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The Historiography of African American Soldiers, 1866-1917.
The United States of America possess a tradition of military service. The country’s historical narrative centers on martial glory that promotes the defense of democracy and liberty. Until the late 1960s and inspired by the Civil Rights Movement, America’s military record has diminished and often excluded the service of African Americans. Black Americans have a long tradition of armed service. Black soldiers demonstrated their patriotism from the Revolutionary War through the War of 1812, but it was on the bloody battlefields of the Civil War where African Americans carved out a place for present and future generations in the U.S. military. Over 180,000 men served in segregated units; the majority organized under the auspices of the Bureau of Colored Troops. The United States Colored Troops’ service during the war was critical to the inclusion of blacks in the post-war Regular Army.¹ The historiography of African American military service has proliferated from the second half of the twentieth century forward: the scholarship continues to expand and evolve.

The purpose of this work is to examine the historical scholarship of black soldiers in the U.S. Army, and national from 1865-1917. The work will focus on the experience of African American soldiers in the post-Civil War South. The dates are significant to the historiography. The U.S. Congress’ authorized the creation of six regiments of black soldiers—four infantry and two cavalry—in July 1866. The Regular Army black units were purposely stationed in the West during their first two decades of service. The latter date ends with American intervention in World War I and conforms to the class’s timeline. The structure of this work is organized both chronologically and thematically. William H. Leckie’s classic, *The Buffalo Soldiers: A Narrative of the Negro Cavalry in the West* published by the University of Oklahoma Press (1967), was the earliest and most significant scholarship on the black Regular Army regiments. Leckie’s work is

considered the standard of African American military historiography from the period—post-Civil War through the first two decades of the twentieth century—and sets the foundation of this work. Historian Bruce A. Glasrud identifies Leckie’s major argument in his review of the topic’s literature, writing, “This now classic study of black cavalry in the late 19th century West, as the author put it, told ‘the story of the Ninth and Tenth Cavalry, in the conviction that they deserve recognition for what they were—first rate regiments by any standards one wishes to apply and major spearheads in the settlement of the West’.”2 The Buffalo Soldiers did have its flaws. The exclusion of the 24th and 25th U.S. Infantry regiments and lack of the soldiers’ social and family dynamics resulted in a revised edition released in 2003.3 Nevertheless, Leckie’s interpretation remains at the center of historical analysis. Glasrud aptly describes the work’s legacy, writing, “…subsequent writers and scholars recognized the import of what Leckie contended, and for the past 30 years a growing sophisticated study of black soldiers in the West continued to emerge”.4

Historians have developed the central thematic arguments from The Buffalo Soldiers as a base to support and refute Leckie’s conclusions. African American military history expanded to include experiences of black soldiers in the immediate post-war South, militia units, and in the America’s colonial conflicts: Cuba and the Philippines. The work’s thematic structure identifies and addresses historians’ interpretation of African American soldiers’ motivations for service. White-Americans’ reluctant acceptance turned escalating and hostile aggression toward black soldiers during rise of Jim Crow segregation and violence in the 1890s completes the narrative.

Black soldiers’ motivations and incentives for enlistment in military units varied and shifted in the decades following the Civil War, but centered on citizenship, manhood-

3 Leckie, The Buffalo Soldiers, XIII.

African American military historiography is diverse and contested. The scholarly interpretation centers on major themes honed and developed in *The Buffalo Soldiers*; succeeding historians affirmed, developed and challenged Leckie’s narrative. 

**Service**

“Colored troops will hold their place in the Army of the United States as long as the government last.”

Bruce A. Glasrud asserts that “Leckie still stands at the forefront—every serious scholar of black soldiers in the West must refer to his work”. He notes *The Buffalo Soldiers’* emphasized the need for the recognition of African American troops; and consequently, inspired “a host of other studies of black soldiers in the American West, their ventures overseas during the Spanish-American and Filipino-American wars, and the ugly racial violence which erupted early in the 20th century”. Glasrud states that historians joined Lecklie in pursuing the legacy of African American soldiers in the West and beyond. Leckie argues the Congressional

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7 Glasrud, “Western Black Soldiers,” 2.
authorization that created six black army units in 1866—later reduced and combined to four in 1869, “began a new chapter in American military history and afforded the erstwhile slave an opportunity to play a major role in the opening up of the West to non-Indian settlement and development”. He contends that USCT veterans and freedmen saw the army as a social and economic opportunity for them and their families. Additionally, military service afforded black men the platform “to prove their manhood in a nation, by in large, but particularly in the South, denigrated their worth as human beings”. African Americans had attained freedom but were denied full citizenship and protection under the law, and were subject to discrimination and violence. Leckie identifies central themes to African American military historiography: black men’s motivation for enlistment in the U.S. Army; their valorous and dedicated service; and the lack of recognition within the military and white-citizens throughout the country. He also recognizes the critical theme that historians of the post-war New South and post-Indian wars affirm: African Americans’ active pursuit of civil rights and resistance against racial discrimination and violence. Leckie cites an African American peace march for civil rights that turned deadly in New Orleans as a precursor for racial strife in the post-war era. Two hundred black men, the majority USCT veterans, marched for African American rights and were met with vitriol white resistance in July 1867. A race riot ensued and resulted in the death of thirty-four African Americans. This case was replicated in the coming decades as white instigated violence against blacks reasserted the racial hierarchy in the South. African American positions as honorable and loyal soldiers did not exempt them from the brutality. The Union’ reconstruction of the defeated South consigned black soldiers to duties out West. They played

