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CHAPTER TWO

COLE AND JOHNSON’S SOCIAL AND POLITICAL THOUGHT

The Case of Shoo Fly Regiment and the Spanish-American War

Bob Cole was one of the real geniuses of our race as a writer, producer, and actor... (WILL MARION COOK)

Bob Cole was associated with James Weldon Johnson and his brother J. Rosamond Johnson in the writing of some of his greatest songs; but their help was simply of the mechanical sort—Bob was the genius. (WILL MARION COOK)

As early as 1893, Bob Cole began collecting data on U.S. imperialistic projects, which enlightened the production of The Shoo Fly Regiment, set during the Spanish-American War. Cole placed an illustration of the sinking of the battleship Maine in the water near Havana in his scrapbook with the heading “We Have to Remember.” Cole also kept clippings on African American soldiers who played an integral role in fighting the Spanish-American War. From these clippings, we can conclude that Cole maintained an acute awareness of the heroism of black soldiers and of the destructive nature of war.

Cole most certainly knew what was at stake in the United States, Cuba, and the Philippines: that blacks faced white lynch mobs here while Filipinos faced U.S. armies; that black soldiers fought against the Filipinos, another aggrieved group; and that black and mulatto Cubans had achieved civil rights through their insurgent war against Spain while the United States denied
African Americans rights in their own country while still expecting them to fight to free the Cubans from Spanish rule.

The setting of *The Shoo Fly Regiment* in Cuba and the Philippines within the Spanish-American War proved a subversive and political act. Cole attempted to educate both black and white audiences through *The Shoo Fly Regiment*, by including black men as soldiers who ultimately win the war. Additionally, by creating sympathetic Filipino characters within the production, Cole not only humanized the Filipinos, but also presented them as allies to African Americans, and replicated some of the real-life relations that developed between the Filipinos and the African American soldiers. By placing African American men within the context of a war fought against other people of color, Cole and Johnson found themselves stuck within the framework of structural racism. This framework denied blacks and other people of color overseas basic human rights while at the same time it promised African Americans citizenship and inclusion by fighting against these very people of color. *The Shoo Fly Regiment* also appeared during a time when the fear of black insurrection weighed heavily on the white imagination; the black, mulatto, and white Cuban insurrection against Spain acted as a reminder of the black “threat” in the United States.

James Weldon Johnson and J. Rosamond Johnson’s political thought coincided with Bob Cole’s in relation to the war. Before the formation of their partnership, Cole was preserving newspaper articles on the Spanish-American War while on tour with *A Trip to Coontown*, while the Johnsons made their foray into the New York musical theater scene with a musical based on the war. Johnson noted in his 1931 farewell speech to the NAACP that he and J. Rosamond Johnson moved to New York in 1899 to pursue a career in the theater. He recalled that they wrote a satiric musical about the Spanish-American War and upon their arrival in New York shopped the show around to theatrical people in the hopes of getting it produced. Johnson recalled that Oscar Hammerstein and many others rejected the show’s premise. Johnson asserted that although his show was well written, he felt the reason for its rejection lay in the fact that “producers feared it was unpatriotic. [He recalled that] The Spanish-American War had just closed, and the opera, first called *Tolosa* and afterwards *The Czar of Zam*, attempted to satirize the new American imperialism.”

*The Shoo Fly Regiment* epitomized Cole and Johnson’s effort to educate blacks and whites about the achievements of African Americans. The March 2, 1907, issue of the *Indianapolis Freeman* proposed, “The play covers very thoroughly, and teaches most useful lessons concerning American Negro
life.”\(^5\) *The Shoo Fly Regiment* performed this service by offering audiences a fully integrated plot in three acts, a departure from the previous forms of musical theater, which failed to use interconnected story lines. Cole and Johnson advertised the show as “The First American Negro Play,” and *The New York Age* reported, “all the songs of the piece are written to fit the character that will render them,” which indicates that the storyline and the music remained interrelated.\(^6\) The music offered a unique innovation for the time period with the use of ragtime, grand opera, and plantation-style melodies.\(^7\)

**Shoo Fly Regiment Summary**

The story revolves around the romance of Ned Jackson, a Tuskegee graduate, and Rose Maxwell, the daughter of the principal of Lincolnville Institute. The conflict in the story surfaces when Professor Maxwell refuses to give his consent to their marriage. Because of this turn of events, Ned Jackson joins the army to fight the Spanish-American War in the Philippines. In the military battle scenes, which included a chorus of black soldiers, he emerges as a hero because of “acts of personal bravery” which garnered him military honors. The emergence of Jackson as the hero in the Spanish-American War in the Philippines replicated the actual accomplishments of the black military. *The Cincinnati Enquirer* underscored the fact that “the chorus of men look quite convincing as soldiers.”\(^8\)

