson in the Ninth and Tenth Cavalry, 1875-1908," Nebraska History 74, 2 (Summer 1993): 56.
black soldiers and the Apaches, Captain William J. Nicholson recommended that the entire infantry company be relocated but that the Ninth Cavalry troop remain.22

Friendship, ambivalence, or hostility between Blacks and Indians depended on the actions of individuals in specific companies and on the attitudes of different tribes. But conflicts broke out with enough regularity to suggest that the situation on the Rio Grande was replicated elsewhere: that the problems which black soldiers experienced with Whites did not vanish once they entered Hispanic and Indian communities. The triangular dimensions of race relations in such places remains an unexplored topic, although Frank Schubert has maintained that in communities neighboring reservations, White-Black relationships improved due to the presence of a hostile third group. That thesis awaits further testing but, if it is true, then black soldiers, through active participation in Indian conquest, may have learned a way to gain white acceptance and occupy an intermediate position among the races.23


By the late nineteenth century, the arrival of new foreign-born peoples through immigration and a consequent resurgence of nativism allowed for the employment of such lessons on a larger, national level. By manipulating fears about newcomers, regimental advocates depicted Blacks as genuine "Americans" who could be trusted to defend national interests. In 1891, Major Guy Henry told a Washington Post reporter:

... suppose there should be a Fenian outbreak or a riot of German socialists, our white soldiers who are largely Irishmen and Germans could not be expected to fight their fellow countrymen with much zeal. But a Negro would not want anything better than a chance to kill some of his hereditary enemies, Germans and Irish. He knows they don't like him, and he likes them no better. ²⁴

Such statements, though well-intended, did little to assure Whites about the benefits of black military service.

Many African Americans perceived the potential value of nativistic patriotism as a means of social and political advancement, illustrated in 1898 by their willingness to join the fight to help liberate Cuba. A writer for the Indianapolis Freeman proclaimed support for the cause: "[This war] is a blessing in disguise for the Negro. He will if for no other reason be possessed

²⁴Evening Post (Washington), June 6, 1891.
of arms, . . . He will become trained and disciplined . . .
. . . He will get honor. He will have an opportunity of
proving to the world his real bravery, worth, and
manhood."

But Blacks achieved neither unanimity nor
consistency in their feelings about the war. Many
spokesmen ignored the morality of the war itself and,
wanting an enlarged role for their own people, insisted
that black soldiers be led by black officers. Others
expressed frustration about the United States' commitment
to the Cuban people when black citizens suffered abuse at
home. One scathing editorial commented on this
contradiction:

It does seem to us that in order to appear
consistent these same negroes who exhibit such
commendable readiness to assist in driving out the
cowardly and treacherous Spaniards ought to show
equal readiness when occasions arise . . . to kill
off some of their drunken, cut-throat neighbors who
make a pastime of hanging, shooting, and burning
men, women, and children. Men who submit to the
constant perpetration of such brutal and horrifying
atrocities without an effort to properly punish the
wretches who inflict them would, we suspect, make
rather poor soldiers."

Despite these sentiments, thousands of African Americans
answered President McKinley's call for volunteers in the
spring of 1898. Of the 125,000 volunteers accepted for

25Freeman, April 23, 1898.

26Afro-American Sentinel (Omaha), April 2, 1898.
service, however, only about 2000 were black. Southern states refused to employ black volunteer companies, while nationwide, only four black volunteer regiments were formed and none of these regiments saw action in Cuba.  

With volunteer participation in combat eliminated as an option, the black regulars assumed greater importance. War with Spain at last removed black soldiers from their western isolation and placed them in full view of the eastern public. Some editors seemed surprised that the regiments existed at all. The Washington Bee wrote: "It may be that our troops are so few in number that we hardly realize that we are represented in the army. In any case the fact remains that we have brave, intelligent colored soldiers who deserve and command our respect, and it is high time for our patriotic colored people to contribute toward their comfort and happiness."  

Southern Whites had different reactions. Insults and violence followed black soldiers as they left the West for temporary assignments in southern states, where they awaited departure for Cuba. White racists

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28Washington Bee, June 25, 1898.
discovered that black soldiers did not bend to local racial mores as easily as civilians. In Tennessee and Florida, black soldiers intervened in the arrests of black civilians by white policemen. In June, black infantrymen stationed in Tampa clashed with volunteers from an Ohio regiment who had assaulted a local black woman and her child.  

Of the 35,000 United States troops who invaded Cuba in the summer of 1898, nearly 3000 belonged to black regiments. Black soldiers fought in the Santiago campaign, notable for its propulsion of Teddy Roosevelt and his Rough Riders into the national spotlight. Following the war, it appeared for a brief time as if the black regiments' fame would soar just as high, as they too enjoyed public acclaim in the form of parades and decoration ceremonies. Roosevelt himself—at first—praised the Tenth Cavalry for its role in the charge on San Juan Hill, calling the soldiers "brave men, worthy of respect," whose courage had matched that of his own regiment.  

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Black leaders who counted on rewards from a grateful nation—in addition to speeches and medals—soon felt disappointment. Even during the war, white Southerners resented the press attention which black soldiers received. In Texas, Florida, and South Carolina, riots broke out when veterans defied segregation laws and used their weapons to protect black civilians. Fears of armed uprisings, led by black soldiers, stirred a series of lynchings, and caused southern communities to petition for the regiments' removal. Thereafter, the white media's enthusiasm for Blacks' patriotic service cooled.\textsuperscript{31} The frantic civilian reaction seemed to validate the earlier assumptions of western army commanders that frontier posts, located far from the public eye, were the safest assignments for African Americans.

Black regulars even found themselves abandoned by their former comrade, Teddy Roosevelt. When Scribner's published his war memoirs in 1899, Roosevelt's account of the battle at San Juan Hill had changed from his earlier complimentary version. Roosevelt now claimed that during the crucial charge, black troops had grown uneasy and drifted to the rear, and if not for his forceful

\textsuperscript{31}Foner, \textit{Blacks and the Military}, 75-82.
intervention, would have retreated. Literary analyst Amy Kaplan has attempted to contextualize Roosevelt’s description of this event within the larger, more fundamental problems that plagued imperialist thinkers. She suggests that by delivering a narrative of black reliance on white leadership, Roosevelt illustrated the classic justification for new imperialism: that people of color could make excellent citizens, but only under white direction. To admit otherwise would have strengthened the racial claims of anti-expansionists that imperialism would only add more dark races to the United States’ population, and thus endanger the established order.

The Spanish American war may have been the most pivotal event in African Americans’ military history, and not merely for the way it propelled the black regulars into public visibility. The war and its aftermath brought to the fore disturbing racial questions left unanswered by Reconstruction: how would new peoples be assimilated into the existing order and what role would Black Americans play in the transition? C. Vann Woodward

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has asserted that imperialism even strengthened anti-
Black racism, for if the United States could appeal to 
white supremacy in imposing its will on "inferior"
peoples abroad, why could southern lawmakers not do 
likewise with their "inferiors" at home?" Decades 
earlier, army commanders had engaged similar questions 
with their use of black troops in conquering the West, 
questions that recent expansions now imbued with national 
and even global significance.

In answer to polemics like Roosevelt's, black 
speakers responded with answers of their own. Between 
1898 and 1905, more than a dozen new books highlighted 
Blacks' participation in every American war since the 
Revolution, all emphasizing traditions of patriotism and 
valor in combat. These works—all of which advocated a 
larger role for black soldiers and a consequent 
recognition of equality with Whites—avoided the moral 
implications of military service for other dark-skinned 
races. The new texts rejected the racist foundations for 
imperialism but did accept some of its civilizationist 
assumptions, believing that Americans—and by extension, 
Black Americans—had a special destiny to uplift 
themselves by elevating others. The primary vehicle for

accomplishing this task became the United States Army, which had changed from a frontier constabulary into a professional military force, dedicated to protecting the nation from foreign adversaries. As the Army's star rose, so too could its black soldiers and the loyal "American" race which produced them.

Such were the sentiments expressed in African American publications like the Broad Ax, which, in July 1898, produced a multi-part series on the history of Blacks in combat. The Salt Lake City paper hoped to show that the victories of the Twenty-fourth Infantry in the Santiago campaign were no aberration but part of a tradition of black military gallantry which dated back to ancient Greece. In 1899, Miles Lynk's The Black Troopers presented an illustrious, patriotic account of the Cuban conflict, a book which lived up to its subtitle, The Daring Heroism of the Negro Soldiers in the Spanish-American War. Lynk manipulated two somewhat contradictory themes, tying the black man's trustworthiness to that of the victorious United States Army, while also condemning its prejudice for preventing Blacks from serving as officers. In one of his anecdotes, Lynk quoted a Spanish commander who resisted

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35Broad Ax, July 9, 1898.
an American advance, until the Spaniard saw the approach of a Tenth Cavalry detachment. Supposedly, the Spaniard ordered a retreat after he mistook the cavalrymen for Haitians, a group known for its ferocity in combat.  

By suggesting that Blacks held an international reputation for courage, Lynk could criticize the Army's exclusionary policies, not on the basis of racial inequality but for its incompetent exclusion of a loyal, native-born race. Lynk even capitalized on racist stereotypes about Blacks' affinity for tropical climates. Since Whites could not withstand yellow fever and other equatorial diseases, imperialism required a greater leadership role for those with dark skin. Lynk wrote, "if the tropical possessions of the Spaniards in either the East or West Indies, or both, are to be conquered or held by the United States, Negro troops will be of utmost importance . . . .".  

Other post-1898 authors emphasized the goal of commissioned black officers. Herschel V. Cashin, a Georgia civilian and Republican orator, held the position of Receiver of Public Moneys at the federal land office

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37Ibid., 96.
in Huntsville, Alabama during the war. In his book *Under Fire with the Tenth U.S. Cavalry*, Cashin delivered a more complete campaign narrative of Blacks in Cuba than did Lynk, paying the meticulous detail to troop movements and skirmishes that was typical of the campaign-history genre. But Cashin went beyond a mere depiction of black men as uniformed heroes and provided a romanticized version of the way in which America's color line should dissolve in the cause of patriotic service. Poems and ballads produced during the early years of expansion, which Cashin's publishers collected for subsequent printings, present the classic story of racial divisions among soldiers being subsumed by their shared loyalty to the flag. This is best illustrated in the poem, "The Fighting Tenth," about the Battle at San Juan Hill:

There wasn't any color line
at San Juan that day;
They didn't look so very fine,
it was their dogged way
Of going straight where duty led
That made their record bright;
a nation cheered them when they said:
"We're simply here to fight."

And many a happy man
has grasped the sable hand
Whose rifle, resolutely clasped,
Answered to each command.
And many a heart bereft would pine
Were it not just to say
There wasn't any color line at San Juan that day.  

Other poems called for equality-through-patriotic service by subjectifying the narrator, placing in the first person the white racist who reverses his feelings about Blacks after observing them in battle. The narrator of "The Negro Soldier" (appendix to Chapter 4) admits in the opening line, "We used to think the Negro didn't count for much," but after witnessing the Tenth Cavalry's valor at Las Guasimas, concedes "we've got to reconstruct our views on color, more or less." Even white Texans might be converted. In a piece titled "The Rough Rider Remarks," one of Roosevelt's volunteers from the Pecos Valley risks his life to save an injured black soldier, a Tenth cavalryman whose company sent the "greaser" Spaniards into retreat.

Black newspapers printed several such compositions after 1898, sharing techniques employed by the mainstream media to mobilize public support for foreign initiatives. Racial-uplift proponents hoped to tap a growing discourse of patriotic songs, stories, and veterans' memoirs to link their goals with those of the white majority and thus reduce the color line. As the reference to the

38Herschel V. Cashin, Under Fire with the Tenth U.S. Cavalry, (New York: F. Tennyson Neely, 1899), 275-76.
"greaser" shows, such stories, while hoping to elevate Blacks, sometimes disparaged other persons of color. Alfred Damon Runyon's "The Color Line" (see appendix) describes two soldiers, one black, the other a white southerner, who are trapped by Filipino insurgents. When the Moro "chief" offers to release the Black if he abandons his comrade, the soldier--complete with Negro dialect--explains that although he and the White are of "separate blood," they serve the same flag, and so share a common nationality which renders their racial differences meaningless. Not only are the two Americans united in death but the black soldier's courage uplifts the "savage" Filipinos; after killing the two heroes, the "warlike Moros" kneel in prayer to ask their "barbarian gods" for the spirits of the brave men they have slain.

Advocates for black enlistment also looked to the past for examples of military bravery. As a result, buffalo soldiers' activities in conquering the West received more attention at the turn of the century than they had before 1890. As in Runyon's fantasy about the Filipino encounter, writers emphasized "honor" and "civilization" when describing Blacks' participation in the Indian Wars. Edward Augustus Johnson, an African American educator, praised the gallant efforts of black troops who brought "progress" both to the frontier and
Cuba, stating that if "Negroes who have other tasks to perform, do their duty as well as the colored soldiers, there will be many revisions in the scale of public sentiment regarding the Negro race in America."\textsuperscript{39}

By emphasizing such themes, Johnson demeaned Native Americans by attributing part of the black soldier's success to the fear and awe which he believed that Blacks inspired in indigenous peoples. Quoting an unidentified recruit, Johnson claimed "that an American Indian has a deadly fear of an American Negro. The most utterly reckless, dare-devil savage of the copper hue stands literally in awe of a Negro, . . ."\textsuperscript{40} Johnson's claim, while holding no historical accuracy, proved significant as propaganda. By playing on fears of military enemies, Blacks-in-combat literature sought to ingratiate African Americans with the dominant group. Johnson elaborated on this theme through a tale of buffalo soldiers stationed on a Sioux reservation:

The Indians would fairly jump to obey the uniformed Negroes. I remember seeing a black sergeant make a minor chief go down to a creek to get a pail of water - an unheard of thing, for the chiefs, and even the ordinary bucks among the Sioux, always make their squaws do this work. The chief was sunning

\textsuperscript{39}Edward Augustus Johnson, \textit{History of Negro Soldiers in the Spanish-American War and other items of interest} (Raleigh: Capital Printing Co., 1899), 139.

\textsuperscript{40}\textit{Ibid.}, 32-33.
himself, reclining, beside his tepee, when his squaw started with the bucket for the creek some distance away. The Negro sergeant saw the move. He walked up to the lazy, grunting savage.

"Look a-yeah, yo' spraddle-nosed, yallah voodoo nigguh," said the black sergeant - he was as black as a stovepipe - to the blinking chief, "jes' shake yo' no-count bones an' tote dat wattuh yo'se'f. Yo' ain' no bettuh to pack wattah dan Ah am, yo' heah me."

The heap-much Indian chief didn't understand a word of what the Negro sergeant said to him, but he understands pantomine all right, and when the black man in uniform grabbed the pail out of the squaw's hand and thrust it into the dirty paw of the chief the chief went after that bucket of water, and he went a-loping, too.41

It is relevant that Johnson included this story--complete with Black and Indian stereotypes--in a book about black soldiers in the Spanish American War, a work intended to establish the fitness of African Americans for civil and military equality.

Racist stories of this type did not often appear in early twentieth-century black publications but they did appear, presenting Indians in a no less bigoted manner than the writings of Whites. Apologists might deny this charge on definitional grounds by asserting that prejudiced views only constitute "racism" if they are held by members of the dominant group. That argument reflects the customary definition of racism as a legitimization of one group's dominance over another but

41Ibid., 33-34.
it fails to consider the way that racism can also emerge from competition among subordinated groups for "middleman" status. While many African Americans sympathized with those races affected by imperialism, others saw the incorporation of new peoples into American civilization as a threat to their own potential advancement.

African American writers who "discovered" the buffalo soldiers after 1898 often exhibited jealousy toward other minority groups who appeared to enjoy more privileges than Blacks. Mary Curtis, for instance, began her 1918 work *The Black Soldier* with an attack on racial hierarchy: "Men are not superior by reason of the accident of race or color. They are superior who have the best heart and the best brain." Curtis devoted several chapters to the low desertion and high success rates of the black regiments, claiming--erroneously--that the Ninth Cavalry built all the forts along the Rio Grande. But in eliciting sympathy for the Blacks whose accomplishments had gone unrewarded, Curtis bemoaned the alleged elevation of Indians:

The Ninth Cavalry spent the greater part of their early history on the frontier fighting Indians and

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paving the way for the American people to establish homes, industries and commerce without fear of the marauding bands of Indians which used to make the life of the white man exceedingly dangerous. . . And to-day the Indian is given more consideration and recognition than the Negro who saved the country from his onslaughs.\textsuperscript{43}

Curtis, Johnson and other black writers, while perhaps not intending to cast aspersions on other people of color, certainly saw no advantage in identifying with them. By glorifying African Americans' military service, they did more than appeal to the national values which they shared with Whites; they also attempted a reconciliation of race and nationality, those halves of the African American psyche identified by Du Bois. Writers of the time hoped that nationalism would prove to be the leveling factor which offset racial inequalities. Lacking the Boasian language of cultural relativism which asserts the equality and dignity of all peoples, they could only appeal to civilizationist doctrines as a means of elevation. Unfortunately, this sometimes meant denying the worth of indigenous or non-American races.

This is not to say that African Americans embraced military service and the imperialistic values which accompanied it without hesitation and trepidation. In some ways, black leaders had little choice but to support

\textsuperscript{43}\textit{Ibid.}, 56-57.
expansion, for opposing it would have raised suspicions about their loyalty and provided racist politicians with an excuse to nullify the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments. George Marks and Willard Gatewood, in separate studies, have characterized Blacks' response to imperialism as somewhere between ambivalence and "cautious and prudent patriotism." Although Marks has identified a tradition of opposition to foreign expansion, both he and Gatewood agree that Blacks approached the dilemmas of the new "quest for empire" in terms of racial self-interest."

In evaluating imperialism with an eye for maximum advantage, some black spokesmen recognized an alternative prospect: that the addition of more nonwhites to the American population might enlarge rather than damage their own commercial and political opportunities. One writer claimed "the more dark peoples that we have under our flag the better it will be for those of us who came out of the forge and fire of American slavery. There will be outlets for the American Negro and a swifter

uplifting because of interest for these new peoples." After all, who better would serve as ambassadors than black soldiers, missionaries, and educators? An editorial in the Seattle World predicted a day when "great generals, merchant princes, bankers, railway magnates and the others belonging to our race will be in evidence in our new possessions. White people go out into the world in quest of land, money, and honorable places; they get them and hold them; why cannot we do likewise?"

While some black supporters of expansion may have been motivated by material gain and self-interest, others sincerely believed that uplifting their own people required them to help "civilize" barbarian races. In his popular 1901 autobiography, Up From Slavery, Booker T. Washington described his schooling at Hampton Institute in Virginia. When Washington attended Hampton in the late 1870s, the school had enrolled "over one hundred wild and for the most part perfectly ignorant Indians." Despite some mutual suspicions, Blacks took Indians as roommates, taught them to speak English, and helped them to acquire "civilized habits," all to Washington's


46World, January 4, 1899.
"constant delight." The great black educator doubted that any white institution would have welcomed and benefitted Indian students the way that Hampton did. In his mind, Blacks' own hopes for racial uplift carried a responsibility to uplift others, for "the more unfortunate the race, and the lower in the scale of civilization, the more does one raise one's self by giving the assistance." 47

The concept of "civilizationist ideology" describes how Americans constructed simultaneous ideals of masculinity and national identity during the age of imperialism. In her study on cultural constructions of race and gender at the turn of the century, Gail Bederman explains that black males--realizing they were seen by Whites as less than men--often asserted their bodily strength by entering "masculine" arenas like sports and combat in order to obtain recognition of their manhood. 48 Although Victorian standards equated "manliness" with "whiteness," middle-class black spokesmen hoped that military service and cooperation with Whites' "civilizing missions" would inspire greater recognition of Blacks'


accomplishments, and, therefore, of their masculinity.

Joining the Army also fit comfortably with Washington's accommodationist approach, which taught temporary acceptance of racial segregation, and that progress would come once Whites realized that they shared with Blacks common goals and aspirations. Washington's ethos of racial uplift shared many similarities with the "civilizing mission" philosophy that justified American expansion. Both taught assimilation through a common set of bourgeois values, and both carried a nationalistic element which held the United States as a model for emulation. Though racial uplift ideology rested more on evangelical beliefs in universal humanity than on racial Darwinism, it also helped to expand America's racial inequalities to other parts of the globe by encouraging cooperation in imperialistic endeavors. Historian Kevin Gaines has argued that adoption of the "civilizationist mission," in the end, undermined effective strategies for pan-racial resistance and proved the limitations of Washington's "self-help" doctrines for fighting prejudice and realizing full citizenship."

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As expansion continued, many African Americans reassessed their positions. The career of Theophilus Gould Steward, a major figure in the African Methodist Episcopal Church and a chaplain with the Twenty-fifth Infantry, shows the dilemmas that black spokesmen could encounter in their support for military service. Steward's sixteen years of working with black recruits convinced him of the opportunities that the Army offered for racial advancement. He wrote a number of pertinent articles and, in 1904, a book titled *The Colored Regulars in the United States Army*. Indeed, by the early 1900s, Steward had emerged as the country's foremost black spokesman for military education, suggesting that every black community should form a battalion of young soldiers trained in local schools by black officers.

Steward, however, did not adopt Washington's educational approach in its entirety. Although the two men respected similar values, such as discipline, sacrifice, and the need for racial elevation through work, Steward believed that Washington's emphasis on industrial and agricultural education ignored the "toughening" military experience by which races became worthy of equality. Enamored of the Army's patriotism

and symbols, Steward asserted that military service provided this opportunity, and he defended the institution against those who criticized it as a hired gun for white interests.\(^5^0\)

Steward also saw a possible solution to America's racial problems in overseas expansion, writing several essays that described the benefits of black settlement in the Pacific islands, especially in the Philippines. Similar to the African emigration movements led by black nationalists like Bishop Henry Turner, black colonization efforts formed to encourage emigration to distant American acquisitions.\(^5^1\) Such endeavors even gained the endorsement of racist politicians like Senator "Pitchfork Ben" Tillman of South Carolina, who urged that the new territories be used as a racial safety-valve to decrease lynchings by deporting troublesome Blacks. In all, these


efforts attracted a mere 400 or so individuals, mostly civil servants, small business owners, and other African Americans who possessed sufficient means to emigrate.52 The Filipino independence movement led by Emilio Aguinaldo challenged Steward and others to question their endorsement of American expansion. Black soldiers stationed in the Philippines, witnessing an establishment of racial segregation on military bases that applied to islanders as well as Blacks, saw no payoff for their previous efforts and found their national loyalties tested. In contrast to the low desertion rates during the Indian Wars and the Mexican border conflicts, Blacks who served in the Philippines deserted more often than Whites. Some black deserters even joined the insurrectos against the United States Army.53 In addition, black troops enjoyed some camaraderie with natives.54 Implying years later a natural bond of affection between people of color, Steward remarked that in "conversation with the

52Seraile, Voices of Dissent, 144-45; and Gatewood, "Black Americans and the Quest for Empire," 545-66.


54Foner, Blacks and the Military, 89-92; and Fletcher, The Black Soldier and Officer in the United States Army, 109-11.
ablest Filipinos [sic], I have observed that same frankness and ease that obtains among colored people of the United States."\textsuperscript{55} Steward and other advocates of military service, and probably many black regulars also, saw the parallels between the Filipinos' struggle for independence and Blacks' own fight for justice at home.\textsuperscript{56}

Despite some apparent sympathies, black soldiers avoided the moral confusions raised by service in the Philippines and performed the duties expected of them. By 1902, support for expansionary policies began to wane as black leaders--believing they had been duped into aiding an extension of the color line--focused their energies on more immediate domestic problems. Opposition to imperialism, however, did not preclude pride and satisfaction in the accomplishments of the soldiers who had joined such endeavors. Newspapers still reported on the regiments' activities, while the number of books and articles about Blacks' bravery in combat continued to grow. When Steward's 1904 book \textit{The Colored Regulars} appeared, it included an introduction by General Nelson Miles, the great Indian fighter and Spanish American War

\textsuperscript{55}Steward, \textit{From 1864 to 1914: Fifty Years in the Gospel Ministry} (Philadelphia: AME Book Concern, 1921), 345.

\textsuperscript{56}Litwack, \textit{Trouble in Mind}, 463-70.
veteran, who reminded readers of his acquaintance with emancipated slaves during the Civil War, his brief command of the "colored" Fortieth Infantry, and the remarkable progress that Blacks had made as a result of army service. Clearly, for Steward and others, the United States' growing empire still offered the dream that adherence to American nationalism and military values could raise black people's fortunes and maybe even eliminate white supremacy.