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active roles in pacifying hostile Native Americans, protecting homesteaders and travelers, securing the border with Mexico, and quelling resistance from ex-Confederates. These duties, regardless of their outcome, reflected Leckie’s central theme and argument that African American soldiers were not recognized or afforded gratitude for their service.\(^{12}\)

Before African American soldiers garnered the sobriquet as the Buffalo Soldiers, their service in the USCT continued into the post-war Reconstruction period. Historian Elizabeth D. Leonard details the chaos between black soldiers and their pursuit of civil rights against embittered, defeated Confederates. White resistance was a harbinger for the racial violence of the South in 1890s. USCT regiments were stationed in ten of the eleven former states of the Confederacy, often in numbers exceeding their comrades in blue, and inspired violent confrontations from white Southerners.\(^{13}\) Leonard notes that black soldiers sought claims to an equal place with whites in society. For their service, ‘the only reward black men should consider acceptable was ‘universal suffrage,’ by which he (Henry Carpenter, 10\(^{th}\) U.S Cavalry) likely meant universal male suffrage”, writes Leonard.\(^{14}\) The infamous Memphis race riot in 1866 pitted the Third United States Colored Infantry against white law enforcement officers. Tensions escalated and resulted in arson the of black churches, schools, and homes. An armed firefight ended with dozens of fatalities, the majority which were black soldiers. Leonard states that the “Memphis riot set a new tone for Southern whites’ resistance to Reconstruction, particularly in response to the army’s black occupation troops”.\(^{15}\) As a result, writes Leonard, “increasingly vigorous Southern white opposition made occupation duty for black soldiers in the former

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\(^{12}\) Leckie, *The Buffalo Soldiers*, 18.

\(^{13}\) Elizabeth D. Leonard. *Men of Color to Arms!: Black Soldiers, Indian Wars, and the Quest for Equality* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2010), 25.

\(^{14}\) Leonard, *Men of Color to Arms!*, 93.

\(^{15}\) Leonard, *Men of Color to Arms!*, 30-31.
Confederacy less and less tenable”.\textsuperscript{16} Leonard concludes that the formation of the Regular black regiments for frontier service “must be seen, at least in part, in a positive light” as it provided African Americans with paid employment.\textsuperscript{17}

The immediate post-war racial tension followed the newly created Regular Army black regiments out West, notably in Texas. Historian Paul H. Carlson notes that the black Regulars’ service centered on pacification of Native groups in Texas and the Southwest. The Buffalo Soldiers’ campaigns against Indian tribes are what they are remembered for, states Carlson.\textsuperscript{18} Their duties in the protection mail, rail, and trail routes, the building and maintenance of military ports, and the protection of civilians against outlaws and thieves was equally important. Their work put black soldiers in direct contact with hostile white citizens.

Historians William A. Dobak and Thomas D. Phillips both challenge and support the historical narrative established by William Leckie in their study, \textit{The Black Regulars, 1866-1898} (2001). Dobak and Phillips contend that “Historians and journalists have drawn two conflicting inferences from the black regulars’ historical record, both of which are false”.\textsuperscript{19} They first challenge Leckie’s argument of the government and army’s racial indifference directed at black regulars, writing, “The first is that the army’s staff bureaus—commissary, ordnance, and quartermaster—systematically discriminated against the black regiments; that the 9\textsuperscript{th} and 10\textsuperscript{th} cavalry, as William H. Leckie writes, received ‘second-rate equipment and the worse horseflesh in the army’.”\textsuperscript{20} The author’s acknowledge that black soldiers did endure racial prejudice, but refute the claims that the army specifically distributed shoddy equipment, material and supplies;

\textsuperscript{16} Leonard, \textit{Men of Color to Arms!}, 84.
\textsuperscript{17} Leonard, \textit{Men of Color to Arms!}, 139.
\textsuperscript{18} Paul H. Carlson. \textit{The Buffalo Soldier Tragedy of 1877} (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2003), 55.
\textsuperscript{20} Dobak and Phillips, \textit{The Black Regulars}, xvi.
rather, it was army-wide policy as oppose to targeted discrimination. The reduction of the army in the 1870s and the vast scale of the Western territory “prevented any policy that might have created and maintained black regiments as a separate corps of second-class soldiers”.\textsuperscript{21} The authors state that black soldiers were armed and equipped, clothed, fed, and paid the same as whites, and performed the same duties expected of any men in the army.\textsuperscript{22} The second point the author’s refute was the false inference, “based largely on the black regulars’ high reenlistment rate, is that the black regiments ‘had become elite units of the army’ by 1890, that they were ‘the most professional, experience and effective troops in the service’.”\textsuperscript{23} The author’s support this argument with the convincing assertion that the army’s recruiting processes—notably its unsystematic and flawed physical examinations, high rate of illiteracy among black soldiers, and the legacy of Southern slavery, “made the adjective ‘elite’ inapplicable”.\textsuperscript{24} The authors’ argue there was not a distinct difference in quality between black and white units.\textsuperscript{25}