The secondary plot of the show centered on Cole’s character Hunter Wilson, the janitor of Lincolnville Institute. Hunter Wilson marries Ophelia, the Village Pride, a widow with ten children. *The Wheeling Daily News* described Cole’s character as somewhat of a social climber, a man who is “ambitious to shine in society.”\(^9\) This review identified Cole as the comedian of the production, as the “chief fun maker” who offered the viewers “violent laughter running through the show.” In Carriebel Cole Plummer’s fictional rendering of Cole’s life “What’s in a Song,” the character who represented Plummer, Mrs. Kingston, states, “Yes he was a funny soldier in his ‘Shoo Fly Regiment.’ A brave soldier in the thickest of the battle where the bullets were thickest, he would say, ‘In the ammunition wagon.’ A natural Negro comedian and never used cork to add to his comedy.”\(^10\) Comedic female impersonator Andrew Tribble portrayed Ophelia, the Village Pride, which reflected the trend in African American cultural productions. African Americans incorporated female impersonation into minstrelsy and vaudeville, but, according to Ann Marie Bean, female impersonation remained minor in
these forms of entertainment. One of the sequences in the play revolved around a scene in the Philippines with Grizelle the Filipino dancer, played by Siren Nevarro, and African American Lieutenant Dixon, played by Theodore Pankey.

The resolution of the show presented Ned Jackson as the hero of the war, heralded and celebrated by those at the school and in the town. With this turn of events, Professor Maxwell grants Ned Jackson permission to marry his daughter. The last act also included Cole and Johnson in a “singing sketch” reminiscent of their “old days in vaudeville.”

Cole and Johnson included settings and situations that replicated actual events in African American life, as the Indianapolis Freeman aptly noted: “the old plantation home filled with fidelity to the traditions of the past,” the Lincolnville Institute reception hall with the male student “wooing the dusky maid in classic English,” and in the performances of “the cultured song, or piano rhapsodies, in all these various phases reality appears, the eloquence of truth speaks.”

**Uplift and Shoo Fly Regiment**

While Cole and Johnson utilized some minstrel modes and stereotypes, including a female impersonator, Pickaninnies, and songs with Southern-themed titles such as “Southland,” and “I Will Always Love Old Dixie,” they made progressive changes in African American theater. One of the most important and significant advances offered by the team included a change in the representation of African American characters. They discarded the stereotypical images of Zip Coon, Jim Crow, and Mammy and replaced them with black men as heroic, patriotic, educated, and loving, and black women as literate, virtuous, and romantic.

Cole and Johnson incorporated three important uplift strategies within The Shoo Fly Regiment: education as an important tool of uplift for the black community, the depiction of black men as masculine through their participation in the Spanish-American War, and the use of a serious love scene. Their inclusion of African American women within the uplift agenda, while perhaps appearing to communicate heteronormative patriarchal ideology, actually rearticulated Booker T. Washington’s progressive approach to gender equality at Tuskegee Institute. As for why the inclusion of a serious love scene and African American men as stouthearted is so significant in African American characterizations, we must look at why proscriptions existed.
The prohibition against the portrayal of realistic love scenes between African Americans existed to consign them to a marginal place in society, to control African Americans, and, most significantly, to mask the humanity of African Americans. In 1906 Ada Overton Walker asserted that African Americans wanted to present theatrical productions just as “beautiful and as artistic in every way as do the white actors,” but that African American performers confronted racist barriers, including the love scene taboo and “ten thousand” other obstacles, which limited the ways in which they could craft their shows due to white hegemony. The interdiction existed to dehumanize African Americans and to argue that they did not experience the full spectrum of human emotions as whites, thus justifying their oppression. The taboo against portrayals of African American men as manly and heroes of war existed for several reasons. First, the African American male posed a threat to white male hegemony by contesting their consigned position as slaves and marginal workers. Their masculinity also proved dangerous to white power because the African American male body became unmanageable and difficult to control. The risk of their demanding equality in the United States loomed large given their show of patriotism through their male power. African American men as warriors fighting U.S. wars might expose the weakness of the white male body and threaten white supreme power if African American men proved the victors of the war. Finally, the image of African American males with weapons brought into the forefront of white supremacists minds the risk of an African American uprising in the United States. By white supremacists I am talking about ordinary white men and women in the North and South, as well as those belonging to organizations such as the Ku Klux Klan who believe in white domination and the subjugation of nonwhites. The use of the Spanish-American War offers one of the most interesting aspects of the plot given the role that black men played within this war.

The Spanish-American War and Black Masculinity

The concept of manliness developed significantly between the Civil War and World War I. The prevailing definition of manliness in the late 1800s placed white men at the center as noble, worthy, strong, brave, independent in spirit, and magnanimous. Gail Bederman argues that the subjugation of the “lower races” through white masculine power and racial and gender dominance proved necessary in order to assert the myth of the ideal man as white and to
maintain the power structure. Davarion L. Baldwin argues that both Booker T. Washington’s and W. E. B. Du Bois’s ideologies regarding African American masculinity revolved around edifying African American men, raising their rank in U.S. society, and, most importantly, “the repression or at least disciplining of the body toward ‘higher’ moral ideals.”

