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Scot Brown

WHITE BACKLASH AND THE AFTERMATH OF FAGEN'S REBELLION: THE FATES OF THREE AFRICAN-AMERICAN SOLDIERS IN THE PHILIPPINES, 1901-1902

> 'To the Colored American Soldier.' It is without honor that you are spilling your costly blood. Your masters have thrown you into the most iniquitous fight with double purpose—to make you the instrument of their ambition and also your hard work will soon make the extinction of your race. Your friends, the Filipinos, give you this good warning. You must consider your history, and take charge that the Blood of Sam Hose [an African American brutally lynched and mutilated in Newman, Georgia] proclaims vengeance.[1]
>
> –Emilio Aguinaldo [?]

IN THE SUMMER OF 1899, four Black regiments—the 24th and 25th Infantries and the 9th and 10th Cavalries—which had previously fought in Cuba were dispatched to the Philippines. They were part of the United States' effort to suppress Filipino Nationalist aspirations for independence. Emilio Aguinaldo had been leading a well-organized Filipino resistance to what he considered an American replacement of Spain as the oppressor. As foot soldiers for a racial imperialism, African-American soldiers in the Philippines found themselves placed in an extremely difficult situation. White Americans characterized Filipinos as they did African-Americans: as inferior and even sub-human. Consequently, when the United States military occupied the Philippine islands, it brought with it a series of racist practices and attitudes which alienated both Filipinos and African-American soldiers.[2]

Black soldiers' experiences with racism in the military was a constant reminder that the fates of African-Americans and Filipinos were bound by their common disenfranchisement. Neither was regarded capable of full political participation and self-determination. Nor did either possess a sufficient coercive apparatus to challenge the hegemony of the powers that made decisions about their political destiny. Some African-American soldiers sympathized with the

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Filipino Nationalist cause, and a few even defected and joined its ranks. The most well-known expression of African-American solidarity with the Filipino cause came from David Fagen of the 24th Infantry, who accepted a commission with the Filipino Nationalist army and led, for more than two years, a protracted guerrilla war against the American forces. He defected from his company in 1899 and was allegedly killed by a bounty hunter in December 1901.[3]

This essay explores the use of Fagen's Rebellion by the White military establishment as justification for the tyrannical mistreatment of other Black soldiers. The most comprehensive study of Fagen's Rebellion is the article by Michael Robinson and Frank Schubert, "David Fagen: An Afro-American Rebel in the Philippines, 1899-1901." Robinson and Schubert briefly discuss the military's harsh treatment of Sergeant John Calloway of the 24th Infantry and Privates Edmund DuBose and Lewis Russell of the 9th Cavalry as a reaction to Fagen's Rebellion.[4] However, their primary concern with explicating Fagen's story obscures the significance of these three Black soldiers' experiences. Their stories, like Fagen's, are also windows that reveal the complex ethical dilemma that African-American soldiers faced in the Philippines.

THE CALLOWAY AFFAIR

Fagen's actions gave White military leaders license to brand any member of a Black regiment a potential traitor. As a result, some were unjustly accused or harshly penalized by military commissions. Two incidents occurred as a direct result of the tyranny which pervaded the U.S. Army's attempt to purge any would-be African-American traitors: the dishonorable discharge of Sergeant John Calloway and the executions of Privates Edmund DuBose and Lewis Russell.

Sergeant Calloway, a well-educated and prominent member of the 24th Infantry, enlisted seven years prior to his arrival in the Philippines and had attained the highest enlisted rank in his regiment. He was a decorated non-commissioned officer who had participated in the suppression of the 1894 Railroad Riots in Colorado and New Mexico and victorious battles against the Spanish in Cuba. His career came to an abrupt end in November of 1900 when a military search party found a letter that he had written to a Filipino friend, Thomas Consunji. Consunji was an employee of the United States Government in the Filipino civil administration and a suspected undercover agent for the Nationalists. An Army investigative commission asserted that the contents of this letter expressed Calloway's sympathy for the Filipino Nationalist cause, and officially found him to be a potential defector.[5]

The commission's findings notwithstanding, the letter was hardly incriminating. Its contents do, however, reveal how Calloway's friendship with Consunji presented an opportunity for a Black soldier to discuss the merits of a conservative African-American leadership model and its applicability to the

