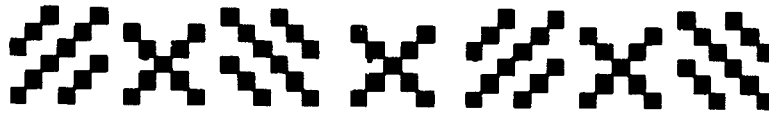


Indiana Negroes and the Spanish American War

Willard B. Gatewood, Jr.*



From the beginning of the Cuban revolt against Spanish rule in 1895, Negroes in Indiana as elsewhere in the United States manifested considerable sympathy for the rebel cause. Confronted by a rising tide of Jim Crowism and oppression themselves, black citizens had little difficulty in equating the Cuban struggle with their own quest for justice. No less important in explaining their sympathy for a free Cuba was the belief that a "racial affinity" existed between black Americans and a majority of the island's inhabitants.¹ The two leading black newspapers in Indiana consistently called attention to the conspicuous role played by "Colored Cubans" in combatting Spanish tyranny. The coverage of the insurrection in the Indianapolis *Freeman*, an editorial mouthpiece for black Republicans, was lavish in its praise of "colored" rebel leaders such as Antonio Maceo and Quintin Banderas. Maceo, in fact, was described as a noble patriot "around whom the aspiring Negro may twine his brightest hopes for the future." The Indianapolis *World*, one of the few black Democratic newspapers in the nation, noted that the absence of race prej-

* Willard B. Gatewood, Jr., is professor of history at the University of Arkansas, Fayetteville. The author acknowledges the financial assistance of the American Philosophical Society. Appreciation is expressed to Mr. L. G. Meldrum of the Archives Division, Indiana State Library, Indianapolis, and to Dr. Elfrieda Lang, Curator of Manuscripts, Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington, for their generous help.

¹ George P. Marks, III, ed., *The Black Press Views American Imperialism, 1898-1900* (New York, 1971), 7-8.

² Indianapolis *Freeman*, August 3, September 7, 14, 1895, March 7, April 11, July 25, August 7, 1896; Indianapolis *World*, April 2, 1898.

udice among "the Cuban patriots" would make the island "an inviting field for emigration from the United States" after independence.²

In February, 1898, the sinking of the U.S.S. *Maine* in Havana Bay prompted many Americans to demand a war with Spain to avenge the national honor. The reaction to this clamor by the two black editors in Indianapolis was typical of the Negro press in general.³ Reluctant to oppose anything that would enable their "colored cousins" in Cuba to achieve freedom, both the *Freeman* and the *World* nonetheless viewed with considerable skepticism the prospect of armed intervention by the United States. Steadfast in the belief that "Cuba should be relinquished to the Cubans by Spain," the *Freeman* emphasized that the national honor could "be conserved by the arbitrament of the pen quite as well as by the sword." The prevailing sentiment among "sober and reflective Americans," according to the editor, was "on the side of peace rather than war with Spain." For black Americans a conflict with Spain over Cuba might well serve to divert attention from the pressing race problem at home without actually alleviating the oppressed condition of the Cubans. In spite of all the rhetoric about humanitarianism, some Negroes found it difficult to believe that a nation which tolerated mob violence against its own colored citizens could be expected to display much humanity toward colored Cubans. If war came, they predicted, it would be a Jim Crow war resulting in a Jim Crow empire.⁴

Throughout the 1890s Negroes in Indiana—who constituted a little more than two per cent of the state's total population—were intimately acquainted with the vagaries of Jim Crowism. But despite their encounters with the omnipresent color line and the increasing incidence of mob violence in the state during the decade, black Indianians at least enjoyed certain educational opportunities denied Negro citizens in the South and suffered no legal restraints upon their exercise of the franchise. Even though the black vote was small and was concentrated in Indianapolis and Evansville, the state's two largest cities, and in towns along the Ohio

² Marks, *Black Press Views American Imperialism*, 18-32.

⁴ Indianapolis *Freeman*, March 5, 12, 19, April 23, 1898; Indianapolis *World*, April 2, May 14, 1898.

River, it was nonetheless significant in a state where the two major parties were nearly evenly matched in strength. Convinced that "the Republicans were dependent upon the Negro vote for carrying the state," the Democrats encouraged political independence among black voters and tried in vain to entice them away from the party of Lincoln. In politics, as in other areas of Negro life in Indiana, leadership was furnished largely by the small black middle class which existed in Indianapolis. In 1898, the capital city, with its population of almost 16,000 black citizens, was unquestionably "the principal center of Negro activities in the state."⁵

As war with Spain became imminent, Negro journals in Indianapolis concluded that black citizens could not afford to risk the repercussions certain to result from outright opposition to the conflict. George L. Knox, the influential editor of the *Freeman*, explained that even though Negroes had little reason to be patriotic because of their treatment in the United States, they would perform their duty as citizens in the event of war. Knox's rival, Alexander E. Manning of the *World*, suggested that by taking up arms to defend the nation's honor Negroes might "so bear themselves . . . as to mitigate some of the prejudice and injustice meted out to them." Both editors contended, however, that Negroes must be allowed to participate in the military effort in a manner that would elevate their status rather than perpetuate a racial caste system.⁶ This view, shared by black citizens throughout the United States, found expression in a nationwide demand for Negro officers to command Negro troops.⁷ According to Knox, previous experience had taught black people that too much humility only brought humiliation.⁸ But the movement to have Negroes commissioned as officers ran counter to the views of the War Department and white Americans in general who held that blacks made good soldiers only if commanded by white officers.⁹ Since it was antici-

⁵ Emma Lou Thornbrough, *The Negro in Indiana: A Study of a Minority* (Indiana Historical Collections, XXXVII; Indianapolis, 1957), 206-207, 227-30, 298.

⁶ Indianapolis *Freeman*, March 19, April 23, 1898; Indianapolis *World*, May 14, 1898.

⁷ Willard B. Gatewood, Jr., "Smoked Yankees" and the Struggle for Empire: *Letters from Negro Soldiers, 1898-1902* (Urbana, 1971), 10, 103; Marks, *Black Press Views American Imperialism*, 33-50.

⁸ Indianapolis *Freeman*, April 23, 1898.