Booker T. Washington employed the Spanish-American War to locate African American men at the core of masculinity through Victorian morals, education, and battle. Washington contended that education provided an avenue in which African American men could assert their manliness. Washington also incorporated war into his discourse on black masculinity in *A New Negro for a New Century*, where he tendered a not so veiled response to Roosevelt’s demeaning remarks concerning the stoutheartedness of the black soldiers of the Spanish-American War. Washington dedicated several chapters to the heroism of the black soldier beginning with the Revolutionary War and included the writings of many of the African American soldiers who contested Roosevelt’s depiction of them. Washington asserted that Roosevelt’s account “makes very nice reading, but it is not history, in which it is always hazardous to sacrifice truth to make a period round.” In response to the new ideologies concerning masculinity, Cole and Johnson created new perceptions of black manliness by incorporating some of the ideas from the white manliness movement, including proving one’s masculinity through war, prizefighting, the conquest of the West, and education. They defined black masculinity by reference to the Spanish-American War, just as Theodore Roosevelt used the conflict as a test of white manhood. Cole and Johnson attempted to redefine black masculinity by proving the black male manly and civil, thus deserving of full citizenship.

Bob Cole, J. Rosamond Johnson, and James Weldon Johnson propounded that scholarship and education proved key qualities for their ideal, masculinized, black man. They succeeded in projecting this image through publicity in the media about their college careers. Books by Shakespeare and Balzac, as well as music and other literary volumes, characterized Cole and Johnson’s studio as a place of erudition, all of which added to the narrative of the team as both educated and refined. As part of their strategy of redefining black masculinity, Cole and Johnson used the manly sport of boxing and the career of Jack Johnson to aggrandize African American men.

**Jack Johnson: The Hypermasculine African American Übermensch**

*We are in the midst of a growing menace. The black man is rapidly forging*
In 1895 Dana likened black superiority in boxing to the loss of white supremacy, which foreshadowed the rise of the ultimate representation of black male power, Jack Johnson. Before Johnson, whites dominated the sport and used boxing to prove their masculinity and physical prowess. When Johnson asserted his manliness by defeating whites and flaunting his middle-class status, he proved that black men were a force to be reckoned with. He challenged the discourse of black male inferiority, proved that the black male body symbolized a source of supreme power, incited fear by displaying the vulnerability of the white male body, and raised the hopes of the African American community.

Frederick Douglass typified the power of the black male body in his physical resistance to slavery through his triumphant battle against the slave breaker Covey. Douglass realized the full potency of his body—“I was nothing before; I was a man now.” Douglass’s victory marked how the black male slave body came to represent a commination to hegemony and led to the invention of the black male as an irrepressible sexual threat to white womanhood, what James Baldwin referred to as a “walking phallic symbol.” White supremacists participated in violence to control the black male body, like the 1899 “race war” in Blossburg, Alabama, where whites accused African American Johnson Shepard of sexual assault and attacked armed blacks, murdering four. The black male child’s body also proved dangerous, as the October 1958 “Kissing Case” of Monroe, North Carolina demonstrated with the arrest of nine-year-old Hanover Thompson and seven-year-old David Simpson, both charged with rape punishable by death, because a white girl kissed Thompson.

All learned that the black male body remains sinister. A strategy used to dominate the black male body included theorizing that it was inherently different and foreign from whites, in need of containment through enslavement, lynching, stereotypes, laws, incarceration, military training, and rendering it impotent.

Many of the theories surrounding the black male body appeared to be crystallized in the body of Jack Johnson, the hypermasculine African American übermensch, the New Negro, prepotent in body and regnant over hegemony, a menace to white male dominion while at the same time personifying the authoritative ideal of masculinity and power. Johnson promoted racial superiority, exhibited pride in his African heritage, and physically fought white power and anyone who offended him. Johnson fashioned a public persona as a super-confident, erudite sophisticate, a sportsman who graced...
the cover of Les Sports Illustrés and attended the Grand Prix; a world traveler; a master of many languages, including French and Latin; and a wealthy connoisseur of fine things such as fast, expensive cars and luxurious clothing. As part of his persona he publicly paraded and courted the forbidden and dangerous—white women. He squired them around the world, married them, and brashly taunted white men and their lynch laws through these associations. These actions added to his celebrity and the perception that he was one all-powerful black man who unequivocally refused the designation of degraded black male.

In 1908 a bellicose Johnson sought the heavyweight title from Tommy Burns, who repeatedly rebuffed him for fear that it would dishonor the white race. The cartoon “The Man They All Dodge,” illustrates this. It depicts a well-muscled Johnson in a checkered suit and reads “Jack Johnson in street togs.” He holds a cigar in his right hand and sports a diamond ring on his left. His face is drawn beautifully, with a shaven head, prominent forehead and nose, smooth lips, and expressive eyes gazing right. In the background are “coons” with large eyes and lips. One peeks from behind a door and states, “Mistah Johnson is still waiting for Tommy Burns.” They do not detract from Johnson’s powerful image; rather they advance Johnson as the hypermasculine African American übermensch. Omitted are the boxers who “all dodge” Johnson, which exposes their hypocrisy.