Filipino situation. When Calloway's off-duty time permitted, he and Consunji would meet and discuss issues regarding race, nationalism, and geopolitics. The century's turn was the backdrop for both men to project themselves as racial or national leaders who played a vanguard role in the uplift of their peoples. Calloway, in keeping with Booker T. Washington's philosophy, regarded this historical period as a "new century for a new Negro" whose priority should rest with economic development rather than agitation for political rights.[6] In a letter to the *Richmond Planet*, Calloway conveyed his feelings about Booker T. Washington's philosophy: "The address of Mr. Washington is the talk of the camp. . . . Mr. Washington's ideas are destined to revolutionize America educationally, as to the Negro, we feel the depth of his advice and feel the path of action outlined by him is the only practical one for colored youth."[7]

Consunji shared this sentiment to the extent that he regarded U.S. occupation as an opportunity for Filipinos to learn industrial and technical skills necessary for nation-building.[8] Consunji even expressed hope for a large-scale emigration of educated African-Americans to the Philippines to teach "occidental . . . political and industrial ideas."[9]

In the letter which eventually brought about his demise, Calloway expressed discomfort with the American suppression of Filipino independence. Nevertheless, he also expressed certainty that U.S. policy would change. He confessed to Consunji that

> After my last conference with you and your father I was constantly haunted by the feeling of how wrong morally we Americans are in the present affair with you. What a wrong to crush every hope of opportunity of a youth of a race. . . . Would to God it lay in my power to rectify the wrong done! But what power have I? If I could muster every youth under my hand I would say to them be not discouraged. The day will come when you will be accorded your rights. The moral sensibilities of all Americans are not yet dead; there still smolders in the bosom of the country a spark of righteousness that will kindle into a flame that will awaken the country to its senses. . . .[10]

Nonetheless, most of the letter was devoted to the sharing of views as to what method educated Filipinos should employ in their strivings for industrial development and eventual political autonomy. Calloway counseled Consunji not to be overly concerned about the political struggle, but to "Educate, Educate, Educate. . . . Not alone in the sense of knowing what others have written but what the Filipino is capable of doing."[11] He further instructed that the young Filipino intelligentsia should "bring up the masses," because

> the capacity of a people is measured by its masses not by its exceptionals. . . . Teach them not alone to know, but to Do. Let sanitation, high plane of living, exalted ideals be their catechisms. Teach them to know that a man who can *do* a *common thing* in an *uncommon way* is the *man* who the *world respects most*.[12]

Calloway, perhaps aware that this strand of gradualism was not always successful in placating the demand for immediate social and political justice from young intellectuals—for example, W. E. B. Du Bois, William Trotter and other emerging African-American leaders of that time—admitted to Consunji that he understood how this approach could seem " very long drawn in the face of your being denied liberty of action, but that will come."[13]

Members of the U.S. Army and the installed civil government in the Philippines suspected Thomas Consunji and his father of aiding the Nationalists. Sometime in October, 1900, almost a year after Calloway had written the aforementioned letter, American military police ransacked Consunji's home in search of evidence to support their suspicions. While this search did not prove damning to Consunji, it did raise the eyebrows of the military authorities who found and read Calloway's letter. Sergeant Calloway was immediately demoted to private, arrested, tried, sent back to the United States, and discharged without honor.[14]

Army officers and investigators took no interest in understanding the complexity of Calloway's friendship with Consunji. Those who reviewed the letter's content concluded that it was "impossible to assume it expresses anything save sympathy for the Filipino insurrection."[15] General Arthur MacArthur, commander of the U.S. forces in the Philippines, concluded that Calloway was "disloyal," and that "should he remain in these islands, he would commit some act of open treason and join the insurrection out and out." He further cautioned that, "one man of the 24th Infantry by the name of David Fagen has already done so and as a leader among the insurrectos [a Spanish term for the Filipino Nationalists] is giving great trouble by directing guerrilla bands."[16] The colonel of the 24th Infantry also surmised, after reviewing the case, that Calloway was dangerous and "is likely to step into the Filipino ranks, should a favorable opportunity occur."[17] He expressed contempt and even jealousy of Calloway's intellect. "Calloway is one of those half-baked mulattos whose education has fostered his self-conceit to an abnormal degree. . . .," the colonel complained.[18] However, after an extensive interview, the Major Inspector General of the Philippines Division conceded that Calloway was "a bright man with an adroit mind, [and] a very good command of language."[19] Nevertheless, he implied that intelligence, in this case, only served to heighten Calloway's propensity for the sinister and increase his "marked skill in evading a question and misconstruing words."[20]

Despite the claims of the Commanding General, the Colonel, and the Major Inspector General that Calloway was prone to commit treason, his prominence and outstanding record of service in the Philippines made it difficult to question his loyalty to the U.S. Army. In any case, the military authorities, intent on convicting him of an offense severe enough to warrant imprisonment, proceeded to trump up charges against the former Sergeant.

