

Kansas Negroes and the Spanish-American War

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THE ROLE of Negroes in the imperialistic ventures of the United States at the end of the 19th century dramatized the irony and incongruities bred by their anomalous position in American society. During the Spanish-American War Negroes were called upon to render military service outside the United States, and as soldiers in Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines, they became representatives abroad among "colored peoples" for a nation which made color a badge of inferiority. Whatever misgivings black Americans may have entertained regarding a crusade in behalf of "our little brown brothers" in the islands, they were careful to avoid anything that would impugn the patriotism of their race or play into the hands of those bent upon nullifying the 14th and 15th amendments. In the hope of enhancing their status as American citizens, Negroes took up the "White Man's Burden" and actively participated in the quest for empire. Failure to realize such hopes only deepened their sense of alienation and despair. The experience of Negroes in Kansas provides in microcosm the larger story of the expectations and frustrations engendered by the imperialistic enterprises among black Americans in general. Nowhere else was the ambivalence that characterized Negro opinion more evident.

By 1898 an air of uncertainty hung over the black community in Kansas. Concentrated largely in towns in the eastern section of the state, the black population had increased rapidly as a result of the so-called Exodus of 1879. Although Kansas may well have not been the "New Canaan" many of the Negroes who migrated from the South expected to find, it did provide respite from the more odious aspects of their previous existence. The presence of articulate spokesmen, as well as greater opportunities for education, economic advancement, and effective organization at least gave Negroes in Kansas a degree of security and respect. Even though the population of the state included only 50,000 Negroes a decade after the Exodus, the small black electorate was assiduously courted by rival political parties. For a time Negroes remained loyal to the Republican party, but by 1890 they had become disenchanted with the

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"party of Lincoln" largely as a result of the indifference and racial prejudice displayed by its white leadership.¹

Throughout the 1890's the rising tide of prejudice and violence encountered by blacks caused them to search frantically for means of securing protection and status. Early in the decade a sizable segment of the black electorate in Kansas shifted its support from Republicanism to either Democracy or Populism. In the case of Populism, as one student has shown, it was not the party's ideology but rather its politics which appealed to Negroes whose primary concern was patronage and security.² Because their interests differed substantially from those of white Populists, the allegiance of Negroes to the party was always tenuous. In short, black Kansans in the 1890's seemed willing to cast their lot with any party or movement that promised to provide them recognition, stability, and protection.³ Their deteriorating position heightened their anxieties and spawned a new note of militancy. Expressing this sense of frustration in 1897, Monroe Dorsey, a Negro editor in Parsons, declared: "Black men everywhere could pin their faith to nothing better than a good Winchester and a wrought iron determination to use it when emergencies call it. Prayers and pleading may be allright but they have proven of little avail when a black man's life is in the balance. . . ." ⁴

The outbreak of the war with Spain which occurred just as black Kansans stood "on the brink of a mighty uncertainty," introduced a new element into the situation. For many it was an element of hope likely to enhance their search for status and security. "The American Negro is strictly an American," Monroe Dorsey declared, "and can be trusted to defend the American flag against all comers, but the flag does not protect him at home or abroad. Will a change soon take place? was war the weapon of God to bring America to time? It seems so." ⁵

From the beginning of the Cuban revolution in 1895, the Negro press in Kansas followed its progress with particular interest. The editors of black newspapers ⁶ in the state clearly sympathized with

1. William Frank Zornow, *Kansas: A History of the Jayhawk State* (Norman, University of Oklahoma Press, 1957), pp. 186, 187; William H. Chafe, "The Negro and Populism: A Kansas Case Study," *Journal of Southern History*, (August, 1968), v. 34, pp. 404, 405.

2. Chafe, "The Negro and Populism," p. 413.

3. Typical of the attitude expressed by Kansas Negroes was the resolution passed by a mass meeting of Negroes in Atchison in 1894 who endorsed "an independent stand in favor of the political party offering the most favorable conditions for the prosperity of the race."—See *National Baptist World*, Wichita, September 7, 1894.

4. *Parsons Weekly Blade*, January 23, 1897.

5. *Ibid.*, April 23, 1898.