Black soldiers themselves--while a tiny minority within the African American population--felt both the privileges and burdens of elevating their race. Although such sentiments always had been present, soldiers by the turn of the century had a greater comprehension of the connection between military performance and civil rights. In this sense, Blacks who served on the Rio Grande after 1898 differed from their predecessors, assuming the responsibilities of racial champions as well as the obligations of membership in a professional imperial army. For many, this translated into a refusal to tolerate abuse, no matter from civilians, enemy soldiers, or even their own officers. After assignment of the Twenty-fifth Infantry to Texas in 1906, Chaplain Steward

worried that the men's nature would lead to trouble with southerners, for there existed "among those who had faced Spanish bullets at El Kaney [sic] a feeling that there were limitations to a soldier's submission to insults and outrages, although all were willing to endure much for the good name of the regiment"--this a few weeks before the Brownsville affray.\textsuperscript{58}

The Texas-Mexico border to which the black regiments returned also had undergone important changes during the fourteen-year interval. By 1899, Rio Grande communities had been transformed from a series of isolated rural hamlets into a capitalistic, urban-oasis society. During the previous 30 years, the population of border counties had risen from 30,000 to more than 110,000. El Paso experienced the most dramatic rise, growing from fewer than 4000 to nearly 25,000 in less than 20 years. By this time, El Paso had become a major railroad terminus and a center for commercial, ranching and smelting activities. Other border towns experienced similar spurts. Del Rio, a village of about 50 persons in 1880, expanded to more than 2000 within two decades. Near Laredo and Eagle Pass, the tapping of soft coal and

\textsuperscript{58}Steward, \textit{Fifty Years in the Gospel Ministry}, 360.
lignite mines brought workers--some migrants, others permanent--into the central border area.  

Although Mexican immigration accounted for much of this growth, Hispanics, up to the 1890s, contributed less to population increase than other ethnic groups. The 1887 state census showed that the rate of Mexican immigration lagged behind that of Anglos, Blacks, and Europeans. In border areas, however, "Hispanics"--which included foreign-born residents as well as Tejanos--comprised more than 80 percent of the population. Of the 19 Texas counties which had more than 500 Hispanic residents in 1887, eleven of these were border counties, and six of them held military bases.  

As with all western locales, the railroad often dictated which places would thrive, and, accordingly, came to promise modernization and stability. By contrast, the other great western institution, the Army, represented a backward, not-so-distant frontier past. In 1899, the editor of the Brackettville paper hoped for the


abandonment of nearby Fort Clark and the purchase of its building by the Southern Pacific, which he believed would insure the town's "permanent place.""\(^{61}\)

For all of its recent growth, most of southern Texas still lagged behind the rest of the state in industrial development. Aided by new irrigation systems, the border region remained a ranching and farming economy, with property ownership concentrated in a minority of hands. Ethnic disparity of wealth accompanied this concentration. Mexicans in southern Texas worked at unskilled labor, occupying a permanent niche in the low-paid service sector.\(^{62}\) Border Mexicans' situation somewhat resembled that of Blacks in the Deep South. David Montejano has described the emergence in Texas of a "race situation," where ethnic or national prejudice, by providing a basis for economic segregation, led to the oppression of Hispanics on racial grounds—a situation akin to that of southern Blacks.\(^{63}\)

\(^{61}\)Brackett News (Brackettville, TX), March 18, 1899.

\(^{62}\)For a thorough discussion of modernization in western and southern Texas and the reduction of Hispanics to landless laborers, see Stewart and De Leon, Not Room Enough, 1-38.

To date, most histories which examine inter-minority relations focus on the workplace and the way that class formation affects racial divisions. Neil Foley's study of Mexicans, Blacks, and lower-class Whites in central Texas--one of the few studies that avoids the racial binary trap--centers on the intersections of race and class which determined agricultural workers' status in the hierarchy of cotton production.64 Such works draw support from the claims of structural-inequality theorists, who minimize the importance of regional and group-specific prejudice, and instead emphasize institutional patterns of discrimination, particularly capitalistic labor systems.65 As Montejano and Foley described, agricultural production did encourage the formation of racial lines in border areas. However, this did not occur in the same way that it did in central Texas, where the Anglo and Black population was greater. On the Rio Grande, the dual presence of an international

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border and of the United States Army carried as many consequences for racial conflict as did the developing class and labor structures.

An unfortunate practice of the New Western History in general, and of race and labor histories in particular, has been their habit of discounting the military's role as "conqueror." By eliminating the local autonomy of a loosely-defined border and integrating the Rio Grande region into a larger network through its insistence on federal authority, the Army made possible the introduction of new class and labor hierarchies. This task, which had been completed by 1885, might be termed a function of the "frontier" Army, as distinguished from the "border" Army that served after 1899 to protect American territory from invasion. Of course, continuity and overlap between the two occurred. Even the distinction between "frontier" and "border" remains fuzzy, since contemporaries often interchanged the terms when referring to the political division between Texas and Mexico. But with regard to functionality, the Army did seek different goals at different times, and by exploring these separately, we may better understand why Rio Grande civilians acted as they did, and when they did, during various periods of military activity.
The frontier Army of the 1860s and 1870s established the groundwork for all of the factors to which structuralists point in explaining racial and ethnic inequality. By subjecting local authorities to federal power, the Army assured the safety of Anglo immigrants, who came to dominate the region with their numbers and capital investments. The destruction of nomadic Indian tribes and outlaw gangs made possible the introduction of railroads, mines, and other features of industrialization necessary for the growth of cities. With modernization came new forms of social stratification. Pre-conquest Hispanic class distinctions still survived, however; Anglo politicians relied on Mexican elites to deliver votes in return for jobs and patronage, leading to a biracial class system.  

Chicano historians describe the formation of a "pan-Hispanic" identity in this period which replaced earlier local attachments with a new ethnic consciousness, one formed as a reaction to Anglo prejudice. Constant migration both within and outside Mexico did reduce provincial loyalties and stimulate an awareness of ethnic and national similarities. But too often, the emergence

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of La raza—the Hispanic "people" or "race"—has been described in excessively homogenous terms. Mexicans on both sides of the border maintained their traditional class stratification, while even political distinctions became more salient. David Gutierrez's work on relations between Mexican Americans and Mexican immigrants shows that many Texas citizens considered themselves socially superior to recent arrivals, and that intermingling among people of the same language and national origin occurred less often than scholars might expect.67 In a way, Mexican Americans' efforts to estrange themselves from migrants resembled those of black proponents of military service. Recognizing the entrenched strength of racial hierarchy, both groups sought to elevate themselves to "middleman" status by de-emphasizing race and emphasizing national identity.

Military activity helped to strengthen these national divisions, a consequence of the Army's function as "border protector" which demanded clear distinctions between citizens and foreigners. Although this role originated in the earlier frontier period, it became the Army's sole function on the Rio Grande after 1898. The nature of this task depended to a great extent on

67Ibid., 28-38. See also Clark, "Mexican Labor in the United States," 513.
Mexico's internal affairs. After the border crises of the 1870s, the regime of Porfirio Diaz benefitted from collaboration with the United States, attracting American investment in railroads, mines, and other industrial ventures.68

As in southern Texas, modernization in northern Mexico produced more advantages for Anglo investors and Mexican elites than it did for working-class Hispanics. Labor organizers and political dissidents who challenged Mexico's new capitalistic order employed the decades-long tactic of seeking sanctuary in Texas. There, they faced American authorities who tried to apprehend and return Mexican rebels to the Diaz government. In essence, the United States Army's ostensible maintenance of "border protection" concealed its actual purpose of buttressing the Diaz administration and stifling attempts at labor reform and land redistribution. Black and white soldiers worked together in defending the status quo. Hispanic workers knew this, understanding that American soldiers, regardless of race, protected the privileged classes---

paradoxically, an association that advocates of black enlistment had hoped white Americans would realize.

The increase of migratory labor contributed to interracial rivalry. Mexicans followed lines of capital into the border regions and the southwestern United States, enjoying the high wages offered by railroads and planters. Employers tended to prefer Hispanic laborers over other immigrants, believing them better-suited to seasonal work and less likely to remain and establish permanent residence. Old military towns like Eagle Pass, Laredo, and Brownsville acquired new importance as passage points for migrant workers. In the Lower Valley, more than 60 boats ferried Mexicans across the river. But it was El Paso that became the Ellis Island of the Southwest, with more than 26,000 Mexicans admitted there during the first nine months of 1907. Violence unleashed by the Mexican Revolution would increase these numbers, establishing a practice of cross-border labor migration that continued throughout the twentieth century. For working-class Texans of all races, competition with Mexican labor proved an obstacle to peaceable relations. Federal and state authorities acknowledged the need for cheap workers but fretted at

the criminal elements who seemed to accompany them. By the early 1900s, the Texas Rangers had revived their earlier role as a frontier constabulary, finding and punishing Mexicans suspected of crimes.70

Economic competition between Mexicans and Blacks produced no consistent winners and losers. In northern and central Texas, Mexicans displaced black and white labor. An employer near Texarkana described Mexican railroad workers as cheap, docile, and efficient employees, who lacked the physical strength of Blacks but still outperformed them.71 However, in communities where black civilians already were established, Mexicans continued to lag in economic and social advancement. El Paso, for example, has been described as a dualistic labor market where Anglo prejudice subordinated Mexicans.72 But in 1910, more than 1400 Blacks also lived in El Paso and enjoyed a degree of political and economic success unmatched elsewhere in Texas. El Paso’s African American community retained these advantages

70John Hulen to Governor S.W.T. Lanham, TX-AGO, Biennial report, 1904, 163.
throughout the twentieth century, with some local Blacks even attaining wealth and prominence. 73

Henry T. Flipper, the West Point graduate and dismissed officer from the Tenth Cavalry, was an example. Flipper's fame in El Paso emanated from his employment with an engineering firm that surveyed land tracts in Chihuahua for industrial development. As one who traveled Chihuahua often, Flipper expressed little admiration for Mexico or the Mexican people. During dinner with the governor of Chihuahua, Flipper disparaged "the foolish custom" of women dining apart from the men and of people "scooping" food with their fingers and tortillas. In his memoirs, he criticized the country's "intensely Catholic" superstitions for failing to prevent rampant immorality, gambling and prostitution. Flipper wrote with disgust about Chihuahua elites who obtained papal dispensations to marry their sisters. Once, Flipper was imprisoned in Meoqui for sending a letter to an El Paso newspaper, in which he claimed that a local priest had fathered children by his own daughter. Fortunately, he reported, the growing influence of

foreigners in Mexico served to reduce such barbarisms. Overall, Flipper regarded Mexicans the same way that Whites regarded them: as a childlike people in need of American civilization, with few native customs worth preserving.

If black newspapers are any indication, then Flipper's views—if not representative—certainly were not exceptional among African Americans. Newspapers reflected the opinions of middle-class Blacks who bemoaned immigration because it reinforced their own place at the bottom of the racial hierarchy. Often, new groups not only acquired better jobs and housing than native Blacks but even joined native Whites in practicing racial discrimination. One black editor thought it deplorable that his people had to ride at the back of public conveyances, while "Mexicans, Chinamen, Dagos, Italians, Sheenies, Jews, Irishmen, and Greeks ride where they please." Blacks sometimes shared dominant


75For a discussion of Blacks' attitudes toward recent immigrants, see Arnold Shankman, Ambivalent Friends: Afro-Americans View the Immigrant (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1982).

76The Taborian Banner, (Galveston, TX), August 24, 1906.
stereotypes about other groups, depicting Chinese as opium addicts, Italians as anarchists, and Indians as alcoholics. 77

During most of the nineteenth century, Blacks held Mexicans in higher esteem than they did other immigrant groups, a legacy of Mexico's historical opposition to slavery. In the 1880s, black Texans even had approached Mexico's government with plans to launch a colonization movement there and boost Mexico's cotton production. 78 By 1900, however, this friendship had disappeared, with black spokesmen beginning to denounce the "lazy" Mexican and the backward, semi-civilized country from which he came. Mexicans' adherence to Catholicism—a religion embraced by fewer than one percent of African Americans—seemed strange and even medieval to evangelical Protestants. 79 As migrant workers crossed the border and competed for low-paying jobs, some black Texans blamed Mexicans for their marginalized political and social status. Responding to a proposed law that required

77Lawrence Levine, Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom (London: Oxford University Press, 1977), 302, 338; and Litwack, Trouble in Mind, 358.


79Shankman, Ambivalent Friends, 60-75.
segregation in public transportation, a Galveston resident wrote, "It must be remembered that this accursed petition was signed not by the true American white man but by the stranger and foreigner. . . . Our Southern white is all right, who once upon a time owned the Negro and their children's children may yet regret that they ever threw open their American home gates to this wholesale flooding [of] millions of Ignorant foreigners."*0

In some ways, Blacks had just cause for resentment. For all the prejudice that Hispanics endured, southern and western states did classify them as "Caucasian," leaving them able—at least in the eyes of the law—to use the same facilities as Anglos. Mexicans too became the victims of lynchings but, in these tragedies, the United States issued formal apologies to Mexico and pressured state and local governments not to exacerbate tensions. While such measures were ineffectual, they still outweighed nonexistent federal efforts to stop black lynchings. One unique feature of western conquest was the way in which race relations often translated into diplomatic relations. Mexicans, Chinese, Japanese, and even Native Americans originated from political homelands

*0The Taborian Banner, September 21, 1906.
with which the United States had to deal, governments that could intervene on behalf of their citizens in other countries. By contrast, African Americans had no state of their own—aside from the one they shared with Whites—to protect them. This lesson was not lost on Blacks, who watched immigrants scale the social ladder within one or two generations. This may have reinforced the view that equal citizenship rights within the state had to be won before addressing the larger question of imperialism's effect on other people of color.

Interracial competition, not cooperation, thus defined the border to which black soldiers returned in 1899. By this time, the transition from a ranching to a commercial farming economy had left black Texans unable to compete with Mexican labor. A black field worker in Nueces County complained that "Mexicans can live on next to nothing. A tortilla and a cup of coffee will stand them for a half-day. . . . More Negroes would come . . . if there were not so many Mexicans and they could find better wages." Victor Clark, who more than any other Anglo of his day studied the nuances of southwestern labor, noted with curiosity that white southerners

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regarded Mexicans with "nothing of that stern race consciousness" which marked their attitudes toward Blacks. Nevertheless, "The American Negro considers himself above the Mexican, and yet the latter receives more social recognition from the white man."\textsuperscript{82} The realization that Blacks appeared to be losing to Mexicans in the competition for middle status prompted occasional acts of violence. In 1894, a riot in Bee County, north of Corpus Christi, led to the bizarre scenario of a combined raid by Blacks and working-class Whites on a community of Mexican migrant workers.\textsuperscript{83}

The radical forces of capitalization and immigration, which so transformed Rio Grande communities, led to a decline in the fortunes of many African Americans who lived there. Never strong in number, Blacks' population in border counties dropped, with the exception of cities like Brownsville and El Paso. Black departures from southern and central Texas at the turn of the century precipitated the Great Migration of the 1910s. By 1918, more than 100,000 Blacks had left Texas for northern cities. Austin lost over a third of its black population within three years, while those who

\textsuperscript{82}Clark, "Mexican Labor in the U.S.," 512.

\textsuperscript{83}Beeville Bee, August 17, 1894.
remained found cultural survival and racial pride more
difficult with their diminished numbers. Blacks in
border towns like Laredo, where the population had
dropped from 205 to 41 between 1900 and 1920, refrained
from public gatherings or even from venturing outdoors
often, since Hispanics and Anglos regarded their presence
as such an oddity. 84

The harsh effects of imperialism on the Mexican
border—white supremacy, disparity of wealth,
subordination of local authority—would be replicated
throughout the hemisphere as American expansion
continued. But imperialism also brought new
opportunities for minority groups to raise themselves at
the expense of others. African American men joined the
Army in 1905 for many of the same reasons as they did in
1870—status, need for employment, lack of civilian
opportunities—but the significance of that service had
changed. Valor in combat and participation in national
endeavors now inspired the hope of elevating their race
to a greater level of equality with Whites. Henceforth,
the goals of protecting their nation from foreign
aggression and lifting themselves to the position of

84 San Antonio Inquirer, July 20, 1918. See also
U.S. Bureau of the Census, Twelfth, Thirteenth, and
Fourteenth Census of the United States, 1900, 1910,
and 1920.
"leading minority" became intertwined. Those aspirations, as well as the troublesome relationship developing between Black and Hispanic civilians, framed the setting for a new round of civilian-military violence after 1899.
APPENDIX TO CHAPTER FOUR

"The Rough Rider Remarks"

I was raised way up in the Pecos Valley;
They call me now the Texas Lamb;
I was in El Caney in Roosevelt’s rally,
If I was not may I be dam,
said the Rough Rider.

I never had no use for a nigger,
A yellow mulatto I didn’t admire;
But I lay that day with finger on trigger
And watched the colored cavalry fire,
And though out loud as we waited for orders,
If them there darkies should break on our right
Twould be good-by to the first Rough Riders!
And I wished to God them niggers was white,
said the Rough Rider.

Twas a red-hot time, and a dam tough place,
That there same fight at the Hell Caney;
And the language we used wasn’t saying grace —
It doesn’t matter what folks may say;
There was bullets from front, and rear, and flank,
And nary other support in sight
Save them nigs of the Tenth, in single rank;
And them there darkies they acted white!
said the Rough Rider.

Up the hill through bramble and briar,
Leaving killed and wounded there in the brush,
They pushed straight ahead in the face of fire,
Then lined up true for the final rush;
Straight in front was the barb-wire fence;
Over they went it, hellity split;
You should have seen the greasers git from thence;
I swear, I reckon they’re running yit,
said the Rough Rider.

All that was some days ago, but I haven’t forgot;
And here we are now on this cussed hill,
In just a similar kind of spot;
And there’s them niggers, a fighting still
Right in the nastiest part of the mess;
I swear, when it comes to a stand-up fight,
Or to stay by a comrade in distress,
You bet your sweet life them darkies is white!
said the Rough Rider.
There is plenty of sand in troops that stand
Such a rain of bullets as comes this way;
In this kind of a game I'll fill my hand
With them black devils that fight for play.
For beauty they don't show up very much;
For color, they're off a little bit,
But the way they git there beats the Dutch;
They may lack beauty but they don't lack grit,
said the Rough Rider.

Here's a darkey now with an artery cut;
Say, doc, can't you put a compass on?
There ain't no time to be fooling about,
If you do the cuss will surely be gone.
I've seen such before; I'll grip that hole
And stop the blood as long as I can,
A nigger? Who says it? Blast my soul
If that there darky ain't a man!
said the Rough Rider.

The cowboys always pay their debts;
Them darkies saved us at Hell Caney;
When we go back on the colored vets,
Count Texas Bill as out the play,
said the Rough Rider.

"The Negro Soldier"

We used to think the Negro
didn't count for much -
Light lingered in the melon patch
and chicken yard, and such;
Much mixed in point of morals
and absurd in point of dress,
The butt of droll cartoonists
and the target of the press;
But we've got to reconstruct our views on color,
more or less,
Now we know about the Tenth at Las Guasimas!

When a rain of shot was falling,
with a song upon his lips,
In the horror where gallant lives
went out in death's eclipse.
Face to face with Spanish bullets,
on the slope of San Juan,
The negro soldier showed himself
another type of man;
Read the story of his courage coldly,
carelessly, who can -
The story of the Tenth at Las Guasimas!

We have heaped the Cuban soil above their bodies,
black and white -
The strangely sorted comrades
of that grand and glorious fight -
And many a fair-skinned volunteer
goes whole and sound to-day
For the succor of the colored troops,
the battle records say,
And the feud is gone forever,
of the blue coat and the gray -
All honor to the Tenth at Las Guasimas!

Source: Cashin, Under Fire with the Tenth U.S. Cavalry, 276-77.
"The Color Line" by Alfred Damon Runyon

Two men were caught in a Moro trap, and the Datto's guns sang near And one wore an officer's shoulder strap, the other a private's gear One was a black of the Twenty-fourth, and one was a Southern man And both were caught in a dark defile by the lines of the Moro clan.

Oh, wonder it is, and pity it is, that they send the Scouts alone To die in the silent jungle paths with never a word or groan Wonder it is, and pity it is; but the two stand back to back And never a word between them passed as they waited the first attack.

What prayers they said they said them low and to their beating hearts They thumped so loud and out of tune; and now the battle starts. A ring of flame about them ran; a tongue of fire shot through Then as machines their muscles moved, and aimed their rifles true.

The bullets whizzed, the wounded shrieked, the rifle bores grew hot But still the two stood back to back, and answered shot for shot. And now the Moro fires down, and now there comes a hush And white and black, with bayonets fixed, await the bolo rush.

They heard the Moro chief call out: "O black man, hark to me!" You give us the Christian dog and you shall go out free. Heed you the call of color and blood - what need we longer fight? In color and blood you're brother to me. O black man, give the white!"
Now one was a white of the Southern breed, and cheaply held the black
And little he'd thought, as the two had fought, of the man behind his back
He loved to live as the White Man lives, But the Datto's swords rang true
And he had no doubt as the chief called out what the black behind would do.

Two men they stood back to back and never a word they said
But face to face with an easy death what thoughts were in each head!
"You go," the white man spoke at last; "for you owe naught to me
Yo go, for I can die alone, that you may go out free!

You go; it seems your time has come to draw the color line -
You and your breed owe naught to me, nor certainly to mine.
I'll go to death as my fathers went," between his cold set lips -
My fathers, who used to use your kind for trade - and poker chips!

One was a black of the Twenty-fourth, and his face was washed with fear
And his breath came thick and bowels were sick as he thought of the knife blades near
Then steady his hands swung to his belt and back to the bolt again
And he loaded and fired as a well-drilled man and counted his dead to ten.

And "Man" he said "in ole Kaintuck a mammy she prays foh me
An' Ah laks to lib like yo' laks to lib but ouah end it am plain to see
Ouah colah an' blood it ain't de same but we sets to de same old boahd
And if we diffah in skin an' blood, w'y, we pass dat up toe de Lawd!

Ouah colah an' blood it ain't de same, but de flag dat covahs us bofe
It nevah has changed on de colah line an' dey didn't colah ouah oafe.
Yo' go yo' route to de Gates o' Gawd
an' I shall trabel mine
An' we shall see when we reach his knee
how He's drawin' de colah line.

Doan' fink Ah'm fightin' for lub o' yo,
or de breed dat yo' laks to brag
Ah'm fightin' foh mammy, in ole Kaintuck -
an' lub o' mah kentry's flag.
Yo' watch dem niggahs along yo' front
an' Ah'll attend toe mine
An' we'll go up to de Gates o' Gawd
toe settle de colah line!

Two men they stood them back to back,
the white man called to the chief
"He's answered the call of the color line
and his answer will bring you grief.
We don't declare as brothers-in-blood,
or the burden of friendship drag
Be we do unite on a color line
and our color's our country's flag.

Two men lay dead in the jungle path
and their faces stared at the sky
And out in the bush on each man's front
the Moros were piled waist high.
And when the warriors
they went in to mutilate the dead,
They found them lying back to back
and white and black were red!
"How strange it is," the chief he cried
"these men should choose to go
They did not love each other's kind -
in blood they differed so.
For one was black and one was white
and yet they chose to die
Because they served a single flag -
in honor they shall lie!

What Gods they worshipped I know not;
what Gods I do not care -
They fought me well and for their flag
and they shall have a prayer
For be he white or be he black
his flag be what it may
All honor to him who dies for that -
my men, kneel down and pray!
Two mounds they stand in a jungle path;  
they buried them back to back  
And the wandering Moros tell the tale  
of the white man and the black.  
Oh, the warlike Moros pass that way  
to kneel in silent prayer,  
And ask their gods for the spirit  
of the men they buried there!