White racists calling for the preservation of the white man’s honor dragged Jim Jeffries out of retirement, away from his farm, off the vaudeville circuit, and into the ring, where in July 1910 Johnson annihilated him, further exposing the white male body as impotent, which resulted in lynchings and pandemonium. To preserve white power, white newsmen painted Johnson as beastlike and comedic. In 1925 they reported, “‘Mr. Jeffries,’ said Jack, his lips parting in a big grin, ‘ain’t no use in talking. Dis is one time you’se met yo Waterloo! Jes’ go an tell em I said so. Yas sir—Waterloo is right!’ This exemplifies the tactics used to depose him. Johnson utilized the media to counter misrepresentation and carefully shaped a public persona as a master of English. On July 5, 1910, Johnson avowed “I won from Mr. Jeffries because I outclassed him in every department of the fighting game. Before I entered the ring I was certain I would be the victor. I never changed my mind at anytime.” Johnson cleverly used “outclass” as a double entendre and asserted that he outclassed Jeffries in the ring, and he outclassed Jeffries, a farm boy out of the ring, as a refined, stylishly dressed black man with a “beautiful” white wife. Johnson incensed racists, for they could not control him, and he taunted their lynch laws by flaunting his white wives. Johnson’s
vaingloriousness drew the admiration of some in the black community, such as W. E. B. Du Bois, and the ire of others, such as Booker T. Washington.

In 1913 Dubois cleverly used Johnson’s interracial marriages to promote the protection of African American women so that “that white men shall let our sisters alone,” while also exposing the degenerate behavior of white southern men toward African American women. Conversely Washington felt Johnson disgraced the race by marrying white, violating the Mann Act, and living a flamboyant lifestyle, which did not fit his uplift ideology. Many African Americans like Cole and Johnson idolized Johnson for his prowess, his kindly demeanor, and his ascendance as the hypermasculine superman, while not giving weight to his choice in women.

Cole and Johnson befriended Jack Johnson around 1905; James Weldon Johnson described him as the most interesting person he had ever met, a very likeable, affable, gentle person with his soft-spoken “Southern speech and laughter” and a sad face “until he smiled.” At this early juncture in Jack Johnson’s career his physical strength and expertise remained praiseworthy, ever present, and something that many, including Cole and Johnson, wanted to emulate. James Weldon Johnson immersed himself in Jack Johnson’s masculine power through the “manly art of self-defense.” Johnson states that “Jack often boxed with me playfully, like a good-natured big dog warding off the earnest attacks of a small one, but I could never get him to give me any serious instruction.” Although Jack Johnson did not take their lessons seriously, James Weldon Johnson admired Johnson greatly and felt that he represented African American male power. Johnson wrote that Jack Johnson symbolized all African American men and their masculinity, and that when faced with the myth of Anglo-Saxon physical and intellectual superiority “the black man did not wilt.” With this statement James Weldon Johnson fused together all African American men with Jack Johnson and put forth that the African American male communally claimed his power over white hegemony as their own. By offering Douglass’s endorsement of Jackson as a race man James Weldon Johnson merged Jack Johnson and Peter Jackson together to argue that Jack Johnson also ennobled the race. James Weldon Johnson followed Douglass’s ideology concerning sports and uplift and linked Jack Johnson with masculinity and the physical joy of sports, as an approach to apotheosizing black men.
Cole and Johnson and the Hypermasculine African American Übermensch

For a portion of the African American community, Jack Johnson represented the restoration of the African American male body from slavery and oppression to redemption, potency, and power. So it is no wonder that Cole and Johnson would use their bodies and their manliness to redeem the African American male in U.S. society. Like Jack Johnson, the Cole and Johnson team showed their masculinity through their bodies. Newspaper articles described Cole and Johnson’s physical prowess in athletics (especially boxing), thus helping to redefine black masculinity and encouraging the belief that black males deserved full rights and privileges of citizenship. A newspaper article in *The World* described Rosamond as “best developed about the chest, arms and hands. His chest expansion is six inches. Cole is best developed in the legs, back and muscles of the stomach.”

The *New York Age* reported that Cole and the Johnsons’ daily physical regimen began at seven-thirty in the morning with “systematic exercise,” including a little boxing. Accomplished at golf, swimming, football, and baseball, the trio competed in these sports as they did at Atlanta University. Their studio resembled a gym, complete with rowing machines, parallel bars, punching bags, dumbbells, “Indian Clubs,” “African weapons of warfare” including the flail of a Zulu Chieftain, assegais, boomerangs, and bolos.

The Cleveland *Plain Dealer* stated that while Bob Cole and James Weldon boxed regularly every morning, Rosamond “does not indulge in boxing on account of his piano playing.”