6. The Negro newspapers from Kansas used in this study include the *Parsons Weekly Blade*, *State Ledger*, *Topeka, Colored Citizen*, *Topeka, Tribune*, *Wichita, American*, *Coffeyville*, and the *American Citizen*, Kansas City.

the oppressed Cubans whose plight was likened to that of black Americans in the South. That the oppressed in Cuba included a sizable colored population made it easy for Kansas Negroes to establish a racial identity with the Cubans and support their aspirations for freedom. Like other black citizens, those in Kansas idolized the Negro leaders of the Cuban revolution such as Antonio Maceo and Quintin Banderas. The death of Maceo late in 1896 prompted a black Republican paper, the *Parsons Weekly Blade*, to call for 50,000 Americans to go to Cuba "to avenge the treacherous murder" of the mulatto leader at hands of the "dirty Spaniards."⁷

Other Negro journals in Kansas, regardless of political affiliation, joined in the demand that the United States recognize Cuban independence. The *Topeka Colored Citizen*, a mouthpiece for Negro Populists, saw the opposition of "the monied institutions" as the greatest obstacle to American aid for the embattled Cubans.⁸ In spite of the lofty rhetoric employed by black journalists in defense of a free, independent Cuba, their concern was by no means devoid of considerations of self-interest. As early as 1897 these same editors began to talk of an independent Cuba as a haven for black Americans desirous of finding economic opportunities and relief from racial discrimination.⁹

The sinking of the *Maine* in February, 1898, prompted Negroes in Kansas to consider seriously whether they, as an oppressed people, were willing to participate in a war to liberate Cuba from Spanish despotism. As war grew imminent, some began to discover reasons for taking a less bellicose view. But whether black Kansans became more or less jingoistic, their position was invariably determined by what they envisioned as the effect of war upon their status as citizens. "Amid all these excitements of war with Spain . . ." the *Topeka Colored Citizen* asked, "the idea arises, as to what figure do we cut in all this?" That Negroes might well "stand only for zero" caused some black Kansans to have serious second thoughts about a war with Spain.¹⁰ Even the *Coffeyville American*, which was inclined to approve any action by the administration of President William McKinley, declared: "The negroes of this country, while they are ready to fight the battles of Uncle Sam, are nevertheless, seriously under the impression that there are Spaniards nearer home than Spain or Cuba."¹¹ And the *Parsons Blade*, for all its previous

7. *Topeka State Ledger*, January 8, March 19, 1897; *Parsons Weekly Blade*, May 2, December 19, 1896, January 9, May 22, 1897.

8. *Topeka Colored Citizen*, January 27, 1898; see, also, *ibid.*, March 3, 1898.

9. *Topeka State Ledger*, March 19, 1897.

10. *Topeka Colored Citizen*, March 10, 1898.

11. *Coffeyville American*, April 23, 1898.

enthusiasm for a *Cuba Libre*, roundly denounced "those hot-headed war 'ranters'" who were urging McKinley to declare war and insisted that American military forces could be put to better use against lynch mobs in the United States than against Spaniards in Cuba.¹²

Although Negroes in Kansas conceded that in the event of war the black man would fulfill his "plain duty" as a citizen by taking up arms, they insisted that participation in the military effort must be of a kind that would enhance, not degrade, his status and rested upon the assumption that once the war was over Uncle Sam would "sweep his own door stone." As a Negro in Coffeyville noted, "the blood of hundreds of innocent black men all over this country was left unavenged to prosecute a foreign war."¹³

Several weeks before the official declaration of war on April 25, 1898, all four black regiments of the regular United States army (the 24th and 25th infantry and the 9th and 10th cavalry) were dispatched to Tampa, Fla., in preparation for the invasion of Cuba.¹⁴ News that the black regiments had been called into service inspired Kansas Negroes with considerable pride and prompted much discussion of Crispus Attucks, Peter Salem, and other black men who had figured in other great crises in the nation's history. Momentarily, the sight of black regulars marching off to war boosted hopes that Negroes would gain recognition in the war. But the prejudice encountered by the black soldiers in Florida scarcely encouraged their optimism. Although black troops were moving to the front, a Negro editor in Kansas City observed, "they should remember the conditions of mankind are not equal in this republic and there will be no return for too strong patriotic zeal."¹⁵ When white Kansans criticized Negroes for their lack of ardor in rushing to arms, the *Coffeyville American* replied: "Jim Crow cars and southern hospitality are not very great inducements."¹⁶

Other black newspapers in Kansas condemned the whole concept of separate, all-black units in the regular army and insisted that if such units were retained, the existing practice of having white officers in command should be abandoned. Black Americans elsewhere, no less than those in Kansas, considered the absence of

12. *Parsons Weekly Blade*, April 9, 1898.