Source: Charles Alexander, Battles and Victories of Allen Allensworth (Boston: Sherman, French & Company, 1914), 374-78.
Chapter Five

Black Soldiers and Civil-Military Violence, 1899-1906

The angry crowd pelted the policemen with rocks and shouted cries of "Down with the authorities" and "Bring out your nigger soldiers," referring to Company E of the Tenth Cavalry stationed at nearby Fort McIntosh. On the following day, March 20, 1899, a gunfight between Mexican residents of Laredo on one side, and black troops from the Tenth and a party of Texas Rangers on the other, caused a civilian's death.¹ This confrontation had erupted over efforts to enforce state health standards. Concerned about the increase of diseases carried from Mexico, customs officials in border towns had issued strict quarantine regulations, and insisted that immigrants provide proof of vaccination or immunity to smallpox.² When a smallpox epidemic struck Laredo in mid-March, state health officers tried to move all infected persons to a local detention center. On March

¹Thomas Scurry to Joseph D. Sayers, TX-AGO, Biennial Reports, 1899-1900, 22.
²Galveston Daily News, October 11, 1899, 2.
19, a crowd of several hundred Mexicans gathered to resist the removal. Two young brothers took a stand in their yard and defied authorities to move their sister, declaring that they had disobeyed no laws and wanted a physician to examine her first. When police tried to intervene, the violence prompted Governor Joseph Sayers to request federal assistance. On March 21, troopers from the Tenth cooperated with Rangers in dispelling the Laredo crowds with a gatling gun, thereby allowing relocation of patients to commence.³

Laredo was not the first border town where black soldiers had fought with Hispanics and it would not be the last. In the 1870s, civilian hatred of black troops had been an obstacle for peaceful relations between the Army and the Mexicans of the Lower Valley. The interval between 1885 and 1899, when no Blacks served on the border, saw little improvement. Prior to 1885, civilians and soldiers clashed over individual grievances but most of these remained local and isolated incidents. Advancements in communication and transportation helped to broaden the significance of skirmishes after 1899. Railroads and telegraphs connected border residents into a communicative network which broadcasted news about

³Scurry to Sayers, TX-AGO, 2; and Brackett News, March 25, 1899.
military affairs within hours. Following the violence in Laredo, newspapers from El Paso to Brownsville reported stories about Black-Mexican bloodshed. An editor of the Brackett News regretted that recent improvements at Fort Clark would lead to an increased garrison. One month after the editor’s observation, a group of enlisted men from Company M of the Ninth Cavalry allegedly fired their pistols into the streets of Brackettville. When Deputy John Sheedy arrested one of them for illegal possession of a firearm, cavalrymen tried to stop the arrest and even shot in the deputy’s direction as he escorted his prisoner to jail.

In Brackettville, Laredo, El Paso, Rio Grande City, and Brownsville, black troops and Hispanic civilians engaged in what can accurately be called a bloodfeud. Of those incidents, the Brownsville episode of 1906 has received by far the most historical attention, a story often interpreted as an example of white racism toward African American soldiers. An examination of

Brandon News, November 11, 1899.

Ibid., December 16, 1899.

For an overview of the literature and reactions relating to the Brownsville shooting, see Walter Pierce, "The Brownsville Raid: A Historiographical Assessment," in Milo Kearney, ed., Studies in Brownsville History (Brownsville: Pan American University, 1986), 223-26. See also John Weaver, The Brownsville Raid (New York:
Brownsville's many antecedents, however, gives us reason to challenge this interpretation and the binary model of "white and nonwhite" from which it emerges. Racism circumscribed the lives of black regulars but racism alone cannot explain their unwelcome reception on the border. Several factors contributed: the region's political and class structure, a resented American military presence, competition and resentment between minority groups, and a turbulent transition to a developing commercial economy. These local factors, as well as the broader national ones described previously, must be considered in order to comprehend the peculiar ferocity of civil-military violence after 1899.

The early twentieth century marked the low point for relationships between African American soldiers and Rio Grande residents. In some ways, the frequency of conflict mirrored the vicious feuds between enlisted men and civilians--regardless of race--that had endured since the frontier period. White soldiers also engaged in quarrels with locals. In 1898, Maverick County officials at Eagle Pass accused white troops of habitual drunkenness and fighting, claiming that the soldiers

confused Mexicans with enemy Spaniards. But civil-military friction grew more dangerous whenever black soldiers became involved. Following an 1899 fracas involving Tenth Cavalry troops at Texarkana, Governor Sayers complained that the Army had endangered civilian lives by allowing armed Blacks to travel through northeast Texas. As Garna Christian's work has shown, Anglo Texans followed Sayers' view that black soldiers presented a threat to white supremacy.

The number of black soldiers stationed at Rio Grande forts, as illustrated in Table 1 (see appendix to Chapter Five), did not approach the high totals of the 1860s and 1870s but still remained sizeable given the civilian population of surrounding communities. African Americans served at all the major garrisons until 1901. Following a five-year interlude, the Army garrisoned some black

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8 Sayers to Roger Mills, February 6, 1899, AGO-LR, file #184450, RG 94, NA.

companies at Fort McIntosh and Fort Bliss, respectively located in Laredo and El Paso. Table 2 shows that with the exception of El Paso, the black civilian population which surrounded the military posts declined in the decade after 1900. Only at Brackettville in Kinney County, where families of the Black Seminoles congregated near Fort Clark, did people of African descent constitute a significant proportion of the civilian populace.

African American civilians, though few in number, could mix peacefully with Mexicans and Anglos. The central border town of Del Rio—where in 1900 Blacks comprised 156 of the county's 5,263 population—saw the races participate in certain cultural events.\(^9\) In celebration of June 19th Day commemorating the end of slavery in Texas, Del Rio's black citizens held a parade, dance, and barbecue to the accompaniment of a Mexican band, with several Anglos also in attendance.\(^11\) A few years later, the town welcomed Black Patti, "a negress opera singer" with an all-black band of musicians, whose

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performance in January 1907—according to a local paper—honored that part of the state.¹²

Some evidence even suggests religious syncretism between Blacks and Hispanics. In 1905, a man named Hernandez, arrested for beating an Hispanic female, counter-charged his victim with placing on him a voodoo curse. Latin culture had its own variations of witchcraft but what Hernandez described fits more appropriately with southern or Caribbean voodoo. The woman had assembled Negro bones, teeth, nail clippings, and hair and buried them in her assailant’s yard, where—according to Hernandez—the mixture caused his feet to become swollen.¹³ No matter the validity of Hernandez’s claim, the fact that border Hispanics even knew of such practices suggests the possibility of cultural borrowing from African Americans.

Even given the economic competition between the races, the hatred that Mexicans and Tejanos held for black soldiers seems not to have harmed the border’s black civilians. Hispanics appeared to distinguish between local African Americans, scarce though they were, and the outsiders who entered their communities as


uniformed authorities. This indicates a stronger "anti-military" than an "anti-Black" attitude. As in the 1899 riot at Laredo, Hispanics showed themselves capable of hurling racial epithets but their chief grievance in that case stemmed from the Army's intrusion into local affairs. People in Lower Valley communities had special reasons to despise military intervention. At Laredo in 1886 and again at Rio Grande City in 1888, American troops (all white) suppressed Mexican riots caused by resentment of local political machines.\textsuperscript{14}

The troubles that black soldiers faced in border towns cannot be separated from the perceptions and prejudices with which Rio Grande people regarded the United States Army. An understanding of those views requires some discussion of the class cleavages and political systems which governed their lives. By the turn of the century, political machines, run by Tejano and Anglo elites, dominated southern Texas. Old-line Mexican leaders, by mobilizing Hispanic votes, gained a share of the profits from railroad, mining, and

commercial agriculture. Historian Elliott Young, in his articles on the gente decente (decent people) of Laredo, describes how elites elevated their status through participation in American civil society: education, family background, and celebration of United States cultural values.

Cooperation between Anglos and Mexicans occurred at its best among the wealthy and powerful, a group which included commercial agriculturalists, industrial developers, county politicians and boosters, diplomatic representatives and, not to be forgotten, army officials. By the 1890s, American and Mexican officers at border forts had solidified their cross-border alliance with social engagements, exchanging pleasantries, inspecting each other's troops, and hosting balls and dinners for visiting generals and businessmen. Just as


professionalization drew the Army closer to conservative interests elsewhere, its growing elitism allowed fort commanders and other officers access to the circles of power that dominated border communities.

The Mexican government depended on the support of American consuls and military authorities to stifle border insurgents who challenged industrialization. The American military response to the Catarino Garza rebellion illustrates the important role that the United States Army played in protecting bourgeois interests. Garza, once a clerk in Brownsville, published a series of newspapers in Corpus Christi and Eagle Pass agitating against machine politicians. Gaining a popular following among working-class Mexicans, Garza, from his base in Starr County, tried to organize a revolution to oust Porfirio Diaz in 1891. Troops from Ringgold Barracks intercepted his force of 80 men, who planned to cross the border below Rio Grande City and raise an army of workers for an invasion of the capital. Seeking to arrest Garza for violation of neutrality laws, military officials could not even locate the rebel, who eluded both the Texas Rangers and federal forces. With the help of his supporters, Garza escaped to Florida where he joined
the struggle against the Spanish monarchy in Cuba and later fought totalitarian regimes in Central America. 18

Garza's revolution had two major consequences for civil-military relations. First, it taught American military leaders that their earlier projections of peace and stability on the border were premature. Believing the effectiveness of state and local authorities to be inadequate, they lobbied for a stronger federal presence on the Rio Grande. Second, the Garza affair earned the Army a new depth of unpopularity among lower-class Hispanics for its role in protecting American capitalists and the Diaz regime. During the 1890s, United States troops returned to the border just as anti-American sentiments reached their peak. 19

As it did in Laredo in March 1899, Hispanic resentment sometimes exploded into collective violence against the Army and its soldiers. Tensions in Laredo


worsened after the Tenth Cavalry departed in April for a return trip to Cuba. Company D of the Twenty-fifth Infantry replaced them two months later. For the rest of the year, black infantrymen endured frequent arrests and fines from Laredo policemen. In October, an officer named Jose Cuellar assaulted a soldier, opened his scalp to the skull, and left him untreated in a jail cell for consorting with a Hispanic woman. Such brutality caused the men at Fort McIntosh to travel in groups and to carry weapons during their forays into town. On October 18, Willie Stoner, a local police officer, tried to arrest a soldier for carrying a butcher's knife but was stopped by a crowd of infantrymen. Later that evening, a mob of over 40 soldiers beat Stoner to the ground with their rifle butts and then dispersed into private yards and homes. Some soldiers fired their weapons at random, terrorizing residents and injuring a young Mexican male.

The following day, Laredo police, in cooperation with Lieutenant John M. Campbell who commanded Fort

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20Regimental Returns, Tenth Cavalry, April 1899, AGO, M744, roll 99, NAMP; and Regimental Returns, Twenty-fifth Infantry, June 1899, AGO, M665, roll 258, NAMP.

McIntosh, arrested three privates for Stoner's beating: Privates Joshua Nichols, Benjamin Hover, and Robert Earl, as well as two corporals who later were released. In November, defense attorneys obtained a change of venue, moving the privates' civil trial to Duval County on the grounds that race prejudice in Laredo would prevent impartiality. Major W. H. H. Crowell, who conducted the Inspector General's investigation, blamed the incident in part on "a feeling of antagonism between the Mexican element of the city of Laredo and the soldiers," but also cited "youth and inexperience" on the part of officers and enlisted men. Campbell, according to Crowell's report, did all that was possible to prevent trouble but simply lacked the leadership ability to control the garrison. Lieutenant Colonel Chambers McKibbin, head of the Department of Texas, agreed with Crowell when he wrote that Company D "is made up very largely of recruits young in years and, owing to the short period since enlistment, they have not, as yet, acquired the habits of discipline which come with long service, which would act as a restraint in periods of excitement."

22AGO, file 292843, RG 94, NA.

23Chambers McKibbin, November 13, 1899, AGO, file 292843, RG 94, NA.
McKibbin responded to Crowell's report by ordering the garrison at Fort McIntosh abandoned in mid-November. Once the privates' trial commenced in January 1900, he reopened the garrison with Company F of the Tenth Cavalry. By this time, few Laredo residents distinguished between experienced and inexperienced soldiers, regarding all black troops as potential troublemakers. A local editor admitted "Some how we can't get along with negro troops . . . . We would like to have a garrison of albinos, we think the trouble is all in the color. Take 'm away how, Uncle Sam, and let us do our fighting all by ourselves . . . .".

Some of the border's Anglo residents feared that Black-Hispanic conflict would result in a permanent removal of American forces. George B. Hufford, a white attorney in Laredo, wrote McKibbin that Mexicans, who comprised nine-tenths of the population in border counties, "are an inflammable people" and without United States troops to quiet them, would be liable to form another revolution. Hufford believed that only white soldiers could protect white civilians, seeing "from the

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24 McKibbin, November 15, 1899, ibid.; and Regimental Returns, Tenth Cavalry, January 1900, AGO, M744, roll 9, NAMP.

25 The Chaparaal, November 25, 1899.
recent disturbances that the negros [sic] and the
Mexicans can not get along well together."26

By late 1899, another stormy affair had broken out
between troops stationed at Ringgold Barracks and the
populace at Rio Grande City. Christian has suggested
that only here in 1899, and Brownsville in 1906, did
violence involve military assaults on entire communities
rather than on specific individuals. The seat of Starr
County, Rio Grande City held fewer than 2000 inhabitants-
–nearly all Hispanic--by 1900. Unlike Laredo or El Paso,
the town lacked important railway connections and so
never became a major crossing point for migrant labor.
Serving an agricultural and ranching economy, Rio Grande
City shared many similarities with its larger neighbor
Brownsville, mostly in what it lacked: a diversified
economy, experienced military leaders, and a resident
black population with whom soldiers could associate.
Democratic political machines dominated government in
both communities, particularly Jim Wells' organization in
Cameron County.27

26George B. Hufford, November 22, 1899, AGO, file
292843, RG 94, NA.

27For a detailed discussion of the 1899 episode
in Rio Grande City, see Christian, Black Soldiers in
Jim Crow Texas, 30-45; and "Rio Grande City: Prelude
to the Brownsville Raid," West Texas Historical
Association Year Book 62 (1981): 118-32. The major
Serving as a military base since the Mexican American War, Ringgold Barracks was regarded by Department of Texas officials as one of the more attractive posts in the state but also considered tedious for its isolated location. In May 1899, the arrival of 100 soldiers from Company D of the Ninth Cavalry returned black troops to the same spot where Edward Hatch and his men had faced assault and civil prosecution 24 years earlier. Nearly a dozen black Seminole Scouts from Fort Clark also joined the garrison.\(^28\)

The local justice system proved no more charitable toward black enlisted men than it had in 1875. By September, soldiers complained of arrests, fines, and imprisonments for minor offenses, as well as having to endure disparaging racial slurs. Private William Turner, who had been with the Ninth for five and a half years, claimed that immediately following his arrival, local police arrested him for carrying a pistol, a charge to which he pled guilty and was fined $34.\(^29\)

\(^{28}\)Regimental Returns, Ninth Cavalry, May 1899, AGO, M744, roll 91, NAMP.

\(^{29}\)Scurry to Sayers, TX-AGO, 19-20.
Turner found himself at the center of an incident on the evening of October 17. Troops had been paid on that day and, as was customary, went to the downtown area to drink and gamble. Civilian witnesses claimed that a group of drunken soldiers started a brawl in a gambling house, drew their weapons, rushed the gaming tables, and sent the other customers fleeing into the street. Shortly afterwards, Turner, several blocks away, met a party of five Mexicans who beat and shot him. Private Thomas Nicholson, another five-year veteran, had been shot through the shoulder while trying to flee back to the post. Mexicans stabbed two other black troopers. Authorities apprehended no civilians but did arrest two soldiers who claimed to have been standing on the street when they were attacked by Mexican gamblers. A constable—overheard by an enlisted scout—claimed that the town sheriff, W. W. Shely, had told his men to kill any soldier who resisted arrest.30

The October assignment of Lieutenant Erubian H. Rubottom as post commander did little to improve town-garrison relations. Only 26 years old, Rubottom—who had graduated from the University of California in May and received a commission as second lieutenant—lacked the

30Ibid., 15-20.
practical experience to deal with such a charged situation. During the weeks following the gambling house fracas, rumors circulated about dozens of armed Mexicans planning to charge the post. On November 17, these reports prompted Rubottom to prohibit all troops from leaving Ringgold Barracks. He also closed the garrison to all visitors except those on necessary business. On November 20, three black women, claiming their lives had been threatened by people in Rio Grande City, came to the post seeking protection. Sentries reported "suspicious-looking" Mexicans lurking in the vicinity. Rubottom responded by increasing the guard but shortly after dusk around 7 p.m., the sound of rifle fire was heard around the post. When the firing recurred half an hour later, Rubottom took the extreme step of placing a Gatling gun near the gate. Angling it to the left of the town, fired off rounds for several minutes. On the following morning, Rubottom seized the local telegraph office, reported his actions to his superiors at Fort Brown and San Antonio, and then delivered a threatening missive to the Starr County judge about the folly of another attack by the townspeople. 

31Christian, Black Soldiers in Jim Crow Texas, 32.

32Rubottom to Cyrus S. Roberts, AAG, Dpt. of TX, in Scurry to Sayers, November 27, 1899, TX-AGO.
As Rubottom's actions became public knowledge during the next few days, exaggerated news reports—blared in Texas newspapers—expounded on the possibility of a race war between two minority groups. The Galveston Daily News compiled these accounts in its November 22 issue, with headlines of "The Negroes Terrorized the Place," "Trouble at Ringgold: It Began When a Protest Went Up Against the Presence of Negro Soldiers in Texas," and "They Smiled on Senoritas Who Did Not Repel Their Advances, and This Angered the Mexican Population." In Laredo, stories flew about the "big fight" at Rio Grande City which claimed the lives of 18 black soldiers and a dozen Hispanic civilians. Another source claimed that over 3000 shots had been fired and that all the women and children had left the vicinity.33

Some Anglo observers seemed uncertain as to whether Blacks or Mexicans represented the greater threat. General Henry Corbin, trying to minimize the problem as posing little harm for Whites, declared that "The whole trouble results from a clash between the Mexicans and the niggers, and the turbulent spirits on both sides will be disciplined if necessary."34 Overall, press coverage

33Galveston Daily News, November 22, 1899.
34Ibid., November 23, 1899.
north of the border--by showing little concern for Hispanic indignation--took the side of the black troops and even suggested that the troubles in Laredo and Rio Grande City indicated a Mexican conspiracy to force a military withdrawal from the border region.  

The task of determining the wisdom of Rubottom's actions became the job of two men, Thomas Scurry, Adjutant General of Texas, and Colonel Cyrus Roberts from the Inspector General's Office. In a rare case of state and federal cooperation, the two investigators met with Starr County authorities on November 25 to collect evidence and to interview soldiers and civilians. A disparity in testimony between the two groups soon became evident. Fifteen members of Company D, a Seminole scout, a civilian townswoman, and Rubottom himself all testified to a pattern of discriminatory arrests by county officials. Sergeant Alfred Alexander, the troop quartermaster, explained that residents had warned him not to enter the town on paydays, as Sheriff Shely and his deputy had advised the Mexicans to kill soldiers. 

Most testimony of this type attributed the antipathy to Hispanics' racial prejudice. Oscar McGhee, a sergeant

35Ibid., November 22, 1899.
36Scurry to Sayers, TX-AGO, 21-22.
with the Ninth who had meagre familiarity with Spanish, had overheard residents say many times "no corres negro soldas," which he understood to mean that they did not care for black soldiers.\(^\text{37}\) Roberts and Scurry also heard testimony that dozens of armed Mexicans, none of them locals, had appeared in Rio Grande City and stalked the post vicinity on November 20. As evidence mounted which suggested a concerted effort against the fort and its black troops, Roberts grew convinced about the primacy of Hispanic racism as a driving cause, writing that Mexican witnesses--even in his presence--used profanity when referring to the soldiers as "niggers."\(^\text{38}\)

Investigators, however, also confronted considerable evidence which supported the civilians' side of the story. Eight witnesses claimed that the soldiers themselves had fired into town prior to Rubottom's use of the Gatling gun and that Mexican boys had gathered three pounds of shells and cartridges from Krag-Jorgensen rifles--the standard military issue--on the morning following the shooting.\(^\text{39}\) On November 29, F. W. Seabury, a local resident, submitted a letter to Scurry's office

\(^{37}\)Ibid., 23-25.

\(^{38}\)"Eight-page letter relating to Ringgold incident," December 3, 1899, RG 393, Pt. 1, entry 4894, 3.

claiming to know of a black sergeant who had admitted that 30 or 40 men from his company, whom the sergeant described as fools and hotheads, had planned the entire raid. As for black grievances about police harassment, Sheriff Shely claimed as "nonsense" the charge that they had been singled out for discriminatory treatment. Shely even claimed that he had been insulted by residents for his excessive leniency with troublemakers. In answer to a complaint that locals despised the troops for associating with Hispanic women, Deputy Marshal K. H. Merren explained that "the Mexicans generally classify such women as negro prostitutes and have nothing to do with them." Further defense for the local citizenry came from Starr County Judge T. W. Kennedy, a Union veteran and a 30-year border resident, who claimed familiarity with the history of black troops on the Rio Grande:

Thousands of negro soldiers have been stationed at various Posts along this boundary during that time. They have readily affiliated with our population and with the exception of the rowdy element among them and our people[,] nothing has ever occurred of any consequence to mar the harmony of the two elements, until these soldiers were stationed here.

Scurry to Sayers, TX-AGO, 49-51.
Ibid., 36-38.
Ibid., 47-48.
By "rowdy elements," Kennedy meant the frequent personal violence between buffalo soldiers and Hispanics prior to 1885, not the group patterns which characterized the latest events in Rio Grande City. Kennedy did not regard racism to be the problem as much as the poor character and ineffective leadership of the officers at Ringgold Barracks. Kennedy chided the post surgeon and other officers as "liquor addicts," whom he claimed constantly visited the social club, mingled with residents, and had every opportunity to learn about a planned assault on the fort had such a plan existed. Scurry shared this view, claiming that Rubottom's youth and inexperience caused him to resort to a display of force based on the rumors of soldiers and camp-followers. He also scored Rubottom for not utilizing the services of his Seminole scouts, who knew the area and the language, and so might have obtained reliable information about the Mexicans' intentions.

Given the conflicting evidence provided by soldiers and townsfolk, Scurry and Roberts could establish the guilt of neither group with regard to the shooting of November 20. The investigation did, however, reveal some

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relevant information which extended beyond the immediate circumstances of the shooting. E. E. Neal, an attorney at Alamogordo, New Mexico who lived in Rio Grande City from 1896 to 1899, attributed Black-Hispanic conflict to the manipulations of Starr County’s Democratic party and to the Wells machine of Brownsville. Neal claimed that Wells’ network owned and operated the gambling house where the October brawl had occurred, and that Judge Kennedy and other county officials operated a prostitution and blackmail ring which provided Mexican women for the soldiers. On every payday after the prostitutes had serviced their customers, pimps would barge in and play the role of injured brother or husband. If a soldier then refused to relinquish his cash, he faced robbery, a beating, and a night in jail courtesy of the sheriff and his deputies. Of the people of Rio Grande City, Neal claimed that 75 percent of them sympathized with Mexico and 50 percent had supported Spain during the Cuban war. Ever since the failed Garza rebellion, troops at Ringgold Barracks had been subjected to ill-treatment. Democratic politicians gained votes by casting themselves as the town’s protectors from the Army and its black soldiers. Neal pointed out that during the smallpox epidemic in Laredo, local officials had refused to enforce the quarantine laws until after election day.
Then, once the black soldiers arrived to restore order, "they were praised by the very local, blood-sucking vampires who now side with the Mexicans against them."  

Neal's letter strengthened a growing belief by federal investigators that racism--while a strong factor--did not by itself explain civilian antagonism. Apparently, local elites had maintained their influence with Hispanic voters by manipulating fears about the Army and its soldiers. McKibbin, in responding to Roberts' report, believed that "the recent troubles there [Rio Grande City], as well as at Laredo" originated from "a race prejudice against colored soldiers . . . fostered by a class of county officials as a means of increasing and solidifying their political following among the Mexican population along the Rio Grande." McKibbin noticed that "It has made little difference in past years whether the troops at Fort Ringgold were white or black, [for] the state system of fees in criminal cases made then, as now, the United States soldier the easy victim."  

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45E. E. Neal, November 23, 1899, AGO, file 296983, RG 94, NA.

46"Eighteen-page report relating to Twenty-fifth Infantry after Brownsville," synopsis of Ringgold incident, p. 16, ibid.

47McKibbin to AG, December 4, 1899, ibid.
By contrast, state of Texas authorities discounted such theories as ludicrous. When Scurry and Roberts filed their respective reports, both agreed that Rubottom had acted improperly, though neither recommended his reprimand. But while both also acknowledged a lack of certainty as to the guilty parties, Scurry's report to Governor Sayers placed nearly all blame on the soldiers, claiming a pattern of drunkenness and resentment toward residents. In response, federal investigators accused state and county authorities of encouraging prejudice against one minority group in order to pacify another, a charge they extended to the Texas adjutant general's office. In a backhanded attack on Scurry's objectivity, Roberts stated "that the only way he [Scurry] can control the Mexican element is by appearing to agree with their own statements and prejudices."  

