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## Brownsville revisited

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# BROWNSVILLE REVISITED

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts

in

The Department of History  
by

Ricardo Purnell Malbrew  
B.A., Grambling State University, 2002  
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## **Abstract**

The case of the all-black 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry of the United States Army in the Brownsville Affair is perhaps one of the most egregious events in American history. On the night of August 13, 1906, a group of anonymous men went on a shooting rampage throughout the town of Brownsville, Texas, leaving one person dead and another wounded. Since there had been hostilities between black soldiers and white civilians prior to the shootings, it did not take long for local authorities to assume the collective guilt of black soldiers. Without an adequate investigation or a full hearing, President Roosevelt bowed to public pressure issued dishonorable discharges to all members of the 25<sup>th</sup> who were stationed in Brownsville. Following their immediate discharge from the United States Army in December 1906, many of these soldiers were refused civilian employment due to their military status. This thesis is a reexamination of the Brownsville affair and its aftermath and seeks to make a case for restitution on behalf of the discharge soldiers and their families.

## **Introduction**

The city of Brownsville, Texas, became the center of a national controversy on the night of August 13, 1906, when members of the all-black 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry of the United States Army were accused of shooting up the town and killing a white civilian. Since there had been hostilities between the locals and the black soldiers since the 25<sup>th</sup>'s arrival weeks earlier, it did not take long for whites to assume the collective guilt of black soldiers, although there was no evidence to suggest that black soldiers committed the shootings. Although there had been a long history of conflict between black soldiers and white civilians in the American South, this case was exceptional in that President Theodore Roosevelt issued dishonorable discharges to all 167 members of Companies B, C, and D, of the 25<sup>th</sup>. Roosevelt issued the discharge to the soldiers although they were not given a hearing nor did they have an opportunity to defend themselves against the charges. Fourteen of the soldiers did receive honorable discharges in 1910, and the remainder of the men received honorable discharges in 1972. This thesis revisits the Brownsville affair and pays close attention to the injustice perpetrated on members of the 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry and concludes by making a case for reparations.

On the night of the shootings a group of fifteen to twenty armed men ran throughout the commercial and business areas of Brownsville firing at civilians, residences, and businesses. The first house they fired upon was the home of Louis Cowen, a home he and his wife shared with their five young children. Minutes later Frank Natus, a local bartender, became the affair's only fatality after he was shot in the forehead by a member of the unnamed mob.

Police Lt. Ygnacio "Joe" Dominguez was on duty that particular night but was not accompanied by his usual eight man-patrol:

Genaro Padron, Dioniso Lerma, Rafael Galvan, Vidal Rivas, Jose Coronado, Felix Calderon, Macedonio Ramirez and Cesario Leal.

Because of the city's vibrant red-light district that catered to Mexicans and Black soldiers, the Brownsville police often needed more officers at night than in the day. Nonetheless, Dominguez was by himself on this fateful evening. Dominguez was sitting on the steps of the local markethouse when he first heard the Winchester shots coming from the garrison wall of Fort Brown.<sup>1</sup> Alarmed, Dominguez jumped on his horse and sped down Washington Street before turning onto Thirteenth Street. As he approached the Miller Hotel across from Cowen Alley he saw eight straggling soldiers running toward Fort Brown. As Dominguez crossed onto Thirteenth Street towards Elizabeth Street, he hollered for the guests at the Miller Hotel to put out their room lanterns.<sup>2</sup> After a number of warnings, Dominguez continued down Thirteenth Street with his back to the raiders. As he turned north, the raiders took numerous shots, and his horse fell from underneath him breaking his left arm. Dominguez struggled to free his legs from beneath the horse. Soon thereafter, he miraculously walked on Elizabeth Street and crawled as far as Twelfth Street, where he met two Mexicans and lost consciousness.<sup>3</sup>

Once the shooting concluded, Mayor Combe of Brownsville walked down Elizabeth Street toward the garrison wall of Fort Brown. As he surveyed the town, police chief George Conner issued him a false report.

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<sup>1</sup> John D. Weaver, *The Brownsville Raid* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company 1971) , 48.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 50.

<sup>3</sup> *Brownsville Daily Herald*, August 14, 1900. UT-Brownsville Southmost College Archives, UT Libraries, Brownsville, Texas.



Combe was told that four police officers were missing, and Lt. Dominguez was reportedly dead. The mayor continued down Elizabeth Street where he encountered Dominguez's horse as it lie dead on the sidewalk.<sup>4</sup> At the post office, a group of angry men gathered with their rifles, wanting revenge, until the mayor approached and convinced them that he would ask Major Penrose to investigate the shooting. Company D commander, Captain Samuel P. Lyon testified during the Senate Hearings Committee that the people were quiet then, and Mayor Combe relayed to him that he had succeeded in dispersing a band of 200 armed men that were headed to Fort Brown.<sup>5</sup> At Fort Brown, Major Penrose ordered his men of every company to defensively line up alongside the garrison wall fearing that the townspeople were attacking them. After the shooting, Penrose detached a group of soldiers to investigate. Upon their return with Mayor Combe, Penrose realized that the soldiers were considered suspects by the townspeople. During the morning of August 14, 1906, Combe appointed a committee of four who were to appoint a committee to investigate the raid. Out of the four men appointed by the mayor, three, Captain William Kelley, Major John B. Armstrong, and E. H. Goodrich were ex-Union officers of the Civil War. William Ratcliff, a director of the First National Bank and president of Brownsville Land and Irrigation Company rounded out the search committee. Within hours, the Citizens Committee appointed Sheriff Celedonio Garza, Chief of Police George Conner, County Judge John Bartlett, Brownsville Attorney Frank W. Kibbe, Alderman James A. Brown, ex-Union Officer E. H. Goodrich, Brownsville Daily Herald Editor Jesse O. Wheeler, Banker John G. Fernandez, William Ratcliff, Major John B. Armstrong, Captain William Kelley, and

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<sup>4</sup> John D. Weaver, *The Brownsville Raid*, 50.

<sup>5</sup> 60th Congress 1st Session 1907-1908 *Senate Documents, Brownsville Affray Serial Set 5252*, 19:41.

Mayor Fred Combe.<sup>6</sup> Predictably, the committee assumed the soldiers were guilty and they immediately dispatched an alarming telegraph to the war department. With the death of a white civilian and the wounding of a white politician, the town was in an uproar, and its citizens would not rest until somebody was brought to justice. Weeks later President Teddy Roosevelt summarily discharged the soldiers denying them back pay and benefits.

This project will not provide a day-to-day narrative of the Brownsville Affair, as historians have called it, nor will it present any new research. Rather, this project will offer a new interpretive framework for looking at the incident and its aftermath. Specifically, it examines the complicity of the local and national government in establishing the collective guilt of the all-black 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry and will examine aspects of the Brownsville Affair that have not yet either been explored or considered. Chapter one discusses three separate cases involving Black soldiers and their interactions on liberty with Brownsville citizens. Collectively they reveal the town's bigotry against Black soldiers, the military's refusal to confront it, and the increasing tension between Black soldiers and Brownsville citizens.

Chapter two examines the dismissal of the 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry by President Theodore Roosevelt. In particular, it pays close attention to the actions of Booker T. Washington and others who tried to convince Roosevelt not to issue the discharge. The actions of Roosevelt shocked African-Americans who were loyal to both Roosevelt and the Republican Party. Despite the pleas of black leaders, Roosevelt summarily dismissed the members of the 25<sup>th</sup> although some of them had served valiantly in the Spanish-American war, including several who won awards for valor. Although Roosevelt had no evidence by which to dismiss the soldiers he nonetheless removed all

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<sup>6</sup> Weaver, *The Brownsville Raid*, 69.

167 from the Army. -

Chapter three looks at the court-martial of Captain Edgar Macklin who as “officer of the day” was responsible for the entire fort on the night of the shootings. Macklin’s testimony and the statements by other soldiers and officers confirm that Macklin committed several serious violations that night. Thus, within the chapter, little evidence suggests that Macklin was not in his quarters on August 13, 1906 during the shooting, but perhaps, in the town as a participant. The court-martial of Macklin is important since a conviction would have exonerated and reinstated members of the 25<sup>th</sup>. Despite evidence to the contrary Macklin was found not guilty.

Chapter four concludes by making a case for reparations based upon government complicity. Although the Brownsville affair is a pivotal event in both African-American and United States history, the subject has been largely ignored for the past 35 years. In 1971 historians John D. Weaver and Anne J. Lane tackled the Brownsville Affair in separate studies. Weaver’s book, *The Brownsville Affair* is based largely upon the 1909/1910 court of inquiry and is the most authoritative. Weaver argued that the black soldiers were unjustifiably punished without a hearing; consequently, he inferred that President Roosevelt was at fault. Weaver concludes in *The Brownsville Raid* that President Roosevelt’s policies in dealing with the affair ignored the evidence presented in the case. In 1997 Weaver published a follow-up book on the subject titled, *The Senator and the Sharecropper’s Son*. This book follows the life of the lone surviving member of the 25<sup>th</sup>, Dorsie Willis, and it discusses the efforts of politicians who convinced Nixon to sign the bill that reversed the dishonorable discharge order given by Roosevelt.<sup>7</sup> Ann J. Lane, on the other hand, studied the reaction of the Black press and its involvement with Black leaders such as

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<sup>7</sup> Weaver, *The Brownsville Raid ; The Sharecropper and the Senator* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1997), 209.

Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Du Bois in her book *The Brownsville Affair*. Her study concluded that the black presses' reaction to the news of the soldiers' discharges from active duty initiated an immediate response from the black community and, like Weaver, she argues that the 25<sup>th</sup> was unfairly discharged. Less generous than some other authors, Lane described Roosevelt as "narrow-minded and self-righteous," embodying the least attractive of Victorian characteristics. Sympathetic to the "unfortunate men," Lane viewed the soldiers as relegated to the margins of the conflict on the political stage.<sup>8</sup> Since the publication of these two monographs, *The Brownsville Raid* and *The Brownsville Affair*, not much has been written about the affair; however, they will assist this thesis in offering a new interpretation of the eventful night in Brownsville, Texas in 1906. With regards to the mysterious actions of Captain Edgar Macklin on the night of the shootings, both Weaver and Lane mention Macklin as a "participant only as the realm of an officer on duty" and both fail to analyze his role while serving in that capacity. Both authors instead look at "the bigger picture," which embodies the role of the black press and the collaboration of the military and the federal government. This thesis provides major and compelling evidence that in the Brownsville Affair a strong case for restitution and reparations can be made on behalf of the dismissed soldiers.<sup>9</sup> Despite the reversal of the discharge in 1910 and in 1972, this thesis will argue more needs to be done on behalf of these soldiers and their families. Three levels of injustice occurred in Brownsville. The first level of injustice began with the municipality of Brownsville. A committee of businessmen, lawyers, judges, and elected officials were organized to investigate the raid. At the conclusion of their investigation the

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<sup>8</sup> Garna L. Christian, *Black Soldiers in Jim Crow Texas, 1899-1917*(College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1995), 85.