13. *Coffeyville American*, April 30, 1898; see, also, *Parsons Weekly Blade*, April 23, 30, 1898; *Kansas City American Citizen*, May 6, 1898; *Topeka State Ledger*, May 7, 1898.

14. See T. G. Steward, *The Colored Regulars in the United States Army* (Philadelphia, A. M. E. Book Concern, 1904), pp. 91, 92.

15. *Kansas City American Citizen*, April 7, 1898.

16. *Coffeyville American*, May 7, 1898.

Negro officers an insult to the race.¹⁷ When white Americans heaped praise upon the Negro regulars for their gallantry in the Santiago campaign during June and July, 1898, black Kansans demanded that these plaudits be followed by the promotion of Negro heroes to the ranks of commissioned officers. Failure to achieve such promotions appeared to confirm the prediction by the Coffeyville *American* that the war would accentuate the Negro's "peculiar position" by emphasizing that he was "first a negro then a citizen or a soldier."¹⁸ The Topeka *State Ledger*, edited by the prominent black Republican F. L. Jeltz,¹⁹ reminded Negro Republicans that there would be precious few rewards left for black soldiers by the time President McKinley finished lavishing military honors upon ex-Confederates.²⁰ Monroe Dorsey of the Parsons *Blade* warned that even the abiding patriotism of black men could scarcely remain unaffected by the way they were "being ignored . . . and insulted" by those in charge of the war. "These insults to his manhood," Dorsey concluded, "are trying to the very soul of the Negro."²¹

Such expressions, however, did not mean that Negroes in Kansas lost interest in the war. They continued to profess a willingness to defend the American flag and to aid the oppressed "colored peoples" of the Spanish isles. W. L. Grant of Topeka, an influential Negro Baptist minister, toured the state urging "colored men to arms." "We must not forget," he told his audiences, "that we have 200,000 kinsmen in Cuba."²² Other Negro spokesmen insisted that the active participation of black men in the military struggle would go far toward combatting racial prejudice and toward securing first-class citizenship. A Negro editor in Wichita proclaimed: "The Negro is interested in this war; it means more to him than anything that has happened to him since the morning stars sang together. It will shape his destiny as a future citizen and bring him up to the full measure of a man the world over."²³

Another theme of those who encouraged black Kansans to take up arms concerned the economic possibilities which would be opened to them in the new possessions acquired from Spain. In the view of the Parsons *Blade*, there was "more in Negroes going

17. Parsons *Weekly Blade*, April 23, 1898; Topeka *State Ledger*, May 7, July 9, 1898; Topeka *Colored Citizen*, May 5, 1898.

18. Coffeyville *American*, June 11, 1898.

19. F. L. Jeltz had flirted with Populism early in the 1890's but had returned to the Republican fold by 1898. He was typical of those Negroes in Kansas who believed in supporting whatever party offered "the most favorable conditions for the prosperity of the race."

20. Topeka *State Ledger*, July 9, 1898.

21. Parsons *Weekly Blade*, June 11, 1898.

22. *Ibid.*, July 9, 1898.