⁹ See Marvin E. Fletcher, "The Negro Soldier and the United States

pated that state militias would be mobilized if war were declared, Benjamin T. Thornton—a well known black detective on the Indianapolis police force—and other spokesmen for the black community in Indiana launched efforts early in March, 1898, to insure that the two Negro units in the state's militia would not only be allowed to demonstrate their patriotism as soldiers but also to go into war under "their own officers."¹⁰

In spite of a state constitutional provision restricting the Indiana militia to white males,¹¹ two Negro companies from Indianapolis with complete rosters of Negro officers belonged to the Indiana National Guard, as the militia had come to be called after the Civil War. Organized in 1882 and 1885, these companies were integrated into the regimental structure of the guard and on several occasions had acquitted themselves "with honor" during civil disturbances, especially during a strike in 1894.¹² In 1896, however, Democratic Governor Claude Matthews, "after much consideration," detached the Negro units from two otherwise all white regiments and designated them as "separate" companies, known as Company A and Company B. By 1898 the senior Negro officer in the national guard was Captain Jacob M. Porter of Company A. A native of Kentucky, with little formal education, Porter was a messenger in the Indiana National Bank of Indianapolis. Because of his service in the Civil War, he had joined the national guard in 1887 with the rank of lieutenant. The commander of Company B was Captain John J. Buckner who had entered the guard in 1889 as a private.¹³

Army, 1891-1917" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1968), 129-31.

¹⁰ Indianapolis *Journal*, March 4, April 2, 1898. On Benjamin T. Thornton, see Thornbrough, *Negro in Indiana*, 360.

¹¹ The only racial distinction left in the Indiana constitution after the adoption of a series of amendments in 1881 concerned the militia article, from which the word "white" was not removed until 1936. See Thornbrough, *Negro in Indiana*, 250n.

¹² The two Negro militia companies were among those units mobilized for service during the coal miners' strike in Sullivan County in June, 1894. Brigadier General Will J. McKee reported that the colored militiamen "performed satisfactorily some of the hardest service allotted to any of the companies." See *Report of the Adjutant General of the State of Indiana, 1894* (Indianapolis, 1894), 18, 31-36.

¹³ Clifton J. Phillips, *Indiana in Transition: The Emergence of an Industrial Commonwealth, 1880-1920* (Indianapolis, 1968), 65n; [James K. Gore], *Record of Indiana Volunteers in the Spanish-American War, 1898-*

As Negroes contemplated ways to guarantee that black militiamen would receive equitable treatment in case of war with Spain, the most significant question was whether the two militia companies should continue to accept their separate status or attempt to be reincorporated into the established regiments. Although the black leadership was divided over the issue, a majority including the Negro militia officers favored reincorporation into the regimental structure. To this end, Captains Porter and Buckner, along with other officers of their companies and Detective Thornton, held a series of conferences with state Adjutant General James K. Gore, during which they emphasized their dissatisfaction with the drawing of the color line in the national guard. With war probable, this grievance acquired an urgency from the conviction of the Negro militiamen that they would stand little chance of participating in the conflict unless they were attached to some regiment.¹⁴

On April 1, 1898, Governor James A. Mount, a Republican elected two years earlier, became directly involved in the discussions between the black militiamen and the adjutant general's office. He claimed that a personal investigation confirmed the wisdom of the action taken by his Democratic predecessor in separating "the colored companies from the white regiments." Furthermore, this action conformed to the practice of the United States Army and to militia organizations in other states. The governor explained to representatives of the black militia companies that in the event of war their separate status would operate to their advantage because it would insure the retention of their own officers. If they were mustered into service as a part of a "mixed regiment," the War Department would require their officers to be replaced by whites. To persuade Negroes to abandon their

1899 (Indianapolis, 1900), 65. The quotation is from *Indianapolis Journal*, April 2, 1898. For a biographical sketch of Jacob Porter see *Indianapolis Journal*, June 3, 1898. Governor Claude Matthews placed the Negro militiamen in "separate" companies on January 6, 1896, in deference to the wishes of white troops, who objected to having black militia officers promoted to regimental positions. When Captain John J. Buckner made an "indiscreet" attack on the adjutant general in 1897 for refusing to reincorporate the Negro militiamen into the regimental structure, he was charged with insubordination and temporarily relieved of his commission. See the *Indianapolis Journal*, March 4, 1898.

¹⁴ *Indianapolis Journal*, March 4, April 2, 1898; *Indianapolis Freeman*, April 9, 1898; *Indianapolis World*, April 9, 1898.

efforts to have the two militia units reassigned to white regiments, Mount promised to work for a black battalion, in which Negroes might rise to the rank of major. Mount emphasized, however, that if the black militiamen refused to accept their separate status and to join him in an effort to raise a black battalion, they would have to be removed from the national guard altogether.¹⁵

Although some Negroes, including Knox, were inclined to accept the proposition of a black battalion, others indicated that nothing less than a full regiment with a complete roster of black officers would compensate for acquiescence in retaining the separate status. The source of greatest concern was the governor's suggestion that the black militiamen might be mustered out of service. Advocates of the plan to reincorporate the black companies into the white regiments now joined those who held out for a "separate regiment" to oppose either of the alternatives put forward by Mount. Quick to translate the controversy into partisan politics, black Democrats insisted that the governor's references to the organization of a battalion were wholly specious. His intention, they argued, was to deprive Negroes of an opportunity to serve their country on the same terms as other citizens. The pro-Democratic *World* of Indianapolis maintained that self respect compelled the black militiamen to choose to be mustered out. If war came, Editor Manning declared, "not a Negro in the whole U. States should volunteer to serve in it. If they can't go as citizens with full rights, they should not be willing to go as underlings and lackeys."¹⁶ Captains Porter and Buckner seemed to have been caught in the cross fire of all the factional strife over the militia. Whether out of self respect or for some other reason, they notified the governor that their companies desired to be mustered out. The adjutant general acted upon their request promptly.¹⁷

On April 8, 1898, a mass meeting of Negroes convened in Odd Fellows Hall in Indianapolis to discuss the militia

¹⁵ *Indianapolis Journal*, April 2, 1898; *Indianapolis Freeman*, April 9, 1898; James A. Mount to Robert B. Bagby, April 26, 1898, Governor James A. Mount Correspondence (Archives Division, Indiana State Library, Indianapolis).

¹⁶ *Indianapolis World*, April 9, July 9, 1898.