<sup>9</sup> Ann J. Lane, *The Brownsville Affair* (New York: Kennikat Press, 1971). Other studies on Brownsville include: James Tinsley, "The Brownsville Affray," M.A. Thesis, University of North Carolina, 1948; "Discharged Without Honor," A&E Television, 2000.

committee sent alarming letters to the War Department. The next level of injustice was at the military level. Earlier conflicts between black soldiers and the townspeople, if handled properly by Major Charles Penrose and Captain Edgar Macklin, could have prevented the raid. Moreover, not a single historian has studied Captain Edgar A. Macklin's actions while on duty that particular night. Overall, this study will place Macklin under close scrutiny to determine whether his own testimony will convict or exonerate his actions that night.

In sum, this thesis will build a case for reparations for all 167 soldiers dismissed without definitive evidence of their involvement in Brownsville. *Reconstructing the Dreamland: The Tulsa Race Riot of 1921, Race, Reparations and Reconciliation*, by Alfred L. Brophy suggest such justification. In this book, Brophy reexamines the destruction of Black Tulsa and makes a strong case for reparations. This project attempts to do the same.<sup>10</sup> Lastly, the decision by President Theodore Roosevelt to dismiss the soldiers without a hearing or court-martial was a miscarriage of justice.

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<sup>10</sup> Alfred Brophy, *Reconstructing the Dreamland: The Tulsa Race Riot of 1921* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

## Chapter 1: No Niggers or Dogs Allowed

The Negro troops would never have been quartered at Fort Sheridan without a protest if I was to remain in command here...I never like them and the farther away they are kept the better it pleases me. For the life of me I can not understand why the United States should try to make soldiers out of them. Certainly there are enough fine white men in this big country to make soldiers of without recruiting from such a source.

-Colonel William L. Pitcher, *Macon Daily Telegraph*, November 7, 1906 *Senate Documents*

During the late 1860s the 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry was established at Jackson Barracks in Louisiana, where it maintained martial law in the racially tense period of Reconstruction. In 1870 the 25<sup>th</sup> reported to Fort Davis, Texas, which was abandoned by both the Union and the Confederate armies after the war. During military campaigns from 1875 to 1880, the 25<sup>th</sup> pursued Mexicans and Indians across the Mexico border, and during the Spanish-American war members of the 25<sup>th</sup> served heroically.

On May 27, 1906, the citizens of Brownsville received word that a black regiment was being assigned to Fort Brown. The news was greeted with alarm in both the white community and across the border into Mexico. The Mexican community in and around Brownsville recalled the raids of black soldiers during the 1870s, and joined forces with white conservatives to protest the pending arrival of the 25<sup>th</sup>. Many Mexicans remembered the raids of the Buffalo soldiers thirty years prior and they shared the same resentment that white citizens of Brownsville possessed. Blacks would not be welcomed. The War Department received numerous telegraphed complaints. Secretary of War William H. Taft responded quickly to those complaints:

The fact is that a certain amount of race prejudice between white and black seems to have become almost universal throughout the country, and no matter where colored troops are sent there are always some who make objection to their coming. It is a fact, however, as shown by our records, that colored troops are quite as well disciplined and behaved as the average of other troops.

The records of the Army also tend to show that white soldiers average a greater degree of intemperance than colored ones. It has sometimes happened that communities which objected to the coming of colored soldiers have, on account of their good conduct, entirely changed their view and commended their good behavior to the War Department.<sup>11</sup>

Established originally as the village of Dapto, its name was changed to Brownsville in honor of George Brown, a wealthy landowner and merchant who made a fortune in the 1830s. During the Civil War the racially diverse town emerged as an important seaport for the Confederacy as rebel soldiers used the city's port to smuggle Confederate goods into Mexico. In the post-reconstruction era Brownsville emerged as a mid-sized city in the 1880s; however, when a yellow fever epidemic gripped the city unrepentantly much of the business community left the city, leaving behind working-class whites and lower-income Mexicans. Black civilians which numbered less than one hundred in the Lower Rio Grande Valley, most of them were males discharged from army service, depended on local military and ranching economies for subsistence.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Champ Clark, *My Quarter Century of American Politics* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, c. 1920), I, 443. <sup>12</sup> James N. Leiker, *Racial Borders: Black Soldier Along The Rio Grande* (College Station: Texas A&M Press 2002), 73.

<sup>12</sup> Unfortunately a good history on Brownsville has yet to be written. However, several studies look at the city in a variety of contexts: William L. Adams, *Portrait of a Border City: Brownsville, Texas* (Austin: Easkin Press, 1997); Milo Kearney, *Still More Studies in Brownsville History* (Brownsville, TX: University of Texas-Brownsville, 1991); Kearney, *Studies in Rio Grande Valley History* (Brownsville, TX: University of Texas-Brownsville, 2005); Kearney, *Further Studies in Rio Grande Valley History*, (Brownsville, TX: University of Texas-Brownsville, 2006); Frank Schubert, *Voices of the Buffalo Soldier: Records, Reports, and Recollections of Military Life and Service in the West* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2003).

Despite local opposition to the presence of black soldiers Mayor Frederick Combe, who had once served with black troops, ordered his police force to show equal respect to black soldiers as they did for white troops.<sup>13</sup> The 25<sup>th</sup> relieved the Twenty-sixth Infantry of their duty in Brownsville on July 28, 1906.<sup>14</sup> In the beginning, the Twenty-fifth enjoyed a pleasant atmosphere, although their mere presence made racial tensions inevitable. During their off-duty hours the troops enjoyed drinking and dancing in many saloons throughout the town. However, several white-owned bars established Jim-Crow policies by either refusing to serve black troops or by setting up small “black bars” in the rear of their establishments. As tensions escalated over the Jim Crow policies of local bars, a former member of the 25<sup>th</sup>, Pvt. Holloman, opened the first black-owned bar in Brownsville in an effort to make money and also in an effort to avert racial hostilities.<sup>15</sup> A series of incidents between black soldiers and white civilians developed days before the actual raid, which, if handled properly, could have quelled the tensions.<sup>16</sup> These incidents were the Baker-Reid case, the Tate-Newton case, and the Lon Evans case.

The Baker-Reed case was the first racial incident and took place on Sunday, August 12, 1906, when Private Oscar W. Reid and another soldier returned after a late night liberty from Matamoros, Mexico, by ferry. Customs inspector A. Y. Baker apprehended them at the pier and accused them of drunkenness and disorderly conduct. He instructed both of the soldiers to “move

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<sup>13</sup> Unfortunately a adequate history on Brownsville has yet to be written. However, several studies look at a city in a variety of contexts: William L. Adams, *Portrait of a Border City: Brownsville, Texas* (Austin: Easkin Press, 1997); Milo Kearney, *Still More Studies in Brownsville History* (Brownsville, TX: University of Texas-Brownsville, 1991); Kearney, *Studies in Rio Grande Valley History* (Brownsville, TX: University of Texas-Brownsville, 2005); Kearney, *Further Studies in Rio Grande Valley History*, (Brownsville, TX: University of Texas-Brownsville, 2006); Frank Schubert, *Voices of the Buffalo Soldier: Records, Reports, and Recollections of Military Life and Service in the West* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2003).

<sup>14</sup> 60<sup>th</sup> Congress 1<sup>st</sup> Session 1907-1908 *Senate Documents, Brownsville Affray, Serial Set 5252*, 19:36-37; Hereafter referred to as *Senate Documents*, 19 .

<sup>15</sup> *Senate Documents*, 19: 41-42.

<sup>16</sup> On every payday a soldier faced robbery. If he refused to relinquish the cash; he faced a beaten and a night in jail courtesy of the (town) Sheriff and his deputies: James N. Leiker, *Racial Borders: Black Soldier Along The Rio Grande* (College Station: Texas A&M Press 2002), 127-128.



on” and then he shoved Reid off a plank into a quarry filled with solid mud and water. The next morning, Reid reported the incident to his company commander, Captain Edgar A. Macklin. Macklin responded to Reid’s complaint by sarcastically asking him if he had difficulty surviving in the quarry. Macklin then told Reid that he had no right to file a report since he was drunk when the alleged incident occurred.<sup>17</sup>

A second confrontation involving black soldiers occurred later that day when a white lady was allegedly attacked by a black soldier. *The Brownsville Herald* told its readers that “Mrs. Evans” was attacked near her front door after returning from a trip. The headline read: “*Negro Soldier Invaded Private Premises Last Night and Attempted to Seize a White Lady.*” For most white southerners-the words: Negro, Soldier, and White Lady, conjured up images of black soldiers wantonly raping white women. The article mentioned the attack on Mrs. Evans and it accepted her word that she was assaulted by a black soldier. “The light was shining brightly through the back doors of the house and Mrs. Evans saw plainly that the man was a Negro dressed in a soldier’s uniform. By the time she was carried into the house and recovered sufficiently to tell what happened, the Negro had disappeared entirely.” The article concluded by mentioning that Mrs. Evans was “feeling quite shaken up,” but not before labeling the unknown alleged black assailant a “brute.” By labeling the assailant a brute, readers were being told that all black men were on the rampage looking for white women to rape. The mood of the article conveyed the attitude of the city toward the presence of black soldiers. The attack upon Mrs. Evans confirmed many of the fears local whites had when it was announced that the all-black 25<sup>th</sup> would be stationed at Fort Brown. Like many other southerners they could not stomach seeing

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<sup>17</sup> *Brownsville Daily Herald*, August 13, 1906. UT-Brownsville Southmost College Archives, UT Libraries, Brownsville, Texas.

black men, carrying weapons, and being trained to kill. The mere idea of a black soldier was unimaginable but the presence of black soldiers certainly frightened many white southerners. The coverage of the attack upon Mrs. Evans certainly fanned the flames of unrest that would erupt the following day.<sup>18</sup>

The next day, Lon Evans informed Major Penrose that one of his soldiers committed an assault against his wife. The mayor suggested that he and Evans take the accusation to Major Penrose. Mayor Combe escorted Evans to the Fort Brown post in his carriage. At the post, the two men were given directions to Major Penrose's quarters. As they walked to Penrose's quarters, they observed him on the fort parade grounds. The mayor introduced Evans to Major Penrose and they discussed the incident. Major Penrose listened to Evans's recollection of the alleged assault committed on his wife:

Last night around nine o'clock, my wife was assaulted by a colored who she is positive was a nigger. We were returning from the train station late and met with a friend of ours. He was riding a pony that we loaned him and he insisted that my wife ride it instead of walk. He assisted her as she mounted the pony and then she went on ahead. We walked slowly behind her and as she made it home, she entered the house towards the back gate then she dismounted. She opened the gate and neared the ash barrel in front of the house when a man appeared from behind her and grabbed her hair. He threw her to the ground as she screamed and then he fled.<sup>19</sup>

Evans' description of the assailant was that he witnessed a large Negro wearing a slouch hat, blue shirt and khaki trousers. Major Penrose informed Evans that he had many men fitting that particular description. He asked Evans if his wife, Mrs. Evans, would be willing to provide a more detailed description of her attacker. Evans stated that she was unable to give a description because she was too traumatized. The *Brownsville Daily Herald* reported that "Mrs. Evans is

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<sup>18</sup> *Brownsville Daily Herald*, August 13, 1906. UT-Brownsville Southmost College Archives, UT Libraries, Brownsville, Texas.