Sports played a significant role in the uplift agenda and ideology of Cole and Johnson and the *New York Age*. By using the print media to redefine blackness as respectable and masculine, the team worked to educate blacks as well as whites by positioning themselves and the members of the company as role models in the quest for black racial uplift. During the tour of *The Red Moon*, a series of articles on the physical prowess of the company ran in the papers. In one, Lester Walton reported that Theodore Pankey “is doping out all the theatrical baseball teams. He can tell you about baseball away back in the ’70’s.” On January 10, 1910, Walton reported that *The Red Moon* company organized a baseball team named The Cole and Johnson Giants. Henry Gant, who played Bill Gibson in the show, used his expertise as a former member of the professional team the Cuban Giants to captain the Cole and Johnson Giants. According to Walton, Gant “carefully arrang[ed] a system of signals for use this coming year.” *The Red Moon* company participated in charity games, including one against Howard University on the campus,
and a charity event played for the benefit of the Washington, D.C., Y.M.C.A. building fund.  

While performing in Toronto, Canada, the company entered a championship skating match at the Crystal Palace on February 4, 1910. The Cole and Johnson Giants learned and played ice hockey, with Sam Lucas as the goalie. Walton described Cole as “a baseball fan of the thirty-third degree,” who, when in Washington D.C., watched a baseball game between the Ridgewood-Royal Giants and the Royal Giants-Philadelphia at Melrose Park. Walton reported that Cole remained in ill humor at a game because his favorite team, the New York Giants, displayed an embarrassing losing streak. Carriebel Plummer described his longstanding affinity with baseball as originating in his boyhood when he excelled at sports and belonged to a baseball team in Athens, and eventually pitched on the Atlanta University baseball team with Johnson. Cole’s dedication to sports proved a lifelong passion and offered an avenue in which Cole and Johnson could create an African American masculinity infused with veneration and uplift.

Just as Theodore Roosevelt connected white masculinity with expansion to the West and the Indian Wars, Cole and Johnson also chose the West to define their masculinity. The World maintained that the team lived in the West for several years after college, where they showed off their athletic skills. In an article for the New York Age the author described James Johnson’s expertise as a runner and a sheepherder as almost superhuman. J. Rosamond Johnson recounted that while driving sheep to flock without his bronco, James Weldon ran faster than four jackrabbits.

Cole and Johnson’s efforts to positively affect the hegemonic discourse on the black male proved daunting given that the print media found ways to stereotype and demean them. For example, the World newspaper article entitled “Athletics Evidently Help Cole and Johnson” included a cartoon, which pictured a blackened Cole and Johnson with big lips and eyes. One of the team is pictured sitting at the piano singing “Under the Bamboo Tree,” while the cartoon depicts the other members of the group boxing. The caption reads, “He may get over it, but he’ll never look the same.” The second cartoon that accompanies the article shows one of the group pictured grotesquely blackened with big lips and eyes, lifting a dumbbell and doing the cakewalk with the caption “Dumbbell Cake Walk.” Created to present Cole and Johnson as monstrous caricatures, these cartoons could not mask the team’s intelligence and dignity that belied the newspaper page as their words revealed their strategy to redefine the black man as educated, talented, physically attractive, and athletic. Through their efforts, a new picture of black masculinity emerged and made its way into the twenty-first century, that of
the supremely powerful African American male who fought ferociously. He would reinvent himself in each subsequent historical period in U. S. history, modeled after the quintessential representation—Jack Johnson.

The athlete, scholar, and performer Paul Robeson embodied this new image of African American masculinity. He was the first black All American football player, playing at Rutgers University between 1915–1919; he played professional football with the Akron Pros (1920, 1921) and the Milwaukee Badgers (1922), and excelled at baseball, basketball and track. He belonged to the prestigious Phi Beta Kappa fraternity, graduated summa cum laude from Rutgers, earned a law degree from Columbia University, mastered many languages including African dialects, Russian, Arabic, and Chinese, and became a musicologist and renowned actor and political activist. Like Cole and the Johnsons, he also displayed his muscular body by posing for photographs, sculptures, and drawings that portrayed him as the definitive black masculine form. Between the 1950s and the 1970s boxer Muhammad Ali used his wit and his body to redefine black masculinity, as the most publicly vocal of the athletes of his era. Ali publicly toyed with his opponents with poetic verve and was compared to Jack Johnson because of his vaingloriousness. Like Cole and Johnson, Ali epitomized black manliness coupled with a politicized ideology, by winning the gold medal at the Olympics in 1960 and “in a gesture of racial defiance of American hypocrisy,” throwing the medal into the river. In 1964 he wrested the heavyweight title from Sonny Liston, courted controversy by studying with Malcolm X, converted to Islam, and changed his name from Cassius Clay to Muhammad Ali. He refused to fight in the Vietnam War in 1966 on religious grounds; became a college spokesperson against the war, and was censured by the New York State boxing commission, which stripped Ali of his title because of his anti-war stance. He won his case against the commission in 1970 and defeated Joe Frazier in 1973 and George Foreman in 1974, regaining the heavyweight title. Ali personified the ultimate hypermasculine African American übermensch. In the 1960s African American masculinity hit its stride with scholar/athlete/activists such as tennis star Arthur Ashe, an anti-apartheid activist, AIDS activist, and advocate for Haitian immigrants, who blossomed into a gentle, graceful black masculine model. The defiant 1968 black nationalist Olympians John Carlos and Tommy Smith, baseball star Hank Aaron, and former San Antonio Spurs children’s advocate David Robinson all embodied the powerful new black male role model through their fusing of athleticism and activism. In *The Shoo Fly Regiment* Cole and Johnson enfolded the hypermasculine African American übermensch and their conception of black masculinity with the manliness of the African American soldiers of the Spanish-American War.
The Restoration of the African American through the Spanish-American War

Many a fair-skinned volunteer goes whole and sound to-day,
For the succor of the colored troops, the battle records say;
And the feud is done forever, of the blue coat and the gray;
All honor the Tenth, at La Quisima.