¹⁷ *Indianapolis Freeman*, April 9, 1898; *Annual Report of the Adjutant-General of the State of Indiana, For the Year Ending October 31, 1898* (Indianapolis, 1898), 5.

situation. Chaired by James H. Lott, a respected attorney, the gathering heard a series of speakers deplore the plight of black citizens desirous of rendering patriotic service to their country in a time of national crisis. John J. Blackshear, minister of the Corinthian Baptist Church, interpreted the whole episode regarding the black militia companies as evidence of "the growing race sentiment" in Indiana. Fully aware that the growth of such sentiment was not easily thwarted, Blackshear insisted that the least the black citizens could do was to protest specific acts of the governor. The "most radical" speaker was Detective Thornton, who was bitter toward Governor Mount as the "representative" of the Republican party. Although Chairman Lott had emphasized that the purpose of the meeting was not "to denounce anybody" or "to make political capital," several resolutions were passed condemning Mount for mustering the black companies out of the militia.¹⁸ By the time war with Spain was finally declared on April 25, 1898, an attitude of indifference if not hostility toward participation in the conflict had pervaded much of the black community in Indianapolis, and apparently in the rest of Indiana as well.¹⁹

With the official declaration of war and the issuance of President William McKinley's first call for volunteers, black leaders were worried lest their seeming indifference be cited as justification for disregarding the rights of Negro citizens. But as these leaders clearly recognized, it was not merely a matter of having black men enlist in the volunteer service. The President's call for volunteers stipulated that in filling their quotas states should give preference to organized militia units. Since Negroes were no longer represented in the Indiana militia, a movement was initiated to recruit an "independent colored regiment" of volunteers whose services would be offered to the governor. Regardless of whether such a regiment would be accepted, black spokesmen were convinced that its existence would help combat the notion that Negroes were unpatriotic. Lott, Professor Willis Kersey, and Gabriel Jones, a black member of the state legislature from Indianapolis, assisted former militia officers Porter

¹⁸ *Indianapolis Journal*, April 9, 1898.

¹⁹ *Indianapolis World*, April 23, 30, 1898; *Indianapolis Freeman*, April 23, 1898.

and Buckner in setting up an organization to recruit volunteers in towns throughout the state.²⁰ Republican Editor Knox of the *Freeman*, who had remained aloof from the earlier controversy over the militia, wholeheartedly endorsed the effort to raise a full regiment. "There is but little to be gained," he advised black citizens, "by sulking in the tents. It must not be said that we are totally wanting in that highest of all civic virtues, patriotism."²¹

On April 26, 1898, two delegations of Negroes called upon Governor Mount to plead the cause of black volunteers. One delegation included Knox and two other well known black citizens of Indianapolis, Dr. J. H. Ballard and Robert Bruce Bagby, who delivered to the governor a letter which purportedly reflected the sentiments of "the colored people of Indiana" regarding the war. The letter stated: "The colored people of Indiana entertain the profoundest sympathy for the oppressed and downtrodden Cubans, and feel that a war, having for its purpose their emancipation, is a holy war. They desire to manifest their sympathy by taking as a race, an active part in the efforts for Cuban freedom."²² Bagby, a past commander of the Martin Dulaney Post of the Grand Army of the Republic, Indianapolis, reminded the governor of the role played by Negroes in the Civil War and assured him that they would perform in the war against Spain with no less valor. Shortly after the departure of Knox's group, another delegation, composed of Kersey and Lott, called upon the governor to offer the services of the regiment then being organized. Impressed by these displays of patriotism and obviously anxious to overcome any disaffection among black Republicans caused by the muster out of the black militiamen, Mount stated: "If additional volunteers are called for, I would be gratified to send from Indiana a colored regiment, fully officered by colored men."²³

As soon as the President issued his second call for volunteers late in May, 1898, Mount acted promptly to have Indiana

²⁰ Indianapolis *Journal*, April 25, 26, 27, 1898; Indianapolis *World*, April 30, 1898. See also Lewis Jones to Mount, April 28, 1898, Correspondence of the Adjutant General (Archives Division, Indiana State Library, Indianapolis). For the military contributions of Indiana in the Spanish American War see Phillips, *Indiana in Transition*, 63-68.

²¹ Indianapolis *Freeman*, April 30, 1898.

²² Indianapolis *Journal*, April 27, 1898.

²³ *Ibid.*; Mount to Bagby, April 26, 1898, Mount Correspondence.

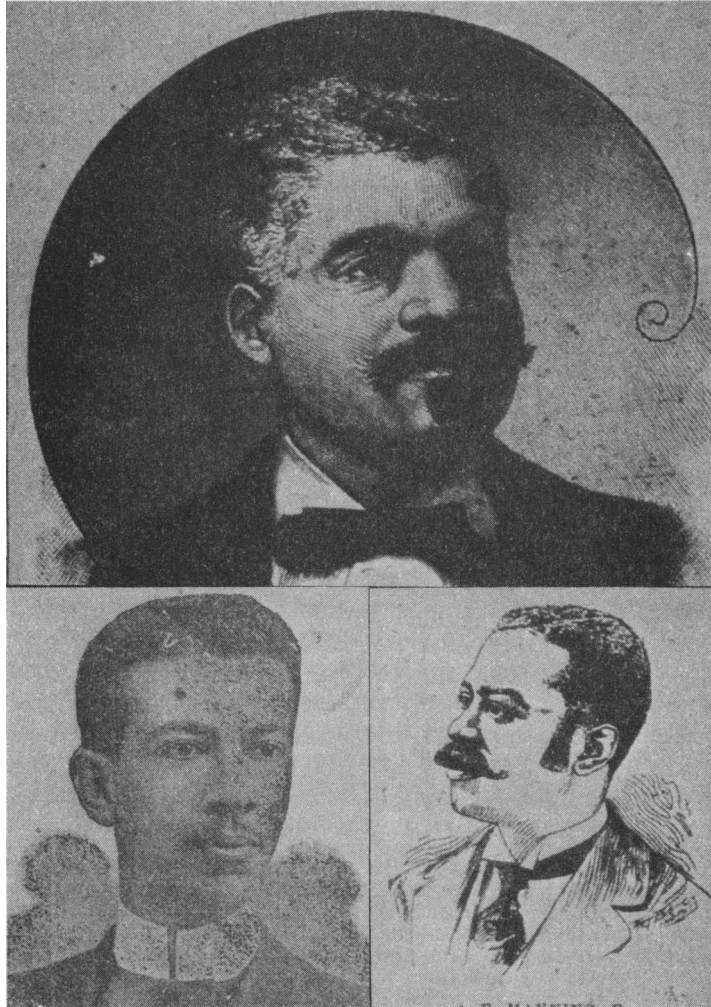
represented by a Negro regiment. On May 26, 1898, he telegraphed the War Department requesting that "a regiment of colored troops, completely officered by thoroughly competent colored men," be accepted in addition to Indiana's quota under the second call for volunteers.²⁴ Two days later the governor enlisted the aid of Indiana's Republican Senator Charles W. Fairbanks in pressing the matter at the War Department. He telegraphed the senator: "Political situation makes it impertaive [*sic*] that indiana [*sic*] [be] . . . represented at the front by Colored men The colored men are greatly disappointed that they have not been offered an opportunity to go to the front."²⁵ Mount later told the senator that a black regiment made up of one battalion from Evansville and another from Indianapolis "would be [a] great stroke of policy" for Indiana Republicans.²⁶