<sup>19</sup> *Brownsville Daily Herald*, August 13, 1906. UT-Brownsville Southmost College Archives, UT Libraries, Brownsville, Texas.

feeling quite shaken up today, though suffering no bodily injury beyond a very sore place where her hair was grabbed, and also her neck, which was twisted by the brute in jerking her from the steps.”<sup>20</sup> Penrose believed that Evans’s claim was without merit and was certain that none of the men under his command was the assailant. He assured Evans that the avid prostitution in and around Mexico was enough to satisfy his men sexually. As Evans got back in his carriage, Mayor Combe escorted Major Penrose aside and warned him, “Major, if you allow your men to go into town tonight I will not be responsible for their lives.”<sup>21</sup> Major Penrose assured Combe that he would restrict all soldiers to the base. Subsequently, he ordered Captain Macklin, the officer of the day, to notify all the soldiers at dinner that all liberty passes were rescinded as of 8:00 p.m. Macklin then sent three patrols into town to retrieve those soldiers who were off base at the time of the order restricting them at the base.<sup>22</sup>

The third and final confrontation took place on the evening of Monday, August 13, 1906, the actual night of the raid. The Tate-Newton case involved another soldier, James W. Newton and another customs inspector, Fred Tate. While Newton and Private Frank J. Lipscomb were walking back to the base to comply with orders, they approached a group of white ladies obstructing their path. According to Newton they made a single file line in order to bypass the ladies.<sup>23</sup> However, Major A.P. Blocksom, a military investigator, later reported that although the ladies were obstructing the sidewalk, Newton and Lipscomb “jostled” the ladies as they passed.<sup>24</sup> The two soldiers continued their conversation until suddenly, Tate, a customs inspector for the

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid, August 13, 1906.

<sup>21</sup> Lane, *The Brownsville Affair*, 71.

<sup>22</sup> *Senate Documents*, 19: 182-184.

<sup>23</sup> *Senate Documents*, 19: 36-37.

<sup>24</sup> *Senate Documents*, 19:35.

city of Brownsville and husband of one of the ladies on the sidewalk, struck Newton on the head with a revolver.<sup>25</sup> Witnesses stated that Tate's remedy was not only too drastic, but it was conducted "in the manner of the South." Macklin however, disagreed with Blocksom's report:

[Newton] was not an incensed or angry, but he felt hurt. Newton was a splendid soldier, a man of good habits, and I do not believe, knowing the man, that he would deliberately pass any people on the sidewalk, white or colored, and brush against them or knock them off. He was my company clerk for a long time, and was extremely polite and obedient.<sup>26</sup>

A culmination of all these minor incidents involving the soldiers prompted many white leaders and politicians to consider replacing Blacks in the military. However, little consideration was given to fully investigate these few mishaps in order to maintain peace within small towns that hosted Black soldiers. These events added to the already mounting tensions and after Brownsville southern politicians made use of these incidents to make a strong case against black military participation. As part of an effort to remove all black soldiers from the military, Texas Congressman James Luther Slayden argued that Negroes were unfit for military duty. He fervently believed that the relationship between the soldier and the people, were not in common at anytime with the Negro soldier.<sup>27</sup> During his speech, Congressman Slayden detailed specific conflicts between the Negro soldiers and white inhabitants in various parts of the country, especially at Brownsville. Slayden stated:

The theory that the killing and wounding was done by citizens of Brownsville masquerading in soldiers' uniforms, in the language of Secretary [Howard] Taft, was no grotesque, if

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<sup>25</sup> Lane, *The Brownsville Affair*, 16.

<sup>26</sup> *Senate Documents*, 19:37.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid. 19:37; John Nance Garner, who represented Brownsville's district in Congress and later became Vice-President of the United States under Franklin D. Roosevelt, sponsored many resolutions for removal of blacks from the United States military. James N. Leiker, *Racial Borders: Black Soldier Along The Rio Grande*(College Station: Texas A&M Press, 2002).

its improbability and absurdity as hardly to call for discussion or comment [...] Fortunately, for the citizens of Brownsville, whose politics might be thought by some persons to have caused the trouble in the only two previous occasions on which soldiers were personally assaulted[...] It seems to me to be too absurd that at this late day we should be asking who did the shooting. I fail to see how there is room for honest doubt if the soldiers had been white and the circumstances the same; if the same mass of clear, strong evidence against them had been supplied and if the President [Roosevelt] had dismissed them from the service in the same manner, there not only would have been no doubt as to who were the murderers, but the actions of the President would have been almost unanimously approved. But then the whites are not a valuable political asset handled in bulk, which explains many things.<sup>28</sup>

Consequently, Slayden's speech was ignored and his bill, to rid Blacks from the United States military, quickly failed. It is fair to assume that Slayden, from Texas, ultimately sided with his constituency due to his outrage that such an event took place in his state. The mindset of Slayden toward black troops was typical of white politicians and civilians. It was this type of thinking that led certain "rough characters" to meet the 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry at the Brownsville train station seeking revenge when it was announced that they were being replaced with an all-white unit. The War Department immediately dispatched a telegram to the Brownsville authorities to ensure the soldiers' safe departure. Naturally, the authorities in Brownsville assured the War Department that they would protect the black soldiers but they were unsure if they could protect them fully. Major Penrose received an additional telegram ordering his men to protect themselves in case of an alleged attack. Members of the 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry boarded the train and left peacefully headed to Fort Reno. Unfortunately, members of the 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry would be dishonorably discharged several months later much to the chagrin of black soldiers, the black community, and black leaders such as Booker T. Washington, while the 26<sup>th</sup> Infantry was given a hero's welcome upon their arrival.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> *The Washington Post*, January 7, 1907.

<sup>29</sup> *Brownsville Daily Herald*, August 22, 1906. UT-Brownsville Archives, UT Libraries, Brownsville, Texas

## Chapter 2: Reevaluating Roosevelt

The Secretary of War (Taft): I have read through General [E.A.] Garlington's report dated October 22, [1906] submitted to me by [William H. Taft]. I direct that the recommendation [discharge without honor] of General Garlington be complied with, and at the same time his concluding portion of his report be published with our sanction as given the reason for the action.

[Signed] Theodore Roosevelt, November 5, 1906, *Macon Daily Telegraph*

Theodore Roosevelt became president of the United States in 1901 after William McKinley's assassination and in 1904 he was elected to a full term in office. After the Brownsville raid, Roosevelt ordered a full investigation of the incident on August 16, 1906. He immediately assigned Major August P. Blocksom of the Inspector General's office as the lead investigator. Blocksom graduated from West Point in 1877. While in the Army, he rose to Inspector General in 1905. As the newly appointed investigator, his duties consisted of disciplining erratic troops and conducting investigations on any infractions caused by troops on military duty. Major Blocksom traveled to Brownsville, Texas, on August 18, 1906, to begin his investigation for the President. Two days later he telegraphed the War Department: "Causes of disturbance are racial. People did not desire colored troops here and showed they thought them inferior socially by certain slights and denial of privileges....Soldiers resented this."<sup>30</sup> Witnesses subpoenaed by Mayor Combe and Blocksom concluded that without a doubt the assailants were black soldiers. Blocksom added to his report that the raid was "pre-concerted," that many of the men must have known of the plan. "Many of these old soldiers who had nothing to do with the raid must know something tangible as to the identity of the criminals. If they do not disclose their knowledge they should be made to suffer with others more guilty."<sup>31</sup> Every soldier denied knowledge of the shooting. Blocksom concluded that their silence implied participation or at the very least consent. According to

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<sup>30</sup> Weaver, *The Brownsville Raid*, 76.

<sup>31</sup> Henry F. Pringle, *Theodore Roosevelt: A Biography* (New York: Harcourt, 1931), 460.

Blocksom's report, which was submitted on August 29, the raid was provoked by the civilians' slights to the soldiers because of their race and was carried out by nine to fifteen soldiers. Ultimately, twelve men were accused by the U.S. Army for perpetrating the crime and were charged with the murder of Frank Natus and the attempted murder of Ynagcio Dominguez. The suspects were:

Sgt. Darby W. O. Brawner of Company C; Sgt. James R. Reid of Company B; Sgt. William E. Allison; Cpl. David Powell of Company D; Cpl. Willie H. Miller of Company C; Cpl. Charles H. Madison of Company C; Pvt. Joseph H. Howard of Company C; Pvt. James Newton of Company C; Pvt. Charles W. Askew of Company C; Pvt. Oscar W. Reid of Company C; and Pvt. John Holloman of Company B.<sup>32</sup>

Infantry Department Commander Major General William S. McCaskey stated that the selection of these men was a gross injustice:

The reason(s) for the selection of these men is a mystery. The manner by which their names were procured. There is no evidence that the majority of them were in any way directly connected with the affair.<sup>33</sup>

The charges of murder and attempted murder against the twelve defendants were flimsy or circumstantial at best. Nonetheless, they were charged because a white civilian was dead and somebody had to pay. Unsure of how to handle the twelve men charged murder and attempted murder, Major Penrose contacted the War Department. Days later, President Roosevelt delivered orders to enrole to leave the prisoners under the control of the military authorities at Fort Sam Houston in San Antonio. Angered that his men were facing trumped-up charges, Penrose devised a plan to find the guilty parties. The first plan was to hire three black detectives and have them go undercover as members of the 25<sup>th</sup> in an effort to find the guilty parties. The second plan was to announce to the three companies that if no one confessed guilt, he would arbitrarily discharge 20

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<sup>32</sup> Lane, *The Brownsville Affair*, 20.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 20.

percent of the companies each month. To Penrose's disappointment, Major General McCaskey felt that both plans were absurd. During a subsequent investigation Lieutenant Colonel Leonard A. Lovering, Acting Inspector General of Southwestern Division, questioned the men on the problems they had encountered prior to August 13, 1906. In particular he wanted to know where they were during the shootings and whether they knew of any plans by fellow members of the 25<sup>th</sup> to shoot up the city. The men denied knowing or participating in the incident. Meanwhile, President Roosevelt studied sworn statements of the twelve soldiers collected by Colonel Lovering. After President Roosevelt weighed the reports of Major Penrose, Major Blocksom, and Colonel Lovering, he called for another investigation to be conducted by Brigadier General Ernest A. Garlington, a southerner and an avid racist. Garlington was from Newberry Hill, South Carolina, and was unapologetically racist. With orders from President Roosevelt, he interviewed every prisoner separately in San Antonio although it was merely procedural. He had already come to the conclusion that they were guilty. Prior to the interrogations Garlington was given permission by President Roosevelt to threaten the whole battalion with a dishonorable discharge if no one confessed to the shootings. The ultimatum was to no avail. Garlington agreed with Blocksom's conclusion that some black soldiers were guilty in a "conspiracy of silence."<sup>34</sup>

On October 22, 1906, General Garlington recommended that all enlisted men of the Twenty-fifth Infantry who served in companies B, C, and D be dishonorably discharged and barred from future service in the armed forces and government employment.<sup>35</sup> President Roosevelt then summoned Booker T. Washington to the White House to inform the wizard of

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<sup>34</sup> Jack Foner, *Blacks and the Military in American History* (New York: Praeger Publishing, 1974), 98.

