JUMPING SHIP:
THE DECLINE OF BLACK REPUBLICANISM
IN THE ERA OF THEODORE ROOSEVELT, 1901—1908

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Thesis

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ABSTRACT

Most analysts of black voting patterns in the United States have assumed that the first substantive abandonment of the Republican party by black voters occurred in the 1930s, when the majority of black voters embraced Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal. A closer examination, however, of another Roosevelt presidency – that of Theodore Roosevelt (1901-1909) – demonstrates the degree to which black voters were already growing disenchanted with the Republicans in the face of what they viewed as uneven support and contradictory messages from the highest ranking Republican in the land. Though the perception of Theodore Roosevelt's relationship to black Americans has been dominated by his historic invitation of Booker T. Washington to dine with him at the White House in 1901, in fact even this event had assorted and complex meanings for Roosevelt's relationship to the black community. More importantly, his dismissal of black troops following a controversial shooting in southern Texas in 1906 – an event known as the Brownsville affair – set off a firestorm of bitter protest from the black press, black intellectuals, and black voters. This paper traces Roosevelt's evolving relationship with black Americans between the Washington dinner and the Brownsville affair. By the election of 1908, Roosevelt's actions had altered black voters' relationship to and expectations of the Republican party. In this paper, I show that black flight, or even its threat, was a significant factor in presidential politics long before Franklin Roosevelt successfully wooed black voters from the Republican party in the 1930s.
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

For most black Americans, Theodore Roosevelt’s presidency could not have started any better than it did. In October 1901, just weeks after taking office, Roosevelt invited the esteemed educator, Booker T. Washington, to a private dinner at the White House, making Roosevelt the first president to host a black man in such an intimate and egalitarian setting. News of the Roosevelt-Washington dinner offered hope to many blacks, and appeared to signal a departure from the endless setbacks and horrors that came to define the previous quarter-century as "the nadir" of American race relations.¹ To American blacks, Roosevelt quickly became "our President," and his action seemed to suggest a renewed Republican commitment to the party’s most loyal supporters.

Roosevelt, however, would eventually disappoint them. In 1906, following a shooting in Brownsville, Texas (which locals blamed on the all-black Twenty-fifth

¹ Between the end of Reconstruction in 1877 and the start of Roosevelt’s presidency in 1901, black Americans witnessed a series of degradations that included the gradual removal of voting rights, legislation that mandated their segregation from whites in public, a system of sharecropping that left black farmers in debt and with few economic options, and increasing violence, intimidation, and lynching by hostile white mobs. The federal government, whether under the leadership of Republicans or Democrats, offered little by way of assistance in this era. Rayford W. Logan’s *The Betrayal of the Negro: From Rutherford B. Hayes to Woodrow Wilson* explores this steady erosion of black civil rights in the decades following Reconstruction. In its original form, first published in 1954, Logan identified this period as the low-point in the struggle for black equality, titling his book *The Negro in American Life and Thought: The Nadir, 1877-1901*. 
Infantry stationed in the town), the President ordered a dishonorable discharge of the one-hundred sixty-seven black soldiers of that regiment. Roosevelt, who spoke often of “square deals” and the importance of judging each man on his merits, quickly deemed the men guilty of a “conspiracy of silence,” for failing to inform on the guilty, if not the shooting itself. The black response to Roosevelt’s discharge order was as bitter as the response to his dinner – just five years earlier – was sweet. For the last two years of Roosevelt’s tenure in office, many prominent black Americans criticized the President for his decision, and of even greater consequence in the long term, questioned their loyalties to Roosevelt’s Republican party.

The presidency of Theodore Roosevelt, therefore, marked a significant turning point in blacks’ relationship to the Republican party. The dinner, even if only a symbolic gesture, seemed to indicate a profound and positive change in Republican attitudes and it served to restore black faith in the Republicans to a level not seen since the early days of Reconstruction. Moreover, the dinner appeared to represent an acknowledgement of the social equality of blacks and whites, not only by Theodore Roosevelt, but also by his administration and, by extension, his party. When, however, just a few years later, Roosevelt issued the discharge order for the black soldiers in the Brownsville affair, blacks felt betrayed. The way in which Roosevelt meted out the punishment – a dishonorable discharge, without trial, and based on questionable evidence – was, in many ways, as symbolic a gesture as the dinner, but now indicating that neither Roosevelt nor his party were interested in further challenging southern whites on the race issues and civil rights abuses that plagued this era. Furthermore, the national attention given Roosevelt’s order, particularly in the black press, as well as the fact that the victims were
soldiers – regarded among the finest representatives of the black community and symbols of black class mobility as well as national allegiance – helped magnify the decision's effect on black Americans beyond that of just about any previous Republican policy failure. Writing several years later in his autobiography, Booker T. Washington summarized Brownsville’s effect on Roosevelt’s stature among blacks:

At the time this famous order was issued there was no man in the world who was so beloved by the ten millions of Negroes in America as Colonel Roosevelt. His praises were sung by them on every possible occasion. He was their idol. Within a few days—I might almost say hours—as a consequence of this order, the songs of praise of ten millions of people were turned into a chorus of criticism and censure.²

The intensity of black reaction to Roosevelt’s discharge order made the two years leading up to the 1908 presidential election among the most tenuous for blacks’ commitment to the Republican party. But while the anger eventually did pass, and the majority of blacks moved past Brownsville to support William H. Taft’s candidacy in 1908, as well as other Republican candidates over the next quarter-century, Roosevelt’s action did inspire enough disaffection in some black leaders that they embarked on a quest to find an alternative to the Republicans. In that first presidential election after Brownsville, several prominent blacks, including W.E.B. Du Bois and other members of the Niagara Movement, endorsed the Democratic candidate, an almost heretical action for blacks at a time when Democrats were synonymous with segregation, voting obstruction, violence, and the lingering specter of slavery. Over the next few decades, an increasing number of black Americans began migrating north, giving even greater importance to the battle for the expanding black vote at the same time Du Bois and his movement (soon

² BTW Papers, Vol. 1: Autobiographical Writings, 446.
reorganized as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) were growing in size and influence. Thus, while election data show that blacks did not shift their allegiance to the Democrats en masse until the 1930’s – when Roosevelt’s cousin, Franklin, secured their loyalty – Theodore Roosevelt’s presidency, two decades prior, was a catalyst sending many influential black leaders on a path toward political independence and away from the party of Lincoln.
CHAPTER II
BLACK AMERICANS AND THE REPUBLICAN PARTY, 1870—1901

In 1872, Frederick Douglass captured the essence of black Americans’ relationship to the party of Abraham Lincoln when he said, for blacks, —the Republican party is the ship, all else is the sea.”

Douglass, the ex-slave, orator, and publisher, who worked tirelessly to abolish slavery, and then later, to secure suffrage for black Americans, was perhaps the most respected black man in America after the Civil War and was widely regarded as the leader of his race. Having counseled Lincoln during the war, Douglass supported Lincoln’s Republican party after the war, endorsing General Ulysses S. Grant for president in 1868. The importance of Douglass’s association with the Republicans grew after 1870, however, when ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment meant that, for the first time, large numbers of blacks would be voting. In 1872, Douglass grew concerned when an upstart faction calling themselves Liberal Republicans split with the Republican party, creating the first contest for the black vote, a development Douglass perceived as —mischievous and dangerous.”

When a few prominent abolitionist Republicans defected to the Liberals (foremost among them Senator Charles Sumner and the party’s nominee, newspaper editor Horace Greeley), a debate over which party to support ensued among delegates at a national colored

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3 McPherson, “Grant or Greeley,” 50.
4 Ibid., 49.
convention in New Orleans. Douglass implored blacks to remain faithful to Grant and the Republicans. “—[W]hatsoever may be the faults of the Republican party,” he stated, “it has within it the only element of friendship for the colored man’s rights.” He continued, proclaiming he would rather “put a pistol to my head and blow my brains out, than to lend myself in any wise to the destruction or defeat of the Republican party.”5 As Douglass later noted in his autobiography, he saw “no path out of the Republican party” that did not lead blacks “away from our friends and directly to our enemies.”6

Most black Americans shared Douglass’s sentiment for the next quarter-century after Grant’s reelection in 1872. In that span, blacks paid their debt to Abraham Lincoln, their Great Emancipator, by loyally voting for his party in local, state, and national elections. During Reconstruction, Republicans rewarded that loyalty by pressing for civil rights legislation and other protections for black citizens. They secured passage of the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments, as well as the Civil Rights Act of 1875, which sought to protect blacks’ access to public accommodations; and it was President Grant who successfully – although only temporarily – destroyed the Ku Klux Klan and its efforts to intimidate and disfranchise black voters.7 However, in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, Republican enthusiasm for black causes appeared to wane. Following a disputed election in 1876, the Republicans acquiesced to the Democrats’ demand for removal of Union troops from the South in exchange for the election of Rutherford Hayes. This “compromise” left southern blacks without federal

5 Ibid., 49; Rees, From the Deck to the Sea, 51.

6 Douglass, Life and Times, 424.

7 Rees, From the Deck to the Sea, 49-50.
protection and at the mercy of white “Redeemer” governments that quickly gained power. Moreover, a handful of congressional Republicans often joined with the Democrats to stifle legislative proposals seeking to provide aid to education or to enforce voting rights for blacks. Despite this, blacks remained loyal to the Republicans – if not out of enthusiasm for the party’s record on race issues, then simply because they saw few alternatives.\textsuperscript{8}

But black disenchantment with the Republicans was developing. In 1883, T. Thomas Fortune, editor of the \textit{New York Age}, complained that “the Republican party had eliminated the black man from its politics….It has left the black man to fight out his own battles.”\textsuperscript{9} A year later, Fortune wrote, “The Republican Party has degenerated into an ignoble scramble for place and power. It has forgotten the principles for which Sumner contended, and for which Lincoln died.” Fortune, however, did not seek refuge in the Democratic party, an alternative which he believed never had, nor would have, “any good thing in it for the colored man.”\textsuperscript{10} Instead, he was advocating for political independence, whereby black voters could support the party that offered the greatest commitment to ensuring their political and legal rights. Unfortunately, neither party seemed willing to make that commitment in the late nineteenth century, and because of that uncertainty, few blacks saw much to gain in leaving the Republicans and squandering what little influence they still had with the party. Moreover, many blacks still fostered a sentimental

\textsuperscript{8} Sherman, \textit{The Republican Party and Black America}, 2.