Despite the entreaties of Mount and Fairbanks, Secretary of War Russell A. Alger denied the request for an additional regiment of black volunteers. Although the secretary indicated that "a colored regiment within [the] limitations of your quota" would "be gladly accepted," his statement of the War Department's policy regarding black officers was clearly incompatible with the intentions of those who had offered the services of a Negro regiment. "It is suggested," Alger wrote Mount, "that the field and staff officers and Captain should

²⁴ Mount to Russell A. Alger, May 26, 1898, Mount to Charles W. Fairbanks, May 28, 1898, Mount Correspondence. The governor's request was for a black regiment in addition to, rather than as a part of, the state's quota because of the arrangement adopted in Indiana whereby volunteer units were allotted on the basis of congressional districts. Raising a full regiment within the quota would have necessitated a violation of this arrangement because of the concentration of the Negro population in one or two congressional districts. As for the organization of the army, infantry regiments after the outbreak of the war in 1898 were usually made up of three battalions of four companies each, with the maximum strength of each company set at 106 men. A brigade included three or more regiments; a division consisted of three brigades; and a corps embraced three or more divisions. See *Annual Reports of the War Department for the Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1898*, House Document No. 2, 55 Cong., 3 Sess. (serial 3744), 254-57.

²⁵ Mount to Fairbanks, May 28, 1898, Charles W. Fairbanks Papers (Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington). Indiana's other senator was David Turpie, a Democrat.

²⁶ Mount to Fairbanks, June 1, 1898, Fairbanks Papers. Others informed the senator that enlisting a colored battalion "would afford great relief for a sorely vexed question." Harry S. New, Roscoe O. Hawkins, and others to Fairbanks, May 28, 1898, Fairbanks Papers. New was the Republican chairman of the Seventh District and Hawkins was a member of the party's state executive committee.



Above, GEORGE L. KNOX, PROPRIETOR OF THE INDIANAPOLIS *Freeman*

Left, WILLIS KERSEY

Right, ALEXANDER E. MANNING, EDITOR OF THE INDIANAPOLIS *World*

Knox and Manning reproduced from Indianapolis *Freeman*, December 22, 1894; Kersey reproduced from Indianapolis *Recorder*, September 2, 1899.

be [as] far as possible trained military men and that [the] first and second Lieutenants should be given to men of color. This has been determined upon in the organization of volunteers at large and possibly the Captains might be colored if suitable men of military knowledge could be found for all the places."²⁷

Upon receipt of the secretary's telegram, Mount returned to the idea that he had promoted earlier during the dispute over the Negro militia companies. He now requested authority to furnish in addition to the state's quota a battalion rather than a regiment of black volunteers. He advised Senator Fairbanks: "We must not fail in this." The governor's plan called for a battalion of four companies with a complete roster of Negro officers, which would be attached to one of the five so called "immune" regiments of black volunteers recruited directly by the War Department without regard for state boundaries. The plan was presented to Secretary Alger by Fairbanks, who was led to believe that the proposition met with the approval of the War Department.²⁸

Mount proceeded on the assumption that at least one black battalion would be allowed from Indiana. After consulting various Negro leaders, he indicated that former militia captain Porter would be commissioned major to command the unit. The governor also expressed the hope of ultimately recruiting two black battalions "to give the colored people as much as it is possible to secure."²⁹ He suggested that two such battalions from Indiana might be combined with the Ninth Ohio Battalion, a black unit already mustered into service, to form a Negro regiment.³⁰ Apparently convinced of the governor's good faith, Editor Knox of the *Freeman* warned Negroes against demanding more than could be obtained. In his view it was both impolitic and unpatriotic for

²⁷ Alger to Mount, May 27, 1898, Fairbanks to Mount, May 28, 1898, Mount Correspondence.

²⁸ Indianapolis *Journal*, May 28, 29, 1898; Mount to Fairbanks, May 28, 1898, Mount Correspondence; Mount to Fairbanks, June 3, 1898, Fairbanks Papers; Fairbanks to Mount, May 28, June 1, 1898, Mount Correspondence. The term "immune" was applied to those regiments because they were supposed to be made up of men who were immune to tropical fevers.

²⁹ Mount to Jacob H. Porter, June 3, 1898, Mount Correspondence; Indianapolis *Journal*, June 2, 1898.

³⁰ Indianapolis *Journal*, June 3, 1898.

black citizens "to strike back in a time so disadvantageous." Knox claimed that efforts to win concessions during wartime would be suicidal because the end of segregation and discrimination would come only with a revolution in the sentiment of the country as a whole. Too many demands while the nation faced a foreign enemy were, in his view, likely to postpone rather than hasten such a revolution.³¹

During the first week in June, 1898, Mount's plan for a black battalion hit a snag in the War Department. Disturbing news was first reported from Washington by a member of the governor's staff, Colonel Winfield T. Durbin, who learned that the department intended to reduce the number of black companies to be furnished by Indiana from four to two. Furthermore, the department planned to attach these companies to the Eighth Infantry, United States Volunteers, one of the immune regiments in which Negroes were not allowed to hold positions above the rank of lieutenant. Durbin learned that the matter rested entirely with Colonel Eli L. Huggins, commander of the Eighth Infantry, who insisted that he could accept only two companies "with white captains only."³² The prospect of being allowed only two companies would have been sufficient in itself to dampen the enthusiasm of those Negroes busily engaged in recruiting volunteers in Indiana, but the idea of white captains was a source of outrage. The pro-Democratic *World* wondered how black voters in the North would react to this "humiliating policy . . . this contemptible policy of the national [Republican] administration."³³ One of the black Republican journals in Indianapolis noted that all the controversy over granting Negroes an opportunity to enter military service had created so much frustration that black men were standing "aloof from the enlistment idea."³⁴

Obviously aware of the political implications of the growing dissatisfaction among Indiana's black citizens, Mount and Fairbanks expressed unwillingness to abide by the decision of the War Department and Colonel Huggins.³⁵

³¹ Indianapolis *Freeman*, May 28, June 25, 1898.