Dobak and Phillips substantiate the scholarly narrative that black soldiers served to declare their rights as citizens. On a practical level, black soldiers saw military service as a career; black service in the professional army provided a steady income for the men and their families, and established their personal reputations and that of their regiments.\textsuperscript{26} The authors do acknowledge army prejudice toward black soldiers in two critical realms: white officers’ racially driven, paternalistic relationship and attitude toward black enlistees, and the nearly insurmountable challenge for black officers and noncommissioned officers to be accepted and ascend up the ranks. Black soldiers “took considerable pride in their own deeds and were

\textsuperscript{21} Dobak and Phillips, \textit{The Black Regulars}, 112-113.
\textsuperscript{22} Dobak and Phillips, \textit{The Black Regulars}, 113.
\textsuperscript{23} Dobak and Phillips, \textit{The Black Regulars}, xvii.
\textsuperscript{24} Dobak and Phillips, \textit{The Back Regulars}, xvii.
\textsuperscript{25} Dobak and Phillips, \textit{The Black Regulars}, xvii.
\textsuperscript{26} Dobak and Phillips, \textit{The Black Regulars}, 66.
sensitive to any criticism of their bravery . . .” and responded with signed petitions and public responses in black newspapers and magazines. 27 The authors’ recognize the necessity of black soldiers to “satisfy two sets of criteria, the professional and the racial” throughout their first three decades in the Regular Army. 28 This interpretation does not support Leckie’s argument that black regulars endured systematic and social discrimination, and succeeded without recognition; rather, their treatment “reflected predominant white American attitudes toward black people”. 29 Subsequent scholarship expands the narrative. Dobak and Phillips contend the soldiers’ enduring legacy was that “service in the regular army kept open to black Americans one means of participating in civic life of the United States”. 30

Historian Marvin E. Fletcher “carried forward the chronicle begun by Leckie” with his work, The Black Soldier and Officer in the United States Army, 1891-1917, released on the heels of The Buffalo Soldiers in 1974. Fletcher’s central argument connects with Leckie’s contention that African American service was unrecognized. He identifies a racial paradox that exemplifies the black military experience in America. Fletcher succinctly explains the contradiction, writing: “In war Blacks provided a ready and willing source of manpower and performed with bravery and loyalty; in peacetime whites either ignored their military potential, or if they reluctantly used them, subjected them to the whims of a prejudiced white society”. 31 Fletcher, along Leckie’s narrative, asserts that the “Government tolerated the presence of Blacks within the service” and that white racism shaped the interracial relations where soldiers were stationed”. 32

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28 Dobak and Phillips, The Black Regulars, 266.
29 Dobak and Phillips, The Black Regulars, 265.
32 Fletcher, The Black Soldier and Officer, 25.
toward black soldiers was more prevalent in small towns along the frontier than large urban areas and cities. Fletcher charges military and law enforcement officers and their treatment of black soldiers as critical factors in their struggle to obtain civil rights, and the deterioration of race relations in the 1890s. Fletcher contends that black soldiers resented the racially charged treatment and “were determined to defend themselves on questions of the rights of their race”.33 Army General Christopher C. Augur, a decorated veteran of the Civil War, noted black soldiers as “easily excited and thoroughly united on any question of insult to their race”.34 But, Fletcher argues, there was little the men could do; they lacked support, for the most part, from their white comrades or officers, and the rights of citizenship guaranteed by the passage of the Fourteenth Amendment was ignored by white, civilians and army officers.35 Fletcher concludes it “was quite clear for the black soldiers service in the army did not ensure their civil rights”.36

Black men’s motivations for enlistment and attitude toward the army is difficult to delineate, states Fletcher. Surviving documents—letters home and to black newspapers, and personal journals reveal that the men “regarded the army as a good alternative to civilian life”.37 Fletcher interprets the desertion and reenlistment rates in the black regiments “indicate that they found at least some satisfaction in a career in the military”.38 But, to the contrary states Fletcher, letters from soldiers to newspapers reflect an undercurrent of dissatisfaction. The soldiers’ complaints included extended isolations in their stations (refuted by Dobak and Phillips as ubiquitous among army soldiers during the period), the lack of protection of their rights, and the

33 Fletcher, The Black Soldier and Officer, 25.
34 Fletcher, The Black Soldier and Officer, 25.
35 Fletcher, The Black Soldier and Officer, 25.
36 Fletcher, The Black Soldier and Officer, 25.
37 Fletcher, The Black Soldier and Officer, 27.
38 Fletcher, The Black Soldier and Officer, 27.
low opinion and distrust of white officers about their capabilities.\textsuperscript{39} The latter two points parallel Leckie’s central narrative of the black military experience.