\textsuperscript{9} Ibid., 75.

\textsuperscript{10} Rees, \textit{From the Deck to the Sea}, 77.
attachment to the party of Lincoln.\textsuperscript{11} In 1892, the Wisconsin \textit{Afro-American} reminded its readers that, although we have not received the protection, recognition, and justice at the hands of the Republican Party, guaranteed to us by the Constitution of the United States, we are yet unfailing in our devotion to this party and its principles.\textsuperscript{12} A few years earlier, Douglass starkly summarized the difference between the two major parties as he, and undoubtedly, most black Americans saw it at the time: I never will forget that every concession of liberty made to the colored people of the United States has come to them through the action of the Republican Party, and that all the opposition made to those concessions has come from the Democratic Party.\textsuperscript{13}

William McKinley’s election, in 1896, ushered in a new era of Republican national dominance, not seen since the Reconstruction era. For the next several years, the Republican party enjoyed solid majorities in both the House and Senate, and the opportunity to press for greater protection for blacks was seldom better. McKinley, however, offered little of substance to aid the plight of black Americans. Having won election with the backing of conservative business interests against the advocates of a radical brand of reform Populism, McKinley, a veteran of the Civil War and a proponent of black civil rights while in Congress, gave little indication that he was interested in new protections for blacks that might upset his supporters. Moreover, McKinley appeared far more interested in currying southern white support, attempting both to heal the still lingering wounds of the Civil War and to loosen the Democratic party’s solid hold on the

\textsuperscript{11} Sherman, \textit{The Republican Party and Black America}, 2.

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., 85.

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 80.
South. Black criticism of McKinley came from the Colored National League, which published an open letter to the President, excoriating him for “cunningly…cater[ing] to Southern race prejudice” on a recent tour of the South, while other black groups vocalized their opposition to McKinley’s policies in the Philippines.\(^\text{14}\)

Of greater consequence to blacks, however, were the attacks Democratic state legislatures made on their voting rights during McKinley’s presidency. In 1898, Louisiana instituted the first grandfather clause, a law that restricted voting rights to only those whose ancestors could vote, essentially disfranchising all blacks living in the state. Other states followed Louisiana’s lead, making the southern black vote insignificant as early as 1900.\(^\text{15}\) Whether the few remaining black voters showed their displeasure with McKinley was becoming increasingly hard to discern, but it is unlikely southern blacks would have seen the Democrats – or their candidate in 1900, William Jennings Bryan – as a preferable alternative. At the turn of the twentieth century, the only significant black votes were quickly becoming those of northern blacks, a group that grew steadily in number as southern blacks began to migrate north. The task of ensuring those blacks maintained their allegiance to the Republican party would soon fall to McKinley’s successor, Theodore Roosevelt.

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\(^{14}\) Rees, *From the Deck to the Sea*, 97-99.

\(^{15}\) Ibid., 99.
CHAPTER III
BEFORE THE WHITE HOUSE

In September 1901, anarchist Leon Czolgosz assassinated McKinley, unexpectedly elevating Theodore Roosevelt to the presidency. The new president was not a political neophyte, and he was familiar to many black Americans even before he entered the White House. During a stint as civil service commissioner under President Benjamin Harrison, Roosevelt had achieved a commendable record on civil rights, maintaining a policy of hiring men on merit, regardless of their race. He continued that policy as New York's governor, securing appointments for qualified black men and pushing a school desegregation bill through the state legislature.

As the Republican vice-presidential candidate in 1900, however, he frustrated black voters with contradictory statements he had made about the black troops he commanded in the Spanish-American War. In 1898, while bidding farewell to his now-legendary regiment of "Rough Riders," Roosevelt paid tribute to the colored soldiers among them, adding,

Now I want to say just a word more....I refer to the colored regiments, who occupied the right and left flanks of us at Guasimas, the Ninth and Tenth Cavalry regiments. The Spaniards called them "Smoked Yankees," but we found them to be an excellent breed of Yankees. I am sure that I speak the sentiments of officers and men...when I say that between you and the other cavalry regiments there exists a tie which we trust will never be broken.16

16 Saxton, *The Rise and Fall of the White Republic*, 373.
However, in Roosevelt’s own published account of his unit’s time in Cuba, his story had changed to include a very different image of the black soldiers:

…[T]hey are, of course, peculiarly dependent upon their white officers….None of the white regulars or Rough Riders showed the slightest sign of weakening; but under the strain the colored infantrymen (who had none of their own officers) began to get a little uneasy and to drift to the rear….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 would shoot the first man who, on any pretence whatever, went to the rear….This was the end of the trouble, for the “smokad Yankees” – as the Spaniards called the colored soldiers – flashed their white teeth at one another, as they broke into broad grins, and I had no more trouble with them…17

The black press quickly challenged Roosevelt and his disparaging comments.

The New York Age published a rebuttal from Sergeant Preston Holliday, a black soldier who was with Roosevelt in Cuba. Holliday contended that the black soldiers were not, in fact, “wakening” and “drifting to the rear” as Roosevelt described, but were following the orders of another officer, a Lieutenant Fleming, who had commanded them to carry wounded men to safety. Roosevelt, Holliday explained, was unaware of this order, and when Fleming informed him of his mistake, Roosevelt apologized to the black soldiers.18

No mention of the blunder or the apology, however, appears in Roosevelt’s published accounts of the war.

When Roosevelt’s name started surfacing as the likely vice-presidential nominee for McKinley’s second term, the black press called into question his true feelings about the race. Under the headline, “Col. Roosevelt’s Injustice,” the Cleveland Gazette

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18 Weaver, *The Senator and the Sharecropper’s Son*, 70-71.
expressed consternation over the candidate’s seemingly contradictory statements about the black troops. “Hitherto known as a just and honorable man…we cannot fathom the meaning of the colonel in his relations to the Afro-American soldier.” Calling Roosevelt a sycophant and demagogue, the Gazette questioned his honesty and integrity and asked why, having acknowledged his error once, he persists in making it. What does it mean?”

More than a year later, the Gazette was still expressing doubt, describing Roosevelt as “unjust and patronizing to a fault” and deserving “our most hearty rebuke.” But with the election now only two months away, the editors of the Gazette were unwilling to let Roosevelt’s indiscretions sever their support for his party. “As the advocate of sound republican principles,” they reminded their readers, “we are inclined to pass in silence the mischievous comments offered by Col. Roosevelt.” The bond between the Republican party and its black supporters remained strong, and the McKinley-Roosevelt ticket won easily in 1900. Soon thereafter, President Roosevelt would redeem himself in the eyes of the black press.

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19 Cleveland Gazette, 10 June 1899.

20 Ibid., 1 September 1900.
CHAPTER IV

RAH! FOR ROOSEVELT: THE DINNER AND FEDERAL APPOINTMENTS

While still vice president, Theodore Roosevelt had made plans to visit Booker T. Washington’s famed Tuskegee Institute during a scheduled tour of the South. McKinley’s assassination necessitated a postponement of the trip, but this did not diminish Roosevelt’s desire to meet with Washington, whose philosophy of black advancement through vocational education and individual self-help resembled his own philosophy for all men. On September 14, the day of McKinley’s death and his own swearing-in, Roosevelt’s only letter was to Washington. The new president expressed regret for having to cancel his visit, but implored Washington to come to the capital instead. “I must see you as soon as possible,” Roosevelt wrote. “I want to talk over the question of possible future appointments in the south exactly on the lines of our last conversation together.”21 His sense of urgency underscored how important the South was in his quest to secure the leadership of his party and its nomination in 1904, and just a few days later, he met with Washington in person to discuss his ideas for southern appointments. On October 16, Roosevelt again learned Washington was in town, and

21 TR to BTW, 14 September 1901. The Letters of Theodore Roosevelt, 149.
after an initial hesitation, he summoned the Tuskegeean to dinner at the White House that evening.\textsuperscript{22}

Washington gladly accepted Roosevelt's invitation, and arrived at the White House later that evening for dinner with the president and his family. After dinner, Roosevelt and Washington continued their discussion of southern politics before Washington quietly departed town. The next day, the morning papers simply noted that "Booker T. Washington, of Tuskegee, Alabama," had been a dinner guest at the White House.\textsuperscript{23} Neither man could have expected what followed, and certainly, neither had sought it.\textsuperscript{24}

For the next several weeks, southern newspapers seethed with indignation over the incident the New Orleans \textit{Daily States} called "a studied insult to the South." The \textit{Times Democrat} proclaimed, "When Mr. Roosevelt sits down to dinner with a Negro, he declares that the Negro is the social equal of the white man."\textsuperscript{25} The Memphis \textit{Scimitar} expressed a more vitriolic criticism, claiming Roosevelt had committed "the most damnable outrage which [had] ever been perpetrated by any citizen of the United

\textsuperscript{22} TR to Albion W. Tourgée, 8 November 1901. \textit{The Letters of Theodore Roosevelt}, 190. In a letter to Albion Tourgée, less than one month after the dinner, Roosevelt confessed to feeling "a moment’s qualm on inviting [Washington] because of his color," but Roosevelt’s sense of shame compelled him to send it anyway.

\textsuperscript{23} Morris, \textit{Theodore Rex}, 54.


\textsuperscript{25} Quoted in the New York \textit{Times}, 19 October 1901.
States…when he invited a nigger to dine with him at the White House.”

The Raleigh Post published this poem:

Booker Washington holds the boards—
The President dines a nigger.
Precedents are cast aside—
Put aside with vigor;
Black and white sit side by side,
As Roosevelt dines a nigger.

Much of the criticism, however, focused on what southerners perceived as Roosevelt’s implied endorsement of miscegenation. Speculation swirled as to whether Mrs. Roosevelt or the President’s teenage daughter, Alice, had dined with the two men. The editor of the Richmond Times interpreted the women’s presence as proof that, in the President’s mind, blacks should mingle freely with whites in the social circle—that white women may receive attentions from Negro men.”