The friction between state and federal investigators reflected a larger dispute between the governor's office and the Army's Department of Texas. Following the smallpox episode in Laredo, Sayers insisted that all black troops be withdrawn from Texas, believing that their lack of discipline--and the apparent inability of officers to control them--presented a threat to civil

48"Letter relating to Ringgold incident," RG 393, Part 1, entry 4894, NA.
order. In answering Sayers' charge, McKibbin defended one minority by demeaning another, replying that Blacks only served in border towns where "an undesirable class" of Mexicans lived." The Ringgold incident in November worsened these tensions, reviving conflict between military and civil jurisdictions that had last appeared during the Hatch debacle of 1875. After receiving Scurry's report, Sayers tried to obtain McKibbin's cooperation in having a state court issue warrants for Rubottom and other participants in the shooting. When McKibbin refused on the grounds that this would grant "every petty court in the country" control over the Army, Sayers called his position "absolutely untenable, and results in making the civil authority subordinate to the military, when the reverse of this has always been one of the most cherished ideas" of democracy.50 By late December, a grand jury at Rio Grande City--for the second time in its history--indicted a post commander by calling for Rubottom's arrest. This action prompted an appeal

49Sayers to Secretary of War, October 31, 1899, and McKibbins to Sayers, December 16, 1899, AGO, file 296983, RG 94, NA.

50Sayers to McKibbin, December 18, 1899, AGO, file 296983, RG 94, NA.
from Sayers to President McKinley for Rubottom's surrender and civil prosecution.\textsuperscript{51}

In the end, Rubottom suffered no civil consequences but his actions did cause the Army to reassess its role in south Texas. Echoing the sentiments of McKibbin and others, Roberts recommended that the garrison at Ringgold be withdrawn, claiming that rapid railway transport for troops from Laredo and Brownsville made the cost of a permanent garrison superfluous.\textsuperscript{52} Although no steps were taken in that direction, the Army replaced the "offensive troops" in January with another black unit: Company G of the Tenth Cavalry, which occupied the post until August 1900.\textsuperscript{53}

Describing the situation at Rio Grande City is far easier than explaining it, given the inconclusive evidence as to the perpetrators of the November 20 shooting. Both the soldiers and the townspeople possessed the motive and opportunity to instigate a frontal assault on the other, and could exert sufficient pressure on individual members afterwards to attribute

\textsuperscript{51}Brackett News, December 23, 1899.

\textsuperscript{52}Roberts, "Eighteen-page report relating to Twenty-fifth Infantry after Brownsville," synopsis of Ringgold incident, 15-16, AGO, file 292843, RG 94, NA.

\textsuperscript{53}Post Returns, Ringgold Barracks, August 1900, AGO-LR, M617, roll 1023, NAMP.
guilt to the other side. At any rate, the explanation of racial antipathy does not suffice as the sole causative factor. The black Seminole Scouts, all of whom spoke Spanish, had no problems with the townspeople. During the excitement in the post when Rubottom fired over the town, the Seminoles stood back and observed the activity with curious detachment, not siding with either faction.54 At the heart of the matter may have been local elites' need to buttress their position with lower-class Hispanics by demonizing the soldiers, even while recognizing the town's own economic dependence on army revenues.

Department of Texas officials grew convinced that such conflicts resulted less from prejudice against Blacks per se than against black soldiers specifically, a view confirmed by yet another crisis in February 1900. Roberts had no sooner filed his report on the Ringgold affair than two months later he was dispatched to investigate an incident in El Paso, this time involving Company A of the Twenty-fifth Infantry. Located hundreds of miles from the cotton belt, the west Texas town had every reason to expect harmonious race relations, with its 400-plus black residents employed in businesses and

54Scurry to Sayers, November 27, 1899, TX-AGO, 3-4.
professions. By contrast, the city’s Mexicans and Chinese toiled in manual jobs and occupied the lower end of the racial hierarchy. El Paso’s Democratic Party resented Blacks’ loyalty to the Republicans, while some Hispanics still recalled the role of black troops in the 1877 Salt War. But with an expanding industrial economy and an amiable relationship with Fort Bliss, El Paso’s prospect for peaceful Black-White relations appeared to be bright.

But from the time of Company A’s arrival almost a year earlier, residents had complained about the soldiers’ disorderly behavior. The enlisted men themselves—just as in Laredo and Rio Grande City—claimed harassment and discrimination from police. Between June 1899 and February 1900, El Paso authorities had arrested 13 soldiers. On February 7, a police officer was killed in the city jail by two infantrymen whom he had arrested in the red-light district. Several days later, a group from Company A fired into the same


jail and killed a second policeman in order to free two comrades being held at the time for drunken and disorderly conduct. Despite some local vigilante bluster about marching on the fort, civil and military authorities cooperated in identifying and punishing the guilty parties. Prosecution efforts centered on Sergeant John Kipper, a Spanish American War veteran, who was tried in May and found guilty of murder by a civilian jury of eleven Anglos and one Hispanic. During Kipper’s trial and his subsequent (and unsuccessful) appeal, El Paso citizens feared reprisals from the black soldiers, creating an environment that Christian has called a "racial crisis." Residents breathed a collective sigh of relief when the Army relocated the entire Twenty-fifth Infantry to the Philippines in the fall of 1900.58

El Paso’s African American residents seemed to have suffered no damaging effects from the affair. Anglos and Hispanics distinguished between "our" Blacks and the "outsiders" imported by the military. McKibbin even attempted to clarify this distinction:

There is, unquestionably, a very strong prejudice throughout all the old slave States against colored troops, and this is quite a separate feeling from the ordinary race prejudice which is,

58Regimental Returns, Twenty-fifth Infantry, September-October 1900, AGO, M665, roll 258, NAMP.
perhaps, less at El Paso than at other border towns in this department. A colored man in uniform represents authority, and this idea suggests superiority, which is bitterly resented. It is not because the colored soldier is disorderly - for, as the rule, they behave better than white soldiers, and even when drunk, are less troublesome to manage - but because they are soldiers. 59

By exaggerating the "orderly behavior" of the enlisted men, McKibbin sought to shift the blame to civilian racism. Roberts' report affirmed this view by distinguishing anti-Black prejudice from the special kind reserved for black soldiers:

I doubt if this [racial prejudice] obtains at least in El Paso, to the same extent as at Laredo and Rio Grande City, as a race prejudice, as negroes are largely employed as servants or laborers, but against colored men as soldiers the feeling is, perhaps, even stronger. . . . It is an unpleasant subject to mention, but it is unquestionably true, that a negro soldier in uniform is frequently subjected to insult, though behaving with perfect propriety, for no other reason than his color. 60

These observations are reconcilable with previously discussed theories about interracial rivalry. African Americans and Hispanics could live in peace until members of one group—in this case, soldiers wearing the colors of federal authority—appeared to surpass the other in economic and social advancement.


60Ibid., 356.
In light of the scenes in Laredo, Rio Grande City, El Paso, and others, the 1906 Brownsville incident can be seen as part of a larger pattern of border conflict. Historians of this episode often assume "southern racism" to be a definitive factor but ignore the town's actual racial composition. Few veterans of the Confederate Army had settled in Brownsville after 1865, while the number of black civilians had remained low—from 150 to 200—between 1870 and 1900. Like other towns in southern Texas, Brownsville had seen recent increases in migration of Whites from the Deep South but these numbers paled beside waves of migrants from Mexico. Contemporaries described Brownsville's 1906 population of about 8000 people as less than one-quarter "white." Most of these were "Spaniards" who managed the city's businesses or northern railroad developers who relocated there after 1900. In terms of ethnic mixture, Brownsville bore little resemblance to the Deep South or even the Texas cotton belt. Instead, it had all the characteristics of a Mexican border town, with Hispanics comprising over half of its population.\(^6\) As one Anglo observer claimed, 

"The foreign element is perceptible in everything around us," with Mexican coinage serving as the unofficial currency, and English-speakers having to learn Spanish in order to communicate.62

During Brownsville's heyday as a major Gulf port in the 1860s, Hispanics got along well with black Union soldiers, some of whom even deserted the service and their homeland for life in Mexico. But within four decades, this amiability had disappeared, along with the town's hopes for unrivaled prosperity. Until 1902, railroad development had bypassed Brownsville for other Valley communities, reaching San Antonio in the 1870s and Laredo in 1881. As of 1905, travel to neighboring Corpus Christi still meant wagon rides or overland marches. Incessant raids from Mexican bandits in the 1870s, followed two decades later by hurricanes and outbreaks of cholera and yellow fever, had delayed capitalistic development until the early twentieth century.

As of 1906, Brownsville's black civilian population of fewer than 100 presented little threat to orderly race relations. Fewer than a dozen black families resided there, working as porters, janitors, or in other low-paid service jobs. Itinerant black agricultural workers, or

62Chatfield, Twin Cities of the Border, 29.
occasionally a discharged soldier, arrived but did not stay long, not once they discovered their inability to compete with cheap Mexican labor. Because of the expense in following state segregation laws that required separate schools for black children, the Brownsville school board classified Hispanics for a time as "colored." One male instructor, a discharged soldier from the Twenty-fourth Infantry, enjoyed great popularity with Mexican and Black families. Post officials often visited the schools and instructed the children in drill and military discipline.

While southern traditions influenced Brownsville more than other border towns, black civilians' insignificant numbers made "Black-White" relations a relatively minor affair. Even in terms of "Anglo-Hispanic" relations, race played a small role compared to the class stratification of Lower Valley society. The majority of residents spoke no English and had little familiarity with Anglo culture. By contrast,

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64 Chatfield, The Twin Cities of the Border, 16-17. For discussion of Brownsville's education system at the turn of the century, see Kearney, Studies in Brownsville History, 190-94.
Brownsville's Hispanic elites—a group which included several wealthy Spanish and "mixed" families—resented the title "Mexican" as pejorative, seldom intermingled with the lower classes, and preferred the company of Anglos. Officers at Fort Brown gained easy acceptance into these privileged circles, attending balls and receptions, and exchanging social visits with civic and business leaders from Brownsville and its sister city Matamoros.

The problems which black soldiers faced in Brownsville had less to do with regional racial mores, which we might characterize as "southern," than with the peculiarities of a militarized border area. In his report on the El Paso case, Roberts recognized the existence "in all border towns in the state, of a feeling of hostility, or prejudice, to say the least, against colored men in uniform [original emphasis]. . . . It is impossible to ignore this fact and, so long as colored soldiers are stationed in these border towns, there will be troubles of one kind or another, which no care or vigilance on the part of officers can prevent."65

Of other cases where black soldiers clashed with Hispanics, the Brownsville episode shared the most

similarities with the incident in Rio Grande City. Both of the Lower Valley towns lacked the stabilizing influences which—as they did in El Paso—could contain the violence: a sizeable Black population, a prosperous local economy, and a sedate, non-politicized labor force. Local growers relied on the steady importation of Mexican laborers, most of whom sympathized with revolutionary efforts to oust Diaz. The names of Juan Cortina and Catarino Garza evoked more passions among Lower Valley Hispanics than elsewhere, giving rise to special hatred reserved for American soldiers.

Even considering the features that Brownsville shared with other border towns, its immediate history suggested some optimism that an affair similar to what had transpired at Rio Grande City would not recur. Troop L of the Ninth Cavalry had been quartered at Fort Brown from May 1899 to January 1900. Upon their replacement with Troop E from the Tenth Cavalry, the town's one newspaper praised the Ninth's orderly conduct. After the Tenth's departure in February 1901, no black soldiers occupied the garrison again until Companies B, C and D from the Twenty-fifth Infantry arrived in July 1906.

66 Brownsville Daily Herald, February 1, 1900.
67 Post Returns, Fort Brown, February 1901 to July 1906, AGO, M617, rolls 153-154, RG 94, NAMP.
Likewise, the infantrymen's previous assignment indicates no unusual disposition towards civilian conflict. Following a stint in the Philippines, these companies of the Twenty-fifth, stationed at Fort Niobrara until 1906, had no problems with Whites living in nearby Valentine, Nebraska. Dependent on post expenditures and wary of Indian trouble from the neighboring Rosebud reservation, Valentine citizens—as a local editor put it—thought the Twenty-fifth to be a "gentlemanly, better-behaved lot of men" than most white soldiers they had seen.⁶⁸

However, when considering how quickly conditions at Brownsville deteriorated in the summer of 1906, these earlier observations—made by officers, editors and civic leaders—can be regarded with skepticism. Witnesses later claimed that even prior to 1902, Brownsville police had seemed "eager and overzealous to do their duty, especially with the soldiers." Policemen arrested enlisted men for minor infractions while permitting intoxicated Mexicans to wander the streets.⁶⁹ As for the

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peaceful nature of the infantrymen, the testimony of Charles N. Lunkenheimer, a railroad employee who escorted the troops to Fort Brown, proves rather illuminating. Lunkenheimer related a story that while en route, the soldiers had asked if he knew of any "colored saloons" in Brownsville. When he answered no, one replied

"Well, we don't care whether there is any of them or not. We will do like we did in so and so. When we first went to so and so we couldn't get a damn thing in the place, but, by God, we were not there but two weeks when we showed them we were there to drink; gave them a couple of clips under the lip, and we could get any damn thing we wanted in town."

A fellow infantryman who overheard the conversation then attempted to apologize for his comrade's attitude:

"Now, wasn't that nice? Now, that is just the way with this regiment. We have got some of the nicest boys in this regiment that you can find anywhere, and then, we have got some of the toughest. Now, that is just the kind of people that does the dirt, and we all have to take the blame.

Later, in another car, Lunkenheimer described Brownsville to some other black soldiers as "nothing but a Mexican town."

"Any colored there?" one asked, I said no more than a dozen, and he says "Holy Christ!" I told them they could do like my boys [employed brakemen] do and get them Mexican girls. He says "No, I am tired of Mexicans, I have had lots of Mexicans in the Philippines." Another said "Any white folks there?"
I said yes, and he says "Well, by God, they are good enough for me." Lunkenheimer’s story, of course, should not be taken at face value. But not being a resident of Brownsville, he had no personal interest in lying to investigators, or in shifting blame to the soldiers rather than the townspeople.

Most primary sources on the Brownsville shooting and its immediate causes derive from the Inspector General’s 1906 report, and from Senator Joseph Foraker’s congressional investigation two years later. Like the Rio Grande City episode, the evidence divides between civilian testimony which placed all blame on the troops, and military testimony which faulted local racism. White soldiers from the Eighteenth and Twenty-sixth Infantries, who occupied Fort Brown through July, verified claims about civilian prejudice toward Blacks. When the assignment was announced in May, Mexican women crossed themselves to ward off possible rape from "Negro brutes." S. P. Wreford complained "We had negro soldiers stationed here a few years ago and had trouble with them."

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Wreford's comment may have referred not to Fort Brown but to the Rio Grande City shooting.\textsuperscript{71}

White soldiers testified that residents had gathered on street corners, had threatened to annihilate the whole infantry battalion, and even talked about recruiting mercenaries from Mexico should the Blacks step out of line. A handful of policemen, which included Victoriano Fernandez and Genero Padron, warned citizens "not to give the niggers an inch." One remarked "I want to kill a couple of them when they get here."\textsuperscript{72} Private Otis C. West observed a Mexican boy carrying spent cartridges in his hat; when West inquired as to their purpose, the child replied "I am going to take them down town and sell them to kill niggers with."\textsuperscript{73}

Following the arrival of the Twenty-fifth companies on June 28, black soldiers complained about the same problems that their fellows had endured in other border towns: police harassment, segregated saloons, and racial slurs. An adolescent girl--the daughter of a local

\begin{footnotes}
\item[71] S. P. Wreford to Charles Culberson, May 26, 1906, AGO, file 1135832, RG 94, NA.
\item[72] Nelson Huron, \textit{Affray at Brownsville, Texas}, vol. 2, 1111, and Alexander J. Levie, \textit{Affray at Brownsville, Texas}, vol. 3, 2929-44.
\item[73] Otis C. West, \textit{Affray at Brownsville, Texas}, vol. 2, 1149.
\end{footnotes}
Jewish family named Cowen--struck up conversation with a black guard, who asked her if she was a "half-blood nigger" or a "half-blood Mexican." When she answered that her mother was Mexican, the guard responded "You look like it," whereupon the girl shot back "Well, you look like an ape." Local tavern owners adhered to state segregation requirements but because of the profitability to be gained from soldiers' patronage, at least one establishment--John Tillman's Ruby Saloon--invited black troops to drink at the rear bar. Enlisted men continued to patronize Tillman's until August 10, when two soldiers opened their own "Negro beer joint," an action that cut into Tillman's profits. Later testimony suggested that Mexican police had staged the August 13 shooting in order to force the closing of the new establishment, or even to run the black troops out of town.

An accurate reconstruction of the shooting itself remains difficult because of the contradictory testimony of soldiers and townspeople. Earlier that day, Major Charles Penrose, who commanded Fort Brown, responded to a complaint that some of his men had assaulted a white

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74 Affray at Brownsville, Texas, vol. 3, 2052.
75 Weaver, The Brownsville Raid, 249-54.
woman, and so agreed to confine all soldiers to the post. Around midnight on August 13, between 100 and 200 shots were fired into homes and businesses located near the fort. At Tillman's saloon, a young bartender named Frank Natus was killed, and shots were fired into the Cowen family's home as well. The shooting lasted about ten minutes. On the following day, a search of the fort vicinity turned up dozens of spent cartridges. 76

Penrose had ordered a personnel check immediately after the shooting and found no men missing but locals still blamed the black infantrymen. Brownsville residents and people from surrounding areas reacted with terror and outrage at the latest apparent atrocity committed by black soldiers. Ferry company employees reported "a constant exodus" of Hispanic and Anglo families fleeing to Matamoros and seeking protection from the Mexican government. 77 Captain William McDonald of the Texas Rangers arrived, heavily armed, on August 21 with plans to enter the post and demand the culprits' surrender. Local and federal authorities cooperated in excluding McDonald from the investigation. 78 Penrose


77Affray at Brownsville, Texas, vol. 3, 2533-36.

78Ibid, 2532.
planned to relocate the companies to Ringgold Barracks but, fearing for the men's safety if stationed elsewhere on the border, transferred them instead to Fort Reno, Oklahoma.

By late August, the Inspector General's investigation led by Major Augustus Blocksom had produced no evidence which could identify the guilty parties with certainty. Several eyewitnesses who at first identified the assailants as "black" equivocated during later examination. Jose Martinez, a Brownsville druggist and a citizen of Mexico, informed Blocksom's staff that despite his earlier testimony, he could not swear the shooters had been Negroes, only that their faces were darker than their uniforms. His observation could well have applied to dark-skinned Hispanics.79 Since the majority of Lower Valley residents spoke no English and tried to avoid American authorities, most civilian testimony in Blocksom's investigation came from Brownsville elites, many of whom were eager to shift blame away from the townspeople. When questioned as to possible Mexican prejudice against Blacks, attorney Rentfro B. Creager responded "They [Hispanics] have absolutely none. . . . Along the border the negro is received as an equal by the

79Jose Martinez, ibid., 2071-84.
Mexicans," a statement which ignored years of Black-Hispanic conflict. 80

The testimony of Captain William Kelly, chairman of the Citizens’ Committee which sought the soldiers’ prosecution, reveals some of the class biases which civilian witnesses brought to the investigation. Kelly had led black Union soldiers during the Civil War and had a son who held a captaincy in the Ninth Cavalry. One of Brownsville’s leading citizens since 1866, Kelly claimed that Mexicans fraternized openly with black troops and harbored no objections to their presence. He did allude to police harassment of drunken soldiers, men who—unlike civilians—always paid their fines and thus became easy targets. Nevertheless, Kelly attributed all fault to the enlisted men’s "disgraceful discipline," lack of respect for authority, and proclivity for lying. Interviewed by Foraker’s committee in 1908, Kelly admitted his belief that "the low class" of Mexican, which included Brownsville’s police force, was just as capable of conspiracy. The actual wording of his testimony is significant:

Q. If this shooting was not done by the negroes, it must have been done by white men, was it not?
A. Yes, sir; taking Mexicans as white men.

80Rentfro B. Creager, ibid., 2839-44.
Q. Yes; taking the Mexicans too?
A. Brown men.
Q. But we are technically speaking; they are white. It must have been done by white men?
A. Why, of course.
Q. Then if the white men did it the same rule applies to it, does it not, as to the negroes, that none of them have disclosed it?
A. That proposition is so utterly at variance with the facts that it is not worth discussing. The proposition that white men went out into the night and shot up their own town, shot into the houses where there are women and children, in order to get rid of a few negroes, is not to be considered for a moment. . . .

Kelly evidently believed "white men" incapable of the levels of deceit and violence possible for black soldiers and lower-class Mexicans, even though he acknowledged Mexicans as "white," or at least "brown," in the very same testimony.

The polarized responses of border residents to the shooting revealed more of a civil-military division than a fracturing along racial lines. An editor at Del Rio shared Kelly's belief that soldiers' own rough demeanor in border towns provoked such trouble. White troops were not immune to aggressive behavior either but when the soldiers happened to be black, the added factor of race made hostile situations inevitable:

The haughty and insolent bearing of a few troops, especially at the smaller posts, is responsible for

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81Kelly, ibid, vol. 3, 2563 (direct quote), 2518-21, 2527-31, 2558-63.
much of the trouble that frequently arises between
the soldiery and the civilian... The feeling
between the white soldiers and civilians are often
acrimonious, because of the overbearing conduct of
some soldiers. It is unfortunately true that there
is a tendency in military life, which is sometimes
displayed here as offensively as in Europe, to
assume an air of superiority over civilians and
elbow them out of the way whenever the two classes
come in contact.\textsuperscript{82}

Army officials denied such charges and even disparaged
Hispanic civilians in order to defend their black
enlisted men. Major Penrose sprang to the Twenty-fifth's
defense when he declared that nearly half of the regiment
had experienced combat and that all of his men had
remained brave and loyal to the American flag. These
actions, in his mind, made the soldiers' word as equally
if not more reliable as that of the Mexican residents of
Brownsville.\textsuperscript{83}

Civilian complaints about black troops, however, had
some merit. Especially after 1898, African American
recruits had become more resistant to segregation and
abuse from civil authorities. As Blocksom's report
confessed, "the colored soldier is much more aggressive
in his attitude on the social equality question than he

\textsuperscript{82}Val Verde County Herald and Del Rio Record-News,
August 31, 1906.

\textsuperscript{83}Penrose, Affray at Brownsville, Texas, vol. 3,
3101-02.
used to be." Black soldiers, hardened by years of service in Cuba and the Philippines, seemed fiercely protective of their rights when challenged by perceived "foreigners." As Lunkenheimer's story about the men en route to Brownsville suggests, discord arose from the actions of a confrontational minority but once attacked, a sense of group camaraderie caused all to support and protect one another.

Investigators who sought information on the Brownsville case described "a wooden, stolid look" on the face of every soldier interviewed, with each denying "any knowledge of the circumstances connected with or individuals concerned in the affair." Hoping to prompt the innocent into revealing the guilty parties, Penrose had the suspect companies held without privileges at Fort Reno. By mid-September, he realized this action to have been "an utter failure" which had the contrary effect of strengthening group unity and silence. Five weeks after the shooting, Penrose concluded that the men in Companies B, C, and D would never cooperate with the investigation:

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84Blocksom, Report on Brownsville Affray, 430.

I am strongly of the opinion that but few men have any knowledge of the deplorable Brownsville affair, but it is quite evident these few will never betray their comrades [sic] under present conditions. The majority of the men, particularly the old soldiers who have served their country for years gallantly and faithfully, and borne themselves honorably, feel this matter very deeply, and I believe, are doing all they can to detect the guilty, but it must be remembered the negro race is a very secretive one, and those having knowledge of the shooting, without being participants, will hesitate a long time under most adverse conditions, before giving information.  

The refusal to cooperate worsened a situation that grew more volatile through the fall of 1906. The Brownsville affair involved a well-organized citizens’ effort which—through political pressure on state legislators and congressmen—petitioned for the dismissal and prosecution of the infantrymen. Although the conflicting testimony and lack of physical evidence prevented any civil court from issuing indictments, the Army had aroused tensions with state officials too often to protect the accused soldiers on this occasion.

President Theodore Roosevelt, taking the men’s silence as proof of conspiracy, accepted the advice of the Inspector General’s office and the Secretary of War and announced the dishonorable discharge of the men in B, C, and D companies on November 6, with no formal court-

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86 Penrose to Military Secretary, Dpt. of TX, September 20, 1906, AGO, file 1135832, RG 94, NA.
martial or filing of official charges. In defending this measure, Roosevelt conceded that a "conflict of evidence" existed which indicated blame on both sides. However, he considered this "a wholly unimportant matter" in terms of meting out justice. From Roosevelt's perspective, the soldiers' chief crime had been to place racial solidarity before their oaths to uphold the law:

If the colored men elect to stand by criminals of their own race because they are of their own race, they assuredly lay up for themselves the most dreadful day of reckoning. Every farsighted friend of the colored race in its efforts to strive onward and upward should teach first, as the most important lesson, alike to the white man and the black, the duty of treating the individual man strictly on his worth as he shows it. 87

Political opportunism likely motivated the timing of the discharges; not wanting his decision to damage black voters' support for Republican candidates, the president delayed announcement until after the midterm elections.