³² Indianapolis *Journal*, June 7, 1898; Fairbanks to Mount, June 4, 1898, Mount Correspondence.

³³ Indianapolis *World*, June 11, 1898.

³⁴ Indianapolis *Recorder*, quoted in the Coffeyville, Kansas, *American*, May 28, 1898.

³⁵ Mount to Fairbanks, June 7, 1898, Fairbanks Papers.

They took the matter of the state's black volunteers directly to President McKinley, who at the time was being subjected to pressure from other quarters regarding the same issue.³⁶ In their appeal to the White House the Indiana Republican leaders emphasized that the two companies in question would consist largely of ex-militiamen who had performed creditably "in strikes and riots" and who were "thoroughly drilled and experienced." Mount told the President: "It is manifestly unjust to refuse colored captains to these companies. Our people feel that such discrimination is unjust."³⁷ The pressure brought by Mount and especially by Fairbanks, whose efforts in Washington were supported by Indiana Congressman Jesse Overstreet of Indianapolis, was sufficient to obtain modification of the War Department's regulation concerning black officers. When the two companies were authorized to retain their Negro captains, the governor assured Fairbanks that his "good work" would be "of inestimable benefit to our friends in Indiana."³⁸ The exception made in regard to Indiana made it difficult for the War Department to adhere in other cases to its earlier policy regarding black officers. The precedent afforded governors of other states, including those of North Carolina and Virginia, the opportunity to muster in Negro units under Negro officers.³⁹

By mid-June, 1898, the problem regarding Indiana's black volunteers seemed to have been resolved. Even so, state officials received no instructions from the War Department about the enlistment of Negro recruits. Mount confided to Fairbanks his belief that these instructions were "being surreptitiously held up after passing [the] heads of [the] war department."⁴⁰ The governor's military secretary, Charles E. Wilson, was even more explicit when he wrote that the orders regarding Indiana's black volunteers had "been pigeon-holed . . . by pig-headed subordinates, who

³⁶ Richmond, Virginia, *Planet*, April 30, May 21, 28, 1898.

³⁷ Mount to William McKinley, June 6, 1898, File No. 91750, Records of the Office of the Adjutant General, Record Group 94 (National Archives, Washington, D. C.).

³⁸ Henry C. Corbin to Mount, June 8, 1898, Fairbanks to Mount, June 10, 1898, Mount Correspondence; Mount to Fairbanks, June 10, 1898, Fairbanks Papers; Indianapolis *Journal*, June 9, 11, 1898.

³⁹ On the significance of the precedent established by Indiana, see New York *Daily Tribune*, May 30, 1898; Atlanta *Constitution*, June 14, 1898.

⁴⁰ Mount to Fairbanks, June 20, 1898, Mount Correspondence.

seem to imagine that they outrank cabinet officials." He wrote that Fairbanks, outraged by the "shilly-shally" behavior of the War Department, would "make somebody's hair to curl" unless the black companies were attended to immediately.⁴¹

Finally, on June 21, 1898, after Fairbanks had made trips to the White House as well as to the War Department, Governor Mount was notified that Indiana's quota under the second call consisted of one regiment and two companies of infantry. The two companies, of course, referred to the black volunteers. Relieved that his black constituents would be represented in the volunteer forces, the governor hastened to assure Senator Fairbanks: "You have achieved a splendid result[.] I congratulate & thank you."⁴² Knox, whose newspaper had carefully avoided any criticism of the governor, declared: "Governor Mount and Senator Fairbanks have done everything possible in behalf of the colored people. Now is our opportunity."⁴³ That Knox's enthusiasm was not shared by all Negroes became evident when Porter and Buckner, whom the governor had commissioned captains in the volunteer service, attempted to assemble two companies at Camp Mount, which was located on the state fairgrounds at Indianapolis. Becoming increasingly anxious that not enough men would be found to fill two companies, Mount concluded that if Indiana furnished no colored troops the blame would rest with no one "but the colored men themselves." Knox fully agreed and encouraged Negroes to justify the faith that state officials had placed in them by volunteering for military service. His Democratic rival, Manning of the *World*, denied

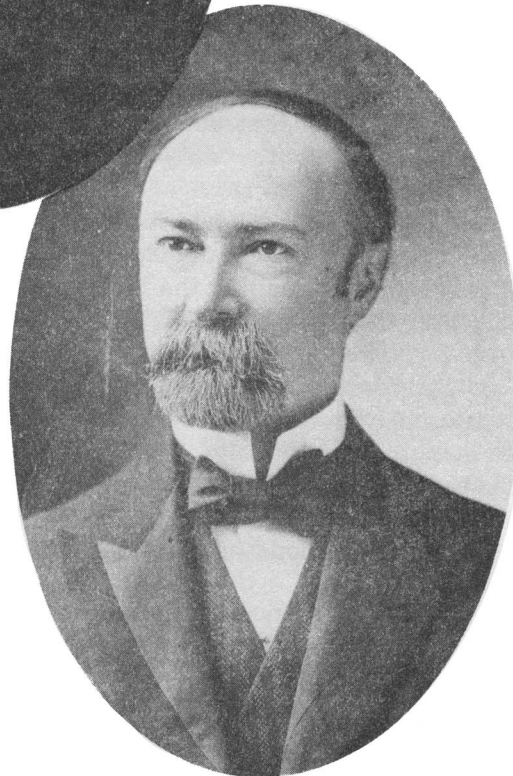
⁴¹ [Charles E. Wilson] to Russell B. Harrison, June 18, 1898, Mount Correspondence; Mount to Fairbanks, June 21, 1898, Fairbanks Papers. One Indiana historian, writing shortly after the war, claimed that the controversy over the Negro volunteers was the reason that Adjutant General Corbin prevented any Indiana unit from taking part in the invasion of Cuba. William Henry Smith, *The History of the State of Indiana from the Early Explorations by the French to the Present Time* (2 vols., Indianapolis, 1903), II, 470. While the research for this essay turned up no evidence to corroborate Smith's assertion, Negroes themselves held Corbin responsible for thwarting the aspirations of black men to participate in the volunteer army. See John W. Cromwell, *The Negro in American History: Men and Women Eminent in the Evolution of the American of African Descent* (Washington, 1914), 58-59.

⁴² Corbin to Mount (copy for Fairbanks), June 21, 1898, Mount to Fairbanks, June 21, 1898, Fairbanks Papers. See also the *Annual Report of the Adjutant General of the State of Indiana, 1898*, 11.

⁴³ *Indianapolis Journal*, June 11, 1898.