William Leckie emphasized the importance of educated after the formation of the black regular regiments in 1866. The Congressional legislation that created the six black regiments in July 1866 contained the provision that “assigned chaplains directly to the regiment with both spiritual and educational duties”.\textsuperscript{40} There was two motivations behind this policy: first, the majority of the enlistees were illiterate and forced officers to perform paperwork normally assigned to noncommissioned officers. Second, the army aimed to “enhance their skills as soldiers in the regular army, the chaplain was to instruct black regulars in the rudiments of reading, writing, and arithmetic”.\textsuperscript{41} Initially, the army did not have a policy that provided education for enlisted men’s children. White officers and their wives possessed the means to hire tutors for their children at their stations or send them to secondary schools back East. The men under their command could afford neither. The army remedied the problem in 1878. Orders “mandated that all posts must provide the children of enlisted men and those of the commanding officer with schooling”.\textsuperscript{42} He contends that the soldiers and their wives were equally determined and adequate to obtain education for their children.\textsuperscript{43} Leckie attest that the soldiers’ “main concern was achieving ag least elementary literacy skills for themselves”, and the end of the major campaigns against Indians provided more time for schooling”.\textsuperscript{44} Chaplain George Gatewood Mullins, serving with the Twenty-fifth Infantry at For Davis in 1875, aptly described the fervor of the black soldiers for education: “The ambition to be all that soldiers should be is

\textsuperscript{39} Fletcher, \textit{The Black Soldier and Officer}, 27.
\textsuperscript{40} Leckie, \textit{The Buffalo Soldiers}, 5.
\textsuperscript{41} Leckie, \textit{The Buffalo Soldiers}, 5.
\textsuperscript{42} Leckie, \textit{The Buffalo Soldiers}, 244.
\textsuperscript{43} Leckie, \textit{The Buffalo Soldiers}, 245.
\textsuperscript{44} Leckie, \textit{The Buffalo Soldiers}, 244.
not confined to a few of these sons of the unfortunate race”.

Army service had its drawbacks, but African Americans believed it offered them opportunities unavailable else.

Frank Schubert and Elizabeth Leonard likewise acknowledged the essentiality of education for black regulars. Schubert explains that the army policy that directed chaplains to provide religious and education services for black soldiers “departed from the practice in the rest of the Army, where the chaplain was appointed to a post, not a unit”. Leonard addresses the reinforcement of white officers’ prejudiced toward the men and their lack of education. As noted by Leckie, officers’ assumed the paperwork traditionally delegated to noncommissioned officers. As a result, writes Leonard, “white officials early on were disinclined to challenge previous discriminatory practices, and black soldiers’ exclusion from the commissioned officers’ ranks continued”. William Dobak and Thomas Phillips acknowledge the racial bias within the army’s education policy, specifically the segregation of classrooms, but argue black soldiers received schooling on par with their white comrades.

Historian Marcus S. Cox details the establishment of military training programs at historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) that was fundamental to African Americans’ pursuit of civil rights after the Civil War in Segregated Soldiers: Military Training at Historically Black Colleges in the Jim Crow South. Cox contends that “the movement to educate African Americans became essential to uplift the race, military training quickly became a fundamental component of black higher education”. Educators encouraged military training and activities “in order promote discipline, moral behavior, and for patriotism in young

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He states that these virtues impacted African Americans’ continued pursuit for civil rights and social progress. Cox’s thematic argument centers on the connection between black service in the U.S. military with the hope of attaining freedom and the privileges of citizenship. Education, specifically military training, was a primary approach for acquiring the rights and protection as citizens. Additionally, Cox states white paternalists and black leaders believed “military training was also a way for African Americans to assert their manhood in a society that often referred to them as ‘boys’.” Cox’s work is focused on the post-World War I experience at HBCUs, but does describe foundation for black military training after the Civil War. He contends that African American soldiers and their supporters broadened their connection of black service for freedom and social equality to “include the pursuit of literacy and strengthened concepts of masculine identity”. Cox notes the establishment of higher education for blacks in during Reconstruction. By 1870, over two dozen HBCUs had been established “with a faculty and staff of primarily former black military soldiers and officers”. Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute and Tuskegee Institute established premiere military training programs. Black cadets did not have an official connection to the U.S. military nor did they receive commissions but “male students were expected to develop a manly presence . . .”. Military training programs worked in conjunction with education programs to train black men as reflections of African American’ manhood. The programs set a foundation for black service at institutions long before the establishment of the Student Army Training Corps (SATC) in 1918.

Cox, Segregated Soldiers, 1.
Cox, Segregated Soldiers, 1-2.
Cox, Segregated Soldiers, 4.
Cox, Segregated Soldiers, 10.
Cox, Segregated Soldiers, 19.
Cox, Segregated Soldiers, 20.
and the Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) in 1919. Cox’s contention that “The military tradition in the black community was vigorously promoted at African American institutions of higher education, and at those schools racial uplift was the primary mission” confirms the scholarship of black motivation for service.

