

Roosevelt's Hostility to the Colored People of the United States

THE RECORD OF THE DISCHARGE OF THE COLORED SOLDIERS AT BROWNSVILLE

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"That President Roosevelt is tinctured with colorphobia is as plain as anything can be."—The Baltimore Afro-American Ledger.

"President Roosevelt is fair in speech in holding out the door of hope to us but in practice we find him false."—The Philadelphia Tribune.

"The one man our race has loved best since Lincoln has betrayed us."—Resolution adopted by the regular Colored Republican Organization of the Ninth New York Assembly District.

"Beyond the shadow of a doubt, Roosevelt has deserted the colored man completely."—J. Douglas Wetmore, of New York City.

The greatest injustice ever done to the colored race in the United States was committed by Theodore Roosevelt when he was President.

By an executive order dated November 5, 1906, Theodore Roosevelt summarily dismissed without honor 170 colored men, enlisted soldiers of the United States, members of Companies B, C, and D, Twenty-fifth Infantry, stationed at Brownsville, Texas. He took this action upon prejudiced statements that the men had been concerned in an affray, and without consultation with the Secretary of War, William H. Taft; without substantial evidence of their guilt, and without giving the accused an opportunity to be heard, Mr. Roosevelt arbitrarily ordered their dismissal in disgrace from the army. Against this order, William H. Taft, unmasked, made his protest and actually held up the order of the President at the peril of losing his own job, in order that Mr. Roosevelt might reconsider his decision. This Theodore Roosevelt refused to do and the dismissal followed.

The episode presents a striking example of Theodore Roosevelt's hostility to the colored race. If he had not been carried away by his anti-negro prejudices he never would have committed such an unprecedented and cruel act.

The story of Brownsville and of the storm of universal and emphatic protest which broke around Roosevelt's head should not be forgotten. The affair happened six years ago, and Mr. Roosevelt has done so many things since then that he has successfully diverted attention from this dark page in his official record. He does not, apparently, wish it to be recalled. When he is appealing for the votes of the colored man he carefully refrains from mentioning Brownsville. It is worth while, however, now that he is seeking renomination, regardless of his pledges and promises and in violation of every principle of justice and fair play, to recall the details of an event that at the time of its occurrence profoundly stirred the righteous indignation of every fair-minded and patriotic citizen.

In the month of August, 1906, the three companies mentioned, belonging to the Twenty-fifth Infantry, a regiment of colored soldiers which had a splendid record for discipline and bravery, were stationed at Brownsville, Texas, with white officers in command. They were not wanted by the citizens of the town. Every effort was made to prevent the detail from going into effect. Upon arriving, however, the men acted with great self-restraint. Even upon paydays they were not drunk or disorderly. They had given no occasion for the stories which were current that they were to be the victims

of the anger and hatred of the Brownsville people.

Sometime about midnight on the night of August 13, 1906, there was considerable shooting. The evidence all went to show that the first shots fired were from pistols, although the enlisted men were not equipped with this character of weapon. In the melee a bartender was killed in a saloon and a lieutenant of police was wounded. The colored soldiers, whose presence had always been objectionable to the Texans, were immediately charged with being the authors of the disturbance. This was evidently part of a pre-arranged programme. "The whole affair," wrote a correspondent of the New York Evening Post, "appears to be a miserable outgrowth of race hatred and mob violence on the part of the people of Brownsville."

The white population quickly managed to get its side of the case before President Roosevelt, who accepted the prejudiced and unsubstantiated stories with remarkable promptness. He at once jumped to the conclusion that the soldiers were guilty because the white people said that they were and he demanded that they surrender their alleged guilty comrades. When they declared that they were all innocent, Mr. Roosevelt charged them with maintaining what he called "a conspiracy of silence" and upon this charge arbitrarily dishonorably discharged every enlisted man in the three companies.

The unfairness of this action toward the colored men is apparent from the fact that the Inspector General of the Army, who went to Texas upon the President's direction, reported that he could not find any evidence of an understanding between the men. The charge of "a conspiracy of silence" existed nowhere except in Theodore Roosevelt's mind. In addition to this, the white officers of the companies, who were responsible for the conduct of the men, were not even mentioned in the order.