<sup>35</sup> Marvin Fletcher, *The Black Soldier and Officer in the United States Army 1891-1917* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1974), 125.



Tuskegee about his intentions to dismiss the soldiers at Brownsville. Washington often referred to President Roosevelt as a friend and was troubled that Roosevelt was making a terrible mistake in rushing to judgment. Washington asked if some soldiers would be allowed to re-enlist. President Roosevelt said no. Despite President Roosevelt's actions Washington continued his support for Roosevelt in the aftermath of Brownsville. In a letter to Oswald Garrison Villard dated November 10, 1906 four days after the publicized dinner, Washington informed Villard of the meeting:

I have just read your editorial on punishing the colored troops. When I saw you in New York, I knew what was to take place, but the President bound me to absolute secrecy. I did my full duty in trying to persuade him from the course not only when I saw him, but wrote him strongly after reaching New York. I am not going to give up. As soon as he returns I expect to have a conference with him with a view of arranging some plan to do justice to innocent men. There is no law, human or divine, which justifies the punishment of an innocent man. I have the strongest faith in the President's honesty of intention, high mindedness of purpose, sincere unselfishness and courage, but I regret for these reasons all the more that this thing has occurred.<sup>36</sup>

The meeting Washington hoped for in this letter never happened. The reasons Washington supported Roosevelt were ambiguous. In a letter to Washington, T. Thomas Fortune challenged him to rethink his unwavering support for the President.

I am sorry that the President did not let you blue pencil his message, as far as it relates to us, and all the more so as he has employed throughout the message your phraseology and often your idioms. His advice that Afro-Americans who know nothing of their criminals shall help to hunt them down and his adoption of the lynch law method of slaying the innocent with the guilty are vile propositions calculated to do us great injury...  
The President has forfeited the confidence and good esteem of the Afro-American people and largely of the American people by the adoption of Southern ideas and methods in dealing with us... and I...think that you have gone as far with him as you can afford to.

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<sup>36</sup> Booker T. Washington to Oswald Garrison Villard, November 10, 1906. Louis R. Harlan, *Booker T. Washington Papers* (University of Illinois Press Urbana, 1972-1989), 9: 122.

He has two years more as President, and you have the reminder of your life as the controlling genius of the Tuskegee Institute and leader of the Afro-American people, and your future will depend largely on how far you allow it to be understood that you are sponsor for what he says and does as far as the Afro-American people are concerned...<sup>37</sup>

T. Thomas Fortune was a founder of the Afro-American League, a precursor to the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, which was established in 1909. Washington tried to discourage black leaders like Fortune from publicly criticizing President Roosevelt's decision to dismiss the soldiers.<sup>38</sup> Instead, he felt that he could use his influence with Roosevelt to encourage him to reconsider his decision; but never did he fully challenge Roosevelt. In a letter to President Roosevelt, Washington expressed his reasons for displeasure with the decision:

I have asked our mutual friend, Mr. Charles W. Anderson, to lay before you the following points, to be considered, if possible, before you receive any of the colored delegations that are likely to seek an interview regarding the colored troops.

First: Of the present deep feeling that your order was given out at a time when the race was much disheartened and sore on the account of the Atlanta Riot.

Second: There is a deep feeling that some wholly innocent men are being punished.

Third: The fact that the order appeared on the night, after the election, created the impression that it was held up to secure the Negro vote.

Fourth: In case you make any modification of your order, I hope you will find some way to give credit to the friends of the administration, who have sought to help in the matter, and not let the enemies of the administration, who are seeking every means possible to destroy the influence of the administration,

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<sup>37</sup> T. Thomas Fortune to Booker T. Washington, December 8, 1906, Harlan, *Booker T. Washington Papers*, 9: 156-57.

<sup>38</sup> T. Thomas Fortune sold the (Newspaper) *New York Age* to Booker T. Washington in 1907: August Meier, *Negro Thought In America 1880-1915: Racial Ideologies in the Age of Booker T. Washington* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press 1966), 31; Fortune was ousted from the *New York Age*; he believed that it was a direct result of his refusal to support the [TR] decision on the dismissal of the Brownsville soldiers: Louis R. Harlan, *Essays of Louis R. Harlan: Booker T. Washington and the Voice of the Negro, 1904-1907* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 1988), 146.

get full credit for it.<sup>39</sup>

Washington purposely kept his displeasure with President Roosevelt quiet because he did not want to jeopardize the mid-term elections for the Republican Party. And President Roosevelt tactically withheld the order until after the midterm election for fear of losing black votes. After numerous attempts to get Roosevelt to rethink his decision; the President scorned Washington for his persistence:<sup>40</sup> “You can not have any information to give me privately to which I could pay heed, my dear Mr. Washington...because the information on which I act came out of the investigation itself.”<sup>41</sup> Eventually, President Roosevelt agreed with Garlington’s recommendation to dismiss the soldiers. The discharges were issued by the United States Army on November 5, 1906. The announcement was given on November 9 just one day after the election. Special Order No. 266 was transmitted from the War Department as such:

By direction of the President, the following-named enlisted men [in] Companies B, C, and D, Twentieth-fifth Infantry, certain members of which organizations participated in the riotous disturbance which occurred in Brownsville, Texas, on the night of August 13, 1906, will be discharged without honor from the Army by their respective commanding officers and forever debarred from reenlisting in the Army or Navy of the United States, as well as from employment in any civil capacity under the Government.

In all, one hundred and sixty-seven names were on the order. One of the more interesting soldiers who was dismissed was First Sergeant Mingo Sanders, who fought in Cuba in 1898, and remembered dividing rations of hardtack and bacon with a Colonel, Theodore Roosevelt, after the battle of Las Guasimas. On November 16 the first discharge papers were served to the men of the Twenty-fifth Infantry. When Roosevelt’s name was mentioned at a black convention later that

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<sup>39</sup> Booker T. Washington to Theodore Roosevelt, November 26, 1908. Harlan, *Booker T. Washington Papers*, 9:147.

<sup>40</sup> Booker T. Washington to Samuel William Bacote, May 5, 1908, Harlan, *Booker T. Washington Papers*, 9:527.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.* 9:527.

day, it was received with complete silence.<sup>42</sup>

The black community was outraged at the dismissal of the soldiers. The fact that it was Theodore Roosevelt, whom they supported, sent shock throughout the black community. Blacks during the early twentieth century supported the Republican Party wholeheartedly as the party of Lincoln. Blacks could not separate themselves from its ideology. The Democratic Party did not present a reasonable political alternative for African-Americans.<sup>43</sup> Lewis Lynne notes in his 1960 article on “Brownsville: The Reaction of the Negro Press”, Brownsville rocked the black community. Reactions to the dismissal came swiftly and bitterly in the Negro press.<sup>44</sup> Most papers accused President Roosevelt of using the lives of black soldiers for a political agenda. Mary Church Terrell, president of the National Association of Colored Women, patiently waited in the office of Secretary of War William H. Taft until he would see her on the afternoon of November 17. During their meeting Taft told Terrell that he could not do anything about the President’s decision. “What do you want me to about it? President Roosevelt has already dismissed them and he has gone to Panama. There is nothing I can do.” Mrs. Terrell answered: “All I want you to do, Mr. Secretary, is to suspend the order...until an investigation can be made.” Shocked at her request Taft informed Terrell that it was not that simple a request. “Is that all you want me to do...suspend an order issued by the President of the United States during his absence from the country?” Nonetheless, Taft realized that President Roosevelt had made a serious mistake and asked President Roosevelt’s secretary to send the President a confidential message. It read:

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<sup>42</sup> Edmund Morris, *Theodore Rex* (New York: Random House, 2001), 468.

<sup>43</sup> Lane, *The Brownsville Affair*, 71.

<sup>44</sup> Lewis N. Wynne, “Brownsville: The Reaction of the Negro Press,” *Phylon*, Volume 33, No. 2 (Summer 1960), 155.

New York Republican Club and many others appealing for a suspension of the order discharging colored troops until your return that you may have a rehearing...Much agitation on the subject and it may be well to convince people of fairness of hearing by granting rehearing. The reports of the officers on which the action was founded will be published early next week.<sup>45</sup>

The next day, November 18, Secretary Taft suspended the dismissal order until President Roosevelt's return. After receiving the wireless telegram on Wednesday, November 21, 1906, President Roosevelt wrote:

Discharge is not to be suspended unless there are new facts of such importance as to warrant your cabling me...I care nothing whatever for the yelling of either the politicians or the sentimentalists. The offense was most heinous and the punishment I inflicted was imposed after due deliberation.<sup>46</sup>

Immediately, Taft released the evidence that President Roosevelt based his dismissal decision upon. *The New York Times* stated that the content of the report did not prove the guilt or innocence of the 25<sup>th</sup>. In response Senator Joseph Foraker of Ohio introduced a bill directing the Secretary of War to supply the Senate with every official document pertaining to the case and service records of every soldier who was dismissed. Roosevelt possessed the privilege, but the articles of war did not permit him to inflict it "as a punishment-as though it had been in pursuance of the sentence of a court martial." Taft, as a former judge, must have remembered that "no man can be deprived of life, liberty, or property without due process of law."<sup>47</sup>

On December 19, 1906, Roosevelt addressed the Senate for the dismissal of the soldiers based upon his review of the Army officers' reports:

By my direction every effort was made to persuade those

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<sup>45</sup> Lane, *The Brownsville Affair*, 106.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid, 107.