**Non-Regulars: Militias & Volunteers**

“Between 1865 and 1917, national, state and local forced offered blacks significant career choices and positions of respect for militia and for volunteers.”

Historians Bruce A. Glasrud edits and introduces a collection of essays centered on African American service in militia units from the end of the Civil War to World War I in *Brothers to the Buffalo Soldiers: Perspective on the African American Militia and Volunteers, 1865-1917*. Glasrud succinctly identifies the collection’s central focus that moved away from the historical scholarship centered on the Regular black military units, writing “African Americans also served in state militias and as volunteers during Reconstruction and after was well as during the wars of those years—the Spanish-American War, the Philippine-American War, the Punitive Expedition into Mexico, and World War I”. Glasrud recognizes two major historians that “bear the major responsibility and deserve credit for bringing the lives and careers of these African Americans non-regular army soldiers to the forefront—Willard B. Gatewood, Jr., and Roger D.

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Cunningham”. The essays of Otis A. Singletary and Marvin E. Fletcher complete the comprehensive and diverse study of non-regular black soldiers.

Historian Otis A. Singletary details the service of African American militiamen during Radical Reconstruction. He contends that Radical Republicans and their constituencies in the South “realized the necessity of furnishing their newly created state governments with sufficient force to perpetuate their existence amidst the undisguised hostility of a potentially destructive local opposition” in order to implement their plans. The passage of the Reconstruction Acts from 1867 through 1870 provided local Radical administrations the authority to enact militia laws. Recruitment enrolled was open to white and black men, but it the majority of the volunteers were African Americans. Singletary notes political affinity to Republicans and the pay nominal by grade or rank in the U.S. army were major factors of enlistment. Their martial reflection in a uniform and the opportunity to participate in drills, parades and speeches motivated enlistments as well. Black women played a critical role in the recruitment and formation of militia units. Singletary elaborates their role, writing, “Failure to show interest in the movement automatically caused black males to become politically suspect and gave rise to a most rigorous program of discrimination at the hands of the women”. Women understood the power and act of militia service for securing rights and citizenship for men. The Reconstruction militias ultimately faltered as Northern support in the South faded. White para-military groups—White Leagues or Rifle Companies—were dedicated to the destruction of black units, and sought

the “return of political control ‘into the hands of white people’.” Historian Stephen Kantrowitz elaborates with the contention that white-Southerners’ actions reflected their perception that “black men were inherently unfit for citizenship” and “could not constitute a legitimate body of the ‘the people,’ fitted for public meetings, political rallies, or military service”. The militia units were created to ensure the peaceful reconstruction of the defeated South, but caused such a violent reaction from whites and ensured its destruction.

Roger D. Cunningham details African American service in “They are as Proud of Their Uniform as Any Who Serve Virginia”: African American Participation in the Virginia Volunteers, 1872-1899. Cunningham argues that “Black participation in Virginia’s militia supports C. Vann Woodward’s conclusion that there was ‘a considerable range of flexibility and tolerance in relations between the races’ in Virginia from 1870 to 1900”. He identifies militia units’ correlation with the church and military organizations as “the most important institution in the lives of most black families—and thus played a major motivational role in the units”. Also, the men of the units formed a proud collective identity. The officers, appointed and required to pass a commissioning examination, often obtained skilled to semi-skilled professions from their elevated status. The Virginia Volunteers served social and ceremonial responsibilities, but also the serious purpose “to execute the Laws of the Union, suppress Insurrection and repel Invasion” and in case of “breach of the peace, tumult, riot, or resistance to the law, or imminent danger

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66 Cunningham, “They are as Proud of Their Uniform as Any Who Serve Virginia,” 42.
thereof”. Cunningham cites an unofficial survey from 1896 with the findings that the Virginia Volunteers were activated nearly forty times in the 1880s, more than any other state. The high number reflected authorities’ efforts to curb the lynching of black men. Black militias did not prevent lynchings, but they did maintain law and order on several occasions of strife. White-Virginians positive views of black militias shifted in the late 1890s. The rise of racism and the unsavory though underserved reputation of the Sixth Virginia Volunteers (organized for service in the Spanish American War. Cunningham notes the statistic that reflected this shift: “At least one black Virginian was lynched every year from 1897 until 1902, as Jim Crow attitudes and policies spread, robbing African Americans of their civil liberties and making the sight of black militiamen far less palatable to the state’s white majority”.