The Colonel set the stage for a charge by asserting that Calloway had "shown himself to be without principle by abandoning his legal wife for a Filipino woman."[21] As a result, Calloway was tried by General Court Martial under the 62nd Article of War. The Major Inspector General's report notes that "the specification being that he, a married man, lived in open adultery with a native woman." Given the fictitious nature of these charges, "Calloway was acquitted on his trial, the fact not being established."[22] Despite his acquittal, however, military authorities had already decided that he had to leave the Philippines and be dishonorably discharged. "I recommend, whatever the result of that trial," the Colonel of the 24th Infantry wrote, "that he be immediately sent to Manila for safe-keeping until he can be discharged without honor and deported."[23]

In early 1901 Calloway found himself, in his own words, "cast into the hold of a ship and brought home in disgrace without trial or hearing to receive a discharge Without Honor!"[24] He completely denied knowing anything of the alleged collaboration of the Consunji family with the Nationalists and insisted that his remarks were neither improper nor expressions of disloyalty. His defense of the portion of the letter stating that "the day will come when you will be accorded your rights," exposes the complex and ironic aspect of the Black soldier's dilemma in the Philippines. "I intended to convey the idea," he insisted,

> that, if America had wronged the Filipinos, she would in due time aright them. This expressed feeling had nothing to do with my official connections. To elucidate, it bears the same relation that the question at home relates to my people, affects my obligation and duty to the Government through my connections with the Army. That we [African-Americans] as a people, in America, have few rights that any one is bound to respect is perfectly plain to every colored man; but does it reduce our love for our country, or does it affect in fealty in the discharge of our duty to the Government—whether citizen or soldier? Not one jot or tittle.[25]

Calloway's remarks shed light on how the Black soldier's dilemma affected him personally. On one hand, he felt obliged to criticize racism in both its domestic and international contexts. Yet he remained steadfastly patriotic and vigorously faithful to the Euro-American nation-state. His appeals also convey his belief that the White military authorities were "men of reason" who could appreciate the logic of his argument and would therefore grant him justice. This, however, was not the case, and his elegant appeals to the Adjutant General and Secretary of War were summarily dismissed.[26]

THE EXECUTION OF DUBOSE AND RUSSELL

White reaction to Fagen's rebellion went beyond the mistreatment of John Calloway. More severe were the executions of two Black soldiers, Edmund

DuBose and Lewis Russell, who were tried and convicted for "desertion to the enemy." Lieutenant Prichard of the 9th Cavalry noticed early in the morning of March 1st, 1901, that Dubose, Russell and a Private named Dalrymple had left their squad. They allegedly had taken carbines and ammunition from other soldiers and fled into the ranks of the Nationalist Commander, Lazaro Toledo, who led a guerrilla war against the American forces on the Island of Samar. For four months the three of them were among the Nationalists, and witnesses claimed to have seen them take part in intense battles against U.S. forces.[27]

At the time of Dubose's and Russell's defection, the National Independence struggle in the Philippines was fragmented and poorly equipped. General Frederick Funston's capture of the Nationalist head of state, Emilio Aguinaldo, at provisional government headquarters in the mountains of Luzon, disrupted the centrality of the Filipino war effort. What was once a relatively unified independence movement degenerated into small pockets of resistance on different islands, with little or no influence on the turn of events in other parts of the Philippines. Samar Island was one of the last major enclaves of organized resistance to American occupation. These nationalists, however, were scarcely armed and received little or no provisions and medical treatment. For reasons unknown, Dalrymple died, and by June, Dubose "was taken sick with the chills."[28]

On June 24th Dubose and Russell sent word to Lieutenant Prichard that they had been held by the Nationalists against their will, managed to escape, and wished to return to their company. Prichard said that upon arrival they "disclaimed having taken any active part against the Americans."[29] Dubose and Russell were immediately tried by a military commission for "desertion to the enemy, in violation of the laws of war," a charge which promised execution along with a guilty verdict.[30] Dubose and Russell maintained that they were innocent, and that they were taken into the custody of the Filipino Nationalists after being duped by Private Dalrymple. "After retreat," Dubose claimed,