<sup>47</sup> Morris, *Theodore Rex*, 472.

innocent of murder among them to separate themselves from the guilty by helping bring the criminals to justice. They were warned that if they did not take advantage of the offer they would all be discharged from the service and forbidden again to enter the employ of the Government. They [soldiers] refused to profit from the warning. I accordingly had them discharged.

People have spoken as if the discharge from the service was a punishment. I deny emphatically that such is the case, because as punishment it is utterly inadequate. The punishment for mutineers or murderers such as those guilty at the Brownsville assault is death; and a punishment only less severe ought to be metered out to those who have aided and abetted mutiny and murder and treason by refusing to help in their detection.

Be it remembered always that these men were all in the service of the United States under contracts of enlistment, which by their terms and statutes were terminable by my direction as Commander-in-Chief of the Army. It was my clear duty to terminate those contracts when the public interest demanded it; and it would have been a betrayal of the public interest on my part not to terminate the contracts which were keeping in the service of the United States a body of mutineers and murderers.

Any assertion that these men were dealt with harshly because they were colored men is utterly without foundation. Officers or enlisted men, white men or colored men, who were guilty of such conduct, would have been treated in precisely the same way; for there can be nothing more important than for the United States Army, in all its membership, to understand that its arms can not be turned with impunity against the peace and order of the civil community.

There are plenty of precedents for the action taken. I call your attention to the memoranda herewith submitted from The Military Secretary's office of the War Department, and a memorandum from The Military Secretary inclosing a piece by ex-Corporal Hesse, now chief of division in The Military Secretary's office, together with a letter from District Attorney James Wilkerson, of New Orleans. The district attorney's letter recites several cases in which white United States soldiers, being arrested for crime, were tried, and every soldier and employee of the regiment, or in the fort at which the soldier was stationed, volunteered all they knew, both before and at the trial, so as to secure justice.<sup>48</sup>

Roosevelt believed that there was a precedent for dismissal. Among the cases that he acknowledged in his letter to the Senate were: Brigadier General Ulysses S. Grant's dismissal of the 20<sup>th</sup> Illinois battalion from the Thirteenth Army Corp on November 16, 1862, when members of this regiment broke into a store and took goods valued at \$1, 240. General Grant used his

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<sup>48</sup> *Senate Documents*, 19: 182.

authority to ferret out the guilty men in this incident. In a related case, General Robert E. Lee of the army of Northern Virginia issued an order in October 1864 that dismissed a battalion for cowardly conduct stating that there were some men belonging to the organization who were obliged to share in the common disgrace because the good of the service demanded it.<sup>49</sup>

Roosevelt then brought up several cases of shootings involving black soldiers and white civilians. Around midnight on October 19, 1899, in Laredo, Texas, a flurry of gunshots was supposedly conducted by Company D of the Twenty-fifth Infantry. It was stated that a police officer named Will Stoner was surrounded by black soldiers and beaten within an inch of his life. In El Paso on February 16, 1900, black soldiers took their rifles from an arms rack and marched to a local jail freeing two soldiers held for trial on the charges of drunkenness and disorderly conduct. They fired into the jailhouse killing a police officer on duty. A noncommissioned officer in charge of the barracks relinquished the keys of the armed rack. During the raid, Corporal James W. Hull, a member of Company A was killed; he was later believed to be one of the culprits. As soon as the Twenty-fifth's commanding officer, Captain R. H.R. Loughborough learned of this particular incident in the morning of February 17, 1900, the whereabouts of every man was determined; the arms and all ammunition were secured and placed under lock and key; and every precaution was taken preventing soldiers from leaving their post. Roosevelt used this incident and compared it to the Brownsville. In order to capture the culprit, likened to the El Paso Affair, Roosevelt explained that the dismissal of the 25<sup>th</sup> was the first step in that process.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> *Senate Documents*, 19: 11-18.

<sup>50</sup> *The Brownsville Daily Herald*, October 23, 1899; *Senate Documents*, 21:11-18.

# REMEMBER BROWNSVILLE!



Figure 1. The contradiction of Theodore Roosevelt as a candidate and as President of the United States. Courtesy of UT-Brownsville Southmost College.

Moreover, Roosevelt's perception on race was considered progressive in 1906. As a progressive New Yorker, Roosevelt believed that blacks, as well as whites, were men. "It is of the utmost importance to all our people that we shall deal with each man on his merits as a man, and not deal with him merely as a member of a given race; that we shall judge each man by his conduct and not his color. This is important for the white man, and it is far more important for the colored man."<sup>51</sup> Yet, Roosevelt was known as a "walking contradiction" who normally vouched on one side of an issue and then later stood on the other side of the same issue. Theodore Roosevelt, a veteran of the United States Volunteers 1<sup>st</sup> Calvary, at times, made numerous declarations for and against black troops. He often inferred that black troops depended heavily upon their white officers and

<sup>51</sup> *The Brownsville Daily Herald*, October 23, 1899; *Senate Documents*, 19:11-18.



that black noncommissioned officers generally lacked the ability to command like the best class of whites.<sup>52</sup>

Roosevelt, on one occasion, described an incident during a critical period of the fighting at San Juan Hill under heavy fire from the Spaniards, under the strain, that none of the white regulars or Rough Riders showed the slightest sign of weakening; however, he had to draw his revolver to stop a group of Black infantrymen from fleeing to the rear.<sup>53</sup> Through thorough description in the book, *The Rough Riders*, Roosevelt remarked that Black soldiers “are, of course, peculiarly dependent upon their white officers, thus, on occasion they produce noncommissioned officers who can take the initiative and accept responsibility precisely like the best class of whites; therefore, it is not seen as normal, thus, it can not be expected.”<sup>54</sup> Roosevelt charged that “a score or so Black infantryman” who, he stated, drifted to the rear “either helping wounded men...This I could not allow, as it was depleting my line, so I jumped up, and walking a few yards to the rear, drew my revolver, halted the retreating soldiers, and called out to them that I appreciated the gallantry with which they had fought and would be sorry to hurt them, but that I should shoot the first man who, on any pretense whatever, went to the rear.”<sup>55</sup> This story, in a different version from 10<sup>th</sup> Calvary Sergeant Presley Holliday, was that the men were following orders given by a lieutenant to move to the rear and bring up more ammunition.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Jack D. Foner, *Blacks and the Military in American History* (New York: Praeger Publishers, Inc. 1974), 81.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, 81.

<sup>54</sup> Weaver, *The Senator and the Sharecropper's Son*, 70.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Foner, *Blacks and the Military in American History*, 81-82

Sergeant Holliday charged that Roosevelt's comments were uncalled for, uncharitable, and ungrateful.<sup>57</sup>



Figure 2. Political cartoons in the black press expressing dissatisfaction about the incident in Brownsville. Courtesy of UT-Brownsville Southmost College.

Furthermore, Roosevelt was always known as a “loose cannon,” making hasty decisions without sufficient evidence. As Assistant Secretary of the Navy, Roosevelt disobeyed direct orders given by the Secretary of the Navy, John D. Long, not to take any steps affecting the policy of McKinley’s administration without consultation. Consequently, ten days after the USS Maine was destroyed in Havana harbor which killed over 260 American sailors, Roosevelt telegraphed Commodore George Dewey:

<sup>57</sup>Ibid. 81-82.

“In the event of declaration of war [with] Spain, your duty will be to see that the Spanish squadron does not leave the Asiatic coast and then [conduct] offensive operations in Philippine Islands.”<sup>58</sup> By March 24, 1898 the naval inquiry board investigating the USS Maine’s catastrophic explosion concluded that a faulty external clause was the primary reason for detonation. For this, no matter how delusional Roosevelt’s enthusiasm in rushing judgment, he was both admired and distained by the Republicans. Therefore, Roosevelt’s reason for the soldiers’ dismissal was not uncommon, thus, he feared that the soldiers harbored the real culprits behind the organization and execution concerning the raid. Harboring these culprits was, as Roosevelt felt, based upon racial solidarity:

More evil and sinister counsel never was given to any people than that given to colored men by those advisers, whether black or white, who, by apology and condonation, encourage conduct such as that of the three companies in question. 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. Any conduct by colored people which tends [sic] to substitute for this rule the rule of standing by and shielding an evil doer because he is a member of their race, means the inevitable degradation of the colored men. It may and probably does mean damage to the white race, but it means ruin to the black race.<sup>59</sup>

Roosevelt throughout this letter to the Senate defended his actions of relating to all Americans when it came to treating them equally. In doing this, Roosevelt refers to his appointments as the staple of equality.

“Throughout my term of service in the presidency I have acted on the principle thus advocated. In the North as in the South I have appointed colored men of high character to

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<sup>58</sup> Weaver, *The Senator and the Sharecropper’s Son*, 61.

<sup>59</sup> *Senate Documents*, 19:11-18.

office, utterly disregarding the protests of those who would have kept them out of office because they were colored men. So far as was in my power, I have sought to secure for the colored people their rights under the law. I have done all I could to secure them equal school training when young, equal opportunity to earn their livelihood, and achieve their happiness when old. I have striven to break up peonage; I have upheld the hands of those who, like Judge Jones and Judge Speer, have warred against this peonage, because I would hold myself unfit to be President if I did not feel the same revolt at wrong done to a colored man as I feel at wrong done a white man.”<sup>60</sup>

Ohio Senator Joseph Foraker, a 1908 presidential candidate, took up the case for the discharged soldiers and in the process a heated debate began between him and the president. On the senate floor Foraker laid out the facts of the Brownsville incident. He stated that there were only eight legitimate witnesses instead of scores of witnesses that came out of the woodworks to convict black soldiers. He looked for evidence that confirmed the soldiers’ guilt and found none.



Figure 3. A political cartoon describing Senator Joseph Foraker’s slaying the gigantic Brownsville investigation. Courtesy of UT-Brownsville Southmost College Archives.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid, 19:11-18.