Historians Willard B. Gatewood, Jr., and Andre D. Armon detail the conflicted motivations that inspired black service in the Spanish American War. Gatewood argues that the “rising tide of Jim Crowism and repression in the United States prompted some to oppose American intervention on the grounds that it would merely ensure the establishment of a rigid system of racial discrimination in Cuba; others objected to military crusade in behalf of the oppressed Cubans until black citizens at home had been relieved of their oppression”. Yet, thousands of African Americans enlisted to defend the United States. Blacks were concerned with the effect of the war on their status in American society. Despite logically concerns against enlistment, “Spokesmen within the black community came to view the conflict with Spain as an extraordinary opportunity for African Americans to demonstrate their patriotism and to prove

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67 Cunningham, “They are as Proud of Their Uniform as Any Who Serve Virginia,” 51.
68 Cunningham, “They are as Proud of Their Uniform as Any Who Serve Virginia,” 51.
69 Cunningham, “They are as Proud of Their Uniform as Any Who Serve Virginia,” 63.
themselves worthy of first class citizenship”. Amron supports this Gatewood’s contention for black service in his essay for *The Journal of African American History*. Amron argues that in the era of escalating Jim Crow discrimination and violence of the 1890s, “a middle ground was needed that would ally southern’ whites fears, but still provide African Americans a more courageous and unbending hero to emulate in such perilous times”. Armon center’s black enlistment on the reinforcement of manhood and personal respect through martial service. Gatewood’s narrative promotes loyalty to the flag as the major cog of black service that would enhance their service if volunteers were given the opportunity to see action.

Marvin Fletcher addresses the unfortunate experience of African American volunteers in the Spanish-American War. Fletcher’s narrative centers on the argument blacks’ “efforts to join the volunteer units were impeded by the changing plans of the federal government and the virulent racial prejudice of the 1880s”. As a result, the “experiences of the lack volunteer soldier in the Spanish-American War were very similar to those of blacks in civilian life”. Fletcher echoes the historical scholarship that blacks viewed the conflict as an opportunity to change their deteriorating status in American society. African Americans recalled the service of the black regiments for freedom and citizenship during the Civil War and hoped that “similar gallant service in the war would reawaken the conscience of the nation”.

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71 Gatewood, Jr., “North Carolina’s African American Regiment in the Spanish-American War,” 144.
75 Fletcher, “The Black Volunteers in the Spanish-American War,” 129.
Black volunteers served in state and federal created units during the war. State governors responded with the mustering of their white militia and National Guard units. The government’s continued calls for volunteers compelled the enlistment of black regiments. The War Department authorized the recruitment of men from the Southern states with the mistaken belief that they were immune from tropical diseases. Ten U.S. Immune regiments were organized, including four black. Only four regiments served in Cuba—the Sixth Virginia, Third North Carolina, and Seventh and Tenth U.S Volunteers—as occupying forces. The black regiments stationed in training posts throughout the American South endured increasing hostility from white soldiers and citizens. Fletcher states that segregation and the sight of armed, uniformed blacks led to violent confrontations. Black soldiers were armed and organized, and responded to their ill-treatment with force. Soldiers from the Seventh Volunteers stoned a train station after being forced to ride in Jim Crow rail car. Their resistance “was something the whites were not used to and could not tolerate,” writes Fletcher. Whites’ responded with increased violence against black soldiers even as their enlistments expired in 1899. Residents of Nashville, including police officers, attacked the Eight Volunteers train cars upon their arrival to the city. They excused the violence with the racially-charged news reports that highlighted misbehavior by black soldiers. Fletcher, echoes Leckie’s interpretation and concludes that “black desire to serve was accepted by whites when it was to the white’s advantage, but acceptance in the service did not mean equality”. Furthermore, the “presence of armed blacks stirred the passions of the white

77 Fletcher, “The Black Volunteers in the Spanish-American War,” 131-132
80 Fletcher, “The Black Volunteers in the Spanish-American War,” 140.
population, especially in the South, and the southern discrimination in turn led to retaliation by the blacks”.

Gatewood contends that the “performance of Negro soldiers in the Spanish American and Filipino Insurrection inspired black citizens with a sense of pride at a time when oppressive racial climate in the United States seemed to warrant only despair”. Gatewood contends that black men were called upon to serve outside of the U.S. for the first time since acquiring citizenship and “became spokesmen abroad among ‘colored people’ for a country which made color a badge of inferiority”. Again, African Americans faced a paradox in the country’s acquisition of an overseas empire. Blacks viewed the war in Cuba and Philippines as an opportunity to redeem their rights as citizens. Yet, black Americans “sympathized with the oppressed peoples of Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines, but as important as the oppressed condition of these people was the fact that many were non-white”. Gatewood’s narrative correlates with the scholarship on the difficulties facing African Americans in the U.S. global conflicts. Thousands for Regular army and volunteer black soldiers deemed service in the face of oppression as the proper route. For black soldiers, their families and African American communities around the country, the wars in the Caribbean and the Pacific would promote “justice and home as well as abroad”.

Historian Christine Bold, writing for the Canadian Review of American Studies, echoes Gatewood’s sentiment. Bold’s argument mirrors that of Gatewood, writing, “The black

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81 Fletcher, “The Black Volunteers in the Spanish-American War,” 140.
83 Gatewood, Jr., “Smoked Yankees” and the Struggle for Empire, 3.
84 Gatewood, Jr., “Smoked Yankees” and the Struggle for Empire, 4.
85 Gatewood, Jr., “Smoked Yankees” and the Struggle for Empire, 21.
military presence in Cuba—and, subsequently, Puerto Rico and the Philippines—threatened that process by challenging white superiority on the western frontier and imperial battlefield.”  