(ST. JOSEPH RADICAL)

One of the most significant aims of the uplift ideology included African Americans’ pursuit of citizenship rights. The denial of the basic rights of the “common man” such as voting, education, and land ownership motivated W. E. B. Du Bois, Booker T. Washington, and leaders of the uplift ideology to encourage blacks to prove their patriotism to the United States as a basis for claiming the full fruits and benefits of citizenship. Washington encouraged black participation in the Spanish-American War, but noted in the January 1, 1898, Bulletin of Atlanta University that black soldiers aided the United States government even though they encountered apartheid-like laws at home. Washington suggested that the United States “succeeded in every conflict except in the effort to conquer ourselves in blotting out racial prejudices.” He argued that black and white men in the North and South must come to a peaceful resolution, and he hoped that the “trenches that we dug together around Santiago [Cuba] shall be the eternal burial place of all that which separates us in our business and civil relations.” Washington pointed to the heroism of the black soldiers of the Spanish-American War and argued that because of African Americans’ willingness to die for their country, the United States should afford them opportunities. As followers of Washington and DuBois, it remains no surprise that Cole and Johnson placed their heroes within the framework of war, and dealt with the complexities of the role of the black soldier, U.S. racism, and citizenship rights within their productions.

The actual black soldiers who fought this war faced opposition and brutality at home, which prevented them from obtaining basic human rights. Because of the explosion of the U.S. battleship Maine in Havana Harbor, the United States joined the black, mulatto, and white Cuban insurgent war against Spain in February 1898. The United States government expected black soldiers to fight in Cuba while at the same time sanctioning the lynch mob and black disfranchisement in the United States. The Spanish-American War in Cuba lasted approximately six months and ended with the Treaty of Paris that required Spain to relinquish ownership of Cuba and ceded Puerto Rico, the Philippines, and Guam to the United States, making it a colonial power.
This war purported to “free” the Cubans from Spanish rule, but it eventually led to U.S. soldiers fighting against the Filipinos seeking independence from the United States as well as from Spain, turning the war into a campaign against people of color. Amy Kaplan suggests that this war worked as a continuation of the Civil War, an “ideological battle against Reconstruction.” Kaplan argues that two battlefronts emerged: domestic and international, with blacks at the center in a struggle for civil rights. I would like to argue that four battlefronts emerged—the Haitian Revolution, the Civil War, and the Spanish-American War in Cuba and in the Philippines. Nonwhites remained at the axis of these wars, charged with fighting for civil rights. The core of these crusades for independence lay in the aggrieved communities of color’s struggle against European hegemony, and these resistance movements brought into focus the power of people of color. These battles against white domination threatened the concept of white power and white male superiority, which the Spanish-American War represented to white supremacists. The Spanish-American War in the white male imagination worked to reconstruct white masculinity previously destroyed by the Civil War. The hope of restoring white manhood through conquering “the other” would reverberate time and again in U.S. history. By uniting the North and the South “against a common external enemy,” African Americans, and other “lesser” races, the nation would reunite and the white male body would revitalize. The war worked symbolically to prove the vitality, vigor, and manliness of the white male body. It also elucidated the power of people of color in their fight for rights and self-rule. Cole and Johnson wrote *The Shoo Fly Regiment* in effect to rejuvenate the black male body through the Spanish-American War.

The Battle for San Juan Hill proved the most prominent cultural icon of the war. Yet by most accounts this battle resulted in a debacle. The sorry state of the U.S. army caused the military failures because of the amateur white soldiers who suffered deadly casualties. The battle was not even fought on the “romantic” San Juan Hill but rather on the mundane and denigratingly titled “Kettle Hill.” The other prominent cultural icon of the war, Theodore Roosevelt, tried to rewrite his own history and the history surrounding this battle. Roosevelt redefined himself as a manly imperialist, a cowboy, Indian fighter, warring yet civilized, the ultimate great white conqueror of people of color, the hero of the Spanish American War. He defined white men by what they were not—black, brown, or yellow.

The recruits for Roosevelt’s Rough Riders included cowboys, educated men, athletes, Indian fighters, and army personnel. As a Harvard graduate, Roosevelt embodied the civilized white man who in fighting the Spanish American War sacrificed his life of luxury and privilege by taking on the
white man’s burden by fighting for the black, mulatto, and white Cubans. Thus manhood through the Spanish-American War, as illustrated by Roosevelt’s actions, remained connected to his colonialist mentality and his nationalism and racism.