> I played cards in the barracks for a while and then went to Dalrymple's party. I then drank considerably and got slightly intoxicated and told Dalrymple I would go and attend roll call. I returned to Dalrymple's after tattoo [as written in the text] and he forced me to drink again. I became completely out of my senses and the next morning found myself surrounded by insurgents. I felt badly but could not say anything because I knew I was in the hands of enemies.... Toledo said he was going to fight the Americans at Tagatay and asked me if I wanted to go and I told him I did not. He took me anyway. When I got there I was taken sick with the chills and he gave me medicine but that did no good.... I got a little better and went to Bogton and met Russell and suggested escape and return to my troop. This was on June 23rd and on June 24th we both escaped and reported to our commanding officer.[31]

Russell's remarks during the trial reiterated Dubose's statement. The Judge-Advocate, however, dismissed the statement and felt that "their attempt to show their irresponsibility at the time of their desertion on account of drunkenness is negatived [sic] by their systematic and felonious taking of arms and ammunition to be delivered to the enemy."[32] Dubose and Russell were found guilty and hanged on February 7th, 1902.[33]

The insistence on applying the death penalty is an explicit illustration of how Fagen's Rebellion influenced the White military establishment's perception of the Black soldier as a particular threat. Correspondence between the office of the Judge-Advocate General and the Secretary of War indicates an extraordinary effort from both parties to ensure Dubose's and Russell's executions. In the case of soldiers convicted for desertion and sentenced to the death penalty, a protocol had been previously established whereby the Secretary of War in Washington had to certify the military commission's decision to execute the convict.[34] In most cases the President would intervene via the Secretary of War to commute the death sentence. However, the Judge-Advocate found legal justification for removing the Secretary of War from the decision-making process and the Secretary of War chose not to intervene.[35]

In the official report sent to the Secretary of War, the Judge-Advocate argued that the execution of these Black soldiers was a matter of immediate necessity. The report stated "that great injury has been done the United States by deserters from the service, chiefly of foreign birth or of colored regiments, who have gone over to and taken service with the enemy, there can be no doubt."[36] This study, however, did not discover any "deserters" who caused "great injury" to the United States other than David Fagen. The Judge-Advocate, nonetheless, felt obliged to update the Secretary of War about the military commission's proceedings since this was, as the report notes, "the first case where the Commanding General has directed the execution of the sentence of death against an enlisted man, without reference to the War Department. . . ."[37] In a cablegram to Major General Chaffee, the Secretary of War gave the "green light" or indirect certification of the commission's decision by stating that "Trial of deserters to the enemy Dubose and Russell by military commission lawful record discloses no reason for interference by the President in disposition cases proposed by you as a measure of military necessity."[38]

In a manner similar to their treatment of Sergeant Calloway of the 24th Infantry, the United States military leadership's decision to execute Dubose and Russell was in part a reaction to Fagen's Rebellion. Dubose and Russell's guilt or innocence notwithstanding, others who have examined their ordeal have also noted the excessiveness that characterized the military's treatment of these Black soldiers. Bernard Nalty, in *Strength for the Fight: A History of Black Americans in the Military*, asserts that these executions took place "to discourage Blacks from emulating Fagen . . . even though President Roosevelt

commuted the death sentences of some fifteen Whites found guilty of the same offense."[39]

CONCLUSIONS

The military's reaction to Fagen's Rebellion obviously went beyond the parameters of the two aforementioned cases. Nevertheless, these soldiers' experiences illustrate, in part, the extent to which the military was fearful of recurring instances of Black rebellion, and its determination to "make examples" of others whom it regarded as rebels or would-be defectors.

In addition to its meaning within the context of backlash and military tyranny, the Calloway affair also captures an African-American voice and perspective vis-à-vis the contradictory position of being a Black foot soldier for racial imperialism. The sentiments revealed in Sergeant Calloway's letters to Thomas Consunji mirror the essence of the African-American soldier's dilemma in the Philippine-American War, and perhaps most of America's wars. Although the African-American soldier in the Philippines served in the citadel of Euro-American nationalism and white supremacy—the United States military—he often felt a strong solidarity with the oppressed Filipino nation because of its parallels with the African-American experience. For Calloway, this dilemma was accentuated by his status as a distinguished non-commissioned officer.

In spite of its idiosyncrasies, the Black soldier's dilemma in the Philippines is but one example of the historical contradiction that African-American soldiers have confronted, and continue to face: the dilemma of fighting against other peoples of color abroad while continuing to struggle against racism and White supremacy at home. Further research on the African-American soldier's dilemma in other venues—particularly in Vietnam—would probably uncover other instances of the pattern discussed in this study: that is, rebellion and a military backlash characterized by collective punishment.