The dismissal of 167 men from the Twenty-fifth Infantry evoked strong public sentiments. Stories proliferated about 20-year veterans submitting their firearms and leaving the Army in tears and disgrace. Newspapers focused on the soldiers' race and the fact that the shooting had occurred in Texas, with no mention

of previous troubles on the Rio Grande. National
dialogue on the subject already had begun to interpret
the shooting in Black-White terms. Letters and telegrams
that flowed into newspaper and governmental offices
revealed a wide range of responses. One white southerner
wrote

. . . In the first place no decent man would have
stationed nigger soldiers down there, where the
feeling between the races was so bitter. It was an
insult thrown in the face of helpless people by a
black-hearted cur, who ought to be in hades. . . .

A few more murderous breaks by these black
hellions and it will be found out that the Southern
rifle has not forgot its cunning. . . . The Creator
Himself stamped inequality upon the mind and heart
of the coon and yankees can hug the black off and
straighten out the kinky hair as much as they
please, but they cannot impreg him with the
principles of manhood . . .

To hades with the nigger soldiers! to hades
with the white scallowags who are sorry enough to
commend them! to hades with the "main guy," whoever
he is, that ordered the brutes to Texas. 88

Not all white respondents saw Brownsville as a
revisitation of federal Reconstruction, however. One
veteran sympathized with the discharged soldiers, and
criticized Roosevelt’s action as harsh:

These men know nothing so why do you use your
authority to arbitrarily dismiss them? I am an old
soldier from the Civil War who worked with colored
troops, and know that they stood by their guns in
the Spanish American War. I am a Democrat but know
them as faithful, loyal, & trustworthy, and consider
one of them as my best friend. This ruckus is no

88 Anonymous letter titled "Brownsville Outrage,"
AGO, file 1135832. RG 94, NA.
reason to treat them this way. Give these poor tired old men, some of them sixty years old, a square deal. 89

Even some white Texans found the abuse of American soldiers unconscionable, illustrating the way that military service could bridge gaps across racial lines:

Your "prompt action" against an entire regiment of men seems similar to the Spanish Inquisition which also invented impossible crimes and then served punishments to transgressors. No more than ten out of a hundred likely know the identity of the murderer. To discharge twenty-year veterans is akin to physical torture. . . .

I am an average Southern white man, with a love of our country well grown in my nature. I submit that the army is not a place for negroes at all. They should be drilled in the arts of peace and industry, not skilled in the trade of slaughter. The overwhelming sentiment of our people favors allowing the negro the privilege to work and live in peace.

It has appeared necessary to burn a few of them as a warning to others, but we just as emphatically insist that industry, sobriety and virtue should be commended when practiced by them that others may be encouraged to do likewise, and we hope that all will be necessary in dealing with them is to punish the individual malefactor, and not to damn them en masse, guilty and innocent, as you have done. 90

Although black soldiers had clashed with civilians in border towns several times before, only the Brownsville affair and the subsequent discharges captured the public spotlight and galvanized black opinion

89Letter to President Roosevelt, November 13, 1906, AGO, file 1135832, RG 94, NA.

90The West Texas Monitor (San Angelo), November 23, 1906.
nationwide. The shooting itself differed little from other post-1898 episodes and even shared similarities with earlier incidents from the frontier period. But ever since the Spanish American War, African American communities had devoted more attention to the cause of black enlistment, and now stood ready to defend the accused soldiers. At a crowded prayer service for the discharged men in Washington's Second Baptist Church, Reverend W. Bishop Johnson accused the War Department of sending Blacks on purpose "to the enemy's country, to the South" in order to drive them out of the Army. 91

Some black editors retreated from their earlier declarations of national loyalty: "Patriotism? We love our country as much as it loves us; no more, no less." 92 The New York Age and the Chicago Broad Ax joined other newspapers in condemning as "traitors" any black man who enlisted in an Army which treated them so unjustly. 93 Marcus Wheatland from Newport, Rhode Island blamed the whole problem on Blacks' "slavish and blind adherence to the Republican party," suggesting that a Democratic

91Washington Bee, November 17, 1906.
92New York Age, November 15, 1906.
93Ibid., November 22, 1906; and Broad Ax, November 10, 1906.
administration could not bode worse than the latest humiliation handed out by Roosevelt. 94

For others, the discharges prompted greater awareness of the need for common cause with other people of color. The Washington Bee challenged all black soldiers to see how their service aided the spread of white racism:

. . . wherever they have gone, they [Whites] have carried race hatred. They say in effect, Cubans and Filipinos are negroes, and a negro has no rights which a white man is bound to respect. Since they have begun this thing let us hope they can continue it until the "yellow peril" and the "black peril" realize their common interest. 95

But not all black spokesmen dismissed the need for national service. The Indianapolis Freeman, asserting that "Negro people all over the country are angry - very angry," also warned against efforts to discourage enlistment, believing that this would play into the hands of southern racists: "As our retirement from the army would so immensely gratify the Negro-haters therein, we are not ready to assist their nefarious scheme of freeze-out by getting out voluntarily." 96

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94 New York Age, November 22, 1906.
95 Washington Bee, December 1, 1906.
96 Freeman, (Indianapolis), November 17, 1906.
Like most events which assume national importance, the local circumstances which provoked the Brownsville shooting received little serious examination once the case became a cause celebre. No media coverage, black or white, doubted that the affray originated with former Confederates' disdain for armed Blacks. The New York Age, perhaps the most heated of all black papers in its denunciation of Brownsville citizens, wrote "The sturdy and proud independence and unflinching bearing of these troops immediately swelled the Cracker breast with rage and hatred." 97 By omitting the Black-Hispanic relationship which helped to provoke the incident, national press coverage perpetuated ignorance of Brownsville's demography and culture. In excoriating Roosevelt, the Broad Ax declared that his action is conclusive proof that as far as it is in his power to do so, he will prevent all Colored men in the employ of the government from defending their lives, their wives and their children from the murderous assaults of the vicious and lawless elements of the whites in the south! 98

Other black papers emphasized the racism factor in a cooler manner. The Washington Bee and the Cleveland Plain-Dealer admitted the troops' probable guilt in starting a riot but charged that Roosevelt's decision

97 New York Age, August 23, 1906.
98 Broad Ax (Chicago), September 1, 1906.
punished the wrong parties and without the proper due process. When a mob of white soldiers had stormed a jail in Walla Walla, Washington and lynched a prisoner for murdering a soldier some years earlier, the War Department had not dismissed the entire regiment, but blamed the post commander and officers for failing to enforce discipline. Why, the papers asked, had not the white leadership at Fort Brown been held to the same standard of accountability as the black infantrymen? 99

Although commentators overlooked the local context which contributed to the affray itself, Americans’ perceptions about the raid and its causes proved more determinative for the soldiers’ fate than the actual shooting. Had the affair been publicized as a battle between two minority groups, the white majority’s attitude might have remained indifferent and the consequences for the soldiers may have been less severe. Such had been the case in the Laredo and Rio Grande City riots, for indeed, on those occasions, the guilt of the black soldiers was supported by a stonger preponderance of evidence than had been available in the Brownsville case.

99*Washington Bee, November 17, 1906, reprinted from Cleveland Plain-Dealer.
African Americans who understood the incident as another example of the untrustworthiness of Whites began to consider new strategies for advancement. Emma Lou Thornbrough, in her study of Brownsville's political repercussions, concluded that the incident diminished the loyalty of black leaders to the Republican party. A writer for the Washington Bee described the increased emphasis on racial self-interest: "Let us learn to vote only for those who will give us the best opportunity in life, whether they be Republicans, Democrats, or what not." Occurring in the same decade as the Niagara convention and the formation of the NAACP, the Brownsville affair at the least contributed toward a shifting focus on the ideas and policies of W. E. B. Du Bois, and away from the accommodationist approach advocated by Booker T. Washington.

Through 1907, the Committee of Military Affairs reexamined the case, re-interviewing witnesses and

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conducting studies of earlier conflicts which involved black regiments. Senator Joseph Foraker, a fellow Republican and rival of Roosevelt, championed a Senate resolution calling for a new investigation. Presented to Congress in March 1908, the Foraker committee criticized the Army and the president's handling of the affair as hasty but nevertheless affirmed the conclusion that soldiers, and not civilians, had instigated the shooting. A minority opinion argued that because no absolute guilt could be established the discharged troops should be reinstated. Following months of political squabbling with Foraker, Roosevelt finally agreed in 1909 to a court of inquiry that would examine and certify individual soldiers for reenlistment. For almost a year, a council of five generals heard testimony from dozens of civilian witnesses and more than 80 former infantrymen. When its final report was published in April 1910, however, the court upheld the summary guilt verdict, with the exception of 14 individuals who were allowed to reenlist.103

The Army realized that the affray had diminished its own power as a peacekeeping force in southern Texas. Two months after the shooting, both Fort Brown and Ringgold Barracks were abandoned. White troops reoccupied the two Lower Valley posts during a renewed outbreak of Mexican violence from 1913 to 1917 but never again would either fort hold a permanent garrison. The remaining companies of the Twenty-fifth Infantry remained on the border at Fort McIntosh and Fort Bliss until July 1907 when they were reassigned to the Philippines. Within one year of the raid, all of the black regiments had been relocated either to Cuba or the Philippines; policymakers had resorted to the decades-old practice of assigning them far from "white" communities in order to avoid racial conflict. Some Anglo border residents, observing the violence between black soldiers and Hispanics, suspected a "Mexican conspiracy" to drive the United States Army from the Rio Grande. No evidence exists to support this but the consequences of these episodes--general reduction of military forces, and the closing of two forts in an area with strong revolutionary activity--did create an advantage for Mexican rebels who, in successive years, used the border as a base of operations from which to challenge Porfirio Diaz and his supporters.
In terms of white Americans' perceptions, the Brownsville debacle destroyed much of the public trust that spokesmen of the black regulars had tried for years to establish. From 1906 to 1916, Congress entertained numerous bills to abolish the regiments. John Nance Garner, who represented Brownsville's district in Congress and later became Vice-President under Franklin Roosevelt, sponsored several resolutions to exclude Blacks from military service. The War Department resisted these efforts, until the need for American troops in World War One halted all discussion of excluding recruits on racial grounds.104

The Brownsville affair and its precedents have the potential to inform scholars as to the dynamics of race, class, and nationalism in a specific locale. Unfortunately, most historians continue to interpret the affray as a Black-White affair, a testimony to the power of bipolar models. Chief among these has been John Weaver, who likened the case to France's Dreyfus affair and claimed—through an exhaustive examination of oral and written material—to have established the soldiers' innocence. Weaver's research, and his 1973 book The

Brownsville Raid, rekindled public interest in the case and led to a decision by the Department of Defense to reduce the discharges to honorable status. However, in blaming "white Texans" and white racism for the shooting, Weaver neglected to define who was "white." His writings refer often to the Mexican presence in Brownsville but rather than analyze it as part of border culture, he categorized Hispanic participants as "white" and "southern" by virtue of their being "non-black."

As a consequence, historical understanding of the Brownsville affair lacks a proper consideration of its many antecedents on the Mexican border. The frequency of violence involving black soldiers in border communities shows that the 1906 shooting, if not the shooting's aftermath, was no aberration. Racial prejudice denied the soldiers their rights to trial and due process, and handed them a strict and arbitrary sentence based on investigators' suspicions of criminal silence. Even so, an unfair outcome should not blind scholars to the multiracial context in which the shooting transpired. Black soldiers had a long tradition by 1906 of demanding equality at gunpoint, especially among other people of color whom they may have perceived as inferior. Historians may never be able to identify who fired dozens of shots in the vicinity of Fort Brown in August 1906.
But history can and does establish that if the infantrymen did fire into the town, such action would have been consistent with other instances when black soldiers retaliated against rough treatment by civilians.

In contrast to Weaver's unequivocal assertion of the soldiers' innocence is the more balanced appraisal by Ann J. Lane:

It is possible that some of the black soldiers of the Twenty-fifth Infantry were guilty of the attack upon the community of Brownsville. . . . Among the soldiers were probably several who found accommodation to their newly prescribed place in society bitter and difficult. These were men, too, of a kind to be found in a peacetime army, that is rough, essentially rootless, accustomed to much drinking and carousing for release from the dreariness of army routine. Freshly placed in a hostile environment, such men might have reacted by shooting up the town.

It is possible they did not. In spite of its enterprising, entrepreneurial spirit, Brownsville remained very much a frontier town. The inhabitants were familiar with firearms. . . . Brownsville and the surrounding countryside were filled with rough, rootless, violent men, living in a community as much frontier and western as it was racist and southern. 105

Lane's interpretation comes very close to hitting the mark but misses a vital point. Brownsville did possess traits characteristic of "western" and "southern" areas, as regional historians use those terms. Its dominant culture, however, was that of a Mexican border town, sharing more in common with Laredo and Del Rio than with

105 Lane, The Brownsville Affair, 166.
Texarkana and Austin. Many factors other than racism contributed to civil-military violence on the Rio Grande, not the least of which was a history of Mexican resistance toward American authorities.

At the turn of the twentieth century, African Americans who wore the uniform of the United States Army placed their lives in danger when they entered border communities. This illustrates how far their relationship with border peoples had deteriorated during the previous four decades. When black Union troops had occupied the Lower Valley in 1865, "the border" still represented a place of freedom and opportunity, a place where runaway slaves and deserters might find sanctuary. By August 1906, the Rio Grande had been transformed into an area hostile to black soldiers, a change underscored by the noise and smell of gunfire on the streets of Brownsville, Texas.
## APPENDIX TO CHAPTER FIVE

### TABLE I

**NUMBER OF BLACK SOLDIERS IN BORDER COMMUNITIES**  
Jan. 1899 to July 1907

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>Brownsville</th>
<th>Rio Grande City</th>
<th>Laredo</th>
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### TABLE I (continued)

**NUMBER OF BLACK SOLDIERS IN BORDER COMMUNITIES**

Jan. 1899 to July 1907

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<th>County</th>
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**Source:** *U.S. Bureau of the Census, Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900; Post Returns, Fort Brown, AGO, M617, rolls 153-154, NAMP; Post Returns, Ringgold Barracks, M617, rolls 1023-1024, NAMP; Post Returns, Fort McIntosh, M617, rolls 684-685, NAMP; Post Returns, Camp Del Rio, M617, roll 304, NAMP; Post Returns, Fort Clark, M617, rolls 216-217, NAMP; and Post Returns, Fort Bliss, M617, roll 119, NAMP.*
TABLE II

BLACK CIVILIAN POPULATION IN COUNTIES WITH BLACK SOLDIERS

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<th></th>
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Chapter Six

Race, Nationalism and the
American Punitive Expedition into Mexico

For many African Americans, Brownsville marked the nadir, if not the end, of the black military experience. The callous discharges of 167 infantrymen seemed to prove Whites incapable of appreciating the valor and dedication with which Blacks had served their country. But public definitions of heroes and pariahs undergo constant change. Ten years following the humiliating Brownsville affair, African American soldiers returned to the Rio Grande one final time to join one of their most ardent spokesmen, General John J. Pershing, in an invasion of Mexican soil that would carry them deep into the Chihuahua desert. As Anglo-Hispanic violence increased and citizens of both countries pondered the possibility of a second Mexican American War, black soldiers enjoyed a brief public outpouring of patriotic affection, reigniting the hope that military courage against foreign enemies would win the respect and admiration of Whites.

The origins of Pershing's "Punitive Expedition" and the participation of black soldiers in that endeavor lay in the exacerbation of troubled border relations by the
Mexican Revolution. Beginning in 1910, the collapse of the Porfirio Diaz regime, after years of peasant uprisings and demands for land redistribution and labor reform, launched a decade of revolutionary fervor in Mexico. Diaz’s alliance with American capitalists and his support for their investments in mines and railroads had turned many of his countrymen against him, especially in northern states like Chihuahua, Tamaulipas, and Sonora. As they had in the 1870s, Mexican rebels often crossed the Rio Grande and took refuge in Texas from Diaz’s federales. When the Revolution’s leaders divided into violent factions after 1911, rebel forces fought for control of important border cities like Ciudad Juarez and Matamoros.¹

From the very start of the revolution, United States policymakers had considered intervention. Worried that Mexico’s internal violence would spread northward, the United States Army marshalled more than 4000 federal regulars along the border by 1913. Among these were the

Ninth and Tenth Cavalry, stationed at posts in Arizona and New Mexico. The 1912 election of Woodrow Wilson brought to the White House a president dedicated to protecting American interests in Mexico. In April 1914, Wilson used a diplomatic insult to the United States Navy as a pretense to order the invasion and temporary occupation of the city of Veracruz. A year later, Wilson's goals of stabilizing the country's political conditions and protecting American holdings led to his de facto recognition of Venustiano Carranza, the governor of Coahuila, as the legitimate president of Mexico.

Wilson's recognition of the Carranza administration had dire consequences for the United States Army on the border. On the night of March 8, 1916, Carranza's chief northern rival, Francisco "Pancho" Villa, and hundreds of his followers attacked the border community of Columbus, New Mexico. The reasons for the attack remain obscure; some sources say that Columbus had been a channeling point for arms to Villa's enemies, while others suggest that the raid was a patriotic retaliation by those who

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2Regimental Returns, Ninth Cavalry, AGO, M744, roll 94, NAMP; and Regimental Returns, Tenth Cavalry, AGO, roll 102, NAMP.

considered Carranza's complicity with the United States a betrayal of the Revolution. Doubtless several motives were at work but, at any rate, Villa and his followers wrought seven hours of carnage in Columbus and killed 17 American citizens. Believing Carranza's forces inadequate for the task of capturing the culprits, Wilson and his advisers mobilized a "punitive expedition" under Pershing's command that would locate and destroy Villa's army in the Chihuahua desert. Companies of the Twenty-fourth Infantry and the Tenth Cavalry joined this mission which, at least in the beginning, had the reluctant approval of the Carranza government.  

Americans' public sentiment toward the expedition, manifested in the print media, showed a wide range of reactions. Some hoped that Pershing's embarkation would accomplish more than the apprehension of an enemy but also would result in an extension of Manifest Destiny south of the Rio Grande. That idea held great attraction for some Anglos in Texas, where border cities became key

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departure points for troops entering Mexico. A writer for the El Paso Morning Times offered this opinion:

... while American troops are now entering Mexico for the sole purpose of capturing the outlaws, no great stretch of the imagination is necessary to predict the eventual policing of the republic by the troops of Uncle Sam. It is only the way to save Mexico for Mexico.5

A minority of jingoists even criticized Wilson for his narrow goal of catching Villa and expressed hopes for a broader objective to seize all of Mexico and Central America south to the Panama Canal. Proclaiming the need to "civilize" Mexicans as the United States had done with Indians, one Texas editor described a southward expansion as "God's will."6

Although the expedition had its imperialistic defenders, extremist views like these represented neither Texans nor the majority of Americans. The New York Times, while anxious for Villa's capture, warned against involvement in another Mexican war, especially with the imminent likelihood of United States entry into the European conflict.7 Even military authorities who were

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5The El Paso Morning Times, March 13, 1916. In addition to providing the most detailed coverage, The EP Times also reprinted stories and essays from other Texas newspapers concerning the expedition, thus its predominance here as a primary source.

6Ibid., March 24, 1916.

sympathetic to intervention advised against an invasion of Mexico through its northern desert. One recent interpretation holds that even the goal of capturing Villa received secondary priority, and that Wilson and Pershing's foremost purpose in organizing the expedition was to increase preparedness for the European war and to boost Wilson's image for the 1916 election.\footnote{Hall and Coerver, "Woodrow Wilson, Public Opinion, and the Punitive Expedition," 194.}

The Punitive Expedition receives its due attention in military and diplomatic histories. Most of these studies, by reconstructing the affair through the records of elite policymakers, treat it as a mere preamble to America's entry into World War One and thus reduce its overall significance. But an examination of newspapers and scattered personal memoirs reveals a wealth of information about the ways in which people of both countries appraised American intervention in Mexico, and even more about the ways that they appraised each other. Whatever goals political and military leaders may have had in organizing the expedition, Americans and Mexicans—especially those living in border areas—viewed the
situation as a genuine crisis, and acted out their prejudices in brutal and bloody fashion."

The Mexican Revolution, and the subsequent response of the United States Army, represented the culmination of racial and national sentiments which had been growing since the first use of federal forces on the Rio Grande half a century earlier. By the time of the revolutionary decade, Mexican nationalism rested in part on distrust of foreigners, particularly Norteamericanos, thereby providing a popular base of support in xenophobic ideas that translated into new ideologies about the superiority of a mixed race. From the perspective of many Anglos, violence and turmoil in the Mexican state indicated a decline of Hispanic people on the racial scale.

If we approach the analysis as one of simple duality between people divided by a political boundary, then race and nationality become almost interchangeable, suggesting a conflict between white Americans and dark-skinned Hispanics. But as always, the participation of African American soldiers raises more complex questions. For instance, how is nationalism defined in a racially diverse population, and what do the national reactions of

people on all sides reveal about their diverse racial attitudes? Black Americans formed concepts about national identity which differed from those of Whites. For their part, white Americans cheered and welcomed as heroes those Blacks who upheld national honor on Mexican battlefields.

Before describing the role of African American soldiers in the Punitive Expedition, it would be useful first to know how Anglos, Blacks and Mexicans reacted to this final excursion of black regulars on the Rio Grande. While it may be dangerous to generalize about the racial and national perceptions held by people within these groups, a comparative approach inevitably calls for some generalizations. By comparing the reactions of all three to the tumultuous events of the 1910s, a tentative picture can be drawn about the social context in which the expedition occurred, one which might enhance our understanding about the intersection of race and nationalism.

Pershing's crossing of the Rio Grande to pursue "bandits" had many precedents in the border's history. Texas post commanders had entered Mexico several times during the 1870s in order to track Indians and outlaw gangs, a practice which increased after the reciprocal crossing agreement of 1880. As they had during the
frontier era, many border dwellers on both sides suspected the true purpose for such an action was to extend American control over Mexico itself. Theories about social darwinism and Anglo-Saxon supremacy, which had helped to justify imperialistic expansion, appeared to be strengthened by Mexico’s instability and discord. After 1911, many Americans who observed the chaos that the Revolution had unleashed came to regard their southern neighbors as unfit for self-government.¹⁰

National publications in the United States increasingly portrayed Mexicans—and by extension, all Hispanics—either as violent or childlike. John Johnson’s research on depictions of Latin America in caricature reveals the use of racial imagery in imperialistic discourse. Through an examination of American newspapers and periodicals, Johnson’s work shows, for example, that editorial cartoonists depicted Latin American countries as seductive but fragile women, in need of protection by courtly, gentlemanly Uncle Sam. (see appendix to Chapter Six - Illustration I) In other cartoons, countries like Haiti and Mexico were depicted as bratty "pickanninies" prone to squabbling, with Uncle Sam as the firm but loving parent forced to intervene for

¹⁰Hall and Coerver, Revolution on the Border, 44-77.
the "kids’" own protection. (Illustration II) Most important was the malleability of these images, for depending on the urgency of needed intervention, the "sultry female" could be replaced with the "tantrum-throwing child" at any time.\textsuperscript{11}

Cartoonists also drew on stereotypes of African Americans to reflect changing attitudes toward Latin peoples. Social darwinists usually distinguished between "mixed" groups such as Hispanics, and Blacks, who occupied the lowest rung of the racial hierarchy. However, as relations with Mexico grew more tense in the 1910s, Mexicans and other Latinos were depicted with Negroid features of dark skin, kinked hair, and wide noses and lips. (see Illustration III) In a replication of Villa’s raid on Columbus, the Houston Chronicle ran a sketch of a raid by Mexican bandits, all of them with darkened faces, huge sombreros, and exaggerated lips.\textsuperscript{12}

Such cartoons should not be taken as determinative shapers of public opinion but rather as examples of the popular racial imagery to which expansionists could appeal in advocating American hegemony. The closer association of Mexicans with Blacks denoted to the


\textsuperscript{12}Houston Chronicle, March 16, 1916.
dominant culture a racial reversion by Hispanic people and a subsequent deterioration in their level of civilization. Even so, this "negroification" of Mexican people—while justifying American intervention in Mexico's affairs—did not evenly translate into a demand for outright acquisition. Many Americans opposed further expansion, if for no other reason than it would mean the addition of more inferior races. Racism, like all ideologies, remains subject to historical change. The turbulent history of Mexico in the 1910s caused some Whites to reevaluate the position that Latin nations and peoples occupied in the racial hierarchy.