The Spanish-American War provided the perfect opportunity for redefining the black male in the United States, and The Shoo Fly Regiment proved the ideal vehicle. African Americans fought in this war side by side with whites, and consequently a certain segment of the white and African American population in the United States perceived them as heroes for their valor. During the war, both the black and the white press cited the black soldiers for their heroism at San Juan Hill. On their return home the soldiers received honors, with the publication of books recounting their bravery; cities gave them homecoming parades, and the U.S. government bestowed congressional medals on these paragons of doughtiness. The city of Philadelphia paid tribute to the “sable hero,” First Sergeant George Berry and the Tenth Cavalry, at their Peace Jubilee, where Berry was “pelted with roses from the balconies and stands crowded with people.” The print media initially elevated the status of the black soldiers to mythic proportions by recounting their courage in battle. In Black Troopers African American Dr. Miles V. Lynk reported that at La Quisima the black Ninth and Tenth Cavalry rescued the Rough Riders from an ambush by Spanish sharpshooters. One southerner wrote in the Washington Post: “If it had not been for the Negro cavalry, the Rough Riders would have been exterminated. I am not a Negro lover. My father fought with Mosby’s Rangers and I was born in the South, but the Negroes saved that fight. . . .”

The Rough Riders, a group of amateur soldiers, could not really compare to the highly decorated professional black units who had already tested their expertise in battles against Native Americans. Among them stood First Sergeant Berry, who gained his expertise by fighting “the Cheyenne’s, Kiowa’s, Arapahoe’s, Comanche’s, Apaches, and Ute’s in Colorado, Kansas, Texas, and New Mexico.” African American participation in the Indian wars marked a pattern in U.S. history where citizenship rights remained intrinsically linked to fighting other aggrieved communities of color, and seizing their rights and lands. The novel Captain Blackman details this pattern through the experiences of Captain Blackman, who fought in all the U.S. wars to date, including the Indian Wars. Blackman encounters Native American Man in Rain and offers him a meal and Man in Rain provides the following narrative.

[O]ne day you’ll tire of the white man killing you one by one, like stragglers in a buffalo herd, and you’ll fight. That will come long after you’ve helped him kill me. But it will come.
Blackman nodded. That day would surely come, and if it did, and he was still alive and Man in the Rain was still alive, the Indian could have his land back.\textsuperscript{77}

The novel underscores the terrible consequences of black participation in U.S. wars against people of color to gain citizenship rights that Blackman comes to realize will never materialize. The African American soldiers of the Spanish-American War did not have the foresight of Blackman and felt certain that they would gain enfranchisement. For the most part the black soldier exhibited a martial spirit and fought proudly for their rights through this war.

\textbf{Roosevelt and the Black Soldiers}

Contemporary accounts acknowledged the bravery and heroism of the African American soldiers, which threatened to diminish the reputation of the Rough Riders. A year after the war, Theodore Roosevelt created a negative image of the performance by black troops. He wrote that they behaved in a cowardly manner by moving to the back and “[t]his I could not allow, as it was depleting my line on the battlefront.”\textsuperscript{78} In his attempt to debase black soldiers, Roosevelt claimed that they compelled him to draw his revolver, and that he “called out to them that I appreciated the gallantry with which they had fought and would be sorry to hurt them, but that I should shoot the first man who, on any pretense whatever, went to the rear.” At this point Roosevelt asserted that his men could attest that he always kept his word, as he cast the Rough Riders in a silly opera. “[M]y cow-puncher, hunters, and miners solemnly nodded their heads and commented in chorus, exactly as if in a comic opera, ‘He always does, he always does!’”\textsuperscript{79} According to Roosevelt, the black soldiers then “flashed their white teeth at one another and they broke into broad grins, and [he] had no more trouble with them.”\textsuperscript{80} Roosevelt casts the Rough Riders in a comic opera and the African American soldiers in a blackface minstrel show, simultaneously demeaning both groups and ultimately portraying himself as the only real man in the battle. He neglected to state that black soldiers moved to the rear to transport their wounded and to rejoin their regiment according to standard military practice.

Roosevelt’s depiction of them drastically misportrayed their actual heroism. An article saved by Bob Cole entitled “Negroes at Siboney, Too. Twenty-Fourth Infantry’s Work in the Fever Camp” illustrates the role the black soldiers played in the war. The Spanish armies underestimated the black
soldiers and attacked them, believing in their vulnerability. Their strategy failed because of the black soldiers’ valiance, battle skills, and their tactical brilliance. “The Twenty-fourth kept on, meeting the fire from the hilltops unflinchingly, ignoring the galling cross fire, not minding the bullets that pattered on the wire fence ahead.” They stayed on San Juan Hill to relieve other commands during the night and returned to the trenches during the day only to face rain, oppressive heat, and no shelter, persevering and keeping their countenance.