On January 26, 1907, the battle over the Brownsville soldiers between President Roosevelt and Ohio Senator Joseph Foraker came to a head at the Gridiron Dinner at the Willard Hotel in Washington, D.C. Senator Foraker took his seat to the right of President Roosevelt's table and was not expected to speak. However, Vice-President Samuel G. Blythe had other plans. President Roosevelt bantered for nearly an hour commenting on the Brownsville case. Blythe introduced Foraker for a rebuttal and he did not disappoint. As Foraker discussed the bogus discharge of the 25<sup>th</sup>, President Roosevelt leapt to his feet in anger and yelled:

Some of these men were bloody butchers; they ought to be hung. The only reason that I didn't have them hung was because I couldn't find out which ones of them did the shooting. None of the battalion would testify against them...It is my business and the business of nobody else. It is not the business of Congress...All the talk on that subject is academic. If they pass a resolution to reinstate these men, I will veto it; if they pass it over my veto, I will pay no attention to it. I welcome impeachment.<sup>61</sup>

Because of Foraker's persistence President Roosevelt found himself defending the dismissal of the 25<sup>th</sup>, nearly two years after he issued the order-Foraker's persistence worked. On his last morning as president, Roosevelt signed the Warner bill that allowed members of the 25<sup>th</sup> who were dishonorably discharged to return to the military in the event they established innocence of any connection with the Brownsville raid.<sup>62</sup> Despite this re-enlistment clause in the Warner legislation only fourteen of the 167 soldiers rejoined the Army: Cpl. Jones A. Coltrane, Cpl. Edward L. Daniels, Pvt. Edward Warfield of B Company; Cook Lewis J. Baker, Pvt. Clifford I. Adair, Pvt. Henry W. Arvin, Pvt. Calvin Smith, and Pvt. John Smith of C Company; Cook Robert Williams, Cpl. Winter Washington, Pvt. Elias Gant, Pvt. John A. Jackson,

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<sup>61</sup> *Senate Documents*, 19:11-18.

<sup>62</sup> Weaver, *The Brownsville Raid*, 248.



### **Chapter 3: The Court-Martial Trial of Captain Edgar A. Macklin**

There was an unquestionable, a very strong prejudice throughout old slave states against black troops. A black man in military uniform represents authority and while wearing that "authority" it suggests superiority, therefore, causes resentment towards them. It was not because the black soldier is disorderly-for, as the rule, they behave better than white soldiers, and, even when drunk, are less trouble to manage-but because they are soldiers. -Chambers McKibbin, Colonel, United States Army, March 1, 1900

On the morning of April 30, 1907, the Court-Martial trial of Captain Edgar A. Macklin commenced in San Antonio, Texas. Macklin was charged with "neglect of duty to the prejudice of good order and military discipline", Section 62 the Articles of War. Major Charles W. Penrose's court martial was by default since he was the 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry's and Fort Brown's commanding officer, whereas Macklin faced more serious charges since he was officer of the day. The Judge-Advocate, who serves as the prosecutor for the military, argued that during the night of the shootings Macklin was negligent in carrying out his duties. His activities for that evening are outlined below:

#### Captain Edgar A. Macklin's Duty Itinerary as Officer of the Day: August 13, 1906

7:30pm	Macklin sends five patrol units to wrangle any soldier who has not made it back to Fort Brown by 8pm curfew due to threats by Brownsville townspeople. He posts a soldier at the wharf for those going to and from Matamoros, Mexico; He covers fifteen blocks himself.
7:35-10:59pm	Macklin enjoys drinking beer and holding casual conversation with Lt. Lawrason.
11:00pm	Taps commences. Macklin receives muster (attendance) reports from senior noncommissioned officers (sr. enlisted men).
11:35pm	Macklin saves several children playing with a vicious black dog in the middle of the parade grounds inside Fort Brown. These children are guests at a social party held by the Cowen's. Macklin escorts the children out of the front gate of the fort. Subsequently, he returns to his quarters.
11:50pm	Macklin prepares for bed.
11:56-12:01am	The suspicious shooting of the Brownsville Raid commences. During this time, the trumpeter-of-the-guard sounds "call to arms".  Every soldier in all four barracks desperately prepare themselves and report to "general" quarters. Only Macklin is absent.

Major Penrose orders his men from all three companies B,C, and D to line up alongside the Fort Brown's garrison wall. Penrose sends numerous soldiers to locate Macklin. All are unsuccessful.

12:55am	Macklin testifies during his court-martial trial that he heard a knock at his door, sat up in bed, looked at the clock, and then returned back to sleep.
1:20am	Macklin mysteriously reappears after an hour and nineteen minutes absent. He claims that he overslept. <sup>63</sup>

According to the court martial transcripts, Macklin committed three serious violations that evening: consumption of alcohol while on duty, conducting and reporting a false muster report, and unlawful absence. Members of the 25<sup>th</sup> watched this trial closely because a guilty verdict on either Macklin or Penrose would have exonerated them.

Consumption of alcohol while on duty was the first violation taken up by the prosecution. Captain Macklin spent time in his quarters with Lt. George C. Lawrason drinking alcohol and reading the paper prior to roll call and bunk time on the night of the shootings. Lawrason recalled that he remembered drinking a beer, but could not recollect whether Macklin drank or not; nor could he remember the conversation between them. According to Lawrason's testimony, Macklin violated War Article 30 and Article 46. He contributed alcohol into a lax atmosphere with a subordinate while on duty, disregarding and neglecting the safety of the men at Fort Brown. Article 46 states that no officer shall be found drinking while on guard. Under oath Macklin admitted to having a beer while on duty. This testimony by itself was enough for the court to convict him.

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<sup>63</sup> Weaver, *The Brownsville Raid*, 35.



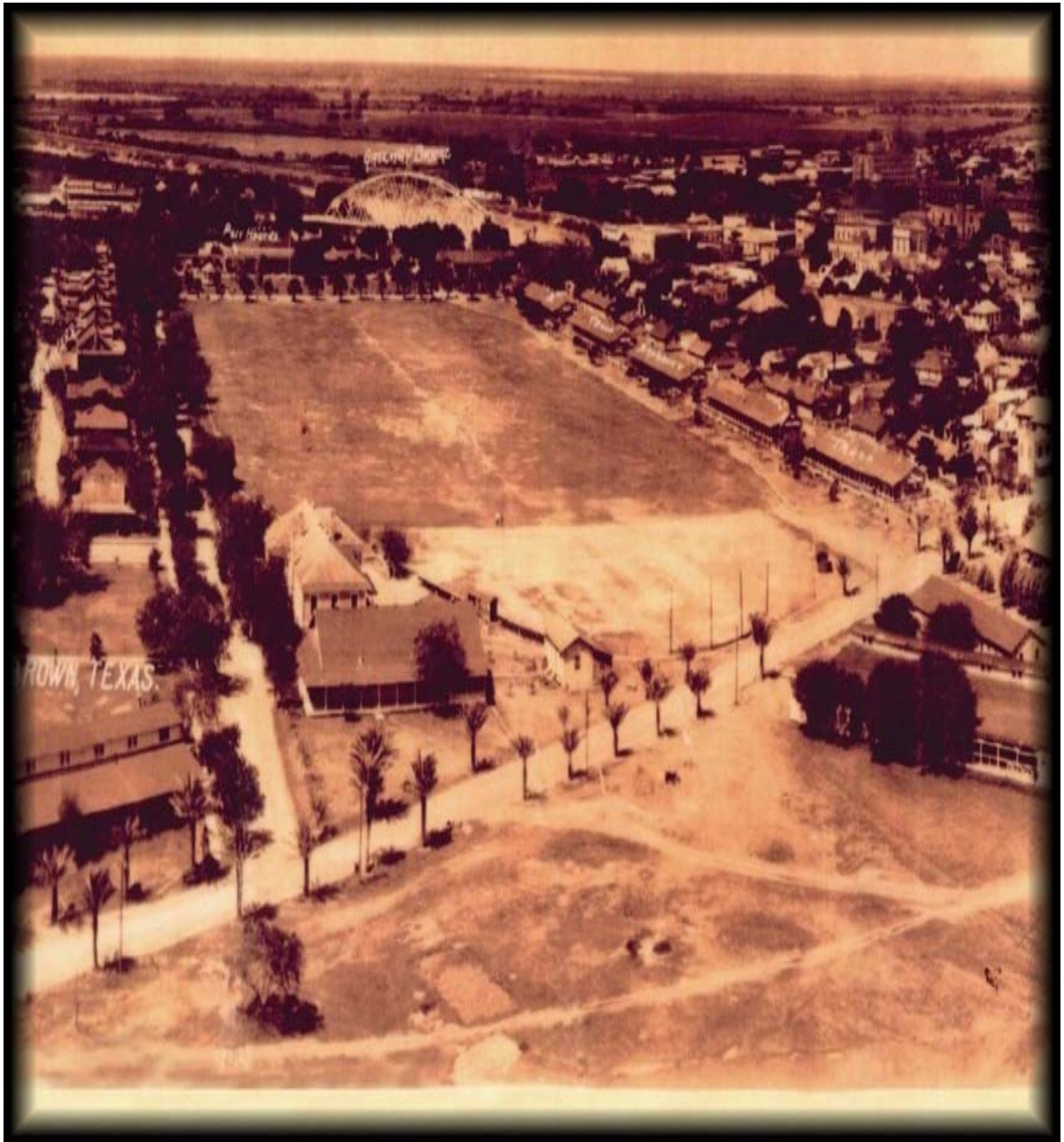


Figure 5. The space between the barracks and the officer's quarters lie the parade grounds of Fort Brown in 1906. During the night of the raid, Macklin was last seen saving children from a black dog in the parade grounds. Courtesy of UT-Brownsville Southmost College Archives.

The second violation dealt with a false muster report during roll call and bunk time. Soon after receiving the reports from the non-commissioned officers in charge, Macklin visited the

guardhouses where the sentries were stationed and held inspection. Macklin committed perjury several times while testifying. Macklin was questioned on the official time of “lights out,” and he answered that it was eleven o’clock. Macklin was then asked by the Judge-Advocate whether it was custom for the officer of the day to carry out orders proceeding 11 o’clock roll call. He did not understand the question. Again the question was posed. Macklin confirmed. The Judge-Advocate then asked Macklin the results of the check-roll call prior to the raid. Macklin stated that all were present and accounted for. The Judge-Advocate then asked whether or not Macklin understood the meaning of the word “present,” which is defined as every soldier either in their quarters or at their assigned post. Macklin stated that he did not for certain know the meaning of “present”; however, he stated that he was aware that two soldiers were out on pass and could not be located. There were actually three soldiers of his company out that night: Corporal Miller, who was in Matamoros, Mexico; Private Edward Lee, who was also in Matamoros, and Sergeant George Thomas whose liberty was unauthorized. According to Macklin’s testimony, the United States Army should have charge him with violating Articles 15 and 18 of the Articles of War. These articles relate to any officer knowingly making false muster and submission of false muster reports. There were no attempts on the courts part to request or acquire a copy of a duty log for those men who were on duty the day of the raid.<sup>64</sup>

The Judge-Advocate then raised the issue of Macklin’s unauthorized absence. Circumstantial evidence suggests Macklin was one of the perpetrators shooting in the town. Thus, a series of questionable events involving Macklin on the night of the shootings likely implicates the captain in the raid. First, Macklin visited the guard mount after 11:00 p.m. that evening before

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<sup>64</sup> 60<sup>th</sup> Congress 1<sup>st</sup> Session, 1907-1909, *Senate Documents, The Brownsville Affray Macklin Court-Martial, Serial Set 5254*, 21: 34, 82; 21:180-181. Hereinafter referred to as *Senate Documents, Vol.21*.

disappearing for the next two and half hours. According to court documents, Macklin ordered the trumpeter-of-the-guard to wake him at reveille at 5:00 a.m. This is important to understand, due to the fact that if any situation arises at the fort, the trumpeter-of-the-guard must play “call-to-arms” to alert the soldiers in the fort that they are under attack. If the trumpeter-of-the-guard is busy locating Macklin or performing some other mundane task and the fort comes under attack or duress, then there will be no one to notify the soldiers.<sup>65</sup>



Figure 6. An angled shot of Fort Brown in 1906. Major Penrose's quarters are located in the center of this photo. Courtesy of UT-Brownsville Southmost College Archives.