23. Wichita *Tribune*, July 23, 1898.

to Cuba as soldiers than a chance to stop Spanish bullet" because the thrifty and energetic among them would have adequate opportunity to "reap abundantly from the natural resources of that wonderfully productive country."²⁴ The Topeka *Colored Citizen*, one of the earliest and most persistent advocates of Negro emigration to the Spanish islands, based its plea not only upon economic opportunities but also envisioned these islands as a utopia for the enjoyment of civil liberties. "The treatment of the colored man among the Latin races everywhere," the Topeka paper maintained, "has ever been more humane and equitable . . . than among the Anglo-Saxon or Teutonic races."²⁵

Regardless of the argument used by black Kansans in their call to arms, virtually all accepted the idea that Negro Americans were immune to the climate and diseases of the tropics. So the prospect of an overseas empire in "a tropical clime" offered "a brighter outlook for the negro climatically, industrially, and socially than any other class of American citizens."²⁶

The volunteer army, recruited primarily from the states on a quota basis, obviously offered Kansas Negroes the best opportunity for rendering military service in the Spanish-American war. Local politics in many states dictated these volunteer units mustered into federal service. In Kansas the political situation operated to the advantage of those desiring military recognition for Negroes. The administration of Gov. John W. Leedy, a Populist elected in 1896 on a Populist-Democratic fusion ticket, had not only been plagued by internal dissension but had also been unable to overcome the effects of the Populist-Democratic defeat in the national elections of the same year. Facing reelection in the fall of 1898, Leedy needed desperately to bolster the declining fortune of the fusion forces especially by regaining the support of those such as Negroes who had become estranged from Populism. Under the circumstances, therefore, the governor was particularly receptive to the clamor among Negroes for a black volunteer regiment commanded by black officers.²⁷

Unlike most governors, Leedy ignored the state's three national guard regiments in filling volunteer quotas and decided instead to recognize volunteer units being organized by citizens throughout

24. Parsons *Weekly Blade*, July 2, 1898.

25. Topeka *Colored Citizen*, May 26, 1898.

26. Coffeyville *American*, October 29, 1898; see, also, *ibid.*, May 28, 1898; Parsons *Weekly Blade*, May 21, 1898; Topeka *Colored Citizen*, March 31, May 5, 1898.

27. See O. Gene Clanton, *Kansas Populism: Ideas and Men* (Lawrence, University Press of Kansas, 1969), pp. 207-212; Walter T. K. Nugent, *The Tolerant Populists: Kansas Populism and Nativism* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1963), pp. 190, 191, 203, 204.

the state.²⁸ Since there were no black units of the national guard in Kansas, the governor's decision won almost universal praise among Negroes. By the time of the President's second call for volunteers black Kansans had organized a sufficient number of companies to constitute a regiment which Leedy accepted as a part of the state's quota. Fully cognizant of the demand by Negroes for a full slate of black officers, the governor resisted pressure from within his administration to place white officers in command of the black regiment and issued commissions to 29 Negro officers including several politically influential individuals.²⁹ James Beck,³⁰ a black Populist who held a minor office in Leedy's administration was appointed commanding officer of the newly organized 23d Kansas volunteer infantry with the rank of lieutenant colonel.³¹

If Leedy's decision to accept a black regiment was designed to win support among Negroes, it appeared to have been successful. On the night of June 22, 1898, the date of his announcement regarding the black regiment, "an acre of Negro citizens assembled around the National hotel [in Topeka] to express their appreciation."³² Negroes who had remained loyal to the Populist party interpreted the governor's action as a vindication of their allegiance. For them the acceptance of a black regiment was "the crowning act" of his "brilliant administration."³³ No less enthusiastic were those who had become disenchanted with Populism. An influential Negro in Topeka who had returned to the Republican party after an interlude in Leedy's party concluded that "the Gov. is a pretty fair one after all" and did "what many a Gov. would have been to cowardly to do."³⁴

For all its Republican sympathies the *Parsons Blade* conceded that Leedy had "done more to recognize the citizenship of Negroes than any of the Republicans who always claim to be the Negroes' friend."³⁵ For the moment Leedy had a substantial personal following among black Kansans, even though they might otherwise have

28. Clanton, *Kansas Populism*, pp. 212, 213; *Appleton's Annual Cyclopaedia and Register of Important Events of the Year, 1898* (New York, D. Appleton and Co., 1899), p. 351.

29. *Topeka Colored Citizen*, April 21, May 26, June 2, 23, 1898; *Parsons Weekly Blade*, June 25, 1898; *Topeka State Ledger*, June 25, 1898; for a complete roster of officers of the 23d Kansas Volunteer infantry (Colored), see John G. Jones, *Some Foot-Steps of the Progress of the Colored Race* (Chicago, n. p., 1899), pp. 64-66.