One southern columnist even facetiously suggested that Washington send his daughter to the White House so she and Roosevelt’s son could marry. The harshest condemnations of the dinner, however, came from southern Democratic politicians. Mississippi’s James K. Vardaman, still seething over a year later, remarked that Washington’s presence had so saturated [the

26 Morris, Theodore Rex, 54.

27 Brands, TR: The Last Romantic, 423. The word “nigger” was virtually absent from print for years before this, but the dinner sparked such outrage in the southern white press that this slur, and others like “darkey” and “coon,” made a sudden and inauspicious return. Morris, Theodore Rex, 55.

28 Norrell, Up from History, 248

29 Gatewood, Theodore Roosevelt and the Art of Controversy, 35-36; Norrell, Up from History, 244-45; Morris, Theodore Rex, 55.
White House] with the odor of the nigger that the rats [had] taken refuge in the stable.”

Ben Tillman called for a thousand lynchings so that blacks would “learn their place again.”

Black responses to the dinner were unsurprisingly favorable. Washington’s close aide and confidant, Emmett J. Scott, wrote him the next day, exuberant in his congratulatory praise and optimism: “I congratulate you most heartily and sincerely on the especial mark of the president’s favor shown by inviting you to have dinner with him and his family. It is splendid, magnificent!...The world is moving forward and I hope they [the South] will find it out sometime soon. My heart bubbles over, and I am so glad!”

Alabama’s W. R. Pettiford, an educator and banker who shared Washington’s self-help philosophy, agreed with Scott’s enthusiasm for the potential impact the dinner could have, suggesting that the discussion of the dinner “will cause both North and South to look deeper into the merits of the Negro for equal justice than anything that has happened lately.”

The black press also took a positive view of the dinner. The Cleveland Gazette expressed some concern over the possibility of southern white retaliation towards Washington or the race at large, but still deemed Roosevelt’s dinner invitation to be

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30 Gatewood, Theodore Roosevelt and the Art of Controversy, 36-37.

31 Morris, Theodore Rex, 55.


“right and proper” and worthy of commendation.\textsuperscript{34} Simon Wolf, writing in the \textit{Colored American}, remarked, “if the President in his official or personal capacity never does anything else but this incident, he will surely live in history as a man of courage and splendid Americanism.” He concluded, “God bless and strengthen the hands of the President…. [H]istory will write him down as worthy successor of Lincoln and McKinley.”\textsuperscript{35}

For many black Americans, Roosevelt was now “our president” and the greatest president since the Emancipator himself.\textsuperscript{36} His simple act of inviting a black man to dinner appeared to renew and strengthen black support for the Republican party. Former critics of the President, including William Calvin Chase, editor and publisher of the \textit{Washington Bee}, now portrayed him in a different light. In its coverage of the dinner, the \textit{Bee} featured a large portrait of Professor Washington on its front page, but otherwise, focused its praise on the President for dining a black man and for his “many acts of recognition” of the Negroes.\textsuperscript{37} Chase went on, defending the President against his southern detractors: “The thing about President Roosevelt is that he is in the habit of doing what he pleases and what he thinks is right and just…. The country is with the

\textsuperscript{34} Cleveland \textit{Gazette}, 26 October 1901.

\textsuperscript{35} The \textit{Colored American}, 26 October 1901.

\textsuperscript{36} Lewis, \textit{W.E.B. Du Bois}, 223.

\textsuperscript{37} Washington \textit{Bee}, 19 October 1901, 26 October 1901.
President and when the time comes those who are condemning the President will see their folly.”

Roosevelt’s admirers, however, may have given him too much credit. Roosevelt quickly responded to his denunciation in the press, calling the South “crazy” and proclaiming, “I shall have [Washington] to dine just as often as I please”; but the first dinner was the last one, and Roosevelt tried to downplay its significance as much as possible. Later, in private letters, he acknowledged the dinner was “a mistake.” And while some blacks may have perceived the dinner as Roosevelt’s endorsement of black social equality, this contrasted sharply with his numerous public and private statements to the contrary. Thomas G. Dyer, in his analysis of Roosevelt and his views on race, argues Roosevelt never accepted blacks as the social equal of whites, concluding:

In Roosevelt’s system, blacks as a youthful race stood much closer to savagery than to civilization in the evolutionary scale. While they could progress individually and as a race the pace of improvement could be extremely slow….If democratic beliefs compelled him to argue that blacks should be received into American political society, he insisted on the need for a very gradual entry without “social equality.”

But for most black Americans, this side of Roosevelt was unknown to them; and for others, it was lost in the glow that the dinner had shone on both the President and their race.

38 Ibid., 26 October 1901.

39 Brands, TR: The Last Romantic, 423.

40 Scheiner, “President Theodore Roosevelt and the Negro,” 172.

41 Dyer, Theodore Roosevelt and the Idea of Race, 92.
Roosevelt's true intention in inviting the Tuskegeean to dinner, of course, was not to challenge social conventions but to solicit Washington's advice on the numerous political appointments the President would soon be making in the South. Roosevelt, like McKinley and other Republicans before him, hoped to use patronage as a means of breaking the Democrats' stranglehold on the South; but unlike his predecessors, Roosevelt did not want to appoint the same class of professional politicians that usually won their posts by selling their votes at the Republican national convention. Instead, he hoped to appoint whites and blacks, Republicans and – in some cases – even agreeable Democrats, who possessed enough influence in their communities to win over political support to Roosevelt and the Republicans. When making these appointments, President Roosevelt insisted – as had Commissioner Roosevelt and Governor Roosevelt before – that “the only thing to do is try each man, white or dusky, personally on his own merits.”

In the years after the dinner, Theodore Roosevelt continued to enjoy the admiration of most black Americans, and his political appointments often served to reinforce their esteem. He won praise in 1902 when he removed a white Republican for “anti-Negro activities.” Two incidents in 1903, however, seemed to solidify his standing among blacks – the Indianola post office affair and the Crum incident. In the first, Roosevelt refused to accept the resignation of a Mrs. Minnie Cox, black postmistress of Indianola, Mississippi, when she succumbed to local white harassment and tendered her resignation after years on the job. Cox was a dignified, educated

42 Ibid., 101.

woman, however, and just the type Roosevelt felt worthy of such an appointment.\textsuperscript{44}

Throughout the ordeal, the President stood by Mrs. Cox, drawing scorn and demands from southern white Democrats to relent. When he ultimately closed the Indianola post office rather than acquiesce, he forced local residents to travel thirty miles to receive their mail, and his stature grew among most blacks. Although some black papers were suspicious of Roosevelt’s motives, the Washington \textit{Colored American} thought the President’s stand was a fitting way to commemorate the fortieth anniversary of emancipation.\textsuperscript{45} At about the same time as the Indianola affair, Roosevelt appointed Dr. William Crum, a black physician, to fill the post of head customs collector for the port of Charleston, South Carolina. The white South’s opposition to the selection was particularly fierce as Crum was to replace a white incumbent in a pivotal post in the heart of the old Confederacy. While the Senate delayed confirming Crum for years, Roosevelt continued to keep him in that post through a series of recess appointments until, finally, the Senate relented.

Once again, Roosevelt seemed to prove his commitment on matters of great concern for black Americans. These two high-profile cases could scarcely go unnoticed, and won him more praise in the black press. Reflecting on both the Cox and Crum incidents, the Cleveland \textit{Gazette} remarked, “The Roosevelt policy…is fair and honorable,…we cannot but honor and give him full credit for the stand he has taken…as well as for the principle and policy enunciated as a result of the same…[T]here is at last

\textsuperscript{44} Dyer, \textit{Theodore Roosevelt and the Idea of Race}, 102-03.

\textsuperscript{45} Gatewood, “Theodore Roosevelt and the Indianola Affair,” 64.
a man in the White House as president who has the courage of his convictions."  

Commenting on another black appointment the next year, the Gazette ran the headline, "Rah! for Roosevelt!"  

A few months later, another black paper gave the President its endorsement for reelection, proclaiming, "The Negro never felt more like an American citizen than he does with Theodore Roosevelt as president."  

Not all blacks, however, were in lock-step with the President. Only a few months after praising Roosevelt for his dinner with Washington, Calvin Chase’s Washington Bee excoriated his southern policy for removing black Republicans and replacing them with white Democrats. This "will not be tolerated by Negro northern voters," the Bee exclaimed.  

Likewise, Chase’s Bee attacked Washington, who was advising Roosevelt on practically all of his southern appointments. "If Prof[essor] Washington eats many more dinners with Mr. Roosevelt," Chase warned his readers, "there will not be enough Negro office holders in the South left to occupy a space 4 by 6."

Joining Chase in chastising Washington and Roosevelt was William Monroe Trotter, founder and editor of the Boston Guardian. Trotter called into question Washington’s "fitness” as Roosevelt’s adviser on the black issues. He called the Tuskegeean a "trimmer” and labeled his selection "an insult to every Negro.” In 1902, he turned his attention to Roosevelt and the Republicans, questioning their commitment to

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46 Cleveland Gazette, 10 January 1903.

47 Ibid., 13 February 1904.

48 Cleveland Journal, 27 August 1904.

49 Sherman, The Republican Party and Black America, 29; Washington Bee, 1 February 1902.
blacks. —The Guardian calmly asks the colored people of America do they not see that a conspiracy is on to take away their rights to ballot and equal opportunity with others? It is being engineered by the Republican party leaders of the country….It is the party, the Republican party leaders, who have deserted the Negro.”

Chase and Trotter, however, were among the few seriously critical black voices condemning the President in his first term. As Roosevelt sought reelection in 1904, his support among rank-and-file blacks was tremendous, and even with the passage of three years since the dinner that endeared him to so many, black Americans still regarded him as the most popular president since Abraham Lincoln. Even Trotter, despite all his misgivings, could not see to it to endorse someone other than Theodore Roosevelt for president, and encouraged his readership to do the same. —[U]nder [Roosevelt’s] administration the terrible condition of peonage has been unearthed and a start made to abolish it. Besides he has stood his ground in most cases against the assault of southern color prejudice, even when practically deserted by his own party….[T]he Republican candidates seem to us clearly to be the safer for Colored Americans” in 1904. Soon after, however, nearly all blacks were wondering if that was still true.