JAMES A.
MOUNT
GOVERNOR
OF
INDIANA
1897-1901



CHARLES W.
FAIRBANKS
UNITED STATES
SENATOR
1897-1905
VICE PRESIDENT
1905-1909

that the apathetic response of black citizens was in any way a reflection upon their patriotism. Rather, he declared, it revealed the profound disgust which most Negroes felt after so much "dilly dallying" and "so much lying" about the use of black volunteers.⁴⁴

By July 13, 1898, Captains Porter and Buckner had recruited a sufficient number of men largely in Indianapolis and Evansville to provide minimum, though not full, strength for two companies. The black officers immediately began a rigorous program of military training while awaiting muster into federal service.⁴⁵ The *Freeman* spoke in glowing terms of the 212 "well-developed, good-looking colored youths and men" at Camp Mount. "The colored people of the city and State," it editorialized, "feel proud that they are represented in the great humanitarian war between Spain and this country. . . ."⁴⁶ But for some of the recruits at least it was not so much a question of participating in a humanitarian cause as it was of being paid. These recruits were under the misconception that they were members of the militia, constituting a part of "the reorganized colored national guard companies," and that as such they were entitled to pay as militiamen from the date of their enlistment until their muster into federal service. They were greatly disappointed when Mount explained that they were not in state service and that the only way the old militia companies "figured in" at all was in persuading the War Department to accept Negro officers whose experience in the national guard entitled them to commissions above the rank of lieutenant.⁴⁷

By the time the two companies from Indiana were mustered into volunteer service on July 15, 1898, the Cuban campaign was virtually over. Although the well publicized bravery of the black soldiers of the regular army in the Battles of El Caney and San Juan Hill inspired black volunteers with the hope of emulating their feats, the possibility

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, June 28, July 1, 1898; Indianapolis *Freeman*, June 25, July 2, 1898; Indianapolis *World*, June 25, July 9, 1898. See the series of telegrams from Wilson to recruiters in all parts of the state urging them to send on what men they had collected. Wilson to Samuel Evans (Bloomington), Walter Russell (Wabash), Cornelius Cross (Evansville), Benjamin Hickman (Crawfordsville), July 8, 1898, Mount Correspondence.

⁴⁵ Indianapolis *Journal*, July 14, 16, 1898.

⁴⁶ Indianapolis *Freeman*, July 16, 1898.

⁴⁷ Wilson to F. E. Benjamin, June 14, 1898, Mount Correspondence; Indianapolis *Journal*, July 12, August 11, 1898.

that they would ever participate in actual combat was slight. Nevertheless, the Negro companies camped at Indianapolis continued "to hope and wait." When Mount visited the camp on July 20, 1898, he told the men that theirs was an opportunity not only to render patriotic service to their country but also to "make history" for their race. In the governor's words the Negro troops were in a position to "add new luster to the act of the immortal hero who emancipated your people" He admonished: "Soldiers of the independent colored companies, you are on trial. The eyes . . . of the Nation, are fixed upon you."⁴⁸ Although the soldiers "joined in three rousing cheers for the Governor," the response of black civilians was not so uniformly favorable. Knox's *Freeman* characterized Mount's speech as strong evidence of the governor's friendship for the black man. The *Democratic World*, on the other hand, described the speech as a conglomeration of "pap, politics and poppycock." Angered by what he termed its "patronizing tone," Editor Manning especially resented the idea that Negroes were on trial, and he pointed out that the role of black men in every national crisis, from the Revolution through the Civil War, scarcely made them "an untried quantity [*sic*]." Furthermore, Manning noted that since black volunteer regiments with black colonels had already been furnished by North Carolina, Illinois, and Kansas, Indiana was obviously "one of the last and least with her two companies."⁴⁹

For almost two months the Negro volunteers remained in camp at Indianapolis, and by mid-August Captains Porter and Buckner were describing their men as "model soldiers." Although the discipline of the black soldiers compared favorably with that of white troops, there was some friction between the soldiers and the townspeople and a newspaper correspondent claimed early in August that the Negro companies wished to be transferred from Camp Mount "as much as the State officers desire them to"⁵⁰ A serious en-

⁴⁸ Address to "Captains Porter and Buckner, and Soldiers of the Independent Colored Companies of Indiana Volunteer Infantry," Mount Correspondence; *Indianapolis Journal*, July 21, August 22, 1898.

⁴⁹ *Indianapolis Freeman*, July 30, 1898; *Indianapolis World*, July 23, August 6, 1898; *Indianapolis Journal*, July 21, 1898.

⁵⁰ *Indianapolis Journal*, August 8, 1898; *Indianapolis Freeman*, August 20, 1898. Possibly a more important reason why state officials were anxious for the Negro volunteers to be transferred from the camp at the

counter between the black volunteers and white civilians occurred on August 29, just prior to the departure of the Negro companies from Indianapolis. Granted passes to visit the city, several men of Captain Buckner's company got drunk, wrecked a saloon, stole watermelons from a fruitstand, and resisted arrest by white policemen. According to the *Indianapolis Journal*, the soldiers labored "under the impression that a United States volunteer can do about as he pleases" The *Freeman* reminded the black volunteers that their behavior had consequences for all Negroes in Indianapolis and warned that disturbances such as the one on August 29 were likely to give rise to cries of "lynch."⁵¹

The fate of the two black companies was a source of many rumors. For a time it appeared as if they would be assigned garrison duty in Cuba along with the black volunteers from Illinois and Kansas.⁵² Later, reports that the Indiana soldiers would not leave the state and would be mustered out early created considerable anxiety. Finally, on September 2, 1898, the two companies departed for Fort Thomas, Kentucky, where they were to be "attached" to the Eighth Infantry, the black immune regiment commanded by Colonel Huggins. The two Indiana companies, with their black captains, were not actually absorbed into the regimental structure of the Eighth, however, but in an unusual arrangement retained their identity as separate units. Their camp, known as Camp Capron, was situated on a hill overlooking the Ohio River. Though apart from the quarters of Huggins' regiment, the Indiana companies were instructed to maintain "no separate guards" and to utilize the Eighth's medical facilities.⁵³ A correspondent among the Indiana volunteers wrote home that contrary to expectations Huggins was very solicitous of their welfare. Gossip in the camp even had it

state fairground was the approach of the fair. See Mount to Alger, August 13, 1898, Mount Correspondence.

⁵¹ *Indianapolis Journal*, August 30, 1898; *Indianapolis Freeman*, September 3, 1898.

⁵² Corbin to Mount, August 14, 1898, Mount to Corbin, August 14, 1898, Mount Correspondence.