The supposed association of Mexicans and Tejanos with the Revolution encouraged racist violence along the Rio Grande, the most ferocious example of which erupted in the Lower Valley. In 1915 and 1916, Anglos captured and executed without trial over 300 Hispanics suspected of conspiring with Villa and other revolutionary caudillos. The Texas Rangers caused many of these deaths; the term "getting rangered" became synonymous at this time with frontier vigilantism. By 1919, the

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13 Harris and Sadler, "The Plan of San Diego," 381-408.

14 Hall and Coerver, Revolution on the Border, 23-25, 159-60; Julian Samora, Joe Bernal, and Albert Pena, Gunpowder Justice: A Reassessment of the Texas Rangers...
viciousness of Ranger activities provoked a series of state legislative investigations into charges of murder and incompetence in their companies. 15

If Mexico's turmoil eroded the status and safety of Hispanics, then it may have produced a slight elevation for African Americans. As the New York Age explained in April 1916: "This is a very poor time for even Texans to be registering any objections to the presence of colored soldiers; the time may not be far off when they will be mighty glad to have them around, and more of them." 16

The expedition brought to national prominence one of the black regiments' strongest spokesmen; Pershing had led black troops as an officer of the Tenth Cavalry and had earned the nickname "Nigger Jack" (later softened to "Black Jack") for his advocacy of black military service. 17 In some border towns, need for protection


16 New York Age, April 13, 1916.

overwhelmed the traditional dislike of black soldiers. At the very site of Villa's raid in Columbus, New Mexico, companies from the Twenty-fourth Infantry occupied Camp Furlong from 1916 until 1922. Although racial segregation prevailed in Columbus, residents sponsored parades, rallies, and musical and athletic events for black soldiers and their families.  

As always, Anglos living in Texas varied in their receptions of black soldiers, depending on the perceived threat posed by Mexican nationals and the federal Army's role in suppressing dissent. El Paso, long a hotspot of rebel activity, had served as a base for the Flores Magon brothers in the early 1900s, while Mexicans in the neighbor city of Ciudad Juarez had supported Francisco Madero's movement of 1910. The city's strategic location at the nexus of several major railroad lines caused the United States Army to station over 60,000 troops at Fort Bliss by 1916, making El Paso the military center of Pershing's expedition.

Soldiers from Fort Bliss often joined local Anglos in anti-Mexican violence. In January 1916, a fight between American troops and Mexicans escalated into a

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riot which injured several people. Pershing, fearing the intervention of Carrancista soldiers from Juarez, sent federal forces to assist the National Guard in containing the violence. Following Villa’s raid, random attacks on Mexicans in El Paso increased. In one such incident, a dark-skinned Hispanic escaped serious injury by claiming to be black, crying to pursuing Whites, "I’m a nigger; I’m a nigger."  

While anti-Mexican racism did somewhat lessen anti-Black racism, black soldiers did not necessarily benefit. White Texans still held notions, handed down from the frontier era, of the Army as a protector of unwanted groups. Many Anglos resented how Fort Bliss gave political asylum to nearly 5000 Mexican refugees after Villa’s military victories. Nor did hostility toward uniformed Blacks disappear. On April 9, 1916, Texas Rangers arrested several enlisted men from the Twenty-fourth Infantry for shooting up a brothel. The Rangers shot and killed Private John Wade from Company C for supposedly attempting to escape. A week later, after Del

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20Cited in Garcia, Desert Immigrants, 191.

21Ibid., 41-43.
Rio residents had protested the Blacks' presence, Companies B and C were despatched to Fort Bliss for participation in the Punitive Expedition.  

African American reactions to the Revolution and the expedition involved many of the same appeals to national values that the black press had used since 1898. Racial pride in their troops dominated most discussion of the Mexican crisis in black newspapers, as in this essay from the New York Age:

At last, we notice that the Tenth Cavalry is appearing in the news despatches. It did look as though the censor's biggest job was keeping any mention of the colored soldiers out of the despatches, but we knew that couldn't be kept up after our boys really got down to work.  

Even so, the memory of Brownsville still rankled, producing for some a cynical realization that black soldiers risked their lives to save those who oppressed them. Following the death of Private Wade in Del Rio, a Washington editor wrote: "While a colored soldier has been killed by a lawless ranger of Texas, we do not look for a dismissal of the whole Infantry (as was done in the Brownsville case) for they may be needed to protect the

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23New York Age, April 13, 1916.
hides of the Texas cowards who have demanded their removal from the state.""24

By evoking a shared nationality against foreign enemies, spokesmen even discovered a means to denounce anti-Black discrimination as unpatriotic and foolhardy. In March 1916, the treasurer of the NAACP wrote to the House and Senate Committee on Military Affairs urging that either the number of black regiments be increased, or that Blacks be allowed to enlist in white regiments. Pershing's expedition made the request quite timely; pointing out that the Tenth Cavalry bore the brunt of duties in Mexico, the NAACP officer described as ridiculous a program of preparedness which rejected the nation's best potential soldiers. Blacks' loyalty had been proven time and again with their performances against the western Indians and the Spaniards in Cuba. Now, given the possibility of war with Mexico and heightened preparation efforts for the European fight, the rejection of ten million native-born, English-speaking Black Americans for military service seemed idiotic.25

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24Washington Bee, April 15, 1916.
25Ibid., April 1, 1916.
In all, renewed border conflict and the demand for American troops in Mexico stimulated new hopes among Blacks that advancement through nationalism was still possible, hopes that the Brownsville affair had dampened. Put another way, the support that African Americans extended to the Tenth Cavalry and other regiments, white ones included, shows that racial injustice did not diminish their pride and optimistic faith in the United States. The New York Age, which had condemned black enlistment ten years earlier when Roosevelt discharged the Twenty-fourth companies, now declared:

There are those who say that the American Negro should refuse to fight for this country because of the unjust treatment to which he is subjected. With this doctrine we absolutely disagree. Regardless of what may be said or done by few or by many, this country is our country. It belongs to us as much as it belongs to any other citizens within its borders, and a good deal more than it belongs to some of them.\(^{26}\)

National identity, as W. E. B. Du Bois had pointed out in The Souls of Black Folk, remained a strong feature of the African American psyche.\(^ {27}\)

While Blacks regarded themselves as American citizens, the denial of their equal citizenship rights still exerted a powerful influence, one which colored

\(^{26}\)New York Age, March 23, 1916.

their view of Mexican rebels and other subaltern groups in ways that did not affect Whites. During the Spanish American War, black newspapers covered the exploits of General Antonio Maceo, an Italian-Black mulatto who had led Cuban troops against Spain. Following the establishment of American control over Cuba, Quentin Banderas, a black Cuban general who had opposed American occupation, gained heroic stature in the black press as a champion of native autonomy. Commentaries likened Banderas to the "courageous" Filipino leader Emilio Aguinaldo, whose own movement ironically had been defeated with the help of black soldiers.

As these examples show, the praise which Blacks showered on their regiments' contributions to American expansion hid a contradictory and even competing strand of admiration for other people of color who opposed that expansion. Despite their patriotism, black civilians at least could identify with charismatic foreign rebels who stood up to the United States. This paradox never appeared more strange than in the high esteem in which some African Americans held Pancho Villa. In contrast

28Freeman (Indianapolis), April 30, 1898; and Edward Augustus Johnson, History of Negro Soldiers in the Spanish-American War and other items of interest (Raleigh: Capital Printing Co., 1899), 8-9.

29New York Age, August 20, 1906.
with negative descriptions of Villa and other Mexicans in the mainstream press, black papers sometimes praised Villa as a figure of destiny. The Broad Ax claimed him as the only man with sufficient courage to challenge American power and to establish peace and independence in Mexico. Following the attack on Columbus, the Indianapolis Freeman took pains to refute the bizarre rumors circulating in black communities that Villa was actually a Negro. One account claimed him to be a discharged member of the Tenth Cavalry, while another--reported in the Baltimore American--claimed Villa to be the son of a black Baltimore resident and a Hispanic woman. The source for this latter story came from a black Texan named George Bond, who claimed to have known Villa from 1903 to 1908 while working on a ranch in Chihuahua. Bond described Villa as a man "admired for his tact and self-restraint," unlike his rival Carranza, who, Bond held, was responsible for most of the discord in Mexico.

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30Broad Ax (Chicago), February 27, 1915. For white depictions of Villa, see Christopher P. Wilson, "Plotting the Border: John Reed, Pancho Villa, and Insurgent Mexico," in Kaplan and Pease, eds., Cultures of United States Imperialism, 340.

31Freeman, March 25, 1916.

The most curious attempt to link Blacks to the growing legends about Villa involved a supposed association between the rebel and Henry Flipper. In 1916, Flipper worked as a mining consultant for New Mexico Senator Albert Fall and, from his home in El Paso, dispatched frequent reports to Fall on affairs in Mexico. During the chaotic weeks following Villa's attack on Columbus, the Washington Eagle ran a front-page article claiming that Flipper—along with other former buffalo soldiers—had entered Mexico, joined Villa's forces and taken up arms against Pershing's troops. The angry denial that Flipper then unleashed reveals the emotional value which he placed on military loyalty, as well as his contempt for the Mexican Revolution. Flipper wrote:

The article contains so many glaring falsehoods, it is inconceivable that a man of any intelligence could have written it . . . . I do not know Villa or Carranza or any of the leaders of the so-called "revolution" in Mexico, have never seen either of them nor have I had any connection of any kind whatever with any of them or with their brigandage, or with the Mexican government at any period whatsoever.

I know Mexico and the Mexican people thoroughly. I have not lost my five senses or any of them to any extent of the upheaval of that country. I can conceive of no contingency under which I would fight the United States. I am loyal through and through, because no man born in the United States, who knows Mexico and has an atom of intelligence can be otherwise . . . .

I have been in El Paso for years, paid to keep in touch with the situation in Mexico and to study and report on it. I have heard no stories of operations of colored "troopers" in Mexico nor read
any dispatches saying that "Flipper is in Mexico." If any such exist your correspondent fabricated them. . . .

In all of Villa’s campaign, after the break with Carranza, there were no foreigners, Negro or others, in either army. . . . On the contrary, several peaceable Negroes have been wantonly killed and robbed by bandits of all factions . . .

As to American troops going into Mexico, I am glad they have gone, regret they did not go sooner, and wish them all possible success and any aid I can give is at their service, now and always.

The 10th Cavalry and 24th Infantry of Negro troops are now in Mexico . . . . These men are sincerely loyal and acknowledge no superiors as soldiers. . . .

From the foregoing it is evident that the writer of the article, which you have printed, is a conscienceless, gratuitous, malicious, unmitigated liar, whose only excuse, if any be admissible, is his superlative ignorance.33

Apparently, Flipper’s scathing rebuttal did nothing to dispel the rumors of his Mexican sympathies. Some El Paso residents, according to a local rancher named Tom Heady, even believed Flipper and Villa to be the same man because of Villa’s kinked hair and full lips.34 Such stories should be interpreted less as a diminution of Flipper’s reputation among Blacks than as an indication of wary respect for Villa. On one level, black civilians lent their support to the Punitive Expedition, largely


because of the participation of black regiments. On another, their own experiences with white racism and power prepared them for a greater degree of sympathy with those who resisted American imperialism.

The same cannot be said of an experienced military man like Henry Flipper. Though three decades removed from service, Flipper still carried the attitudes and values of a professional soldier: unwavering loyalty, national honor, and respect for order and stability. That Blacks occupied an inferior position in American society, and that Flipper himself had been driven from the Army for reasons he attributed to white racism, did not undermine his confidence in the superiority of the United States. The suggestion by fellow blacks—whom he felt lacked any understanding or appreciation of military tradition—that he or any black veteran would dishonor the United States infuriated him. Years earlier, Flipper had refused a professorship at the Military Academy of Chapultepec, since accepting the appointment would have meant becoming a Mexican citizen.35 Equally loyal to his employer, Flipper’s reports to Albert Fall became useful in 1919, when Fall headed a Senate subcommittee that investigated the impact of the Mexican Revolution on

35Harris, 48.
American economic interests. In 1921, when Fall joined the Harding administration as Secretary of Interior, his appointment of Flipper as Assistant Secretary earned him praise from black leaders—at least prior to Fall’s indictment on charges emanating from the Teapot Dome scandal.36

How well did Flipper’s views represent those of other black soldiers, with less education and fewer opportunities than he had? Servicemen seldom recorded their feelings about Mexicans but their violent clashes with border civilians in places like Rio Grande City and Laredo after 1898 shows a pattern of mutual animosity. Socialist writer John Reed witnessed one encounter between a Ninth cavalryman and a Mexican at Presidio, Texas during the early years of the Revolution:

One colored trooper, watering his horse on the bank of the river, was accosted by an English-speaking Mexican squatting on the opposite shore. "Hey, coon," he shouted, derisively, "when are you damned gringos going to cross that line?" "Chile!" responded the Negro. "We ain’t agoin’ to cross that line at all. We’re just goin’ to pick up that line an’ carry it down to the Big Ditch [the Panama Canal]."37

36Ibid., vii-ix.

In another instance at El Paso, a black cavalryman explained to a reporter the puzzled manner with which Mexicans regarded the Tenth Cavalry and their dark skins:

"For a while they just stood around gawking at us," he said. "Then they began talking excitedly among themselves." "These are not Americanos," said one, "they are devils." Presently a trooper who could speak Spanish came up and said: "Yes, we are Americans, and you should keep it in mind, too." The Mexicans merely shook their heads. 38

At least in these examples, soldiers demonstrated no hesitation in their national loyalties, a quality that distinguished them from civilians. While we can only speculate as to the representativeness of those views, black soldiers—who had been trained for instant obedience and taught to survive in combat situations where sympathy for enemies could mean the loss of life—had little reason to regard Mexicans with friendship.

While national identity for a time seemed to provide Blacks and Anglos with a common adversary in Mexico, Mexicans' own views about race and nationalism had begun to coalesce in the 1910s into a genuine revolutionary ideology. "Race" in Latin America always had been less a fixed genetic concept than a synonym for "ethnicity." Indians and Blacks, though regarded as racial inferiors, could become "whitened" through education or occupational

advancement and achieve mestizo status. Historian Alan Knight argues that while Eurocentric racist ideas did not imbue Mexican thought to a significant degree, the Porfiriato's openness to European doctrines of liberal progress and social darwinism did contribute to a certain racial consciousness among its citizens. With the 1910 Revolution, Mexican nationalists attempted to dispel foreign influences by stimulating new concepts about race which were contiguous with Mexico's mixed society.

Knight's study on race and revolution explains how the strong tradition of mestizaje--racial mixture between Spaniards and Indians--helped to produce a revolutionary ideology less reliant on ideas about racial hierarchy than on indigenismo, or Indian pride. Rejecting European models of hybrid inferiority, mestizaje embodied an optimistic belief that the blending of different races leads to a superior culture. As a result, the mestizo became the Revolution's ideological symbol, a racial representation of the country itself which accompanied nationalist cries of "Mexico for the Mexicans."

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40Ibid., 86-102.
Jose Vasconcelos, Mexico's minister of education from 1921 to 1924, became the most celebrated cultist of mestizaje. His 1925 book *La raza cosmica* (*The Cosmic Race*) predicted a new era of global amalgamation between the races. Mexico, with its strong mestizo population, was destined to lead this intermixture. No doubt Vasconcelos' childhood on the Texas border and his experiences with Anglos influenced these views. Recalling his boyhood in Eagle Pass during the 1890s, he later described the racist taunts he endured from American children, his first use of a knife against a bully, and the negative depictions of Mexico he was forced to read in United States history textbooks.  

Racial ideas about *indigenismo* and *mestizaje*, not fully formed as of the 1910s, represented only a part of Mexican self-definition through the turbulent decade. Mexicans' understanding of "otherness" relied more on nationalistic pride than on racial stereotypes. Images of the United States in caricatures emphasized the hated tradition of Anglo interference in Latin America's internal affairs. One cartoon in 1913 pictured "Tio Sam" as a gigantic octopus, with its tentacles encircling

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Cuba, Mexico, the Philippines, Puerto Rico, and other countries. (Illustration IV) During Wilson's 1914 occupation of Veracruz, a graphic caricature showed Carranza and Villa crucified at the side of a Christ-like female named "Revolucion," with Wilson in the foreground as a persecuting Roman soldier. (Illustration V) Another 1914 cartoon presented Mexico as a small David, wielding a slingshot named "Justicia" against an evil Goliath with Wilson's face. The giant's bloody sword was titled "ambicion," protected by a shield shaped as a dollar coin. The United States Capitol building rose ominously in the background. (Illustration VI)

Cartoons and editorials that appeared in Mexican and American newspapers, of course, reflected the private interests of the newspapers' owners, many of whom published such images for narrow business and political purposes. Yet the hatreds they reflected were genuine, manifesting themselves in outbursts of racism and xenophobia against outsiders. For example, Chinese laborers in Mexico often were described as "filthy wretches" who contaminated the Mexican race.42

Mexicans' cultural antagonism toward the United States created special danger for Americans who traveled

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through the country after 1910. Shortly before the Columbus raid, Villa and his forces attacked a trainload of American mining engineers near Santa Isabel and murdered 17 men.43 Similar atrocities by Mexicans against Americans continued through the decade. In congressional testimony in 1920, John Kleiber described an incident in northern Chihuahua when a gang of Carrancistas boarded his train and robbed and killed several Americans, but did not harm the German passengers and American-born Mexicans. Villa's men derided all of the Anglos as "gringos," a term which Kleiber believed to be just as vicious as "greaser."44

Francisco Villa's own racial rhetoric as a popular revolutionary leader bears inspection. Early in his career, Villa projected an attitude of respect and admiration for the American people, expressing formal contempt only for the United States government. By 1915, however, Villa began to use anti-Anglo rhetoric to muster opposition to Carranza and his Washington allies. In May, he denounced American efforts to thwart the

43Knight, The Mexican Revolution, 343-45.

Revolution and "seize our land and prostitute our race." One account by an African American living in Chihuahua describes Villa's successful manipulation of xenophobic sentiment. Edwin R. Spencer, an employee of an American-owned ranch, was captured by Villistas in early 1916. Spencer heard a speech delivered by Villa to his men shortly before the Columbus raid:

He told the men that gringoes were to blame for conditions in Mexico, and abused Americans with every profane word he knew . . . . He didn't talk very long, but before he got through, the men were crying and swearing and shrieking. Several of them got down on the ground and beat the earth with their hands. I have never seen a bunch of men as sore and wild in my born days. And I hope I never see it again.46

After being released, Spencer feared that he would be mistaken in nearby Columbus for a Mexican involved in the raid, and so, instead, traveled dozens of miles to cross the border at Hachita, New Mexico.47

This degree of nationalistic fervor illustrates how thoroughly the Rio Grande had evolved by the 1910s into a legitimate "border"—a demarcation of political and, to an extent, even of racial identity. Though nationalism lay at the root of most border conflicts, all sides

45Katz, Pancho Villa and the Attack on Columbus," 111; and Knight, The Mexican Revolution, 342-43.


47Ibid.
employed racial ideology or imagery to convey national differences. These divisions, which widened as the decade wore on, further eroded interracial relationships. Mexicans who practiced and even glorified racial mixture and diversity in their national consciousness did not discriminate between Blacks and Whites when it came to their anti-American attitudes.

One glaring exception may exist, however. An incident in 1915 in the Lower Rio Grande Valley hints at a possible coalition between people of color that may have transcended national differences. In February, a Spanish-printed document in the Texas town of San Diego called for all Hispanics in the United States Southwest to launch a race war at 2 a.m. on February 20, the ultimate goal of which would be the recapture of lands stolen from Mexico in 1848. Titled "the Plan of San Diego," it demanded the execution of all adult white males. Blacks, Indians and Asians would be spared and, in fact, would be expected to join the Revolution. From this race war would come a new Mexican republic in which North American Blacks would receive six former American states for starting their own country.\(^4\)

At first glance, the Plan of San Diego indicates a broadened world view of a liberating army of internally colonized peoples who share a history of Anglo oppression. While the Plan appealed to other people of color against a common enemy, however, the document also embraced racial nationalism by advocating separate states for Blacks and Indians. The Plan's text also reveals an incorrect reading of recent interracial history. The preamble declared: "In Texas, [Whites] have paid their workers with an unjustified race hatred that closes to the Mexican, the Negro, the Asian, the doors of the schools, the hotels, the theaters, of every public place." But, on the contrary, Mexicans and Tejanos usually were regarded in Texas as "Whites" in their rights to use public facilities.

Through the early 1900s, Mexican labor movements had deplored comparisons of Hispanics to Blacks and other people of color. At the Cananea mines in 1906, union workers circulated handbills proclaiming "Curse the thought that a Mexican is worth less than a Yankee; that a negro or Chinaman is to be

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50 Plan of San Diego, in Martinez, ed., Fragments of the Mexican Revolution, 145.
compared to a Mexican. . . . Mexicans, Awaken! The country and our dignity demand it!"\textsuperscript{51}

Given the context of the Mexican Revolution, it seems likely that the Plan's release was intended to exploit Hispanic unrest in Texas. According to historian James Sandos, Mexicans in the Lower Valley--many of whom had fled their war-torn country to work as peon laborers in Texas--were open to radical ideologies of reform.\textsuperscript{52} Authorities found a copy of the Plan on the person of one Basilio Ramos after his arrest at McAllen, a known center of Villista sympathy. In May, a federal grand jury at Brownsville indicted Ramos for conspiring to steal United States property.\textsuperscript{53}

Numerous conspiracy theories abound as to the authorship of the Plan of San Diego, ranging from German involvement to American arch-expansionists hoping to provoke a Mexican war. The prevailing current explanation, offered by Charles Harris and Louis Sadler, concludes that the Carranza administration secretly


\textsuperscript{52}Ibid., 63-78.

\textsuperscript{53}Harris and Sadler, "The Plan of San Diego," 381-408.
published the Plan in order to prompt the United States into de facto recognition. Mexican raids into the Lower Valley claimed over 20 civilian deaths in the summer of 1915. Harris and Sadler suggest that Carranza’s government organized these raids and released the Plan, first to excite trouble on the Rio Grande, then to prove to American policymakers Carranza’s effectiveness in suppressing that trouble.  

If the Carranza administration did activate the Plan, then the ploy succeeded, for the United States extended official recognition of his government in October 1915. But it did so at terrible cost. Fear of Mexican invasion and paranoia over the Plan launched a wave of anti-Mexican violence in southern Texas that lasted through the following year. By June 1916, the United States Army had diverted almost 50,000 troops—nearly half of its mobile units—from the Punitive Expedition in an attempt to restrain bloody reprisals from white Texans in the area between Laredo and Brownsville. Hundreds of people were killed, in some cases their corpses not being discovered until decades later.  

Harris and Sadler perhaps put it best: "The

54 Ibid.

55 Sandos, Rebellion in the Borderlands, 54-66.
Plan left a legacy of racial tension in south Texas that has endured to the present."\textsuperscript{56}

Given the absence of any evidence that African American civilians or soldiers sympathized with the Plan of San Diego, the question of its appeal to cross-racial alliances still remains puzzling. Similar ideas, though few in number, were expressed both before and after 1915. In 1898, a Mexico City newspaper, calling for Hispanic unity against Yankees, proposed a concerted uprising that would recruit southern Blacks and Indians on American reservations.\textsuperscript{57} In June 1916, guerrillas destroyed a series of railroad tracks near Laredo; an editor at Piedras Negras claimed the saboteurs to be Texas-born Mexicans who sought equality for Hispanics, Blacks, and other dark-skinned races.\textsuperscript{58}

Assuming that the Carranza regime devised the Plan of San Diego, then it is also possible to conclude that other revolutionary appeals based on race may have been designed not as a manifesto for Black and Indians but as a way of terrorizing white Texans. Whatever the origin of the Plan, it seems improbable that its devisers

\textsuperscript{56}Harris and Sadler, "The Plan of San Diego," 406.

\textsuperscript{57}Sandos, \textit{Rebellion in the Borderlands}, 79-84.

\textsuperscript{58}Houston Chronicle, June 17, 1916.
intended to launch an actual pan-colored race war. Its anonymous authors, however, recognized the deep-seated Anglo fear that such a war could occur. White Texans' fears about a racial alliance between people of color had roots far in the antebellum era. Manipulating those fears provided a rare opportunity to influence American policy, albeit at a severe price. While the Plan produced no retaliatory violence against Blacks, its association of Mexicans and Tejanos with other "savage races" strengthened Anglos' image of Hispanic people as backward and degenerate.