52 Fox, The Guardian of Boston, 149-50.
CHAPTER V

THE BROWNSVILLE AFFAIR

The turning point for black Americans’ relationship to Theodore Roosevelt and the Republican party came in 1906. In late July, black troops from the Army’s First Battalion, Twenty-fifth Infantry arrived at Fort Brown in Brownsville, Texas, a small town near the Mexican border. Almost immediately after the soldiers arrived, they were complaining of hostile treatment from the white residents of the town. Bars and businesses refused them service, while local citizens and police harassed the men, accusing them of rude or aggressive behavior toward white women. Some threatened the soldiers with violence.\(^53\) It was in the context of this charged environment, when just before midnight, on the evening of August 13, an unidentified group of men opened fire on the streets of Brownsville, killing one man and wounding the local police lieutenant.\(^54\) Brownsville’s citizens did not hesitate to accuse the black soldiers of the violent shooting,

\(^{53}\) Lane, *The Brownsville Affair*, 15-17.

\(^{54}\) James Leiker, *Racial Borders*, 132-35. Leiker offers a new perspective on the Brownsville episode by placing it in context of similar incidents involving black troops on the border. Leiker rejects the traditional explanation that “southern racism” was the primary factor in the affair. He argues that this ignores the actual racial composition of Brownsville, where most of the population was Hispanic, perhaps one-quarter was white, and very few were black. He contends that the prejudice directed at the men of the Twenty-fifth grew as much from class differences, as well as from a general antipathy toward American soldiers, as it did from race.
demanding the President remove them from the fort and replace them with white soldiers. 55

Roosevelt responded to the plea and ordered a full investigation by the War Department under the direction of Major August P. Blocksom. As Blocksom’s investigation got under way, he discovered that the evidence and testimony local officials had procured immediately after the shooting only clouded the true nature of the event. On the one hand, spent shell casings found at the scene, matching the soldiers’ military-issued rifles, as well as testimony from eyewitnesses, seemed to indicate the soldiers were the perpetrators; but the sequence and timing of events that night made it doubtful the soldiers could have instigated the shooting and still have made it back to the fort in time to yell ‘present’ for a roll-call conducted several minutes later. 56 Despite these ambiguities, Blocksom favored the eyewitness accounts, and his report to Roosevelt was anything but ambiguous. —That the raiders were soldiers of the Twenty-fifth Infantry can not be doubted,” he avowed. —The evidence of many witnesses of all classes is conclusive. Shattered bullets, shells, and clips found are merely corroborative.” 57

Satisfied the shooters were from the Twenty-fifth, the investigation shifted to finding the individual soldiers who pulled the triggers. Ernest A. Garlington, the new Inspector General of the Army, launched a series of interrogations of the black soldiers, but failed to produce any information that would indicate whom the guilty parties might

55 Lane, The Brownsville Affair, 18-19; Morris, Theodore Rex, 453.
56 Lane, The Brownsville Affair, 17; Morris, Theodore Rex, 454.
57 Warren, Affray at Brownsville, Texas, Volume I, 63.
have been. In his report on the interrogations, Garlington stated that, when asked about
the trouble at Brownsville, the black soldiers "assumed a wooden, stolid look" and
denied any knowledge of the circumstances connected with or individuals concerned in
the affair."58 Raised in South Carolina, and proclaiming to be somewhat of an expert on
the black race, Garlington interpreted this silence to be patently characteristic of blacks:
"The secretive nature of the race, where crimes to members of their color are charged, is
well known."59

Roosevelt appeared to share Garlington's understanding of the soldiers' conspiratorial silence. In accordance with his own racial ideology, Roosevelt expected an "immature race" to act as directed by the "superior race." In this case, he thought the black soldiers should have obeyed the law; but failing that, they should have at least assisted in identifying the guilty parties. Roosevelt's expectation for black self-policing at Brownsville was largely consistent with his racial ideology, as evidenced by his earlier thoughts on lynching. Throughout his public career, Roosevelt's rhetoric and actions revealed his considerable opposition to lynching as a practice,60 but he often appeared willing to accept the mob's rationalization that the primary cause of lynching was black

58 Weaver, The Brownsville Raid, 93-94.

59 Ibid., 94; Morris, Theodore Rex, 464-65.

60 Roosevelt made many public and private statements condemning lynching as a means of social order and control. Perhaps most famously, while touring the South in 1905, Roosevelt confronted Arkansas governor Jeff Davis on the issue. To Davis' claim that the "only good Negro is a dead Negro," Roosevelt retorted: "Above all other men, Governor, you and I [as] exponents and representatives of the law, owe it to our people...to free the United States from the menace and reproach of lynch law." Morris, Theodore Rex, 425.
crime, particularly black men’s assaults on white women.\textsuperscript{61} Thus, in his mind, the best way to curb lynching was to impress upon blacks the importance of self-policing as a means of diffusing white anger. An 1899 letter is illustrative. In the letter, Roosevelt recounted a recent address he had given to a black audience in which he counseled, ―At all hazards, the brute who committed rape must be hunted down.‖ He went on to encourage blacks to ―take the lead in hunting him down.‖\textsuperscript{62}

In the Brownsville episode, not only did the black soldiers of the Twenty-fifth upset the president’s expectations by breaking the law, but by refusing to help the white officers identify the perpetrators, they were guilty of what Roosevelt deemed ―race solidarity.‖\textsuperscript{63} Just eighteen months before the shooting at Brownsville, Roosevelt expounded on this idea during a Lincoln Day address to the Republican Club of New York City:

\begin{quote}
[V]ice and criminality of every kind are evils more potent for harm to the black race than all acts of oppression of white men put together. The colored man who fails to condemn crime in another colored man, who fails to co-operate in all lawful ways in bringing colored criminals to justice, is the worst enemy of his own people, as well as an enemy to all the people. Law abiding black men should, for the sake of their race, be foremost in relentless and unceasing warfare against lawbreaking black men.\textsuperscript{64}
\end{quote}

This line of thinking served as the basis of Roosevelt’s actions in the aftermath of the affray, and it helps explain why Roosevelt ultimately accepted Blocksom’s

\textsuperscript{61} Ibid., 113.

\textsuperscript{62} Ibid., 113-14.

\textsuperscript{63} Dyer, \textit{Theodore Roosevelt and the Idea of Race}, 115-16.

recommendation that all enlisted men of the three companies present on the night of August 13 be discharged the service and debarred from reenlistment in the Army, Navy, or Marine Corps." In early November 1906, Roosevelt made it official. Special Order Number 266 identified by name the 167 enlisted men that the President had "discharged without honor" and "forever debarred from reenlisting." A few months after he ordered the discharge, Roosevelt sent a letter defending his decision to journalist Ray Stannard Baker. In it, he appeared to underscore just how much the soldiers' "conspiracy of silence" motivated his actions:

I have been really deprest over this Brownsville (Texas) business, not so much by the attitude of the colored troops themselves, although that was sufficiently ominous, but by the attitude taken by the enormous majority of the colored population in regard to the matter. I had never really believed there was much justification for the claim of the Southern whites that the decent Negroes would actively or passively shield their own wrongdoers; or at least I had never realized the extent to which this statement was true; but this Brownsville business has given me the most serious concern on this very point.

Although Roosevelt issued the summary discharge on November 5, the public did not start to receive word of it until the evening of the sixth – after they had returned from the polls. By all appearances, Roosevelt had intentionally delayed publication of the order to avoid any backlash from black voters toward Republican candidates. It worked. Among the Republicans who benefited from Roosevelt’s delay was his son-in-law, Nicholas Longworth, whose black supporters in his Cincinnati congressional district

65 Warren, Affray at Brownsville, Texas, Volume 1, 64.

66 Included among the names were several veterans of the Spanish-American War. One of those was twenty-six-year veteran First Sergeant Mingo Sanders, who had recollections of sharing his rations in battle with Colonel Roosevelt in Cuba. Morris, Theodore Rex, 467; Weaver, The Senator and the Sharecropper’s Son, 68.

67 TR to Ray Stannard Baker, 30 March 1907; Brands, TR: The Last Romantic, 589.
more than likely constituted the margin of difference in his reelection.\textsuperscript{68} The press did not miss Roosevelt’s political sleight of hand. The Waterville (Maine) \textit{Sentinel} questioned the President’s political courage. –“The picture of a President,” proclaimed the \textit{Sentinel}, –“whose chief merit is supposed to lie in his fearless bravery dodging an issue like this one, until after the votes are counted, is not pleasant to look upon.”\textsuperscript{69}

Most of the criticism Roosevelt received for Brownsville, however, stemmed from the fact the President dismissed the soldiers without proof of their guilt and without a proper trial. Many wondered why he could not see to it to give these men a “square deal” as he had trumpeted in so many other situations.\textsuperscript{70} Upon examining the official army reports, the New York \textit{Times} reported, –“that no evidence had been gathered to prove a conspiracy on the part of the members of the battalion. The whole proceeding in fact was based on the assumption…that those who did not take part in the riot at Brownsville „must know‘ who did….Not a particle of evidence [was] given…to prove that any enlisted man had certain knowledge of the identity of any of the participants.”\textsuperscript{71}

The New York \textit{World} and the \textit{Evening Post} also tossed barbs at the President. Oswald Garrison Villard, a staunch opponent of Roosevelt’s policies and a founder of the NAACP, edited the latter. In a private letter to Washington, he called the dismissal “really disgraceful” and offered to prove to the Tuskegeean that Roosevelt was —the worst

\textsuperscript{68} Morris, \textit{Theodore Rex}, 466-67; Weaver, \textit{The Brownsville Raid}, 97-98.

\textsuperscript{69} Ibid., 98.

\textsuperscript{70} Leiker, \textit{Racial Borders}, 139.