⁵³ Corbin to Mount, August 29, 1898, Mount Correspondence; Jacob H. Porter to Corbin, August 29, 1898, File No. 91570, Records of the Office of the Adjutant General; General Order No. 33, September 2, 1898, Companies A and B, Indiana Colored Volunteers, Regimental Book Records, Records of the Office of the Adjutant General.

that the colonel had never expressed any opposition to Negro officers.⁵⁴

After a month at Fort Thomas, the two Indiana companies were transferred along with the Eighth Infantry to Chickamauga Park, Georgia, near Chattanooga, Tennessee. At the time, these units, with a total of 1,500 men, were the only soldiers stationed at Chickamauga, and the black volunteers were well aware that their presence was a source of considerable concern among whites. They were constantly reminded by their officers and by visiting dignitaries as well of the necessity "to be better men in every respect in order to receive what is due you."⁵⁵ The men themselves seem to have been keenly aware of the additional burden that their race placed upon them and attempted to avoid behavior which could be cited in support of the claim by some whites that Negro soldiers were unruly and insubordinate when commanded by Negro officers. The Indiana soldiers took especial pride in their military bearing and in the proficiency they exhibited on the parade ground. They began to refer to themselves as "The Indiana Invincibles."⁵⁶

For white residents in the vicinity of Chickamauga Park, however, the military proficiency of the black volunteers stationed there was of far less moment than their conduct outside the camp, and good conduct was measured by the degree to which the volunteers conformed to local racial mores. Experiences earlier in the year with black soldiers of the regular army had aroused considerable hostility toward Negroes in uniform. Like the black regulars, the volunteers showed little inclination to abide by the segregation practices in saloons, cafes, and especially on the railroad between Chattanooga and Chickamauga Park. The tension between white civilians and black soldiers reached a climax early in November when a volunteer from Indiana refused to leave his seat in a railway car reserved for whites and "take one assigned to colored people." The incident created a stir in the local press and set off a barrage of rumors about

⁵⁴ Indianapolis *Freeman*, September 10, 1898.

⁵⁵ Chattanooga *Daily Times*, October 10, 1898.

⁵⁶ Indianapolis *Freeman*, September 10, October 15, November 12, December 24, 1898; Eli L. Huggins to Porter, September 7, 1898, Regimental Book Records, Records of the Office of the Adjutant General; Chattanooga *Daily Times*, October 10, 1898; Indianapolis *Recorder*, January 28, 1899.

an impending race war.⁵⁷ In a strong protest to the secretary of war concerning the affair, the mayor of Chattanooga requested that all black troops be removed at once from Chickamauga Park.⁵⁸ Colonel Huggins countered with a defense of the black volunteers and informed the War Department that white citizens magnified and distorted "every instance of misconduct on the part of colored soldiers." He declared: "My colored officers and men have quietly submitted to slights and insults which would not be patiently borne by white troops."⁵⁹ The colonel pressed the local newspapers to investigate the validity of stories which they published about Negro soldiers. Such an investigation by one editor, J. E. MacGowan of the Chattanooga *Daily Times*, resulted in a full apology. MacGowan wrote Colonel Huggins:

Allow me to apologize for the absurd reports that have appeared in this newspaper concerning alleged bad conduct on the part of some of your officers and men. The publisher and myself are much exasperated over the reporter's break. I do not think he will make a similar one soon.

As for our mayor asking the Secretary of War to take your command elsewhere, that only shows that we have an unwise man for mayor. He represents nobody in this matter—at least nobody of account.⁶⁰

This apology, coupled with Colonel Huggins' strong defense of the black volunteers under his command, thwarted the effort to have the troops transferred elsewhere.

In his confidential communications with the War Department regarding the friction between Negro soldiers and white civilians, Huggins was always careful to distinguish between the men of his own regiment and those of the Indiana companies and to absolve the former of any wrongdoing. He felt that the training of his own men precluded any serious breaches of discipline but claimed that the same could not be said of the Indiana volunteers. "I have done what I could to discipline these [Indiana] companies," he wrote the adjutant general, "but they had been several months in service before they came under my command and having their own

⁵⁷ Chattanooga *Daily Times*, April 24, 25, October 23, 24, 25, 1898.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, November 3, 4, 19, 1898; E. W. Watkins to Alger, November 3, 1898, File No. 15473, Huggins to Corbin, November 12, 1898, File No. 157536, Records of the Office of the Adjutant General.

⁵⁹ Huggins to Corbin, November 10, 1898, File No. 157499, Records of the Office of the Adjutant General.

⁶⁰ J. E. MacGowan to Huggins, November 23, 1898, File No. 154749, *ibid.*



CORPORAL PETER W. BARNETT
Co. A, First Indiana Infantry,
U. S. V.

The subject of this sketch was born in Livingston County, Ky. Attended the schools there, and also his home in Illinois. He taught for a short time in the schools of Kentucky; came to Indianapolis in 1891, and soon after spent some time attending high school. He spent two years attending the Indiana State Normal school at Terre Haute, Ind., receiving the recommendation of the president of that institution. Returning, he engaged as general and soliciting agent with the Union Publishing Company of Indianapolis. He was for

some time connected with the Indianapolis Freeman, also the World as reporter. Together with J. T. V. Hill, he published the Colored Business Directory of Indianapolis of 1898, giving valuable information concerning the advancement of the colored citizens of the city. Some time previous to enlisting, Mr. Barnett began the study of law and was associated with J. T. V. Hill. Since the Indiana companies have been stationed at Chickamauga he has been the regular correspondent for The Recorder. Should the companies go to the West Indies, he will continue to furnish valuable information to the readers of The Recorder.