“Where did the Black Rough Riders Go?” also reflects Andrew Amron’s central narrative in “Reinforcing Manliness”. Bold addresses the critical role the black press media reflected on black soldiers’ service in the Cuba and the Philippines. Citizens at home absorbed and perpetuate tales, images, and accounts of black heroism that became the “basis of heroic black solidarity”.

Bold concludes that blacks’ viewed service far beyond the scope of patriotic duty—rather, duty overseas was a “resource for black militancy, not for conformity to hegemonic notions of patriotism”.

**Agency & Resistance**

“They are possessed of the notion that the colored people of the country is more or less affected by their conduct in the Army.”

Historian Frank N. Schubert develops William Leckie’s central arguments by expanding from *The Buffalo Soldiers* focus on black cavalry units to include the Twenty-fourth and Twenty-fifth U.S. Infantry regiments. Significantly, Schubert “paid attention to the problems and discrimination that troopers faced, as well as their reactions to this ill-wanted and ill-warranted treatment . . .” writes Glasrud. The evolving interpretation of black soldiers was broadened by historians to include their service beyond the Indian pacification campaigns of the 1870s and

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89 Bold, “Where did the Black Rough Riders Go?”, 286.
90 Schubert. *Voices of the Buffalo Soldiers*, 86.
1880s. Schubert provides African American soldiers the platform to voice their personal and collective narratives in his work, *Voices of The Buffalo Soldiers: Records, Reports, and Recollections of Military Life and Service in the West* (2003). He uses strong primary source materials from pension records, the black press nationwide, personal letters and journals that offers “glimpses of the Buffalo Soldiers’ relations with the world around them and of life insider their community show some of the tensions and contradictions between being soldiers and being black”.

Schubert contends that the black soldiers were not merely ignored and suppressed men fighting out in the far west; rather, “They were respectable, secure, powerful me who bore arms and participated, along with other Americans from a variety of backgrounds, in the major chapters of the American national epic—the spread of the republic across the continent . . .”.

In doing so, argues Schubert, black soldiers occupied strong positions in the national mainstream.

Schubert’s strongest contention in the evolving interpretation centers on African American agency from the men, their families, and the African American community as a whole. Black newspapers stationed correspondents with the regiments in their pacifying and protection campaigns. This demonstrated the “high status of the soldiers in the black community. . .” and “the high regard in which black soldiers were held among African Americans, resulting as it did in the appearance of numerous reports of soldier activities in newspapers . . .”, writes Schubert.

He declares that the complex human story of black soldiers is best understood as conscious agency. Schubert elaborates on this point, writing, “the men were capable of human error, and indeed the entire range of human emotions, understandings, desires, aspirations, achievements,

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92 Schubert, *Voices of the Buffalo Soldiers*, 3.
93 Schubert, *Voices of the Buffalo Soldiers*, 3.
95 Schubert, *Voices of the Buffalo Soldiers*, 2.
and failings”\textsuperscript{96} Schubert’s emphasis on the African American experiences is fundamental to the scholarship of black soldiers.

Historian Garna L. Christian’s work, \textit{Black Soldiers in Jim Crow Texas, 1899-1917}, demonstrates the evolvement of black soldiers’ scholarship from William Leckie. Christian writes that Leckie “introduced to the reading public documented proof of ‘the true character and contributions’ of the \textit{The Buffalo Soldiers}”\textsuperscript{97} Christian acknowledges Leckie, but also states the influence of the Civil Rights Movement, the formation of black studies programs, and the rise of revisionist Reconstruction history in the proliferation of black soldier studies. He expounds on the influence of these factors, writing, “. . . there appeared a significant body of writings that placed the American black squarely in the ranks of the military tradition, particularly in the army”\textsuperscript{98} Christian too acknowledges the scholarly interpretation that African Americans viewed service as “an opportunity to validate their rights of citizenship”\textsuperscript{99} Christian applies the experience of black regulars in Jim Crow Texas as a case study that demonstrated resistance to racial discrimination. He contends that the soldiers “withstood the indignities on virtually a daily basis but sporadically returned their vengeance in like many” and the “retaliation created ‘incidents’ and an outcry from residents, the press, and political leaders”\textsuperscript{100} Bruce Glasrud echoes this interpretation in his review of the topic’s literature, writing, “[he] clearly portrayed the hostility and tense feelings which existed between white Texas communities and black soldiers”\textsuperscript{101} Troopers from the 10\textsuperscript{th} Cavalry stationed in San Angel, Texas in 1881 responded to the killing of two soldiers from white citizens by scattering handbills with the warning: “If we do

\textsuperscript{96} Schubert, \textit{Voices of the Buffalo Soldiers}, 3.
\textsuperscript{97} Christian, \textit{Black Soldiers in Jim Crow Texas}, xii.
\textsuperscript{98} Christian, \textit{Black Soldiers in Jim Crow Texas}, xii.
\textsuperscript{100} Christian, \textit{Black Soldiers in Jim Crow Texas}, xiv.
\textsuperscript{101} Glasrud, “Western Black Soldiers,” 5.
not received justice and fair play . . . someone will suffer, if not the guilty, the innocent. It has gone far enough”.