\textsuperscript{71} Weaver, \textit{The Brownsville Raid}, 107-08.
president we have had in 25 years.” While much of the southern white press endorsed the President’s action – “the most praiseworthy thing the President has done,” exclaimed one paper – they were virtually alone in that view.

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CHAPTER VI
BLACK REACTIONS

Predictably, the black community responded with outrage to the injustice of Roosevelt’s summary discharge order. However, when one considers how routine injustice must have seemed to black Americans at the turn of the century, the degree of protest appears even more overwhelming. As Ann Lane, author of *The Brownville Affair*, observes, “Violence, terror, organized and otherwise, intimidation – these were the ordinary occurrences for the black in America. That the Negro community reacted so strongly and so persistently to the Brownsville issue suggests that there was more to it than simple injustice of a kind the Afro-American had come to know intimately.”

James Leiker, writing about black soldiers in the border South, suggests the emphasis and support blacks had given to military enlistments after 1898 made the black community more prone to defend the discharged soldiers, explaining in part why the Brownsville episode aroused such a reaction. Undoubtedly, the sense of pride that black Americans carried for their soldiers, who had recently fought Indians in the West, the Spanish in Cuba, and the Filipino *insurrectos*, contributed to their powerful response to Roosevelt’s order and its affront to black fighting men. But one finds a more likely explanation by

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74 Lane, *The Brownville Affair*, 70.

75 Leiker, *Racial Borders*, 140.
examining the target of black Americans’ anger. So much of the hostility printed in the black press and spewed from the pulpits of black preachers fell squarely on Theodore Roosevelt. With one stroke of his pen, Roosevelt, once considered “our President,” fell out of favor with much of black America.

Five years earlier, just one month into office, Roosevelt had earned the adoration of millions of blacks when he had Booker T. Washington to dinner. Since then, he had won their praise for his defense of the appointments of Mrs. Cox and Dr. Crum. Throughout his five years in the White House, Theodore Roosevelt had championed a “square deal” for all men and advocated judging each man on his merits, and blacks responded favorably to this rhetoric. They saw in Roosevelt a man who could deliver the social justice they had long been denied. In 1903, an editorial in the Cleveland Journal asserted, “Surely there is not an Afro-American living who has not the highest regard and esteem for President Theodore Roosevelt. More than any other person…he has championed the rights of our race….Long live the President!” That kind of adulation was common in many circles throughout black America, but it evaporated when Roosevelt betrayed the one hundred and sixty-seven soldiers of the Twenty-fifth Infantry.

The Baltimore Afro-American Ledger offered a synopsis of Roosevelt’s fall from grace:

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

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76 Cleveland Journal, 7 November 1903.
been thrown from its pedestal….That President Roosevelt is tinctured with colorphobia is as plain as anything can be.⁷⁷

For the most part, the rest of the black press joined the Ledger in its vitriolic criticism of the President.⁷⁸ While initially accepting that the soldiers of the Twenty-fifth were guilty (as so many others did), most papers focused on Roosevelt’s hasty decision to discharge all the soldiers, casting aside the due process of law.⁷⁹ The Langston City (Oklahoma) Western Age considered his order manifestly unjust, un-American, and treasonous. The Baltimore Weekly Guide called it unprecedented and childish.⁸⁰ The Cleveland Gazette thought Roosevelt provided the South with an “undeserved and unmerited triumph” of their prejudice.⁸¹ Another rebuke came from the Ledger, chastising the President for turning the soldiers loose “like mangy curs to go through the world with the brand of Cain upon their brows.”⁸² Recalling the lithograph depicting Roosevelt’s celebrated dinner with Booker Washington, an editorial in the Richmond Planet wondered whether its publisher went out of business, as there was no demand for

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⁷⁷ “Roosevelt’s Hostility to the Colored People of the United States.” (Accessed 26 February 2010.)

⁷⁸ For a more complete analysis of the reaction of the black press to the Brownsville episode, see Chapter 7 of Ann Lane’s The Brownsville Affair and Lewis N. Wynne’s “Brownsville: The Reaction of the Negro Press.”

⁷⁹ Lane, The Brownsville Affair, 111.

⁸⁰ “Roosevelt’s Hostility to the Colored People of the United States.” (Accessed 26 February 2010.)

⁸¹ Lane, The Brownsville Affair, 111.

⁸² Weaver, The Brownsville Raid, 102.
it down this way now." The New York Age, however, seemed best to encapsulate the impact of the President’s order on his relationship with black Americans when one of its editorials proclaimed, “The Afro-American people present an unprecedented phenomenon of unity and resolution—their alienation from the President, once their idol, has been spontaneous, bitter, and universal.”

Prominent black leaders shared this frustration with Roosevelt, including many who had supported the President before the whole Brownsville affair. W. Calvin Chase of the Washington Bee, who just five years earlier had praised the President for his dinner with Washington, confessed that in the wake of the order, he found it “more and more apparent…that President Roosevelt and his advisers [were] prejudiced against the negro and [had] no real love for him.” James A. Cobb agreed. In a letter to Booker T. Washington, he expressed that he had “long since come to the conclusion that the President has a very low estimate of the Negro” and that the dismissal order “forces that conclusion beyond debate in my mind.” Most unsettling to Cobb was Roosevelt’s timing, issuing the discharge on the day of the election. It showed Cobb that the President was “capable of playing very low politics.” However, Cobb, like many in Washington’s circle, said he did not intend to “abuse” the President over this, although he did add that he would encourage all blacks to “go slow on him hereafter.”

83 Richmond Planet, 12 January 1907.

84 Ibid., 98.

85 “Roosevelt’s Hostility to the Colored People of the United States.” (Accessed 26 February 2010.)

simply dismayed. Ralph Tyler, an associate of Washington’s from the *Ohio State Journal*, agreed that Roosevelt had erred in dismissing the soldiers, but he withheld criticism because he could not accept that “the President would act against the race. His course has been so fair and just heretofore.”\(^{87}\)

Washington, too, expressed disappointment and concern with the President’s decision. He had learned of Roosevelt’s decision a week before it became public, and pleaded with the President to stay his order until after he could investigate the matter himself. A few days later, Washington again asked for time, writing, “If you possibly can avoid doing so, I very much hope you will not take definite action regarding the Negro soldiers…until after your return from Panama. There is some information which I must put before you before you take final action.”\(^{88}\) Roosevelt replied curtly a few days later:

> My dear Mr. Washington: I have your letter of the 2nd instant. I could not possibly refrain from acting as regards those colored soldiers. 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 is that which came out in the investigation itself. Sincerely yours, Theodore Roosevelt.\(^{89}\)

Frustrated by Roosevelt’s obstinacy, Washington sent a letter to Secretary of War William H. Taft, hoping that, if the President would not change his mind on the order to dismiss, he and Taft might at least consider replacing the Twenty-fifth with more black soldiers at Fort Brown as a way of softening black anger. Washington remarked that never before had he seen a time “when the entire people have the feeling that they now

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have in regard to the Administration.” He added that blacks were “not so much resentful or angry” as they were “hurt and disappointed,” the order coming so soon after the riots in Atlanta.\footnote{BTW to William Howard Taft, 20 November 1906, \textit{BTW Papers}, Vol. 6.}

After Taft tried and failed to rescind the President’s order, it was becoming increasingly clear to Washington that his efforts were having little effect. Like other moderates, though, he did not break with Roosevelt. From the start, Washington was acutely aware that his association with the President – now under the ominous cloud of Brownsville – could damage his standing among blacks; but despite that, he refused to denounce the President’s decision publicly. Writing to Charles W. Anderson within days of Roosevelt’s order, Washington maintained that he had done his “full duty in the matter” [to change Roosevelt’s mind]. Anticipating the criticism that was to come his way from those who had long criticized his accommodationist approach to civil rights, he added somewhat dejectedly, “The enemy will, as usual, try to blame me for all of this. They can talk; I cannot, without being disloyal to our friend, who I mean to stand by throughout his administration.”\footnote{BTW to Charles W. Anderson, 7 November 1906, \textit{BTW Papers}, Vol. 6.}

Despite the resolve of Washington and many of his confidants to remain faithful, the President’s action did inflict a measure of political damage on the President and Republicans. In fact, the Brownsville affair presented the first serious threat to blacks’ four decades of loyalty to the Party of Lincoln.\footnote{Thornbrough, “The Brownsville Episode and the Negro Vote,” 469.} By delaying the order as he did, Roosevelt spared his party an immediate backlash in the 1906, but black papers quickly
signaled that trouble lay ahead. On the front page of its first issue after the election, the Richmond *Planet* ran a dual headline. The left hand side celebrated the Republicans sweeping victories; but on the right, it chastised the President for punishing the innocent along with the guilty and for the calculated delay of his order. The editor of the *Planet* called Roosevelt’s action “the blunder of the century.”93

Some papers began openly questioning blacks’ longstanding fidelity to the Republicans. Chase’s Washington *Bee* asserted that blacks would have voted differently had they been aware of Roosevelt’s decision before going to the polls. Traditionally a Republican paper, the *Bee* immediately called on blacks to reconsider their blind loyalty. “Let us learn to vote only for those who will give us the best opportunity in life, whether they be Republicans, Democrats, or what not.”94 A week later, Chase dared the President to seek another term in 1908 “and see how dearly he is loved by the colored citizens of the United States.”95

Soon, more were calling on blacks to reconsider their political allegiances. Marcus Wheatland, a prominent black radiologist, writing in the New York *Age*, questioned blacks’ “slavish and blind adherence to the Republican party” and pondered whether the race would fare much worse under the Democrats.96 Reverend Charles S. Morriss of the Abyssinian Baptist Church of New York urged his congregation to elect a Democratic president in 1908, proclaiming, “Thus shall we answer Theodore Roosevelt,

93 Richmond *Planet*, 10 November 1906.


95 Thornbrough, “The Brownsville Episode and the Negro Vote,” 472.

once enshrined in our love as our Moses, now enshrouded in our scorn as our Judas.”

A black Republican organization in New York City passed a resolution expressing its anguish over the betrayal by “the one man our race has loved best since Lincoln.” In another resolution they promised to “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.”