The second piece of evidence of Macklin's involvement concerned reports of pistol shots being fired before rifle shots were heard. The citizens of Brownsville, for the most part, were not wealthy; therefore, it was very difficult to own a pistol of any kind. Rifles were popular in small towns, thus, they were plentiful. Army officers were issued pistols as a side arm along with a

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<sup>65</sup> *Senate Documents*, 21: 181.

saber. Therefore, it is highly unlikely that if the citizens had fired upon Fort Brown that night, few would have owned a pistol. There was absolutely no investigation conducted on Macklin's issued pistol which was never considered as evidence.

Third, there were many soldiers who testified during the court martial that they tried to arouse Macklin during the raid. Corporal Ray Burdett, Private Joseph H. Howard, and Private Joseph Rogers were initially sent by Major Penrose to locate Captain Macklin and they were unsuccessful. Major Penrose then ordered Lt. Grier to send Corporal Madison to find Macklin since he was more familiar with the base. Madison stated that when he found Macklin's saber adjacent to the front door of the officer's barracks he assumed he was inside but after banging on the door for a period of time he came to the conclusion that Macklin was not there. "I pounded so loudly that it seemed to me that if anyone were in that house downstairs he must have been in a trance not to awaken," he remembered.<sup>66</sup>



Figure 7. On the right of the photo is the Cowen residence where the first shots of the raid landed in 1906. Courtesy UT-Brownsville Southmost College Archives.

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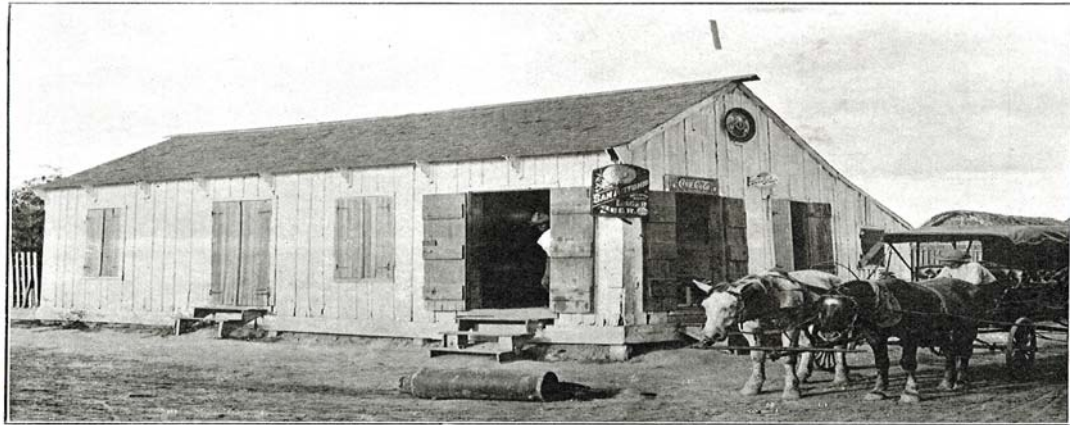
<sup>66</sup> *Senate Documents*, 21:46-58.

Under oath Capt. Macklin stated that he was awakened at 12:55 a.m. on the morning of August 14. He rose and listened; however, the knock was not repeated and he heard no one call. Determining the significance of the knock is important because it establishes when Macklin was awakened. The Judge-Advocate concluded that the knock Macklin initially heard was not Cpl. Charles H. Madison. Madison's attempt was approximately thirty minutes earlier on the morning of August 14, 1906 when Lt. Grier ordered him to find Macklin. After Cpl. Madison's attempt, he reported to Maj. Penrose. Penrose ordered him to the far end of Fort Brown to the artillery and cavalry post to defend the fort. It would not be until a quarter after 1:00am before Cpl. Madison reported to Lt. Grier of his failed attempt to locate Captain Macklin. The knock, Macklin stated that he initially heard, could not have been Sgt. Taliaferro. Taliaferro made his attempt before the shooting had concluded. Nor could the knock have come from Private Joseph Rogers. Rogers, according to Pvt. Samuel Wheeler's testimony, was one of the three soldiers sent initially after the first "call to arms" was sounded, thereby returning while the shootings were in progress. The knock, Macklin claimed he heard, according to the Judge-Advocate, was Private Hairston. Macklin's testimony showed that he replied to the knock at his front door at 12:55 a.m. by calling out "All right," which concurred with Private Hairston's testimony.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> *Senate Documents*, 21:79.





SALOON OF PRIVATE HOLLOMAN, COMPANY B, TWENTY-FIFTH INFANTRY.

Figure 8. Private Holloman's bar that was built by the business men of Brownsville for Black soldiers to socialize. Courtesy of UT-Brownsville Southmost College Archives.

The verdict of the Macklin Court-Martial was critically important to the entire Brownsville episode. Had Macklin been found “guilty” of negligence while in the service of his duty the men of the 25<sup>th</sup> would have been exonerated. Despite the seriousness of the unauthorized absence charges against Macklin the United States Army made no attempts to investigate his actual whereabouts during the shooting that night. Major Penrose testified that Macklin eventually appeared at 1:20 a.m. on the morning of August 14<sup>th</sup>, an hour and half after the first shot was heard. Major Penrose never questioned Captain Macklin's whereabouts during the shooting, nor did he reprimand Macklin afterwards. And despite evidence to the contrary Captain Macklin was found not guilty by the Court-Martial Review Board on charges of “neglect of duty.”<sup>68</sup> If Macklin had been convicted it may have helped exonerate the soldiers. Other officers besides Macklin, assigned to Fort Brown, possessed pistols-they were present and accounted for during the shooting. None of these officers or their men within the fort fired a single shot, thus, no counter claim can be made that perhaps a pistol shot was fired from the fort. Thus, witnesses

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<sup>68</sup> *Senate Document*, 21:247.

testified that there was a series of single pistol shots fired from inside the town. In addition to Macklin's absence inside the fort during the entire raid, it is not a farfetched assumption that this places him in the town as a participant with the townspeople conducting the raid. Remember, Macklin did not take his men seriously when they reported malicious acts against them instigated by the townspeople. In fact, Macklin snickered at their misfortunes and made no thorough inquiries on the numerous matters that were obviously serious. But Macklin was not convicted, and no one pursued the possibility of his involvement. His soldiers continue to be blamed.



Figure 9. The 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry poses for a photo. Courtesy of UT-Brownsville Southmost College Archives.

## Conclusion: The Case for Restitution

“Let us consider whether this is a just and politic provision. Whatever may be the fate of the rest of the bill I must earnestly pray that this may not be defeated. On its success, in my judgment, depends not only the happiness and respectability of the colored race, but their very existence. Homestead to them are far more valuable than the immediate right of suffrage, though both are their due.”

-Thaddeus Stevens’ speech on the Reparations Bill of 1867 spoken on March 11, 1867

Although members of the 25<sup>th</sup> were posthumously given honorable discharges by Richard Nixon in 1972, the executive order did not include much in the realm of monetary reparations. Private Dorsey Willis, the only surviving soldier, still under dishonorable discharge, received a monetary award of \$25,000 in 1972. Few of the soldier’s immediate family received \$10,000 for their heartache and financial hardships over a sixty year period. However, this is not nearly enough compensation to equate the injustice that these soldiers endured. The injustice perpetrated by the U.S. government suggests that the descendants of the 25<sup>th</sup> have every right to reparations. Their plight is similar to Japanese-Americans and other minorities who suffered government-sanctioned discrimination. Native Americans who lost their land and suffered from genocidal atrocity at the hands of the United States government included Alaskan Natives, who in 1971 received \$1 billion dollars in monetary compensation and an additional \$44 million in land acreage from the U.S. government and the Klamaths of Oregon who received \$81 million dollars in monetary compensation in 1980. Five years later, the Lakota tribe of South Dakota, the Seminoles of Florida and the Chippewas of Wisconsin were granted a total of \$143.3 million dollars in compensation. And the very next year in 1986, for the United States’ violation of the 1836 Treaty, it shelled out \$32 million dollars to the Ottawa Indians of Michigan. Four years later, in 1990, Japanese-Americans received \$1.2 billion dollars in compensation for their predicament during World War II.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Raymond A. Winbush, *Should America Pay?* (New York: Harper Collins Publisher, 2003), xii.



During the United States' involvement in World War II the government removed 120,000 Japanese-Americans from their homes and subjected them to American internment camps in the Midwest. During this "relocation process many Japanese families lost their homes, their possessions, their jobs, and their businesses."<sup>70</sup> Approved by President Franklin D. Roosevelt on February 8, 1942, Executive Order 9066 forced many Japanese-Americans into poverty. Executive Order 9102 on March 20, 1942 enforced the War Relocation Authority, "which provided for the removal from designated areas of persons whose removal was necessary in the interest of national security." General John L. DeWitt alleged that due to the attack on Pearl Harbor by the Japanese, it was likely that over 112,000 Japanese-Americans were apt to assist in continued attacks due to ties to their homeland. FDR affirmed DeWitt's concerns as a military necessity.<sup>71</sup>

In *Atonement and Forgiveness*, historian Al Brooks argues that in *Hohri v. United States*, the plaintiffs sought monetary value for their violated constitutional rights and losses to their possessions. Brooks suggests that it was racial prejudice and war hysteria, rather than military necessity, that had been the real reasons for the removal and internment of Japanese Americans. In the case concerning reparations for African-Americans, Harvard Professor, Leon Friedman suggested, "Too many southern officials let their emotions and prejudice sway their decisions in only one direction: against the Negro. The result is not isolated injustice or occasional error. An entire pattern and practice is established that effectively overrules the law in the statute books or the Constitution. A new kind of law owing its allegiance only to the hates and fears of the white community governs the day-to-day existence of the...Negro."

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<sup>70</sup> Al Brooks, *Atonement and Forgiveness: A New Model For Black Reparations* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2004), 112.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid, 112.