The dismissal of these brave and innocent men under such unfair and unjust conditions created a feeling of indignation which was not confined to the Afro-American newspapers or citizenship. President Roosevelt was condemned in all directions. Republican and Democratic newspapers forgot party lines in a common appeal for justice, while Roosevelt's name was held up to scorn in mass meetings throughout the United States. No President had ever before been denounced in such unsparing terms by his fellow-citizens, irrespective of color or political affiliation. The record shows that this condemnation was richly deserved. It demonstrates that the colored man in this country cannot expect a square deal from Theodore Roosevelt.

The President's unprecedented and arbitrary action provoked criticisms even from the newspapers of the military service. The Army and Navy Journal, a conservative publication, said that it "savors of oriental methods" and that it "went beyond the power even of the Commander-in-Chief."

Theodore Roosevelt went out of his way to inflict unmerited disgrace upon the colored soldiers. In order to impose punishment for an offense of which no one had been convicted, he had to issue an executive order which was illegal, unconstitutional and unjust. It was worse than this, because it deliberately sacrificed the colored soldier to Roosevelt's inordinate ambition. It was asserted later, and never denied, that Mr. Roosevelt, knowing that no Republican had car-

ried a Southern State since reconstruction days, was ambitious to be the first Republican to break the Solid South. He was willing, therefore, to condemn the colored soldiers without a hearing in the hope of gaining more popularity in the Southern section. As a matter of fact, the only newspapers which praised him were published in the South.

With great adroitness, however, the order dismissing the colored soldiers was not dated until after the election in New York in November, 1906, so that the colored people in that State cast their vote for Hughes and in support of the administration, utterly unconscious of the blow which was in store for their people. Thousands of them said after the appearance of the order that its issuance before the election would have lost the vote of every colored man. Are these things to be forgotten, now that Theodore Roosevelt is appealing for the votes of the colored man to gratify his latest and most dangerous ambition?

Public indignation over Roosevelt's action was so great that the United States Senate ordered an investigation through its Committee on Military Affairs. Through the support of five Democrats every one from a Southern State and, therefore, prejudiced against colored soldiers and colored people, the committee was able to bring in a majority report which, in a way, sustained the President. Four Republican Senators, on the other hand, manifested a degree of fairness which was totally lacking on the part of Mr. Roosevelt. They signed their names to a report which concluded as follows:

"Therefore, having carefully considered all the testimony, we have reached the following conclusions:

"1. The testimony wholly fails to identify the particular individuals, or any of them, who participated in the shooting affray that occurred at Brownsville, Tex., on the night of August 13-14, 1906.

"2. The testimony wholly fails to show that the discharged soldiers of the Twenty-fifth U. S. Infantry, or any of them, entered into any agreement or so-called 'conspiracy of silence,' or that they had among themselves any understanding of any nature to withhold any information of which they, or any of them, might be possessed concerning the shooting affray that occurred at Brownsville, Tex., on the night of August 13-14, 1906.

"3. The testimony is so contradictory, and much of it so unreliable, that it is not sufficient to sustain the charge that the soldiers of the Twenty-fifth U. S. Infantry, or any of them, participated in the shooting affray that occurred at Brownsville, Tex., on the night of August 13-14, 1906.

"4. Whereas the testimony shows that the discharged men had a good record as soldiers, and that many of them had by their long and faithful service acquired valuable rights of which they are deprived by a discharge without honor; and

"Whereas the testimony shows beyond a reasonable doubt that whatever may be the fact as to who did the shooting, many of the men so discharged were innocent of any offense in connection therewith; therefore it is, in our opinion, the duty of Congress to provide by appropriate legislation for the correction of their record and for their re-enlistment and reinstatement in the Army, and for the restoration to them of all the rights of which they have been deprived, and we so recommend.

N. B. SCOTT.
J. B. FORAKER.
J. A. HEMENWAY.
M. G. BULKELEY.

"Mr. Foraker and Mr. Bulkeley, in addition to the conclusions set forth in the foregoing minority report, make also the following finding, namely:

"The weight of the testimony shows that none of the soldiers of the Twenty-fifth U. S. Infantry participated in the shooting affray that occurred at Brownsville, Tex., on the night of August 13-14, 1906.