In the weeks that followed the discharge order, criticism of the President had grown deafening. On November 26, Samuel Laing Williams, a close friend of Washington’s and a Roosevelt appointee to the U.S. district attorney’s office, reported to Washington on the situation in Chicago. “You cannot find a Negro who is not denouncing the President in frightful terms of abuse. I never saw and heard anything like it.” Roosevelt, it appeared, also sensed the animus rising against him and quickly defended his decision in a letter to Silas McBee:

I have been amazed and indignant at the attitude of the negroes and of shortsighted white sentimentalists as to my action. It has been shown conclusively that some of these troops made a midnight murderous and entirely unprovoked assault upon the citizens of Brownsville. The fact that some of their number had been slighted by some of the citizens of Brownsville…is not to be considered for a moment as provocation for such a murderous assault.”

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98 –Roosevelt’s Hostility to the Colored People of the United States.” (Accessed 26 February 2010.)


Roosevelt also acknowledged the growing unease surrounding black support for the Republican party. “There has been great pressure not only by sentimentalists but by the Northern politicians who wish to keep the Negro vote. As you know,” he reminded McBee, “I believe in practical politics, and where possible, I always weigh well any action which may cost votes before I consent to take it; but in a case like this, where the issue is not merely one of naked right and wrong but one of vital concern to the whole country, I will not for one moment consider the political effect.”

The timing of Roosevelt's discharge order, delaying it until after the voters went to the polls, made this last statement ring hollow. So, too, did his efforts to undermine his most vocal Republican critic in the whole Brownsville matter, Ohio senator Joseph B. Foraker. Roosevelt and Foraker had squared off before – they battled over railroad regulation and foreign policy matters – but it was Foraker’s opposition in the Brownsville episode, contends Ann Lane, “that so angered the President that he determined to eliminate Foraker from political life.”

In December 1906, the Constitution League, an interracial civil rights group under the direction of John E. Milholland, presented Congress with a report that raised the first serious doubts about whether any of the black soldiers of the Twenty-fifth Infantry were guilty of the shoot up at Brownsville. Foraker, perhaps seeing an opportunity to be a thorn in the President’s side, used the report to justify a full Senate investigation into the

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matter.\textsuperscript{103} When Congress started its session in December, Foraker requested that Secretary Taft turn over all evidence related to the incident that proved the soldiers guilty. In January 1907, Foraker won an investigation by the Senate Committee on Military Affairs, an investigation that would keep the Brownsville issue alive well into 1908.

Blacks were quick to embrace Foraker. As the shock and disappointment from Roosevelt’s betrayal began to settle in, blacks must have wondered who, in a position of power, would rally to their cause. While Republican support for black civil rights had been waning for some time, Roosevelt appeared to reestablish the Republicans’ historic support for black causes – that was, until Brownsville. Desperate, blacks now championed Foraker.\textsuperscript{104} Editorials in the black press heaped praise on the Ohio senator for taking up the cause of the soldiers on the Senate floor. The Boston \textit{Guardian} labeled him “the true champion of the rights of the Colored soldiers” and “the great advocate for constitutional rights and liberty for all.”\textsuperscript{105} The Washington \textit{Bee} proclaimed, “The name of Senator Foraker will go down in history as the immortal and the truest defender of

\textsuperscript{103} James A. Tinsley suggests Foraker’s aspirations for the Republican nomination in 1908 may have motivated his efforts in defense of the black soldiers. Sensing that Roosevelt was grooming William H. Taft to be his successor, Foraker saw Brownsville as an opportunity to discredit both the President and the Secretary of War. –Roosevelt, Foraker, and the Brownsville Affray,” 51. Emma Lou Thornbrough agrees, accepting Taft’s assessment of Foraker’s motives: –Foraker is determined to make the President as uncomfortable as possible, and incidentally eliminate me from the Ohio situation.” “The Brownsville Episode and the Negro Vote,” 477.

\textsuperscript{104} Ann Lane credits blacks’ desperation as an explanation for their “uncritical” and “blind defense of Foraker.” \textit{The Brownsville Affair}, 70.

\textsuperscript{105} Boston \textit{Guardian}, reprinted in the Cleveland \textit{Journal}, 22 December 1906; Fox, \textit{The Guardian of Boston}, 155.
human rights and civil liberty….We owe a debt of gratitude to this distinguished man.
The American colored man is not without a defender."\textsuperscript{106}

Just as Foraker was becoming the hero of black Republicans, Roosevelt sought to undermine his political strength. On Christmas Day, the President wrote to Booker T. Washington seeking the names of one or two first-class colored men, good Republicans…who live in Ohio, and whom [he] could appoint to office in that State.” He then specified, “I should prefer a first-class colored man around Cincinnati” – the hometown of both Foraker and Taft.\textsuperscript{107} Washington put forth the name of Ralph W. Tyler (of Columbus, Ohio) to fill the post of port surveyor. Although Roosevelt ultimately withdrew Tyler’s nomination (likely due to resistance from whites in the area), it was clear that Roosevelt was seeking to restore his administration’s position with black voters in Ohio, a group that would be crucial to both Taft’s nomination and electoral chances in 1908.\textsuperscript{108} The black press saw through the charade. In an open letter to Roosevelt in the Washington Bee, Calvin Chase wrote, “The appointment…is not a drop in the bucket. It will only influence one vote in the entire state of Ohio and that vote is no doubt doubtful – Ralph W. Taylor [sic].” The Cleveland Gazette said that Roosevelt had only served to aggravate the situation.\textsuperscript{109}

Roosevelt’s treachery toward Foraker may have extended even further than political appointments. In her memoirs, Mrs. Julia Foraker, the senator’s wife, recalled

\textsuperscript{106} Washington Bee, 19 January 1907.
\textsuperscript{107} Weaver, The Brownsville Raid, 121-22.
\textsuperscript{108} Thornbrough, –The Brownsville Episode and the Negro Vote,” 479.
\textsuperscript{109} Ibid., 480.
that White House dinner invitations abruptly ceased after her husband took up the soldiers’ cause. She added that her husband’s mail appeared tampered with and Secret Service agents watched their home. She also recounted the President making an offer, via an intermediary, to appoint Mr. Foraker to an ambassadorship if he would only drop the Brownsville investigation. Roosevelt, Mrs. Foraker surmised, had turned “the full force of his dangerous enmity” against her husband.  

In January 1907, at the annual Gridiron Club dinner, Roosevelt verbally attacked the senator, calling him out for having the audacity to question his exclusive authority to decide the Brownsville matter. In a breach of protocol – traditionally, no one spoke after the President – Foraker rose and offered a lengthy but impassioned defense of the black soldiers. By the time Foraker had finished, and Roosevelt offered a drowned-out rebuttal, the hall had descended into pandemonium. A few days later, the Washington Bee celebrated Foraker’s “manly speech” and his “crushing rebuke to the Chief Executive.”

To many blacks, Joseph Foraker had replaced Theodore Roosevelt as the champion of their race. Illustrating this change was the fact that black attendance at Roosevelt’s annual reception event – once so large that many whites stayed away – was now dismally low, while the number of blacks in the Senate galleries was at an all-time high, with the audiences cheering their hero Foraker.


111 *Washington Bee*, 2 February 1907.

112 Lane, *The Brownsville Affair*, 71.
Booker T. Washington, however, was not among those saluting Foraker. According to biographer Robert J. Norrell, Washington grew increasingly annoyed by blacks’ incessant fixation on the Brownsville matter. Moreover, Washington viewed Foraker’s challenge to the Administration, and the praise blacks were bestowing upon Foraker for it, as a threat to his continued leadership of American blacks and to black support for the Republican party. While the Brownsville affair was threatening to divide Republicans heading into 1908, it was already increasing the rift between black leaders, particularly Washington’s “Tuskegee Machine” and the anti-Washington faction led by W.E.B. Du Bois and William Monroe Trotter. And because of Washington’s association with Roosevelt and Taft, the Brownsville incident was slowly driving a wedge between blacks and the Republican party itself. By 1908, as Washington was strenuously attempting to keep blacks in the Republican camp, his rival, Du Bois, was endorsing the Democrat.


Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Du Bois were not always at odds with one another. In 1894, Du Bois wrote to Washington seeking a teaching position at Tuskegee. Washington eventually offered the younger man a mathematics position, but not before Du Bois had already secured a post at Wilberforce University in Ohio. For the next several years, the two men maintained a cordial and professional relationship, often corresponding on legal matters and planned conferences. Mark Bauerlein refers to this time as a “decade of guarded collegiality.”\(^{115}\) In 1895, Washington delivered his seminal “Atlanta Exposition” address, in essence striking a compromise of sorts with the white South. Blacks, he said, with white assistance, would thereafter pursue an economic path to equality, built on industrial education; in return, they would drop their demands for social equality, which, he claimed, the wisest blacks understood as “the extremest folly.”\(^{116}\) Du Bois was initially quick to congratulate Washington on this phenomenal


\(^{116}\) The climax of Washington’s speech included one line that appeared to condone a segregated society: “In all things that are purely social we can be as separate as the fingers, yet one as the hand in all things essential to mutual progress.” Harlan, *Booker T. Washington: The Making of a Black Leader*, 218.
success,” referring to the speech as “a word fitly spoken.” Many blacks joined Du Bois in praising the principal of Tuskegee. The Richmond Planet hailed the speech as a “magnificent effort” and placed Washington at the “forefront of the representatives of our race in this country.”

Some black leaders, however, did not share the same enthusiasm for Washington‘s philosophy. Calvin Chase wrote in the Bee that Washington’s words were “death to the Afro-American and elevating to the white people.” The Cleveland Gazette reprinted an editorial from the Atlanta Advocate that took to renaming the educator “Professor Bad Taste” Washington. Rejecting the white press‘ label of Washington as a “new Negro,” the editorial retorted, “...if there is anything in him except the most servile type of the old Negro we fail to find it in any of his last acts.” Henry McNeal Turner, an influential bishop in the African Methodist Episcopal Church, added that Washington would “have to live a long time to undo the harm he has done our race.” But despite the criticism, most responses to the “Atlanta Compromise” were favorable, and it was now clear that whites – and most blacks – considered Washington the successor to Frederick Douglass (who, coincidentally, died in 1895) as the singular leader of the black race in America.