The Mexican Revolution, the raid on Columbus, and the Punitive Expedition thus occurred within a multi-sided array of racial and nationalistic attitudes. As military and diplomatic histories point out, Pershing's mission had little chance of altering the political landscape of Mexico, since, in fact, intervention or even Villa's capture remained secondary matters compared to the global context of World War One. Few people living in border areas, however, stood to realize this at the time. Villa's attack on American soil, besides offending national dignity, increased anti-Mexican hatred in border communities. Likewise, when Pershing led his forces into Chihuahua in March 1916, Mexican patriots perceived his action as another case of American aggression. Never had
the power of both federal governments to produce unexpected but significant changes in race relations along the border been stronger than at this time.

American and Mexican perspectives about the expedition—and each other—remained a significant factor during the mission itself. Details about the expedition's military aspects, well-covered in campaign narratives and participant memoirs, are worth consideration here.\(^5^9\) A greater appreciation of how racial and national views intertwined to affect the expedition's process and outcome may help to explain not only why Pershing's troops failed to capture Villa but for that matter failed even to locate him.

All descriptive accounts agree that the hostility of Mexicans in Sonora and Chihuahua became the expedition's chief obstacle. Since American forces lacked accurate maps and a general knowledge of the topography, officers relied on Mexican cooperation, following the standard practice of using indigenous guides in unfamiliar territory. Local assistance, however, proved less than

forthcoming. Villagers relayed false information about the Villistas' whereabouts to American troops, while commissioned Mexican guides led cavalry forces into terrain with no grass or water and then disappeared. Officers attributed the problem to an abundance of Villista supporters in the region but even Villa's Carrancista opponents had no wish to see the Yankee mission accomplish what their own troops could not. James Lord, a former mining engineer with over 40 years of experience in Sonora, explained how peasants' national pride outweighed political factionalism:

Mexicans in Sonora are neither Carrancistas nor Villistas. They are all anti-gringo. . . . The popular feeling in this country that one United States soldier can whip a dozen Mexicans shows the lack of knowledge of conditions in Mexico. On the contrary, it will take a dozen United States soldiers even to locate one Mexican.\(^6\)

United in their hatred of the invading American forces, Mexican peasants did not confront Pershing's troops but, whenever possible, took opportunities to sabotage the expedition. No strangers to desert tracking and warfare, the men of the Tenth Cavalry spent three months leading their mounts through hundreds of miles of mountains and canyons, and chasing down leads on Villa's

\(^6\)Brown, The Punitive Expedition, 5; and Tompkins, Chasing Villa, 100.

\(^6\)The El Paso Morning Times, April 14, 1916.
whereabouts gained either from camp rumors or falsified information from locals.62 Besides the problems of locating an enemy who avoided conflict and dealing with a hostile populace, Pershing had extended his troops too far beyond the border for adequate supply lines. Within a week after entering Mexico, the expedition lost more than 100 horses and mules because of the sparse availability of food and water in the Chihuahua desert.63 Cavalrymen spent more time searching for water and grazing land than they did tracking those responsible for the Columbus raid.64

Despite apparent failure, Wilson could neither withdraw the expedition without diplomatic embarrassment nor strengthen Pershing's forces without offending the Carranza government. Indeed, the expedition's duration intensified friction between the two countries. On April 12, a clash between the Thirteenth Infantry and an angry mob at Parral, Chihuahua, killed several soldiers and Mexican villagers.65 Both the scale and nature of the

62Brown, The Punitive Expedition, 4-5, 16-20; and Mason, The Great Pursuit, 92-93.


64Brown, The Punitive Expedition, 16-20.

65Hall and Coerver, Revolution on the Border, 66-67; and Tompkins, Chasing Villa, 150-55.
conflict changed after Parral. Having first complied with the expedition, Carranza began to endure criticism from nationalists whose voices grew more strident the longer that American forces remained on Mexican soil. Then, reversing his earlier position of cooperation, Carranza insisted on Pershing's recall and promised to attack any new American troops which crossed the border. In response, Wilson federalized the National Guard in June for a possible northern invasion and, by July, had massed an army of more than 100,000 men along the Rio Grande.  

Government actions reflected growing hatreds on both sides. Mexican consuls reported alarming increases in anti-American sentiments, with patriotic parades and rallies daily calling for the invaders' destruction.  

The Mexico City newspaper Accion Mundial printed the following piece in May:

The American troops in Mexico are utterly demoralized because they have encountered privations to which they are unaccustomed. They lack in the morning their hot cakes, oatmeal and milk. At lunch they have no ice water, ham and eggs, nor tastily arranged tables served by waiters. But much more do they miss 5 o'clock tea in camp with pretty girls. Ambulances are necessary along the route, as the men collapse after walking eight miles a day.

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66 Hall and Coerver, Revolution on the Border, 71-74; and Knight, The Mexican Revolution, 350-51.

Some of the troops have committed suicide after these marches, which is not surprising, because other American troops have done the same in Cuba and Venezuela, where suicides are counted in thousands. 68

Though exaggerated in the Mexican press, the difficulties experienced by Pershing's forces did increase after Parral. Observers noticed that villagers grew more aloof and unfriendly, guides abandoned even the pretense of helping to locate Villa, and American citizens who lived in the area now approached the troops daily for protection. 69 Increasingly, the expedition seemed to unify Mexicans in a common cause against an outside enemy.

The hostility toward Americans in Mexico mirrored a growing backlash against Tejanos in Texas. Racial paranoia there had remained at a fever pitch since the Plan of San Diego and the Columbus raid, with hundreds of suspected "spies" arrested on suspicion of associating with Villa. 70 Popular images of Mexicans grew more spiteful. Photographers marketed hundreds of postcards showing Mexicans as violent, lazy, sinister beings. 71

68 Ibid., May 13, 1916.

69 Tompkins, Chasing Villa, 207.

70 The El Paso Morning Times, March 10, 1916.

71 Vanderwood, Border Fury, ix, 195.
Bud Fisher's "Mutt and Jeff" comic series placed the main characters with Pershing in Mexico. A June cartoon had Jeff proclaim, "It's open season on Mexicans," with a caption that read "we may go [on vacation] to California and shoot wild goats. Shooting Mexicans is more exciting for they can run faster and are more numerous."  

Political and military leaders took seriously the implications of such imagery. With Wilson's guard units congregating around Fort Bliss, Carranza distributed arms to over 1000 civilians in Ciudad Juarez with advice to evacuate the city. Responding to an federal directive which called for the protection of law-abiding Hispanics, the El Paso district commander replied that Texans would respect the safety of Mexicans who "behaved themselves" but those who did not would "be treated as they deserve. You can say for me for that all Mexicans who misbehave themselves and cause trouble for the United States authorities will be severely dealt with."  

In late June, black soldiers began to play a more central role in United States-Mexico relations due to a fracas between the Tenth Cavalry and Carrancista forces.

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"Hall and Coerver, Revolution on the Border, 71-74; and Knight, The Mexican Revolution, 350-51.

"Ibid., June 19, 1916."
at the Chihuahua village of Carrizal. (see Map) Located some 80 miles southeast of El Paso, Carrizal had withstood Apache raids in the 1870s, Villista attacks in the early years of the Revolution, and now, became the scene of one of the United States' deepest penetrations of Mexican territory. Pershing, investigating rumors of a large body of Carrancistas in the vicinity of Villa Ahumada, dispatched a scouting detachment of 79 cavalrymen under Captains Charles Boyd and Lewis Morey. Although Pershing issued clear orders merely to reconnoiter the area and avoid confrontation, Boyd replied to his assistants that "we are going to Villa Ahumada with a chip on our shoulder. If they [the Mexicans] knock it off, General Funston will move and so will General Pershing."

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76 Wharfield's 1968 study questioned the clarity of Pershing's written orders, claiming that Boyd acted under secret direction by Pershing, Wilson, or both, to
Arriving at Ahumada on June 20, Boyd confirmed the presence of Carrancista cavalry nine miles east at Carrizal. According to one of his scouts, Boyd ignored warnings from his assistants not to enter the village and muttered something about "making history" by confronting the Mexicans. Reaching Carrizal early the next morning, Boyd conferred with Carrancista officers. Despite their warning that no American troops should pass through Carrizal, Boyd ordered his troops to advance. With a round of machine-gun fire from the Carrancistas, an hour-long battle then erupted, evolving into a general melee that spread into the village and killed the Mexican commander. With officers dead on both sides, some American cavalrymen retreated, while others were killed by mounted Mexican soldiers. Altogether, the Tenth lost 12 cavalrymen and two officers in the engagement, Boyd among them. For the next few hours, stragglers from the Tenth filtered through Villa Ahumada, obtaining food and medical treatment before scrambling back to Pershing's headquarters at Casas Grandes. Several days passed before all survivors reached safety; many wandered

create an incident that would either force Carranza into war, or to relent on his restrictive policy regarding the expedition's movements. See Wharfield, "The Affair at Carrizal," 29-30.
listlessly on foot in the desert, disoriented and unable to locate their base camp."

Not wishing to pursue the American troops, the Carrancistas collected all of the wounded and surrendered prisoners. Lem Spilsbury, a Mormon scout and the only White to be captured, later said that he and the other captives were stripped naked and marched to a nearby rail line for incarceration in Chihuahua City. Spilsbury, apparently mistaken for a Hispanic, claimed that several Mexicans favored shooting him as a traitor. During the overnight ride to Chihuahua, mobs gathered at each town through which the train passed, demanding the deaths of the "gringos." Upon arrival, the Carrizal survivors, some injured and all still unclad, were marched a mile and a half through the streets to a penitentiary.

The isolated location of Carrizal prevented quick access to information about the battle. The first official news that Carrancistas had fired on Pershing's troops and taken prisoners came from sources in Chihuahua and Mexico City. American newspapers soon distorted the incident; a special evening edition of The El Paso

77Lem Spilsbury, AGO, File #241-6172, RG 94, NA, 47-52.

Morning Times announced in banner headlines "U.S. and Carrancistas Clash," claiming exaggerated numbers of dead and wounded.⁷⁹ Texas reporters made outrageous claims about Mexican atrocities, claiming that wounded soldiers had been murdered following surrender.⁸⁰ Border Hispanics grew more fearful about Anglo retaliation in the week after Carrizal. Ciudad Juarez became nearly deserted. In Arizona, hundreds applied at Mexican consulates hoping to cross into Mexico but were directed to remain in the United States and "stay quiet."⁸¹ Texas governor James Ferguson delivered a public address that warned brutal treatment for all Hispanics suspected of aiding Carranza’s government.⁸²

Fears about war rumbled through Washington and Mexico City, but they were especially strong along the border. Publicly, Wilson and Pershing praised Boyd and his troops for valorous service, even though the accounts of Carrizal’s survivors made clear that Boyd had disobeyed written orders not to provoke conflict. Despite the fact that this left Wilson unable to assume

⁸⁰Ibid., June 30, 1916.
⁸¹Ibid., June 22, 1916.
⁸²Ibid., June 23, 1916.
any moral high ground, he issued a formal statement on June 25 which condemned Mexico's actions and demanded the immediate release of Spilsbury and the black soldiers.  

As a show of strength, Wilson mobilized the National Guard units on the border for imminent invasion. The United States consulate in Sonora reported an increase of anti-Americanism due to the soldiers held in Chihuahua. Another consulate office in Eagle Pass believed the Mexican community there expected annihilation from United States forces:

Never before since the beginning of the Mexican Revolution has there been such a general belief among Mexicans and Americans alike that war between Mexico and the United States was a surety, as there has been in the past week.

Attempting to justify a possible invasion of Mexico to other Latin American countries, Wilson's administration sent letters to heads of state in Cuba, Paraguay, Peru, and elsewhere. Avoiding the offensive term "intervention," the telegrams described invasion of Mexico as a "simple act of war" to end barbarities

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"U.S. Consulate, Hermosillo, Sonora, June 16, 1916, #18589, ibid.

"U.S. Consulate, Eagle Pass, Texas, June 23, 1916, #18591, ibid."
against Americans, not a usurpation of Mexico's right to self-determination.\textsuperscript{86}

Carranza's government responded with its own interpretation of events by delivering the following statement to foreign Latin American consulates:

It seems that the American government, having no legal or political grounds on which to declare war on Mexico, desires to render it inevitable through incidents that are sweeping us on to it. Mexico will know how to conquer or succumb, but it wishes first to make known to the American continent the conduct observed by the United States of America which is trying to create pretexts for intervention.\textsuperscript{87}

Within Mexico, national circulars prepared the public for war against its northern enemy. Though the Carrancistas could not claim Carrizal as a victory, the battle provided a rallying cry for Mexican pride. In Chihuahua, military authorities blustered "If the United States wants its soldiers who are held here as prisoners of war the best way would be to come down and take them."\textsuperscript{88} Border Mexicans were reassured of their government's support with the following message:

No fighting will be necessary. Our brave troops will simply march northward, brushing the gringos

\textsuperscript{86}Robert Lansing to Woodrow Wilson, June 21, 1916, \textit{ibid.}

\textsuperscript{87}Telegram, Mexico City Consul to Puerto Rico Consulate, June 24, 1916, \textit{ibid.}

aside until our glorious tricolor floats from the dome of the Capitol at Washington." 89

While the racial origin of the hostages mattered little on either side, their color did not become obscured. American newspapers employed racial stereotypes even as they transformed the cavalrymen into heroes. The first press accounts blamed the soldiers for having panicked after Boyd's death, claiming that the Blacks had become "demoralized." Those who had fled the scene were castigated for not remaining to face death with their comrades. 90 Actually, Pershing had to restrain a sergeant who had confronted him with a demand to lead his company back to Carrizal for an attempt at retrieving the prisoners. 91

Overall, however, the American press reacted with favor to the Tenth's performance. Amid patriotic eulogies of Boyd and his "brave stand," newspapers ran headlines like "Negro Troops Faced Death With Bravery." 92 In Winooski, Vermont, where the Tenth had been stationed for four years, community leaders organized a rally and prepared a statement to Pershing's superiors expressing

89Ibid.
90The El Paso Morning Times, June 23 and 24, 1916.
91Mason, The Great Pursuit, 211-12.
grief and admiration for "the brave men who fell
gallantly at Carrizal" and served to "inspire every true
American." The same statement also cursed the
"treacherous" Mexicans."

The usual stereotyping of African Americans
accompanied the praise, illustrating racism's
malleability to humanize a celebrity as well as
dehumanize an enemy. Descriptions of the battle
described the Blacks as facing death with a smile, even
breaking into song during the heat of combat. Private
Sam H. Harris had escaped the battle scene and was
recovering from his wounds at Fort Bliss. Newspaper
interviews claimed "the little yellow fellow," with "his
quaint mannerisms," to be the hit of his ward and printed
his belief that the machine-gun operators must have been
deserted Americans because no Mexican could have fired
with such accuracy.

Black newspapers, which ran many articles about the
Carrizal battle and the "Fighting Tenth," outpaced the
mainstream press in excoriating what they felt was
Wilson's weak and vacillating response to the crisis.

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93 Glass, ed., The History of the Tenth Cavalry, 129.
95 The El Paso Morning Times, June 27, 1916.
One writer claimed that the lives of white troops would never have been employed in a dangerous reconnaissance mission. The same editorial likened Carrizal to the Brownsville episode, for in both cases, the president refused to take immediate action against those who had assaulted American soldiers. Once again, black lives had been forfeited, and the government’s official reference to Carrizal as an "incident" and not an outright attack revealed the low esteem with which it regarded the black regiments. 96

Much of the media speculation centered on the prisoners' treatment in their Chihuahua cells. The British embassy in Chihuahua City reported that the wounded soldiers had received medical attention and that the others were well-fed and in no danger. 97 However, as the prisoners testified months later, all had endured abuse during their week in captivity. Jailers beat the soldiers and joked that they would be shot against the wall. Daily rations of beans had to be consumed directly off the floor. Most humiliating of all, no clothes had been provided following the strip search in Carrizal,

96New York Age, June 29, 1916.

with the men forced to wait naked in their cells. Regarding Spilsbury as the group's leader, jailers directed their communications through him. George Turner later recalled that Spilsbury had coached the group in an escape plan should they have been taken into the prison yard for execution.98

The appearance of Blacks in United States Army uniforms seemed to surprise some Mexican observers. In the Carrancista camps, rumors circulated that the imprisoned Blacks would desert and join the Mexican Army. This in turn might prompt the defection of all Blacks serving with Pershing. The El Paso consul attributed the rumors to "smooth talk" by the captives themselves, who may have given the impression of desertion in order to ease their mistreatment.99

Despite all of the saber-rattling, few military authorities on either side contemplated actual war. The inability of 11,000 American troops to capture even one brigand illustrated the difficulty of a northern invasion, and even had removal of Carranza been a motive, the factious nature of Mexican politics made the finding

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99Telegram, El Paso Consul to Secretary of State, June 22, 1916, Records relating to Internal Affairs of Mexico, NAMP, roll 54.
of a suitable replacement problematic.\textsuperscript{100} For Carranza, holding the prisoners had value only as a bargaining chip with which to force Pershing's withdrawal, something Wilson made clear he would not consider in his demand for unconditional release.

One week after the fracas, Carranza broke the diplomatic stalemate. On June 28, he ordered the men released and escorted to the border. His announcement accompanied a fabricated account of the prisoners' reaction upon hearing the news. The Chihuahua City wire service reported that the Blacks broke out in plantation melodies, dancing and singing with their jailers. Their happy anticipation of returning to "Dixie" elicited cheers and encores from the Mexicans, who fraternized in brotherhood with the Blacks as they departed.\textsuperscript{101}

A very different picture emerged over the next few days. Turner, Spilsbury, and others later explained their fear that the release was a ruse and that they would be executed en route to Ciudad Juarez. Arriving there on the afternoon of June 29, the soldiers passed through the El Paso delousing station clad only in

\textsuperscript{100}John Silliman to Woodrow Wilson, June 26, 1916, Records relating to Internal Affairs of Mexico, NAMP, roll 54.

\textsuperscript{101}The El Paso Morning Times, June 29, 1916.
blankets and sandals, with a silent throng of Mexicans watching as Carrancista authorities transferred custody of the prisoners to officials from Fort Bliss.\textsuperscript{102}

The arrival of the Carrizal hostages became the most celebrated event of El Paso's year. A huge outpouring of affection greeted the cavalrymen in the form of a downtown parade. Businesses closed their shops and sent food, money, cigarettes, flowers, and many other gifts to the troops. A commenter summarized the general feeling: "Though the captured men were negroes, they were United States soldiers and had gallantly upheld the honor of their nation on a foreign battlefield."\textsuperscript{103} Locals delivered watermelons en masse for a welcome-home feast:

Major Fewell, who knows what a happy combination can be made out of the merging of a negro and a watermelon, thought of the watermelon feast. John Wyatt and Frank Coles carried the melons to Fort Bliss and got nearly as much happiness out of the thing as the negroes themselves.\textsuperscript{104}

The Carrizal survivors provided a sense of pride to El Paso's African American community. The principal of the local black high school met the arriving troops with a bouquet, while the Negro Women's League led the city's

\textsuperscript{102}Mason, \textit{The Great Pursuit}, 216-17; and Turner, \textit{Investigation of Mexican Affairs}, 1567.

\textsuperscript{103}\textit{The El Paso Morning Times}, June 30, 1916.

\textsuperscript{104}\textit{Ibid}. 
participating Blacks in the parade by displaying the stars and stripes. Some merchants complained that not a single porter, barber, or bootblack could be located as the soldiers passed through town.\textsuperscript{105}

Other stories soon replaced Carrizal in the national media but in El Paso, the Tenth received great attention for several days. With no hesitation, the cavalrymen refuted claims of adequate treatment in the Chihuahua penitentiary, denying stories about camaraderie with their jailers. Private Joe Oliver stated, "If being fed just enough to keep us alive and being forced to sleep on a bare concrete floor is good treatment then we got lots of it."\textsuperscript{106} The men also repudiated claims of Mexican atrocities at Carrizal; none remembered any wounded soldiers murdered after surrender. When questioned about the cause of the fracas, all corroborated the reports of Boyd's rashness and complained that the battle had been unnecessary.\textsuperscript{107}

Retrieving the bodies of those killed at Carrizal became an issue over the following week. The American consul demanded that the corpses be exhumed and returned

\textsuperscript{105}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{106}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{107}Ibid.
to Texas for proper burial. On July 5, a crew from Villa Ahumada disinterred nine bodies, only one of which could be identified since all valuables—including name tags—had been removed. Upon arrival in El Paso, the flag-draped coffins were displayed in a funeral procession, with flags flown at half-mast along the route and the released hostages serving as pallbearers.\textsuperscript{108}

Patriotic affection might be expected from El Paso, with its high need for military protection and with black civilians comprising a significant part of the community. Even at the national level, however, Americans paused to honor the Carrizal heroes. Six of the fallen cavalrymen received burials in Arlington National Cemetery. On July 10, Congress unanimously approved a resolution that all House members who had served in the Union and Confederate armies and the Spanish-American War would form a committee to attend the funeral at Arlington.\textsuperscript{109} Thousands of people from the district lined the procession route. Secretary of War Newton D. Baker directed the ceremony and President Wilson personally placed wreaths on the six coffins.\textsuperscript{110} During a tribute

\textsuperscript{108}Ibid., July 3 and July 7, 1916.


\textsuperscript{110}Freeman (Indianapolis), July 29, 1916.
to the Carrizal dead at Washington's Cosmopolitan Baptist Church, Congressman Joseph Walsh declared, "Their conduct should awaken an appreciation of the devotion of the men of that race to our flag."\textsuperscript{111}

Never before had public praise of this magnitude occurred for African American soldiers. Although the watermelon references and other stereotypes still indicate that Whites interpreted Blacks' behavior within a preconceived racial framework, that should not distract historians from viewing this appreciation of the Carrizal survivors as genuine. Whatever racist fears Brownsville had aroused ten years before, the Carrizal incident permitted those fears to be supplanted--at least for a brief time--since recent events in Mexico and on the Mexican border had caused many to substitute Blacks with Hispanics in the role of racial subordinate.

Even so, the new appreciation for black soldiers proved quite temporary as the dedications dwindled over the next few weeks. As the \textit{New York Age} pointed out a month after the prisoners' release:

> The most astounding incident of the Mexican situation as so far developed is the apparent consent of all parties to forget the battle of Carrizal. Having recovered the prisoners, the government calmly ignores the dead. . . . It is as

\textsuperscript{111}\textit{Washington Bee}, August 5, 1916.
though the United States were ashamed of the men who fought and died on that occasion.\textsuperscript{112}

This black editor's observation indicates how quickly the Carrizal affair became a memory. With the crisis over, the threat of war with Mexico dissipated as well. As of August 1916, Pershing's army was still concentrated at Casas Grandes, while a huge mobilization of American troops remained on the border. Forming a joint commission, the two governments attempted for the remainder of the year to negotiate a solution. Facing re-election in November, Wilson could not withdraw the expedition without giving the appearance of failure. His refusal to recall Pershing clashed with Carranza's insistence on immediate removal. Both sides had reached a deadlock; each knew the other had no immediate intention of declaring war, or the Carrizal affair would have ended differently.\textsuperscript{113}

The commission's failure meant another seven miserable months for Pershing's troops in Mexico. By fall, his officers had abandoned the pretense of tracking Villistas and languished in camp at Colonia Dublan. Enlisted men in the Tenth grumbled that "the election had


\textsuperscript{113}\textit{Hall and Coerver, Revolution on the Border}, 75-77; and \textit{Knight, The Mexican Revolution}, 354.
something to do with the duration of camp." The transportation of supplies began to improve, with motorized trucks delivering mail and basic staples. Wilson demobilized the guard units at the rate of 6,000 per week in late 1916 but the original expeditionary forces remained in Mexico over the winter. In celebration of the Tenth's fiftieth anniversary, the regiment's black cooks prepared a Christmas feast for the homesick soldiers but a windstorm ruined the event by covering the food with sand, making it inedible.

Carranza continued to insist on the expedition's eviction but he could afford patience, having learned that the best way to humiliate the Norteamericanos was to ignore them. By January 1917, America's interest in Mexico had reached apathetic levels, in contrast to the dawning inevitability of entry into World War One. Later that month, Wilson finally announced withdrawal, with the last troops crossing the Rio Grande on February 5. Two months later, Pershing sailed for France as head of the American Expeditionary Force.