African-Americans too have suffered from racism on a massive scale that merit reparation. Reparations are not only warranted for the conditions and operations of slavery, but for its aftermath. The essence of a Reconstructed South after the Civil War caused vigilantism, economic depression, and social division toward newly freed slaves. The effects of Black Codes, Jim Crow laws, lynching, and terrorism affected numerous blacks before, during, and after Reconstruction. In *Race, Racism, and Reparations* author J. Angelo Corlett argues that racism is motivated by fear that the racist has of the target. Corlett elaborates that racism is normally motivated by power that the perpetrator seeks to wield over the target. While arguing this specific point, Corlett establishes that there are two factors of racism: ignorance and ideological dogmatism. The fact that the United States government lacked the intelligence to better understand the African-American beyond public opinion was, as Corlett states, based on ignorance. Corlett explains that ideological dogmatism is a racist ideology against African-Americans, by those who pretended to support them.<sup>72</sup> Omari Winbush, attorney, consultant, and contributor in the book, *Should America Pay?*, suggests the United States never intended to grant social, political, or economic equality to any African-American. And that the African-American suffered from two distinct barriers: skin color and ineffective civil rights legislation dating back to Reconstruction. Winbush argues that for too long blacks in America have suffered from racism, bigotry, and prejudices primarily from having black skin.<sup>73</sup> The only way, according to Winbush, to rectify these racial resentments is through recognition of the problem, repentance of the evildoing, and conciliatory measures toward the sufferers. Winbush believes reparations will accomplish those measures. Tulane University professor, Robert Westley suggests that

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<sup>72</sup> J. Angelo Corlett, *Race, Racism, and Reparations* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2003), 72-73.

<sup>73</sup> Winbush, *Should America Pay?* 150-159.

reparations to Blacks are an obligation of the American government for its role in slavery and the violation of Black rights. Westley suggests that the American government's obligation to the restitution on behalf of African-Americans' plight based on race can be attributed through taxpayer funds. Taxpayers, Westley argues, do not have the right to pick and choose government expenditures they wish to support. Westley contends that any basis of claim for reparations to the descendants of enslaved Africans in America is warranted. Westley further argues that any redress from the U.S. government is sufficient. This includes: Sovereignty, land, monetary transfers, tax breaks, education scholarships, medical and housing subsidies are all proportionately within the federal arsenal. Westley states, that Blacks deserve reparations not only because the oppression they face is "systematic, unrelenting, authorized at the highest government levels, and practiced by large segments of the population," but also because they face their oppressors as a group, they have never been adequately compensated for their material losses due to white racism, and the only possibility of an adequate remedy is group redress.<sup>74</sup> Westley does not address the Brownsville raid; however, many of his arguments apply to the soldiers at Brownsville. As he argues the United States should take into consideration the case of the Brownsville soldiers as a group redress on behalf of a grave injustice. Any redress for every African-American from every committed injustice over several hundred years seems improbable.

Many factors contributing to the still unanswered questions continue to haunt Brownsville. The affair involved unreliable eyewitness accounts. For example, witness George W. Randall testified that he heard the pistol shots as early as ten o'clock the night of the raid; while it is commonly known that the shooting did not commence until midnight. T.M. McCambell, another citizen, testified that he "saw a whole company shooting," although

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid. 109-134; 150-159.

government reports account for the involvement of five to twenty men.<sup>75</sup> Further, the evidence presented by military investigators themselves clearly illustrated that a legal lynching had taken place with the dismissal of the 25<sup>th</sup>. During a thorough investigation by the army in 1907 about the affair, military experts argued that four of the weapons used that night had been recovered. Three of the guns were assigned to members of the 25<sup>th</sup>: Thomas Taylor, Joseph L. Wilson, and Ernest English, all privates of Company B. All three testified that they were asleep during the raid, heard the call to arms, rushed with their comrades to the gun racks, and were given a gun for the entire night, although it was not their assigned weapon. They testified that every man grabbed the first rifle they could get during the shooting, thus, their assigned rifles were used by other soldiers during the defense of the raid. The fourth gun was not fired at all that night. Rifle 45683 was originally issued to Sergeant William Blaney of Company B. Prior to the Infantry relocating to Brownsville from Nebraska, Blaney went on leave and turned his rifle over to Quartermaster Sergeant Walker McCurdy, who placed Blaney's name on a piece of paper and stored it in the butt of the gun. On the night of the shootings Blaney's gun was stored in an arms chest and was never touched. Lt. George C. Lawrason inspected every gun in the gun racks and inspected the arms chest which contained Blaney's rifle. Lawrason was satisfied that all the rifles had been accounted for in the gun racks and in the arms chest. Not one rifle was missing, further proving that the fourth gun that military officials claimed was used the night of the raid was actually not used since it was under bolt and key.<sup>76</sup>

Throughout the military investigation witnesses stated repeatedly that they saw soldiers shooting throughout the town. Although military officials knew that it was common for civilians

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<sup>75</sup> *Senate Documents*, 19: 217-218.

<sup>76</sup> *Senate Documents*, 19:146.

to wear discarded army uniforms they did not take that into consideration during their investigation. Prior to the arrival of the 25<sup>th</sup>, the Third Battalion, a white regiment occupied Brownsville. At the beginning months of their duty they threw away many of their worn uniforms in favor of their new khaki uniforms. Soon afterward, many of the citizens, especially Mexicans were witnessed wearing the Third Battalion's old uniforms. It is likely that the raiders wore these uniforms. In addition the investigators never took seriously the testimony of black soldiers who stated that they saw civilians taking guns out of a building directly across the street from the barracks around 2:00 p.m. on the afternoon prior to the shootings. For instance Private John Cook told Sgt. Walker McCurdy about locals removing weapons. Walker reported this to Major Penrose who never documented this incident in the government's report.<sup>77</sup>

Along those same lines, two weeks after the raid several black soldiers reported seeing civilians around the fort magazine. They found magazine locks broken open, and in the door was an iron wedge where an attempt was made to pry it open. Members of the 25<sup>th</sup> believed that locals broke into the magazine and took live rounds and dispersed them on the street near the fort to establish their guilt.<sup>78</sup> This was also reported to Major Penrose. Many of these investigative reports that could have established the clear innocence of the 25<sup>th</sup> were ignored by government officials. For example, a report conducted by Texas Ranger William McDonald was ignored by the White House because it placed a great deal of suspicion on Penrose and Macklin.

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<sup>77</sup> *Senate Documents*, 19:219.

<sup>78</sup> *Senate Documents*, 19:219.

“I couldn’t help thinking Macklin must have been out with the coons who were committing murder and trying to kill ladies and their children,” McDonald recalled.<sup>79</sup> During his investigation he told the two officers, “You are sorrier than these niggers...because you, as their officers, and as men of the United States Army, ought to be the first to hunt out the guilty ones, instead of trying to hide them.”<sup>80</sup> Because the Brownsville soldiers were given dishonorable discharges, largely on the basis of race, an argument can be made that they were forever unable to reap any benefits that befit their mistreatment by the United States government. It can be established that these soldiers’ subsequent generation are entitled to their ancestor’s grievances. Based upon Brophy’s argument in *Reconstructing the Dreamland*, the descendants of the 25<sup>th</sup> have a strong moral case for reparations.

First, there is the unquestioned complicity of both local and federal government. If Mayor Combe’s investigating committee had not sent that telegram to the war department the Brownsville raid would have been just another incident involving black soldiers and white locals. Further, if military investigators would have not assumed the collective guilt of the 25<sup>th</sup> then Roosevelt would not have been able to issue an order based upon their faulty conclusion. Last, Roosevelt at any point could have just sent the 25<sup>th</sup> to another fort instead of dismissing them.

The second claim for reparations is based upon monetary loss. A lengthy military career in many ways put one into middle-class America. Since many other professions were closed to black males, especially in the South, military participation was seen as a way to make a living. Many black soldiers had served valiantly in the military and they looked forward to the financial

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<sup>79</sup> It is very likely that McDonald used the term, “coon” to describe Blacks. However, depending on where he originated from (ex: Southern portions of Louisiana) he could have intended “poor whites.” The term “Coon” or “Coonass” is also an ethnic derogatory term for poor whites and Cajuns. They are commonly used mostly by non-Cajuns. Lane, *The Brownsville Affair*, 19.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid, 19.

awards of retirement. But, when they are dismissed from the army they lost any and all their benefits. The dismissal of the 25<sup>th</sup> and their economic loss conjures up images of economic intimidation during “white” hysteria in which black business owners in the Jim Crow south were forced to either “sell” their businesses to whites or had their businesses burned to the ground. The economic loss to the families of the 25<sup>th</sup> was a great injustice to those soldiers and their offspring.

The third and final claim for reparations centers on time and space. According to Brophy, reparations for “very specific damage” are what we have in the case of the Brownsville soldiers. This is not a case of “general societal discrimination” but rather a case based upon “concentrated harm.” Awarding reparations to the descendants of the 25<sup>th</sup> does not involve the entire African-American community. Rather, it seeks to award the families of the 167 men who were dismissed. In this regard the government-sanctioned racism compares favorably to that of the Japanese during World War II and the cases of Native American ethnic groups who received reparations for government sponsored and supported discrimination.<sup>81</sup>

Truly, there is no conclusion to the Brownsville raid. This thesis overall, may further debate on Brownsville. Even today, the raid is a sore topic of discussion within social circles in Brownsville. Numerous ancestors of those citizens involved in 1906, still, even today, blame the Black soldiers. Moreover, this thesis concludes that irresponsibility, brought about at many different levels of government, resulted in an American injustice. Now is time to right the wrong.

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<sup>81</sup> Brophy, *Reconstructing the Dreamland*, 105-106.



Figure 10. Pvt. Dorsie Willis receives a check for \$25,000 dollars from the United States Army after six decades of injustice that imposed poverty on many of the dismissed soldiers. Courtesy of the Associated Press Archives. Courtesy of UT-Brownsville Southmost College.



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Courtesy of University of Texas at Brownsville and Southmost College Archives.

Courtesy of the Associated Press Archives.

**Videotapes**

*“Discharged Without Honor,”* Produced by Arts & Entertainment Television and the History Channel. 58 min. 2000.

## **Vita**

Ricardo Purnell Malbrew is from Lake Charles, Louisiana, by way of Ashland, New Hampshire. He received his Bachelor of Arts degree from Grambling State University of Louisiana in 2002. Prior to his attendance at Grambling, Malbrew served in the United States Navy from 1994 until 1998. While attending Louisiana State University, he represented the Graduate School in Student Government for the fall semester of 2006. After graduation, Ricardo plans to pursue a doctoral degree in the area of jurisprudence in 2007.