Amron recognizes the importance the black press had in promoting not only black enlistment but loyal, capable black soldiers against the rising tide of Jim Crow discrimination and violence. Amron attests that “the frequency of public exhibitions by black militia organizations prior to the outbreak of war with Spain represented attempt by African Americans to project an image of strength and discipline and white onlookers”. The war marked a major turning point in the public image of black soldiers. The Regular black regiments—Ninth and Tenth U.S. Cavalry, and Twenty-fourth and Twenty-fifth U.S. Infantry—served with great distinction in Cuba and Philippines, and were heavily covered by the black press. Black troopers’ accounts of the El Caney and San Juan Hill battles reached home, and was promulgated by black and white media. The accounts of black soldiers’ inspired African Americans at home to become “personally invested and gallantry of their men overseas”. Printed media: military histories centered on black soldiers, illustrated lithographs of the Regulars service in Cuba, popular fiction and poems perpetuated young African American soldiers as “fearless, modest, and resolute in defense of democracy”. Amron further substantiates C. Vann Woodward’s contention that the demise of African American civil rights and claims to citizenship was not fixed at the end of Reconstruction, rather, a gradual constriction by contested forces. He concludes the effect of black soldier marital glory, writing, “The pervasiveness of these images in public and private life, and the aggressive dissemination of these representations reinforced the value of courage

102 Christian, Black Soldiers in Jim Crow Texas, xiv.
103 Amron, “Reinforcing Manliness,” 411.
104 Amron, “Reinforcing Manliness,” 412.
105 Amron, “Reinforcing Manliness,” 419.
and manhood in African Americans” and that “these symbols and representations by African American artists and journalists were needed to repair the emotional damage created by images of lynching and other negative stereotypes”.107

By the 1890s, the relationship between black soldiers and civilian inhabitants hinged on their need for Army protection and the regulars’ adherence to Jim Crow discriminatory laws and customs. It was a volatile setting and illustrated black resistance to the New South’s purging of their rights. The 9th Cavalry was stationed in San Antonio in 1917. White Texans’ demanded that the regiment be moved. Black soldiers’ resistance segregated railcars caused the local congressman to write, “This is an outgrowth of friction which has been caused by negro soldiers refusing to observe the ‘Jim Crow’ laws respecting streetcars in San Antonio”.108 Christian contends the racial tension turned massed violence in Brownsville (1906) and Houston (1917) “convinced African Americans that swift justice against their own while white violence continued unpunished meant justice denied”.109 In both incidents, African American soldiers responded to perceived racial affronts and physical threats from white citizens and law enforcement with armed forced. Major August P. Blockson of the Inspector General’s Department reported the tensions to the War Department, writing, “Causes of the disturbance are racial” and the “People did not desire colored soldiers here and showed they thought them inferior socially by certain slights and denial of privileges at public bars, etc. Solders resented this”.110

Major Blockson’s telegram reveals two important themes that defined the relationship between black soldiers and white citizens in the Jim Crow era after the Spanish-American and

Philippine-American Wars. First, white Southerners’ initiated an unrelenting campaign of discrimination and violence against black soldiers. Garna Christian succinctly captures the rising tide of Jim Crowism, writing, “The conditions that beset black soldiers in southern cities and towns in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were common to the black population at large”.

Second, black soldiers’ responded to racial discrimination with force. Historian John D. Weaver cites W.E.B. Du Bose address for the second annual conference of the Niagara Movement in 1950 that reflected the sentiment of black servicemen: “We refuse to allow the impression to remain that the Negro American assents to inferiority, is submissive under oppression apologetic before insults”.

African American military historiography has evolved substantially since the publishing of William Leckie’s *The Buffalo Soldiers* in 1967. Historians have since expanded from Leckie’s focused work of the Regular black regiments in the West. Black service in local, state, and national militia units, and state and national volunteer regiments from Reconstruction through the U.S.’ oversees imperial conflicts has enhanced the historical scholarship. Bruce Glasrud addresses the future of black military history. He states that scholarly studies “continue to reach the market”. Glasrud cites the erection of a statue honoring Buffalo soldiers at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas; the development of Buffalo Soldiers’ organizations and reenactments; the portray of black soldiers in film; an extensive bibliography of western black soldiers compiled by Leckie and Glasrud “which ought to serve as a beacon for future investigations”, and illustrate the expansion of black military history. He does stress that certain topics necessitate further research and publication. He states notable topics include the lives of black soldiers after they

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112 Weaver, *The Brownsville Raid*, 269.
leave the military; black soldiers in the Indian territory\Oklahoma; the communities around forts and garrisons; the role of family and friends of the soldiers; and leisure activities.\textsuperscript{115} The scholarship to follow will expand the narrative of black soldiers. William Leckie concludes that “the story of the buffalo soldiers is not simply a chronicle of black history”; rather, it is “a chronicle of American history and a vital part of our command national heritage”.\textsuperscript{116}

\textsuperscript{116} Leckie, \textit{The Buffalo Soldiers}, 296.
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