J. B. FORAKER.
M. G. BULKELEY.

Theodore Roosevelt's hasty and unwarranted condemnation of the colored soldiers was thus shown to be also unfair and prejudiced. At no time did he show any disposition to give the soldiers a square deal. The appeals of eminent colored men like Booker T. Washington for justice fell upon deaf ears.

The discussion upon the floor of the Senate revealed Roosevelt in his true attitude toward the colored race. Senator Foraker, in an eloquent speech, made it clear that there should have been a court-martial before dismissal. Under the Roman law, 2000 years ago, a man was given an opportunity to face his accusers. Theodore Roosevelt would not give colored men even this chance to defend themselves.

These men, as Senator Foraker showed, had served their country faithfully for many years; they had fought in battle to defend their country's flag; they had an unblemished record for bravery, sobriety and discipline; they all had honorable characters; and yet they were disgraced before the world and branded as criminals without an opportunity to prove that they were not guilty. No wonder that Senator Foraker characterized the action as a shame and a disgrace to the American people.

The record shows that as soon as the shooting began the officers assembled the men and called the roll. Every man responded. Not a gun was missing from the gun racks. Despite this, Theodore Roosevelt sent a message to the Senate in which he said that the soldiers were "midnight assassins," and "cowardly and deliberate murderers," and asserted that the affair was "unprovoked and murderous savagery." When he uttered this calumny against brave men he did not have a single scrap of evidence that had been taken under oath before any legal tribunal. It was a wanton and unjustified reflection upon a splendid representation of the colored race. Mr. Roosevelt seemed to take a personal delight, also, in making the case as black as possible. By his direction the history of the regiment was searched and every incident that could be found to its discredit was publicly paraded, even though it did not directly concern the three companies which had been so arbitrarily dismissed. This attempt to blacken the fair name of this colored regiment was denounced upon the floor of the Senate as a dastardly act. Contrasted against these minor incidents which were deliberately dragged into publicity and emphasized by Roosevelt, was the splendid congratulatory order issued to the regiment at the close of the Spanish-American war. As a matter of fact, no regiment which went to Cuba won more honor on the field of battle than did the Twenty-fifth Infantry and no companies in the United States Army had a more gallant or heroic record than Companies B, C, and D of that regiment.

And these were the companies which Theodore Roosevelt characterized as "midnight assassins" and "cowardly murderers," and which he discharged without honor. These were the men whom Mr. Roosevelt indicted, tried, convicted and dismissed by an executive order, denying them the rights to which they were entitled under both the civil and military laws.

No wonder that the men cried when they were compelled by the cruel order to surrender their arms. No wonder that their officers braved Roosevelt's wrath and displeasure in order to bear willing testimony to the character of the men who were the victims of such injustice.

The language in which Roosevelt's unjust action has been briefly described is not nearly as emphatic as the words used by the editors of the Afro-American newspapers throughout the United States in voicing their indignation.

"I am a Republican and believe in the principles professed by the Republican party," wrote W. Calvin Chase, editor of "The Washington Bee," one of the most influential papers printed for the colored race, "but it is becoming more and more apparent to me every day, from one official utterance and then another, that President Roosevelt and his advisers are prejudiced against the negro and have no real love for him."

With almost prophetic instinct Editor Chase suggested in his newspaper that Theodore Roosevelt would run for a third term "and see how dearly he is loved by the colored citizens of the United States."

Here are a few of the editorial utterances which appeared in newspapers edited by colored men concerning the Roosevelt order:

From the New York Age.
Any black man in any part of the United States who offers to enlist in the United States Army to fill the places of these innocent but dishonorably discharged men should be hated and spurned by all the members of the army in the Twenty-fifth Infantry and by the Afro-American people at large.

From the Richmond Planet.
Every State in the Union that has any citizens of color should voice a protest and Theodore Roosevelt, the President, should know in no uncertain language the opinion of the Negroes as citizens of this Republic.

From the Baltimore Weekly Guide.
This unprecedented act on the part of the President is in keeping with his sensational record of giving the nation something startling every day. * * * The method pursued by the President is unprecedented and childish.

From the Kentucky Standard.
We would scarcely expect the Czar of all the Russias or even Kaiser Wilhelm himself to take so high-handed a method in a matter of this kind.