30. For a biographical sketch of James Beck, see *Topeka Colored Citizen*, April 21, 1898.

31. There was considerable discussion of a plan to combine the Negro companies of Kansas with the Ninth battalion (colored) of Ohio to form an all-black regiment under the command of Charles Young, a Negro graduate of West Point.

32. *Parsons Weekly Blade*, June 25, 1898.

33. *Topeka Colored Citizen*, July 14, 1898.

34. *Topeka State Ledger*, July 30, 1898.

35. *Parsons Weekly Blade*, August 27, 1898; the *Blade* ultimately endorsed Leedy for reelection.

reservations about the Populist-Democratic fusion ticket. Evidence suggests that many Negroes may have decided to follow the course taken by the *State Ledger*, a black Republican paper, which endorsed Leedy for governor but supported Republicans for all other state offices.³⁶ But whether Leedy could retain his popularity among Negroes until the fall elections remained to be seen.

Late in August the 23d Kansas was selected by the War Department for garrison duty in Cuba. In a stirring address to the troops on the eve of their departure, Governor Leedy declared: "No troops that have been camped in Kansas have behaved better than you. You can be relied upon to go to a foreign country." He also assured the men that in Cuba they would find themselves "among a people of your own race" but a people far less intelligent than they were.³⁷ Black Kansans interpreted the dispatch of the regiment to Cuba as a signal honor for the race. But as Colonel Beck often reminded his men, the race was on trial, because a black volunteer unit with a complete roster of black officers was an experiment and its performance would affect the future of all Negroes in the United States.³⁸

The 23d Kansas arrived in Cuba early in September, 1898, and established camp at San Luis near two other Negro volunteer regiments. Among the jobs undertaken by these volunteers, other than those normally a part of their garrison duties, were the construction of roads and bridges and the repair of streets and plazas.³⁹ The cordial relations which developed between the Cubans and the black soldiers from Kansas appeared to confirm the prognosis of a Negro editor who maintained: "The Negroes of America can better understand the condition of the Cubans and can better treat with them and make everlasting friends, while the white soldier with his bundle of hatred for anything not of white skin, haughty airs and bulldozing disposition, can make nothing but enemies out of the Cubans."⁴⁰

Several men of the Kansas regiment married Cuban señoritas. Others became so enamored of the economic possibilities of the island that it was estimated that half of the men in the regiment would remain there permanently. Nor did the soldiers fail to apprise the people back home of the opportunities available to the black man in Cuba. Numerous letters from soldiers which appeared in

36. *Topeka State Ledger*, October 29, 1898.

37. *Topeka Colored Citizen*, August 25, 1898.

38. See *Parsons Weekly Blade*, August 27, 1898.

39. Abundant information regarding the activities of the 23d Kansas regiment is found in "Records of the 23rd Kansas Colored Infantry," Record Group 94, National Archives.

40. *Parsons Weekly Blade*, August 27, 1898.

the Negro press in Kansas provided abundant advice about the climate, growing season, and job opportunities in Cuba.⁴¹

While Leedy's "black regiment" was still performing garrison duty, the political campaign in Kansas was entering its final stages. Negro voters were the recipients of considerable attention from both Republicans and fusionists. Anxious to capture some of the black support which the creation of the Negro regiment had apparently gained for Leedy, the Republicans claimed that the selection of the Kansas volunteers for service in Cuba had actually been arranged by Republican Congressman Charles Curtis. According to their version, the black regiment would never have left its camp near Topeka if Curtis had not rushed to Washington and used his influence with President McKinley.⁴² Taking a different approach, W. B. Townsend, a black Republican leader in Leavenworth, criticized Leedy for waiting so long to accept the black regiment. He charged that only when the last call for volunteers had been made and Kansas was short of its quota by 800 men did the governor accept Negroes. In Townsend's view, it was ridiculous for Negroes to support "this Populist" who "at the last moment divided with the colored men the right to die for their country."⁴³