The rift between Washington and Du Bois steadily grew, however, as the twentieth century began and their views about the best methods to achieving civil rights diverged. Washington maintained his belief in industrial education, individual self-help,
and accommodation to segregation, while Du Bois embraced higher education, investment in a “Talented Tenth” to lead other blacks, and demands for full civil rights.\textsuperscript{120} In 1903, Du Bois published his seminal work, \textit{The Souls of Black Folk}. Included in the book was a chapter critical of Washington’s accommodation strategy. Some viewed Du Bois’ words as a declaration of war, and as Du Bois rose in popularity, a power struggle appeared likely.\textsuperscript{121}

Another challenge to Washington’s leadership was developing in Boston. In 1901, William Monroe Trotter and George Forbes founded the Boston \textit{Guardian}, a paper dedicated to countering Washington’s philosophy and Tuskegee’s near monopoly of the black press. “The real issue as to Washington,” Trotter explained in his paper, “is his lust for power, his desire to be a political leader, to be a czar, his clandestine methods of attempting to crush out all who will not bow to him.”\textsuperscript{122} In 1903, Trotter published a series of questions for Washington, among them, “Are the rope and the torch all the race is to get under your leadership?” The \textit{Guardian} was the first major paper to offer such open and harsh criticisms of Washington and his “Tuskegee Machine,” and it served as the mouthpiece of the anti-Bookerites for several years thereafter. Steadily, other prominent blacks joined the opposition to Washington, and Du Bois was feeling pressure to do the same.

\textsuperscript{120} Jacqueline M. Moore contends that, although these differences did exist, Washington and Du Bois were not as far apart on these issues as it may have appeared. \textit{Booker T. Washington, W.E.B. Du Bois, and the Struggle for Racial Uplift}, 61-62.


In July 1905, Du Bois organized a meeting of anti-Bookerites in Buffalo, New York. When segregated facilities in Buffalo forced the meeting to the Canadian side of Niagara Falls, a new organization had its name. The Niagara Movement emerged to provide an organized challenge to the rising tide of race violence and discrimination. It also served as a vocal critic of Washington and his accommodationist stance. Although its overall effect was relatively small during its first year, in the fall of 1906, two events—the Atlanta riots and the Brownsville affair—served both to energize the movement and to undermine Washington’s leadership of black America. In September, armed white mobs, responding to allegations that black men were raping white women, indiscriminately attacked blacks on the streets of Atlanta. For five days, whites and blacks rioted, leaving ten blacks and one white dead and many more injured. Then, just a few weeks later, Roosevelt issued his infamous discharge order. For many blacks, this was the nadir.

It was also a low point for Washington personally. The Atlanta riot, and the white reaction to it (they largely blamed blacks), led more blacks to question the effectiveness of Washington’s methods. Washington also suffered humiliation when he tried but failed to persuade Roosevelt to change his mind on the Brownsville soldiers. The events of 1906 seemed to indicate that Washington’s approach to civil rights was failing, and yet he continued to support the President at the expense of his legitimacy as the leader of his race.

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124 Ibid., 80; Washington’s biographer, Robert Norrell, calls Washington’s refusal to renounce Roosevelt’s decision possibly “the worst mistake of his public career.” *Up from History*, 350.
Adding to Washington’s misfortune were Roosevelt’s comments on Atlanta and the lynching problem in his annual message to Congress, delivered on December 3. Roosevelt, perhaps hoping to restore some faith in his black constituents, denounced lynching and called for stronger legislation to prevent it; however, he continued by identifying the cause of lynching as “the perpetration, especially by black men, of the hideous crime of rape.” He went on, with more than a hint of subtlety about the Brownsville incident, counseling blacks:

Every colored man should realize that the worst enemy of his race is the negro criminal,…and it should be felt as in the highest degree an offense against the whole country, and against the colored race in particular, for a colored man to fail to help the officers of the law in hunting down with all possible earnestness and zeal every such infamous offender.\(^\text{125}\)

Washington tried to convince the President to remove this language from his speech, but like the Brownsville matter, Roosevelt ignored his advice. Kelly Miller, an academic who often sought a third way between the Washington and anti-Bookerite factions, wrote Washington upon receiving advanced notice of the contents of the President’s message. Speaking freely, he blasted the contents of the speech. –The Negro is held up as a race of criminals and rapists, banded together to uphold one another in crime….The Negro will thus be branded as a lecherous race….This will be the most serious official blow that the race has ever received. Can you not bring him to see that he is about to inflict a great and lasting wrong…?” Miller went on, indicating the potential political ramifications:

The President’s recent order dismissing the colored battalion has evoked the universal condemnation of the race. If upon the heels of this action he sends out

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this damaging statement, it will surely aggravate the bitter feeling already engendered….The political phase of this question may prove serious and far reaching. Secretary Taft is his reputed choice for the Republican nomination in 1908. Did he tacitly consent to this action…? Some colored voters are apt to think on these things.

He concluded with a note of caution for Washington. —As the acknowledged spokesman for the race, you will be held responsible for the President’s utterances in these matters….You will allow Mr. Roosevelt to do you a great wrong if he sends forth this reproach against the Negro race, seemingly with the stamp of your approval.”

Even more disheartening, New York minister Adam Clayton Powell told the New York Times that some blacks were beginning to blame Washington, as adviser to the President, for the recent shift in Roosevelt’s attitudes toward blacks. —The awful march of events since the famous Roosevelt-Washington [dinner] makes a thoughtful man ask: Has the colored race been sold for a mess of pottage?”

Washington was undoubtedly aware of the effect that Brownsville and the President’s words were having on his standing in the black community. The events of 1906 gave strength to the anti-Booker faction, and many of Washington’s one-time supporters were beginning to inch away from him and toward the Niagara Movement, including Archibald Grimké, John Milholland, and Mary Church Terrell. Terrell, a long time friend and associate of Washington, once considered Roosevelt “one of [her] idols,” and believed “he could do no wrong.” However, after Brownsville, she could

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126 Kelly Miller to BTW, 16 November 1906, BTW Papers, Vol. 6.
127 Norrell, Up from History, 350.
128 Lane, The Brownsville Affair, 77-78.
—ever respect and admire him as [she] did before.”

The anti-lynching advocate and journalist, Ida Wells-Barnett, who had been critical of Roosevelt and Washington even before 1906, seemed almost to welcome Brownsville’s effect on the President and the Tuskegeean, as she praised those who led the fight against President Roosevelt.”

Meanwhile, Du Bois was using his magazine, The Horizon, to publish sharp rebukes of the President. “If the truth must be told,” Du Bois stated bluntly, in his first issue, “Theodore Roosevelt does not like black folk. He has no faith in them.” He also raised serious objections about Roosevelt’s contributions to black America.

What after all have we to thank Roosevelt for?...[F]or asking a man to dine with him, for supporting another man, quite worthy of the position, as Collector of the Port of Charleston, and for saying, publicly, that the door of opportunity ought to be held open to colored men? The door once declared open, Mr. Roosevelt by his word and deed since has slammed most emphatically in the black man’s face.

The Niagara Movement itself was also chastising Roosevelt, and as the nomination battle between Foraker and Taft intensified, it came out for Foraker. Du Bois, this time writing on behalf of the movement, wrote Foraker, thanking him “very heartily” for his work in behalf of the soldiers. He added, “I trust that you will realize that the colored people of the United States appreciate this service and will always look

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129 Terrell, A Colored Woman in a White World, 318.

130 Giddings, Ida: A Sword Among Lions, 469.


upon your efforts with the greatest gratitude. If there is anything that I can do or my friends to help you in your work, we should be only too glad to know.”\footnote{Lane, \textit{The Brownsville Affair}, 78-79; Du Bois to Foraker, 11 October 1907, Aptheker, \textit{The Correspondence of W.E.B. Du Bois}, Vol. I, 135.}
CHAPTER VIII
1908 AND THE DECLINE OF BLACK REPUBLICANISM

As early as December 1906, the Washington Bee was looking forward to the 1908 presidential election, cautioning Republicans against nominating Secretary Taft. “Mr. Taft may be nominated for President but there is one thing for certain, and that is that the colored voters of the country will not support him if nominated.”134 Editorials in the Richmond Planet demonstrated an even sharper hostility to Taft as the next chief executive. One sarcastically endorsed Taft as “—President—of some Negro-hating society.” Another exclaimed, “A colored man who now endorses Secretary Taft for the presidency may next be expected to endorse Senator [‘Pitchfork Ben’] Tillman for the same position.”135 In August, 1908, a group calling itself the Negro National Anti-Taft League organized, encouraging blacks to vote Democrat, to vote for an independent candidate, or to avoid the polls altogether. These sentiments reflected how many blacks felt between 1906 and 1908: they were disgusted with Roosevelt’s administration, particularly its handling of the Brownsville affray, and though they still likely preferred the Republican party to any alternative, they would rather the Republicans had nominated Foraker, or anyone but Taft. The sting of the Republicans’ betrayal, however, did not

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134 Washington Bee, 22 December 1906.
135 Richmond Planet, 22 December 1906.
heal immediately, nor did it ever go away for some blacks; and while black Americans did not defect from the Republican party en masse as a direct result of anything Theodore Roosevelt did or said, the seeds of that defection were planted in 1906.

In 1957, Emma Lou Thornbrough wrote what remains the most comprehensive analysis of Brownsville’s effect on the black vote. In her essay, she acknowledges that Roosevelt‘s discharge order created "a real threat to the traditional loyalty of Negroes to the Republican party” and that some blacks "were aroused over the treatment of the soldiers as they had not been aroused by the action of any other president.” She concludes, however, dismissing the effect of Brownsville on black allegiance, stating, "The Brownsville episode did not lead to a marked defection of Negroes from the Republican party, nor did Taft appear to have suffered personally because of his part in the affair." Thornbrough credits two things with keeping blacks in the Republican fold in the immediate aftermath of the Brownsville affair: Booker T. Washington’s efforts to restore the party in the eyes of blacks and the Democrats’ failure to take advantage of the crisis.