Reproduced from the Indianapolis Recorder, January 14, 1899

colored captains who were their neighbors at home and familiar with them, they are more self-assertive and less respectful in their demeanor than the men of my regiment."⁶¹ Although Huggins admitted that the press reports of misconduct by the black Indianians were "distorted and exaggerated," he nonetheless made it clear that he considered them something less than model soldiers.⁶²

In October, 1898, Colonel Marion Maus, an inspection officer, visited the camp of the Indiana companies and transmitted to the War Department a lengthy report. He complimented "the good appearance" of the men and declared that "both companies appear to be as well drilled as those of the 8th [Infantry]." Maus continued: "I found that as a rule the officers could give commands fairly well and could drill companies." Despite such compliments he recommended that the two companies be mustered out. To justify this recommendation his report cited the "poor condition" of the company records which resulted from the fact that all officers except Lieutenant James H. Thomas were "insufficiently educated to hold commissions." Maus was particularly shocked to discover that neither of the captains knew what constituted a government ration. He also indicated that like so many other volunteer outfits, those from Indiana were inspired more by political than military considerations. The Indiana companies, he had been told, "were organized by Senator Fairbanks." In taking note of the racial factor Colonel Maus wrote: "I do not think it is for the best interests of the service to have these two [Indiana] companies attached to the 8th Regiment. The captains of that regiment are white and these are colored, and a distinction is thus made. I have found that there was an objection There seemed to be a slight friction which, however, was not pronounced." Even though Colonel Maus thought that the Indiana companies should be mustered out, he nevertheless recommended "that such of the men that desire to remain in service should be assigned to fill vacancies in the [immune] regiments," because they were "good men as a rule and on account of their instruction would be most desirable to fill vacancies in the regiments named." Notwithstanding these recommendations,

⁶¹ Huggins to Corbin, November 11, 1898, File No. 157536, *ibid.*

⁶² Huggins to Corbin, November 12, 1898, File No. 157499, *ibid.*

the Indiana companies remained in service until the general disbandment of the volunteer army began early in 1899.⁶³

Throughout their three months at Chickamauga the men of the Indiana units continued to believe that they would ultimately be assigned garrison duty in Cuba. A majority of them apparently were enthusiastic about the prospect.⁶⁴ In mid-November their hope of immediate transfer to the island was squelched by orders from the War Department directing both the Eighth Infantry and the Indiana volunteers to remain at Chickamauga through the winter. To break the monotony of camp life the men engaged in various sports and musical activities, attended a class in law conducted by a member of the Eighth Infantry who was an attorney by profession, and established a reading room with the help of the Soldiers' Aid Society of Indianapolis. Corporal Willis O. Tyler of Bloomington, formerly a barber and part time student at the state university, conducted a class in Spanish for the black volunteers as preparation for duty in Cuba, which was expected to be their assignment in the spring. Contrary to such expectations, the Indiana companies received news early in January that they were due to be mustered out before the end of the month.⁶⁵ Prior to the scheduled time, a dozen of the Indiana volunteers transferred to the Eighth Infantry on the erroneous assumption that the regiment would be sent to Cuba. In fact, the Eighth never left Chickamauga and remained in service less than two months after the Indiana companies were mustered out.⁶⁶

On January 20, 1899, the black volunteers from Indiana left Chickamauga for home. Their return was celebrated at

⁶³ "Report of an Inspection of Company A and B, 1st Indiana, by Lt. Col. Marion Maus," Appendix 7 of Army War College, "The Colored Soldier in the United States Army" (typescript copy, United States Army Military History Collection, Carlisle Barracks, Pa.), 32-34. See also Chattanooga *Daily Times*, October 13, 1898.

⁶⁴ See "Camp Notes" and correspondents' special reports which appeared nearly every week in the Indianapolis *Freeman*, November 5, 1898-January 28, 1899. Willis O. Tyler's reminiscences of camp life describe some of the soldiers' less wholesome diversions. See Indianapolis *Recorder*, February 11, 1899.

⁶⁵ Indianapolis *Freeman*, November 12, December 3, 1898; Indianapolis *World*, December 10, 17, 31, 1898; Indianapolis *Recorder*, January 7, 14, 28, 1899; John J. Buckner to Mount, January 5, 1899, Mount Correspondence. According to the records in the office of the Indiana University registrar, Tyler eventually received an A.B. degree in history in 1902.

⁶⁶ Indianapolis *Recorder*, January 14, 28, 1899.

the Bethel A.M.E. Church in Indianapolis with a banquet sponsored by the Soldiers' Aid Society and attended by Negro citizens from throughout the state. The ex-soldiers marched into the church while a large choir sang "John Brown's Body." Various speakers extolled their patriotism and predicted that their military service would inaugurate a new era in the quest for racial justice. "This ends the beginning of a new chapter of Negro history in America," Knox exclaimed.⁶⁷

As for the volunteers, most of them returned to civilian life and probably were unable to detect any evidence of the new day proclaimed by these speakers. In the spring of 1899, twenty-two Indiana Negroes, mostly former members of the black companies, enlisted in the regular army and prepared to take part in the military campaign in the Philippine Islands. Later in the year, James H. Thomas and James F. Powell, also former members of the state's volunteer units, received commissions in the Forty-eighth and Forty-ninth infantries, two black regiments recruited by the War Department specifically for service in the Philippines.⁶⁸ Denied an opportunity for combat in Cuba, these black Indianians took up the White Man's Burden in the Pacific and rendered important service to a cause which had become unpopular with many black Americans.⁶⁹

The experience of the black volunteers from Indiana offered a dramatic example of the controversy created throughout the United States by the demand for Negro officers.⁷⁰ The action of Governor Mount in mustering out the black militiamen on the eve of the war rather than allowing them to become integrated into the regimental structure of the national guard was wholly consistent with the policy of

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, January 28, 1899; *Indianapolis Freeman*, January 28, 1899. Rosters of Companies A and B as of their muster out date are in Gore, *Record of Indiana Volunteers in the Spanish-American War*, 345-52, and W. D. Pratt, pub., *A History of the National Guard of Indiana* (Indianapolis, 1901), 389-92.

⁶⁸ *Indianapolis Recorder*, May 6, September 9, 16, 1899. For the complete rosters of the officers of the Forty-eighth and Forty-ninth infantries, see *Congressional Record*, 56 Cong., 1 Sess., Appendix, 442-43.

⁶⁹ See George P. Marks, III, "Opposition of Negro Newspapers to American Philippine Policy, 1899-1900," *Midwest Journal*, IV (Winter, 1951-1952), 1-25.

⁷⁰ For a brief account of this controversy, see Fletcher, "Negro Soldier and the United States Army," 235-36.

the War Department and with the practice of states such as Illinois and Ohio. Like the Republican governors of those states, Mount was keenly aware of the small but significant black vote, and political considerations undoubtedly figured in his effort to gain for black Indianians some measure of representation in the volunteer forces recruited in the state. But whatever the motivation, the pressure exerted by the governor and by Senator Fairbanks in behalf of Negro volunteers caused the War Department to modify its racial policy—a change which made it easier for other states to muster in Negro units with complete rosters of Negro officers. It was perhaps ironic that Indiana, which could claim credit for modifying the War Department regulations, should be, in the words of a black editor, “one of the last and least with her two companies.”⁷¹

⁷¹ Indianapolis *World*, July 23, 1898.