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The United States' official position maintained that although Villa remained at large, the expedition had broken his power and brought peace to the border. While attacks on American lives and property did diminish after 1916, Villa's military and political influence actually grew. His Villista army, numbering only about 500 during the Columbus raid, was estimated at over 10,000 as the last American forces crossed the border. Carranza's original compliance with invading Yankees cost him patriotic supporters, many of whom turned to his rival as the real hope for Mexico. Mexican legends still regard Villa as the arrogant symbol of anti-Yankee resistance, the only man ever to attack the continental United States and get away with it. It seems too conspiratorial to credit Villa with having masterminded the entire affair; however, the expedition's outcome could not have worked more to his advantage than if he had planned it himself.

Carrizal and the Punitive Expedition have received their proper attention in historical literature but the gift, and burden, of hindsight often leads historians to forget the imperialistic ideas which framed these affairs. Colonel Frank Tompkins spoke for several expedition veterans, including Pershing and General

George Patton, who later regretted the decision not to seize Mexico:

During these months of May and June the United States would have been fully justified in declaring war on Mexico. That we failed to do so was a fatal error, for our continued acceptance of Mexican abuse not only warranted Mexican contempt but weakened our prestige abroad, and above all we lost the excuse for organizing an army of half a million men with which to bring Mexico to her senses...”  

In 1916, such sentiments represented the minority views of Anglo expansionists and border residents. Neither country at the time possessed the resources nor the public commitment to wage a second Mexican American War. But the Mexican Revolution and the United States’ military response—in exacerbating tensions between the two countries—also worsened race relations along the Rio Grande. As the gulf between Americans and Mexicans widened, the military accomplishments of black soldiers briefly gained recognition.

An over-simplified analysis, one that asserts a dichotomy of race and nationalism, would conclude that nationalistic pride outweighed racial prejudice. But racism and nationalism, rather than opposing one another, became mutually reinforcing, and, in fact, reveal nationalism to be a more racially complex identity than

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*118 Tompkins, *Chasing Villa*, 199.*
scholars realize. White supremacy equated dark skins with physical and mental inferiority. But patriotic faith in national institutions, especially the Army, defended imperialism as a means of uplifting inferior peoples. If the Carrizal prisoners were elevated for a time to hero status, it was because they behaved within that ideology. When Sam Harris reflected on whether Abe Lincoln gazed down from heaven and approved of the troops’ behavior at Carrizal, a white editor responded with this comment:

To us they are heroes - every one of them. They are American soldiers, and as such have only given added evidence that they are made of real American stuff; that undiluted American blood courses through their veins; that they are on tiptoe for the honor of the nation to which they have sworn undying allegiance. And as we welcome them back to their native soil with heartfelt cheers of rejoicing for the survivors - we drop a sympathetic tear for those who went down into the deep, dark valley, unsuspecting victims of a lurking and venomous hatred.

So, never fear, Sam Harris - you or your comrades. Your sacrifice on the altar of your country is the glory of your American heritage - splendid, brilliant, enduring. The "folks in heaven" know; the people on earth appreciate.119

On the surface, glowing sentiments like this suggest greater acceptance for the inherent worth of Blacks and other dark-skinned peoples. Rather than repudiating imperialist views, however, black soldiers’ participation in the Punitive Expedition strengthened them. As one

119The El Paso Morning Times, July 1, 1916.
group was elevated to heroic status, another was degraded for its refusal to cooperate with American visions of progress. When one prisoner exclaimed upon arrival at the Rio Grande, "Thank Gawd, Thank Gawd, I'm off of dat concrete floor and round flat corn pone in dat spick jail," he not only expressed his gladness to be home but verified his countrymen's beliefs about American superiority.¹²⁰

As the black regiments departed Mexico in 1917, they left behind a border which had witnessed both change and continuity during the previous fifty years of their service. In many ways, the Rio Grande of the 1910s differed little from that of the 1870s; instability and unrest at the core of either nation translated into discord and violence at their mutual periphery. In both decades, the attempt by federal authority to assume control over border affairs had brought new actors, and hence a new series of social dynamics to the region. But the border also had experienced dramatic changes in how people of the region perceived it. Providing more than a division of political jurisdictions, the Rio Grande by 1916 demarcated a separation of national identities. As a consequence, the ambiguities which residents once had

¹²⁰Ibid., June 30, 1916.
held about "nationality" were relegated to the frontier past. These continuities and changes would continue to shape political and social relationships on the Rio Grande for the remainder of the twentieth century.
Appendix to Chapter Six

"Charge of the Tenth Cavalry" by Wellington Adams

Beyond our border line went forth with pride
Black troopers brave, beneath their flag unfurled
Unheedful of the dangers lurking round
Unmindful save of duty neath its curls

Led on by Captain, gallant in command
And followed ne’er the less by gallant souls
Received firm orders, onward to go
And ONWARD went, tho’ hell oppressed their blows.

Across the misty plains, dusk-ridden, gone
Beyond horizon thick of cactus brier
O’er hill and dale, cross endless empty streams
They bravely plodded on, to do or die.

"Halt, men!" rang out upon the evening air,
"The enemy, the enemy is here;"
Pointing beyond, they paused with silent stare,
Their time was come to venture and to dare.

And dare they did aft’ parlance brief and curt
With rare determination they defied
Charged on with vengeance beaming from their eyes
Into a trap of death where bleeding, died

With song upon their lips (tense drawn before)
And laughter bold (as on a skylark day)
These black boys fought like demons in a cage
To keep Old Glory floating thro’ the fray.

Brave captain and his "aide" soon felt the blow
Of lead, fast showered o’er the ranks from foe
With vile effect and wounded there they fell
Yea, one by one, and two by two, and more.

Tho’ perched not victory on their uncrowned head
Still victory ‘twas because of heart so brave
That shrunk not from its task, nay, even swerved
From duty’s path though leading to the grave
Heroes today! Thou brave Tenth Cavalry  
With Captain "game" now sleeping neath the sod  
Let glory be, where glory's wont to go  
As glory did, where gallant souls have trod.

ILLUSTRATION I

SOURCE: John J. Johnson, *Latin America in Caricature*,
ILLUSTRATION II

SOURCE: John J. Johnson, *Latin America in Caricature*  
(Austin: University of Texas Press, 1980), 158.
ILLUSTRATION III

Ande con cuidado, Tío Sam.

—El de arriba.—Si no agachas la cabeza, te pincho.
El de abajo.—¡Ahi no más! Pos como gue a tocarme, te quedas sin tentáculo.

("Futilidades," México)

ILLUSTRATION IV

ILLUSTRATION V


LAS OBRAS DE MISERICORDIA. Dar de beber al sediento

PATRIA (En clave de la Revelación.)— ¡Paz! ¡Dadme Paz! ¡Tengo SED de Paz y Justicia!

ENTRÉNAN. Toma, he aquí el hiel de mis ambientes!
David y Goliat.

ILLUSTRATION VI

Reconnaissance to Villa Ahumada via Carrizal

June 1916

July 1916 marked a milestone for the black military experience. Besides the acclaim showered on the Carrizal participants, that month also saw the fiftieth anniversary of the establishment of the black regular Army regiments. The Ninth and Tenth Cavalries and the Twenty-fourth and Twenty-fifth Infantries, for most of their existence, had performed their duties in relative obscurity, remaining on the peripheries of Americans' consciousness and their expanding empire. Although Carrizal did raise hopes for improvement, some Blacks, disgusted with the release of the film Birth of a Nation in 1915, assessed the black soldier's future more pessimistically. D. W. Griffith's portrayal of a prostrate South, menaced by simian-like black soldiers and legislators, delivered the ultimate racist message about the dangers of empowering a childlike and inferior people.

Regimental defenders tried to counter the damage done by the Griffith film with patriotic images of black
soldiers marching gallantly through Mexico.¹ Later that summer, when Representative Thaddeus Caraway from Arkansas introduced a bill that would have prohibited recruitment of Blacks, Secretary of War Newton D. Baker fought the proposal, declaring that, at Carrizal, "colored troops conducted themselves with the greatest intrepidity and reflected nothing but honor upon the uniform they wore." The measure went down to defeat.² In September, the United States Senate considered a plan to segregate black and white employees in the State War and Navy building. This proposal too was rescinded, partly for reasons identified by a black newspaper: "That such a thing could have been contemplated while the bodies of the Carrizal heroes had barely enough time to settle in their new graves at Arlington is unconscionable."³

¹For an example of the way that film was used to minimize racial differences, see Thomas Winter, "The Training of Colored Troops: A Cinematic Effort to Promote National Cohesion," in Peter C. Rollins and John E. O’Connor, eds., Hollywood’s World War I: Motion Picture Images (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1997), 13-25.


The way the glorious memory of Carrizal was manipulated to combat racist initiatives illustrates the important connection between military service and the rights of citizenship in the early twentieth century. By creating their own set of heroes and martyrs, names that could be evoked at opportune political moments, Blacks minimized the racial divides which separated them from Whites by emphasizing the national values which bound them together. It is significant that when Caraway introduced his bill to ban black enlistment, the Washington Bee—in addition to attacking his racism—derided him as "a man with no military record and apparently no common sense." What true American would deny his country the service of experienced veterans, whom history showed to have made "greater soldiers and better fighters than any white man"? All groups need their heroes and, despite the many setbacks that the regiments had endured, Blacks by and large still expected that deeds of valor on behalf of their nation would not go unacknowledged.

Only war could make such deeds possible. In the summer of 1916, black leaders expected war with Mexico but as Pershing's forces languished in Chihuahua over the

following months, it became clear that Europe, not Mexico, would become the next battleground for African American soldiers. Like Whites, Blacks' opinions about the European conflict had evolved since 1914 from neutrality to sympathy for the Allies. The four regular regiments remained stateside through the war but a number of new black units were sent overseas. Almost 400,000 African Americans left home hoping to fight in World War One. Some of them saw front-line action in France but most served in non-combat roles, comprising about a third of the United States' military labor force.5

Other allied countries, recruiting from the colonies of their respective empires, employed Blacks in the war. The French, for instance, used troops from Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, and Senegal in their occupation of the Rhineland after 1918. In a manner reminiscent of the United States' use of Blacks in Texas, the presence of African forces in occupied Germany stimulated fears about race and miscegenation. German propagandists spread stories about African soldiers raping white women and pillaging towns, rumors that in some cases were

deliberately spread by the French who hoped this would cow the Germans into submission.\footnote{Jena M. Gaines, "Darkness on the Rhine: Truth and Propaganda in Occupied Germany," unpublished paper, in author's possession.} Scholars have barely begun to examine Allied recruitment from the African diaspora in the two world wars but a tentative glance suggests some chilling consequences for global race relations. When Adolf Hitler warned in \textit{Mein Kampf} about those enemies of Germany who bring "Negroes into the Rhineland," he tapped into popular paranoiac fears for which the use of black soldiers had helped to provide fertile ground, fears that later fortified the anti-Semitism of Nazi racial ideology.\footnote{Hitler, \textit{Mein Kampf} (Berlin: Verlag Frz. Eher Nachf, 1925; trans., Ralph Manheim, Houghton Mifflin, 1971), 325.}

The global participation of black soldiers in World War One captured the attention of many African Americans. Even before United States intervention, black leaders and journalists followed with curiosity the exploits of African forces in Europe. One reporter described the soldiers from Senegal and Madagascar as "coal-black giants" who "face the trenches with wistful eyes, and when they are unleashed, the Germans won't stop running until they get back to the Kaiser." Although the African troops spoke with a strong French dialect, their language...
was supposedly "recognizable by former plantation slaves." Claims like these, so imbued with racial pride, indicate a growing and assertive pan-African consciousness among Black Americans that would soon test their national allegiance.

This clash between loyalties was perhaps best articulated by W. E. B. Du Bois who, early in the war, hoped that military service would not only end Jim Crow but would liberate Africa from European domination. Du Bois expected that the Allied powers would regard a protected franchise and a free African state as fair compensation for Blacks' help in "the Great War." Even in his last major work published 28 years later, Du Bois recalled the debt which Whites owed to Blacks for their part in saving the world for democracy.  

Yet in his more pessimistic (or should we say realistic?) moments, Du Bois realized the potential of racial prejudice to subvert democracy and concluded that black veterans--because of the pride they had known as soldiers--would never return to subordinated status. If

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*New York Age*, June 22, 1916.


Whites proved unwilling to accept black equality, then the black man should use his recently-acquired fighting skills to take what rightfully belonged to him. In a 1919 editorial titled "Returning Soldiers," Du Bois announced that "we are cowards and jackasses if now that the war is over, we do not marshal every ounce of our brain and brawn to fight a sterner, longer, more unbending battle against the forces of hell in our own land."\(^\text{11}\)

As Du Bois wrote those words, black veterans already were returning to find reformed racists very much in the minority. Following a decline in recent years, the number of black lynchings reached 58 in 1918 and 77 in 1919; at least ten of the victims in the latter year were World War One veterans. "Red Summer" riots erupted in Washington, D.C., Chicago, Omaha, Longview, Texas, and Helena, Arkansas. The NAACP reported incidents in at least six states where uniformed African Americans had been assaulted and driven out of town.\(^\text{12}\)

\(^{11}\)Quoted in Lewis, W. E. B. Du Bois, 578-79.

In Texas, where Blacks had fought and died to secure the safety of Anglo settlement, soldiers and civilians alike faced a new wave of racist violence during the late 1910s. Texas was second only to Georgia in anti-Black lynchings in 1916, with nine lynchings occurring that year in the eastern cotton belt. Assigned to Camp Logan in August 1917, over 100 men from the Twenty-fourth Infantry mutinied against their officers, seized rifles and ammunition, and engaged in a three-hour riot that left more than 20 people dead or dying on the Houston streets. The riot, which had begun over police brutality and an insult to a black female, resulted in the court-martial of 63 infantrymen and the execution of 13 black soldiers.13

The role of military service in post-WWI racial discord seems indisputable, not only because of black veterans' open defiance of social mores but for the pride and assertiveness they stimulated in civilians. As historian Stephen Reich has written, black communities in Texas and across the nation celebrated "their" soldiers

as emblematic of a militant racial consciousness. In defending their country from foreign adversaries, African American men had discovered a sense of self-respect and national purpose which, in turn, raised expectations for racial reform and equality. When those expectations went unfulfilled, a new, more aggressive approach emerged, one free from patriotic naiveté and more attuned to the reality of white racism in America. Since the 1890s, black leaders had defended national service as a means of elevation. Now, with these bitter disappointments, African Americans' efforts at advancement began to focus more on racial than on national identity, foreshadowing the "New Negro" and Marcus Garvey's United Negro Improvement Association of the 1920s. Clearly, the origins of modern racial activism deserve reassessment within the context of Blacks' military experience during the United States' period of imperialistic growth.

It should be no exaggeration to declare that African Americans, who have heeded Du Bois' call to do battle for equality and justice, took much inspiration from the

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black enlisted men of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. On many occasions, black soldiers risked court-martial and death—during an era of vicious racial terrorism—to defend their rights in civilian communities. On a more symbolic level, their presence in the United States Army provided a rallying point for black dignity. By shouldering part of the burden for national defense, they challenged racist assertions of America as "a white man's country." Garna Christian's words are significant: "The New Negro of the post-World War I period—assertive, decisive, proud—was a younger cousin of the black fighting man."

If historians are to acknowledge this debt, then they must also recognize the dedication to national citizenship and American supremacy which came to motivate soldiers' military service. The freedman or free Black of 1866, like most men who joined the frontier Army, enlisted more for regular pay than for lofty ideals or patriotism. Yet after fifty years of collisions with Indians, Mexicans, Spaniards, and Filipinos, many buffalo soldiers developed a concept of "Americanness"—in contrast to "foreigners"—which offered the hope of a

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subsuming of racial differences beneath a shared national identity. African American history often has been told as the story of one people's involuntary presence in the United States, and of a resistance built on racial solidarity that opposes the power of the nation-state as oppressive. The activism of the early black soldier, however, did not emerge from a desire to resist America's national expansion but rather to join it, strengthen it, and, ultimately, to share in its benefits.

The paradox of Blacks' military service lay in their own ironic contribution to an expansion of the color line in regions they helped to acquire. Prior to the 1860s, the Rio Grande area comprised a "frontier"—not in the Turnerian sense of a sparsely settled geographic zone—but of a pre-racialized and pre-nationalized society based on local community identities. As such, the river and its surrounding terrain offered a refuge for Indians, runaway slaves, army deserters, outlaws, and others who found "civilized" institutions oppressive. While life along the river was hardly easy or even peaceable, racial and national conflict—as defined in

17 For an example of this usage of "frontier" as it applies to Mexican history, see Ana Marie Alonso, Thread of Blood: Colonialism, Revolution, and Gender on Mexico's Northern Frontier (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1995).
the modern sense—did not exist, because the very borders which would have made racial and national categorization possible had yet to be defined.

A leading cultural historian writes: "All borders are dangerous. If left unguarded, they could break down, our categories could collapse, and our world dissolve in chaos." This statement could have served as the motto for the Army and its black recruits on the Rio Grande. The United States and Mexico, through what in time became a collaborative effort, subordinated local authority to national power. In the process, the two governments redefined the line between them as a genuine "border," a separation of identities as well as polities. By the 1910s, national and racial categories played an important new role in the ways that border peoples tried to reshape their world.

Increased consciousness about race and nationality does not necessarily translate into conflict but it does indicate the formation and maintenance of new boundaries that prevent people of color and even lower-class Whites from recognizing mutual interests. Despite their shared experiences with white racism, African Americans,

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Hispanics, Native Americans, and Asians have been slow, historically speaking, to engage in cross-racial dialogue and address "the race problem" outside of their group-specific situations. Not until the post-World War II civil rights movements did black leaders, for instance, begin to reevaluate their opposition to immigration and embrace alliances with Chicanos and Asian Americans.¹⁹

Twentieth-century studies of race relations in southern Texas show a continuing pattern of competition and even hostility between people of color. One study from 1952 examined Whites' racial attitudes in an unnamed southern city with a combined Black-Hispanic population of about 8 percent. The majority of respondents said that they preferred to share their neighborhoods with Mexicans than with Blacks, regarding the latter as "too pushy, asking for more than they deserve," and competing with Whites for low-paid jobs. By contrast, Mexicans performed seasonal labor, stayed more them to themselves

due to the language barrier, and bore a closer resemblance to white people. 20

This study, however, only reflects Anglo stereotypes about non-Anglos. But if binary theories about two-tiered structures of prejudice are correct, how do we explain Blacks' and Hispanics' stereotypes about each other? Sociologist Ozzie Simmons conducted a similar study of McAllen, Texas--located northwest of Brownsville--by using oral interviews to determine Hispanic attitudes toward Blacks. Simmons found most lower-class respondents indifferent on the question but discovered that most middle-class Mexican Americans were divided on the issue of black civil rights. While some Hispanics in McAllen did perceive advantages in cooperating with Blacks, most favored maintaining sharp distinctions and insisted on inclusion for themselves in "the white race." One informant replied:

It gets me so mad when people say we’re not white. We’re not black and we’re not yellow, so we must be white. No one can say we’re niggers, but that’s the class we’re put in if we’re not white. Now, I have nothing against niggers as long as they know their place. It’s like every other people, there’s good niggers and bad niggers. A good

nigger is one who knows his place, and a bad nigger is one who doesn't.\textsuperscript{21}

Simmons also interviewed a Chicano civil rights activist from San Antonio who incurred the wrath of fellow Hispanics for suggesting collaboration with African Americans:

\ldots Well, all I got at that time was just a lot of criticism. They said I was a nigger lover, that I had no right to make such suggestions, that the Anglo people were already looking down on us as it was, without getting mixed up with the Negro to make the situation that much worse. The policy of our organizations always has been against mixing or associating with the Negro people, or even talking about the Negro problem being similar to the Latin American problem in any manner.\textsuperscript{22}

Another study, which examined the 1960s civil rights movement in San Antonio, confirmed Simmons' conclusion: that shared grievances by Blacks and Hispanics increased their competition for jobs and housing, and that neither group felt any common history or identification with the other.\textsuperscript{23} As Simmons' informant indicated, plans for racial advancement, even into recent decades, often aspire to equality with the group on top rather than the alleviation of problems for other groups at the bottom.

\textsuperscript{21}Ibid., 504.

\textsuperscript{22}Ibid., 505.

If the historian's task is to shatter myths, then few myths deserve exploding more than the notion of a historical "pan-colored" unity which simplistic discussions about "black and white" race relations help to perpetuate.

Likewise, as black World War One veterans learned in 1919, the story of minorities gaining upward mobility and white acceptance through military service constitutes another myth. Although the United States Army has provided individual African Americans with opportunities for respect and authority, the persistence of division and inequality in the modern nation-state dramatizes the military's failure to catalyze national integration, at least outside of the Army itself. Furthermore, military service—as we have seen—has even served to erode relationships between racialized groups who otherwise might have become allies.

This does not mean, however, that the military's role in racial and social change has been negligible. The Army serves two basic functions in modern times. On the one hand, it protects the nation's interests, or, to be more precise, the interests of that dominant group which controls the state. On the other, it operates as a patriotic symbol of the nation itself. Seldom, though, have these two tasks been accomplished with success at
the same time, and, in fact, they often conflict. During perceived crises such as wartime, states often demand the recruitment of soldiers who do not represent the national majority. This contradiction between the Army's protective function, which necessitates the use of minorities, and its symbolic function, which holds it as representative of nationhood, can create discord by upsetting a nation's internal coherence.

Many historians, in explaining American expansion, choose to describe the United States Army as the enforcer of a racist ideology that stripped native peoples and Hispanics of their independence, first in the West and then throughout the hemisphere. True, the Army did provide the muscle for expansion which, at the time, favored the establishment of white supremacy. But it also delivered the internal inconsistency which attacked the core assumptions of white racism by placing part of the burden for expansion directly on the shoulders of black servicemen. As recent debates about the recruitment of women and homosexuals illustrate, minority representation in military ranks continues today, and will continue in the future, to challenge and reshape Americans' concepts about their national self-image.

Minority enlistment has been no less a source of internal tension for the minorities themselves, who
sometimes must choose between conflicting loyalties of nation, race, gender, and ethnicity. The buffalo soldiers who rioted at San Angelo, Laredo, Brownsville, Houston and other Texas towns seem to have acted out of a dual loyalty both to nation and race. These multiple identities do not always merge so easily, as Du Bois well knew. But the fact that they are capable of co-existing at all speaks to the permeable possibilities of both. Though scholars are accustomed to describing them as mutually exclusive, the history of race and nationalism shows an ongoing tug-of-war between chauvinism and inclusion. 24 African American soldiers and their advocates, at least up to World War One, managed to reconcile these loyalties by linking their racial interests to those of their country.

As a consequence, their experience suggests the need for reconsideration about the hegemonic role that "race" enjoys in historical study. Racism did not motivate the participation of buffalo soldiers in western conquest, anymore than it did the Hispanics and Native Americans who fought them or, for that matter, the white officers

who commanded them. The phrase "racial borders," as used in this study, conveys a final meaning, referring to more than the Rio Grande itself or even the constructions of racial and national identity through the enforcement of their boundaries, but to the limitations of "race" as an analytical tool for understanding conflict and cooperation. Only when "race" is examined through its intersections with nationalism, class, and other identities can we begin to grasp the true complexity of the term. Only then will any effort to assess responsibility for the sins of the past be worthy of the word "justice," for as Vernon Bellecourt of the American Indian Movement has said, "Justice is the act of conscious, informed human beings." 25

In 1903, Du Bois predicted that the problem of the twentieth century would be that of "the color line - the relation of the darker to the lighter races of men in Asia and Africa, in America and the islands of the sea." 26 Considering the power that white countries and people of European descent have held in this century, his observation was prescient. White domination continues


strong today but even the greatest pessimist can concede that the twenty-first century is likely to see a rise—through economics, through political leadership, through sheer demographic numbers if nothing else—in the aggregate influence held by people and nations of color. Standing at the dawn of this new century, it may be wise for us to reconceptualize Du Bois' prediction, to look beyond the color line for other divisions, and to ask what relations the darker races of men will choose to have with each other, and how they will redefine themselves in the process.

Historians who grapple with those questions should not expect to be guided by the same sense of prophecy that guided Du Bois. One answer, however, seems certain. Camaraderie or friendship should not be expected between groups who share nothing more than a common historical experience with bigotry. In fact, when considering the poor way that subjugation and conquest prepares people for the responsibilities of power, we may do well to consider another quote, this one by the psychiatrist Frantz Fanon, who understood the legacies of imperialism from his perspective in post-colonial Africa: "The native is an oppressed person whose permanent dream is to become
the persecutor."\textsuperscript{27} That sentiment bodes ill for the dream of racial equality and justice. To ignore its implications, however, is to oppose the lessons which might be found in the history of black soldiers and the peoples whom they helped to conquer along the Texas-Mexico border.

\textsuperscript{27}Fanon, \textit{The Wretched of the Earth} (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1963), 93.
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