From the Baltimore Afro-American Ledger.
When President Roosevelt was inaugurated his "all men up and not some men down" and his "door of hope" speeches were looked upon as opening a new era to the Afro-American and that at last there had come to the chair of government one man to whom at least the Afro-American could look for hope in the future. * * * Now with one fell swoop of his pen he debars innocent and guilty alike from any future benefits under the government for which they have fought on more than one battlefield. Certainly the Afro-American cannot but feel that even this idol has been thrown from its pedestal. * * * That President Roosevelt is tinctured with colorphobia is as plain as anything can be.

From the Topeka Plaindealer.
President Roosevelt has lowered his dignity as a soldier and a statesman in the estimation of thousands of loyal American citizens. We cannot understand his attitude on the Negro question at this time. It seems that since his trip to the South he has joined hands with Southern rebels to continue the outrages upon the Negro.

From the Western Age.
President Roosevelt's order was manifestly unjust and un-American and will be remembered as an act of official treason.

From the Richmond Reformer.
The dishonorable discharge of the colored soldiers in the Twenty-fifth Infantry will go down in history as a crowning act of infamy.

From the Philadelphia Tribune.
President Roosevelt is fair in speech in holding out the door of hope to us but in practice we find him false.

In every section of the country the Afro-American newspaper press thus expressed the sentiment felt by the colored people over Theodore Roosevelt's injustice to their brave comrades. In addition to this the great daily newspapers throughout the land were filled with reports of mass meetings. We quote some typical examples:

Chicago, November 23.—Two thousand Afro-Americans in Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church last night severely criticised President Roosevelt for discharging the three companies of Afro-American troops involved in the Brownsville, Texas, riots, and in a personal letter to the President and in resolutions addressed to the War Department urged the rescinding of the action.

Evansville, Ind., Nov. 26.—The Ministerial Alliance of the Afro-American preachers met last Monday in the A. M. E. church and passed resolutions condemning President Roosevelt's indiscriminate punishment of the innocent and the guilty in discharging three companies of the Twenty-fifth Infantry.

Cincinnati, Nov. 11.—In resolutions calling the action of President Roosevelt in discharging the companies of Afro-American troops from the army "despotic usurpation of power," the Union Republican Club has condemned the action of the President. The resolutions also state that he has departed from the position of holding the door of hope open to the Negro.

The Regular Colored Republican Organization of the Ninth Assembly district of New York City held a meeting which was attended by over two hundred intelligent, law-abiding and respected colored citizens of that city. Addresses were made by prominent colored men denouncing President Roosevelt and then the following resolutions were adopted:

Whereas, President Roosevelt is resolved to persist, against the protest of the aroused conscience of the north and of the negro people, in persecuting an injured and innocent race,

Therefore, be it resolved, that we censure with the utmost severity the President's obstinate injustice;

And be it further resolved, that we hereby give expression to our pain that the one man our race has loved best since Lincoln has betrayed us;

And be it further resolved, that we shall keep continually in mind the fact that our ballots are our only weapons and that we are determined to use them to reward our friends and chastise those who despitefully use us.

One of the speakers at the meeting was the well known colored lawyer, J. Douglas Wetmore, who has stumped the State for Governor Hughes, but whose opinion of Roosevelt was expressed as follows:

"Beyond the shadow of a doubt Roosevelt has deserted the colored man completely."

Such is the record of Theodore Roosevelt's betrayal of the colored people.

Can any self-respecting colored man, as he reads this overwhelming array of facts, support Roosevelt in his pretensions for a third term?

Has the colored man forgotten Brownsville? Has he forgotten that Roosevelt called the brave soldiers of the Twenty-fifth Infantry "midnight assassins" and "cowardly murderers," and dismissed them in disgrace, without evidence and without a trial?

If so, let him read the story of Brownsville over again and learn of Roosevelt's persecution and injustice to the colored people. Then, when he comes to decide whom he will support for President, let him recall how much President Taft has willingly and heartily done for the colored people and contrast it with Roosevelt's manifest dislike of the negro race. The question for him to determine is whether he will support Taft, who has done so much for him, or whether he will vote for Roosevelt, whose administration was marked by the greatest act of injustice ever shown to the colored race.

The memory of Brownsville ought to decide the question for him instantly. A vote for William Howard Taft is a vote for a man who, unlike Roosevelt, has never betrayed and never will betray the colored citizenship of the United States.