Leedy's black supporters characterized such charges as cheap political maneuvers by Republicans to steal credit which rightfully belonged to the Populist governor. The Parsons *Blade*, indignant over the manner in which Republicans connived to "square themselves with the colored voters," maintained that if Curtis was in any way responsible for the 23d regiment being in Cuba, his purpose was to have Negroes sent there "to get the fever and die for their treachery to the g. o. p."⁴⁴ Neither the *Blade* nor other pro-Leedy black journals were impressed by the appeals of William E. Stanley, the Republican gubernatorial candidate, who urged Negroes to remain loyal to the party that had freed them. The Topeka *Colored Citizen* insisted that Negroes had "paid that debt of gratitude" and urged black Kansans to "vote for the benefit of your babies."⁴⁵

In the elections of 1898 Stanley and the Republicans were victorious. It is impossible to ascertain with any degree of accuracy

41. Coffeyville *American*, November 5, 1898; Topeka *Colored Citizen*, November 11, 1898.

42. Topeka *State Ledger*, August 20, 1898; Parsons *Weekly Blade*, August 27, 1898; Wichita *Tribune*, November 3, 1898.

43. Coffeyville *American*, October 15, 1898.

44. Parsons *Weekly Blade*, September 24, 1898; see, also, Topeka *Colored Citizen*, September 1, 1898.

45. Topeka *Colored Citizen*, September 8, 15, 29, November 4, 1898.

how a majority of Negroes voted,⁴⁶ but there is reason to believe that relatively few actually voted for Leedy. Certainly this would seem to be the case if the vote of the 23d regiment was any indication, since of the 383 votes cast by the soldiers fewer than one fourth were for Leedy.⁴⁷ Undoubtedly the Republican effort to claim credit for sending the regiment to Cuba and to cast suspicions upon Leedy's motives for creating it were not without effect. No less than others in Kansas, Negroes also recognized that the denouement of Populism was at hand and chose to remain with the party of Lincoln rather than give their allegiance to the party of William Jennings Bryan which included unabashed racists such as Benjamin R. Tillman of South Carolina. For many black Kansans the demise of Populism left them with a choice between the lesser of two political party evils.

Events late in 1898 and early in 1899 seemed to belie the contentions of those Negroes who still clung to the idea that the war and the imperialist policy would somehow improve the plight of the race in the United States. A series of brutal lynchings and the outburst of racial violence in various sections of the country appeared to verify the assertion that the display of patriotism by black citizens had intensified prejudice against them. The failure of the McKinley administration to intervene to protect Negroes from mob action in Wilmington, N. C., Phoenix, S. C., and Pana, Ill., prompted many to ask the same question posed by the Topeka *State Ledger*, since the President is "certain to interfere in Cuban affairs and protect an oppressed people, why in the sam hill don't [*sic*] he interfere in the Carolina just now."⁴⁸ About the same time Negro soldiers from Kansas began reporting instances of racial discrimination in Cuba, which caused some to conclude that white Americans had even introduced "the hellish principle of race discrimination" in a more virulent form than it ever previously existed in the island.⁴⁹

Nearer home black Kansans had reason to doubt that participation in the military effort had brought them any benefits. Lynchings and threats of mob action against black citizens were reported from various parts of the state. Even though Governor Stanley strongly condemned the spread of the lynching mania,⁵⁰ he virtually

46. Available statistics on the election prove little about how Negroes voted, but it is interesting to note that those counties with a large black population gave the Republicans a majority.—See Clarence J. Hein and Charles A. Sullivant, *Kansas Votes: Gubernatorial Elections, 1859-1956* (Lawrence, Government Research Center, 1953), pp. 34, 35.

47. Topeka *State Ledger*, December 3, 1898.

48. *Ibid.*, November 12, 1898.

49. Topeka *Colored Citizen*, November 11, 1898; Coffeyville *American*, February 18, March 11, 1899.

50. Kansas City *American Citizen*, July 14, 1899.

ignored the black regiment upon its return from Cuba in March, 1899, and the men were quickly mustered out.