NOTES

1 *Cleveland Gazettte* (February 3, 1900); *Richmond Planet* (November 11, 1899); quoted in Willard Gatewood, *Smoked Yankees: Letters From Negro Soldiers, 1898-1902* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1971), 258-259 n2.

2 Bernard Nalty, *Strength for the Fight: A History of Black Americans in the Military* (New York: Free Press, 1986), 72; James Blount, *The American Occupation of the Philippines, 1898-1912* (New York: Putnam, 1912), 364-365; Laurence Lowell, "The Colonial Expansion of the United States," *Atlantic Monthly* (February 1899): 52; Frederick Palmer,"White Man and Brown in the Philippines," *Scribners Magazine* (June 27, 1900): 81.

3 Michael Robinson and Frank Schubert, "David Fagen: An Afro-American Rebel in the Philippines, 1899-1901," *Pacific Historical Review* 44 (1975): 68-82.

4 Ibid., 78-79.

5 John Calloway to Adjutant General, January 12, 1901. Record Group 94, AGO file 17043, National Archives, Washington, D.C. [All further references to AGO files are from R.G. 94];

Major Inspector General to Adjutant General, December 12, 1900. AGO file 17043; Robinson and Schubert, "David Fagen," 72.

6 Booker T. Washington, *A New Negro for a New Century* (Chicago: American Publishing House, 1900).

7 *Richmond Planet* (December 30, 1899); quoted in Gatewood *Smoked Yankees: Letters From Negro Soldiers, 1898-1902* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press), 252.

8 Major Inspector General to Adjutant General, December 12, 1900. AGO file 17043: 2; John Calloway to Thomas Consunji, February 5, 1900. AGO file 17043: 3.

9 *Richmond Planet (*November 16, 1899); quoted in Gatewood, *Smoked Yankees,* 254.

10 John Calloway to Thomas Consunji, February 5, 1900. AGO file 17043: 2-3.

11 Ibid., 3.

12 Ibid.

13 Ibid.

14 Major Inspector General to Adjutant General, December 12, 1900. AGO file 17043; Robinson and Schubert, "David Fagen," 79.

15 Major Inspector General to Adjutant General, December 12, 1900: 3.

16 Papers in the Case of John Calloway, 3rd Endorsement, December 15, 1900. AGO file 17043.

17 Official Commentary on Enclosed Letter to Consunji, 2nd Endorsement, November 11, 1900. AGO file 17043.

18 Ibid.

19 Major Inspector General to Adjutant General, December 12, 1900. AGO file 17043: 3.

20 Ibid.

21 Official Commentary on Enclosed Letter to Consunji, 2nd Endorsement, November 11, 1900. AGO file 17043.

22 Major Inspector General to Adjutant General, December 12, 1900. AGO file 17043: 1.

23 Official Commentary on Enclosed Letter to Consunji, 2nd Endorsement, November 11, 1900. AGO file 17043.

24 John Calloway to Adjutant General, January 12, 1901. AGO file 17043: 5.

25 Statement of John Calloway, Dec. 11, 1900. AGO file 17043: 1.

26 John Calloway to William H. Taft, Secretary of War, April 25, 1904[?]. AGO file 17043.

27 "Record of Proceeding of a Military Commission which has Sentenced Privates Edmond A. Dubose and Lewis Russell," Judge Advocate General to the Secretary of War, January 31, 1902. AGO file 417222.

28 Ibid., 6.

29 Ibid., 2-3.

30 *San Francisco Chronicle* (February 12, 1902); quoted in Robinson and Schubert, "David Fagen," 78 n43.

31 "Record of Proceeding of a Military Commission which has Sentenced Privates Edmond A. Dubose and Lewis Russell," Judge Advocate General to the Secretary of War, January 31, 1902. AGO file 417222: 5-6.

32 Ibid., 7.

33 *San Francisco Chronicle* (February 12, 1902).

34 "Record of Proceeding of a Military Commission which has Sentenced Privates Edmond A. Dubose and Lewis Russell," Judge Advocate General to the Secretary of War, January 31, 1902. AGO file 417222: 8.

35 Ibid., 7-11.

36 Ibid., 9.

37 Ibid., 9-10.

38 Cablegram, Secretary of War to Major General Chaffee, February 5, 1902. AGO file 417222.

39 Nalty, *Strength for the Fight*, 76.