Washington’s efforts were immense as he was determined to keep blacks in the Republican fold. Believing most blacks would remember how Roosevelt and Taft had "favored them in nine cases out of ten,” he reasoned that "the intelligent portion of the race” would not find it wise to criticize the Republicans "because they might have done what is considered a mistake in one case, but in nine cases have done what they

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136 Thornbrough, "The Brownsville Episode and the Negro Vote,” 492.

137 Ibid., 492.
considered right.”\textsuperscript{138} To ensure this, he coordinated speaking arrangements, whereby both he and Taft appeared on the same podium; he exploited the news that Taft’s daughter taught a black Sunday school class; and he secured seats at the Republican convention for black delegates in critical states. Mostly, however, Washington manipulated the black press. He assured Taft’s campaign manager that he was —\textsuperscript{ding} some quiet and effective work with the colored newspapers” to mitigate the hostility over Brownsville.\textsuperscript{139} In truth, he offered financial support to editors in exchange for their backing of the Republican ticket. By the summer of 1908, Washington successfully won over the majority of black papers, many of which had been hostile to Taft for the previous year and a half. Among those that now endorsed Taft for president were the Washington \textit{Bee} and the Richmond \textit{Planet}, the same papers that had condemned him just months earlier.\textsuperscript{140}

Additionally, the Democrats seemed to do everything they could to discourage black support. Not only did southern Democrats vocally support Roosevelt’s discharge order, but some even called for blacks’ complete exclusion from the military. Moreover, Democratic candidate William Jennings Bryan defended black disfranchisement and his party’s platform made no mention of blacks whatsoever.\textsuperscript{141} Thus, in March 1908, the Washington \textit{Bee} announced its support for Taft’s candidacy, but offered only this half-hearted endorsement:

\textsuperscript{138} Harlan, \textit{Booker T. Washington: The Wizard of Tuskegee}, 325.

\textsuperscript{139} Weaver, \textit{The Senator and the Sharecropper’s Son}, 139.

\textsuperscript{140} Ibid., 327-28; Haney, “Theodore Roosevelt and Afro-Americans, 1900-1912,” 219-20.

\textsuperscript{141} Thornbrough, “The Brownsville Episode and the Negro Vote,” 488-89.
If the Republican party says Taft, and if the Negroes of this country prefer the Republican party to the party of Tillman, Vardaman, et al., there is nothing left for us to do but to join in the general acclaim….The Bee recognizes that the party is greater than any one man, and that the tail cannot wag the dog….The Bee, because of the accursed and relentless opposition of the Democratic party to the race, must of necessity stand for the Republican party.142

Yet in spite of Washington‘s machinations to buy off the black press and the continued Democratic hostility to the race in general, small but significant numbers of blacks did begin to abandon the Republicans and an examination of the election returns from 1908 may indicate a weakening of black support. Overall, Taft‘s popular-vote margin of victory in 1908 was only half that of Roosevelt‘s margin four years earlier, and his margins of victory in northern states with large black populations, including Pennsylvania, Indiana, Illinois, and Taft‘s Ohio, were smaller than Roosevelt‘s had been in 1904, perhaps indicating a loss of black votes.

In the West, Colorado, Nebraska, and Nevada switched their electoral votes to the Democrats in 1908, and Oklahoma‘s first-ever electoral votes went that way, too. The statehouses in Indiana, Minnesota, North Dakota, Montana, and Taft‘s Ohio, all changed from Republican to Democratic control.143 In 1907, Republicans lost elections in both Baltimore and New Haven, Connecticut, to which the New York Times attributed black anger over Brownsville.144 Meanwhile, in Boston, the number of blacks identifying as Democrat, independent, or non-partisan steadily increased” between 1905 and 1909; and


143 Weaver, The Senator and the Sharecropper’s Son, 143-44.

in 1910, perhaps as many as one-third to one-half of all black voters in Boston favored the Democratic candidate for governor.\textsuperscript{145}

A close examination of the results from Cleveland, Ohio, may also indicate black disenchantment. From 1904 to 1908, Republicans lost an average of 433 votes in each of the city’s five wards with the largest black populations; in the other twenty-one wards, the Republicans gained an average of 54 votes over the same period. Furthermore, while the total number of votes cast in Cleveland’s twenty-one predominantly white wards increased by nearly 550 votes per ward from 1904 to 1908, the total cast in the five wards with the heaviest black concentrations decreased by an average of more than 300 in that time.\textsuperscript{146} Although blacks constituted no more than one-sixth the population in any of these five wards, it is plausible that black voters were the primary factor in the Republicans’ vote loss, with many black voters choosing to abstain in 1908, if not voting for the Democratic or Socialist alternative.

Du Bois stated convincingly in \textit{The Horizon}, “Without doubt more Negroes voted against Mr. Taft than ever before voted against a Republican candidate.”\textsuperscript{147} And although it can be difficult to interpret early twentieth-century election returns to

\textsuperscript{145} Henderson and Sumler-Edmond, \textit{Freedom’s Odyssey}, 195.

\textsuperscript{146} The five wards with the largest black populations between 1900 and 1910 were Cleveland’s Tenth, Eleventh, Twelfth, Thirteenth, and Fifteenth. Kusmer, \textit{A Ghetto Takes Shape}, between 146 and 147, 284; Gerber, \textit{Black Ohio and the Color Line}, 289-90. Election data for Cleveland’s twenty-six wards come from the Board of Cuyahoga County Commissioners, \textit{Abstract of Votes: November 8, 1904} and \textit{November 3, 1908}. Both can be found at the Cuyahoga County Archives.

\textsuperscript{147} Weaver, \textit{The Senator and the Sharecropper’s Son}, 144.
determine how blacks voted as opposed to whites, the Democratic gains in these northern states, where significant numbers of blacks were able to vote, suggests that Du Bois may have been correct – Brownsville inspired a degree of black disaffection with the Republicans previously unseen.

More telling than the election results, however, was the attitude of the Niagara Movement toward Taft and the Republicans in 1908. In August, at its annual conference in Oberlin, Ohio, the Niagara Movement issued this statement to black voters:

Register and vote whenever and wherever you have a right….Remember that the conduct of the Republican party toward negroes has been a disgraceful failure to keep just promises….We therefore trust that every black voter…will leave no stone unturned to defeat William H. Taft. Remember Brownsville, and establish next November the principle of negro independence in voting, not only for punishing enemies but for rebuking false friends.

In *The Horizon*, Du Bois published a series of articles, which he dubbed ―heart-to-heart talks with the Negro American voter.‖ He wrote not only to express his displeasure with the president and party that perpetrated Brownsville and to raise the call for black political independence, but also to make his case for the Democrats. ―[A]side from special consideration of race,‖ Du Bois proclaimed, ―the policy of the Democratic party is the best policy for this nation,‖ for in Du Bois‘ view the Democrats offered more to the

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148 Little data exist indicating a voter’s race or ethnicity in the early twentieth century; therefore, it is difficult to discern the rate of voter turnout and party preference for black voters. Likewise, because the suppression of black suffrage was widespread in many states, relying exclusively on vote patterns may not be the most accurate measure of black political sentiment in this era. Other sources (incorporated elsewhere in this paper), including articles, editorials, and endorsements in the black press, the personal correspondence of black leaders, and the endorsements of black organizations, are necessary to provide a better understanding of black political preferences.

149 Lane, *The Brownsville Affair*, 79.
cause of black laborers and greater opposition to monopolies and imperialism.\textsuperscript{150} In the \textit{Guardian}, he announced his own intentions. –It is high noon, brethren, the clock has struck twelve. If between the two parties who stand on identically the same platform you can prefer the party who perpetuated Brownsville, well and good! But I shall vote for Bryan.”\textsuperscript{151}

Likewise, a group of prominent black voices, including Monroe Trotter, Bishop Alexander Walters, Bishop Henry McNeal Turner, and Reverend J. Milton Waldron, organized the National Negro-American Political League and backed the Democrat as well.\textsuperscript{152} One month before the election, they issued a paper entitled, –Remember Brownsville and Vote for Mingo Saunders and the Discharged Negro Soldiers.” It concluded: –Let every negro remember Brownsville, and vindicate the honor of Mingo Sanders and his brave black compatriots, and defeat on November 3rd the party which upholds a President, and his candidate, William Howard Taft, by voting the Republican Party out of power!”\textsuperscript{153}

These endorsements of Bryan do not represent the attitude of all, or even many, black Americans in 1908. However, as the Niagara Movement – and its progeny, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) – grew in membership and influence over the next two decades, Du Bois’ call for political independence carried more weight with many blacks, especially those migrating north

\begin{footnotes}
\item[\textsuperscript{151}] Lewis, \textit{W.E.B. Du Bois}, 229.
\item[\textsuperscript{152}] Sherman, \textit{The Republican Party and Black America}, 80.
\item[\textsuperscript{153}] The National Negro American Political League, 5 October 1908, \textit{Du Bois Papers}.
\end{footnotes}
during the Great Migration. To southern blacks, the Democratic party was synonymous with the old Confederacy, the Klan, and Jim Crow; thus, even a less-than-perfect Republican party was a far better alternative. But in the North, the Democratic party increasingly supported the interests of farmers, laborers, and the poor, and it represented greater opportunity to northern blacks than it ever could in the South. As the northern black population grew from 1900 to the 1930s, both parties competed for this pivotal bloc of voters, and it served blacks well to adopt a more independent political stance. Thus, while Thornbrough’s assessment is valid – Brownsville did not lead to a marked defection of blacks from the Republican party – that assessment tends to understate the magnitude of black disaffection and fails to appreciate the significance of even a small black defection from the Republicans at this time. The Brownsville incident did not destroy Black Republicanism, but it was an important step in moving many blacks toward political independence. After Brownsville, blacks were less likely to offer blind loyalty to the party of Lincoln, and the defection of key black leaders to the Democrats, the Socialists, and others made possible the wholesale departure of black Americans from the Republican party in the 1930s.
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