Colonel Beck, upon returning to civilian life, immediately resumed an active role in politics and as editor of the *Topeka Colored Citizen*, beginning in June, 1900, was a persistent critic of McKinley and the Republican policy of expansion.⁵¹

By 1899 Negroes in Kansas, like those elsewhere in the United States, manifested increasing disenchantment with the whole imperialist enterprise. Their attitude was shaped by the rising tide of racial repression at home, the treatment of Negro soldiers during the war, and the mounting evidence that the American version of the color line was being fastened upon Cuba. Experience in Cuba seemed to validate the views of those skeptical black Kansans who from the outset had envisioned a Jim Crow war resulting in a Jim Crow empire which would leave colored Americans as well as the colored populations of the Spanish colonies in a more oppressed condition than ever. According to the *Parsons Blade*, the Cubans themselves had come at last to understand that for all McKinley's rhetoric about humanity, American intervention in the island had been motivated solely by "the greed of gain." Such deception, the *Blade* concluded, was to be expected of "a nation that shows by its actions at home that the principles of humanity are an unknown factor when the treatment of the American Negro is taken into consideration."⁵² The degree to which the attitude of black Kansans regarding imperialism had hardened into belligerent opposition became evident during the attempt of the United States to subdue the "insurrection" in the Philippines.⁵³

From the moment American forces landed in the Philippine Islands, black Americans displayed sympathy for the independence movement among a people whom they identified as "our colored brothers." When in 1898 the Filipinos under Emilio Aguinaldo refused to submit to American control of the islands, some Negroes in Kansas openly expressed admiration for their "spunk."⁵⁴ The difficulties for Negro Republican imperialists posed by American involvement in the Philippines was poignantly expressed by the *Topeka State Ledger* when it confessed: "There are a few imperialists in favor of a down right defeat of the Filipinos but we

51. *Ibid.* March 10, 1899, March 2, 1900; *Topeka Colored Citizen*, June 15, 29, July 13, August 3, 24, 1900.

52. *Parsons Weekly Blade*, December 10, 1898, January 21, 1899.

53. For Negro opposition to Philippine policy, see George P. Marks, "Opposition of Negro Newspapers to American Philippine Policy, 1899-1900," *Midwest Journal*, Jefferson City, Mo., v. 4 (Winter, 1951-1952), pp. 1-25.

54. *Parsons Weekly Blade*, August 18, December 10, 1898.

don't know if we are in favor of that or not, [but] we wish this provoked war would soon come to a close."⁵⁵

Others had no such doubts. When the Department of War organized two black volunteer regiments for service in the Philippines, the *Kansas City American Citizen* expressed vehement opposition to what it called "pitting Negro against Negro." "God forbid," the paper declared, "the sending of a single Negro soldier from this country to kill their own kith and kin for fighting for the cause they believe to be right."⁵⁶ Convinced that American rule "was no consolation for any human being with a dark colored skin," the *Parsons Blade* quoted a statement that it was better for Filipinos to "fight and die rather than surrender to American rule."⁵⁷ The unenthusiastic response of black Kansans to the War Department's call for volunteers to serve in the Philippines suggested that such editorial sentiment accurately reflected Negro opinion in the state.⁵⁸

In spite of all their rage over the Philippine imbroglio, black Kansans had by no means forsaken their interest in America's new empire as a possible refuge from the oppressive atmosphere at home. In fact, it appeared that such a possibility offered the only hope of Negroes to share in the "harvest" of imperialism. The deteriorating status of black citizens throughout the United States prompted numerous schemes for emigration, and probably in no other state did such projects elicit more lively discussion among Negroes than in Kansas.

In some instances, support for the emigration of Negroes to Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines was related to the opposition to imperialism expressed by Negroes in the state. Some of those committed to the cause of emigration were unalterably opposed to American annexation of these islands on the grounds that it would nullify whatever advantages the Negro might hope to find there. In the words of one black editor, "inequitable domination over all classes of dark people . . . will be the inevitable policy of our Caucasian brethren, and with the tendency now in vogue in the new districts, the opportunities of the Afro-Americans will be a hundred times poorer than they would be if independent republics were established with government left wholly in the hands of the native peoples."⁵⁹ Other Negroes in Kansas were willing for the United States to annex the Spanish islands but only on the condition

55. *Topeka State Ledger*, October 21, 1899; see, also, *Ibid.*, June 10, 1899.

56. *Kansas City American Citizen*, April 28, 1899.

57. *Parsons Weekly Blade*, December 10, 1898, December 15, 1899.

58. *Ibid.*, October 6, 20, 1899.

59. *Topeka Colored Citizen*, July 14, 1898.

that the flag extend special protection to black citizens who emigrated there.⁶⁰

The most grandiose emigration scheme originating in Kansas was proposed by the Rev. W. L. Grant. Convinced that Negroes could "never get justice in the United States," Grant petitioned Congressman Curtis and Sen. L. C. Baker of Kansas, to sponsor a bill for the federal government to provide \$100,000,000 to assist in settling black Americans in Cuba, Puerto Rico, Hawaii, and Africa. His plan had the endorsement of the executive board of the Negro Baptist State Convention.⁶¹ But because the prospect for government support of such a scheme was nonexistent, few Negroes displayed enthusiasm for it.

More feasible in their view was the plan put forward by John L. Waller, a prominent black Republican of Topeka who formerly had served as consul in Madagascar and as a captain in the 23d regiment. Waller encouraged only those Negroes with capital or particular skills to emigrate to America's newly acquired overseas possessions. As he pointed out, any mass exodus of poor, unskilled black laborers would be disastrous because they could not compete with the natives. With considerable fanfare Waller announced in 1899 the organization of the Afro-American Cuban Emigration Society to promote his scheme.⁶²

Less ambitious was the plan of John T. Vaney, a Negro Baptist clergyman of Topeka, who proposed to establish a colony of 30 Negro American families near Santiago, Cuba.⁶³ There is no evidence to suggest that either Waller or Vaney succeeded in implementing their projects. Increasingly Negroes abandoned emigration as a solution to their plight in America, largely because the new possessions appeared by 1900 to offer few guarantees of civil liberty and even fewer economic opportunities for the Negro masses.

By the time American forces broke the back of the Filipino Insurrection in 1901, Negroes in Kansas and throughout the United States had discarded whatever notions they may have entertained about the beneficent effects of imperialism upon their status. All too clear was the answer to their persistent question: "What will the harvest

60. Coffeyville *American*, August 27, October 29, 1898, April 1, 1899; *Wichita Tribune*, July 23, 1898. The *Kansas City American Citizen*, on the other hand, claimed that since Negroes had spilled their blood for the American flag in the war with Spain, they were entitled to treatment as first-class citizens in the United States. "Why should we emigrate?" the paper asked.—See *Kansas City American Citizen*, November 29, 1899.

61. *Parsons, Weekly Blade*, December 24, 1898.

62. *The Recorder*, Indianapolis, Ind., July 8, 1899; *Kansas City American Citizen*, November 24, 1899.

63. *New York Daily Tribune*, November 13, 1898; *Morning News*, Savannah, Ga., December 17, 1898.



CPT. JOHN L. WALLER
(Kansas City, Kan.)



LTC. JAMES BECK
(Manhattan)



MAJ. JOHN M. BROWN
(Topeka)

Officers of the all-black 23d Kansas Volunteer infantry which did garrison duty in Cuba during the winter of 1898-1899.

be for the Negro?"⁶⁴ Even the most pessimistic predictions made early in 1898 regarding the Negro's role in the nation's quest for empire seemed to be fully confirmed by his failure to share in the imperialistic harvest. Such an outcome only heightened the frustrations of black Kansans who had encouraged black men to take up the "White Man's Burden" in the belief that it would "necessarily exercise a great influence upon the condition of the Negro here."⁶⁵ Embittered by the failure of Negroes to be rewarded for their support of the policy of imperialism, they came to appreciate the observation of the black Kansan who declared that "this is a world of deception."⁶⁶

64. For a typical editorial entitled "What Will the Harvest Be?" see *Topeka Colored Citizen*, April 21, 1898.

65. *Ibid.*, May 5, 1898.

66. *Topeka State Ledger*, July 30, 1898.



Commissioned officers of the Twenty-third Kansas Volunteer infantry which served in Cuba, 1898-1899, as reproduced from Marcus J. Wright's *History of the Spanish-American War* (n. p., 1900), p. 144.