A day after the battle of San Juan Hill the San Francisco Chronicle reported that a Spanish officer told a white American officer that

“[W]e didn’t leave our positions, until we saw creeping on toward us these black men, these Haitians.” “No not Haitians” said the American officer, “but Americans.” Spaniards did not retreat—not even from Americans, until they thought Haitians soldiers were in sight! Every race loving Negro’s heart must swell within him while he reads these lines!

African Americans “swelled with pride,” for they linked the Haitian Revolution and the Cuban Insurgent War with their ongoing fight for freedom in the United States. By merging the black soldiers’ fearlessness with the gallant Haitians, many African Americans came to envision full enfranchisement as obtainable through insurgency. The amalgamating of the black and Haitian soldiers by the Spaniards, who only retreated when they saw them, illuminates the growing strength of the African American man and his threat to hegemony. The fusing of the black and Haitian soldier, the knowledge that black soldiers like Sergeant Bivens held the “The Distinguished Marksman class,” and photographs of black troops bearing arms must have instilled in white supremacists intense fear by elucidating the potential danger of a U.S. black uprising. The courageousness of the “Colored Regiments” and their rescue of Roosevelt and the Rough Riders contested and threatened the very conception of white manhood. The presence of the stouthearted African American soldier magnified the weakening of the white male body and growing black strength. Cole and Johnson took note: The Shoo Fly Regiment reflects their careful reading of the African champions of the Spanish-American War and the Haitian Revolution. While the African American soldiers fought for one colonial power against another, Afro-Cuban commissioned officers and generals manned the Cuban Insurgent War and made up 40 percent of the personnel. Their tactical expertise, which secured Cuba’s victory against Spain, and Cole and Johnson’s knowledge of their existence and their military feats and triumphs surely led the team to center the story
of *The Shoo Fly Regiment* around the war. They could not have missed the irony of two black colonial subjects fighting side by side against white hegemony in Cuba. Cole and the Johnsons must have seen the relationship between the struggles of Africans in Cuba and the U.S. and cleverly used the war for its references to the Haitian Revolution in the show in order to aggrandize African Americans by using the tools of hegemony—conquest, war, and masculinity. By alluding to the Haitian Revolution and by overtly positioning African American soldiers at the axis of the Great White Way, that is, Broadway, Cole and Johnson took a stand against white hegemony and unapologetically and unstintingly propounded black power. The Haitian Revolution and the African American and Afro-Cuban soldiers of the Spanish-American War threatened hegemony at its very core. The Great White conqueror had been conquered on all fronts.

By censuring the black soldiers and making them subordinate, Roosevelt insured the denial of the rights the soldiers hoped for, such as equality within the army and the appointment of black officers. Roosevelt destroyed their heroic narrative by creating a narrative built on stereotypes of black men as weak and unable to take charge unless guided by whites. Several political issues framed this portrayal, the most important being the struggle for the appointment of black commissioned officers. Spanish-American War veteran Corporal William T. Goode noted that when African Americans rallied for commissioned officers and the government refused to comply, many African Americans volunteers resigned rather than allow white officers dominion over them.84 Roosevelt’s account of the war contributed to the argument for white leadership of black soldiers and the argument against black officers, producing a counterplot to the aspirations of African American soldiers who had fought independently. For example, the Twenty-fifth Infantry battled triumphantly under the command of black Colonel First Sergeant S. W. Taliaferro at El Caney, when the white officers were killed “or lay weltering in their life blood.”85

Another political reason for painting the black soldiers as unqualified for battle included the threat of an uprising. African American soldiers’ very presence in the war contested Roosevelt’s vision of a United States as distinctly white and raised the fear of black revolt.86 The black soldier’s role in the war threatened to eradicate Roosevelt’s iconic white, manly, imperialistic vanquisher. Thus Roosevelt retold the tale and placed himself and the Rough Riders at the center of the war. African Americans fully resisted Roosevelt’s account of their role in the war and fought back in the press and in their autobiographies.
For African Americans the pursuit of full citizenship became one of the most important aspects of the uplift movement, and they demanded rights by demonstrating their manhood through war. The Rough Riders’ image was created to symbolize white American masculinity, culture, and progress. Because this war took place against nonwhite people in the Philippines and Cuba, Roosevelt attempted to draw parallels between the Spanish-American War and the war against the Native Americans. Roosevelt wanted to assert the necessity of imperialism through the conquest of “lesser races.” By creating an image of the Rough Riders as representative of American masculine racial power inside the racialized project of imperialism, African American soldiers faced erasure from the discourse on American masculinity. Returning African American soldiers in uniform defied ideas about their masculinity and virility, their place in U.S. society, and traditional stereotypes, which led to violence against them. Black soldiers faced racism and Jim Crow laws on leaving for war and came home to the same repressive conditions, even though they had displayed their patriotic zeal.

They discovered that no matter how many medals and honors they received for their service, their show of patriotism as soldiers aroused a storm of bitter hostility in white racists. African American Sergeant Horace Bivens recounts that when he and the Tenth Cavalry left the West to fight in the Spanish-American War, they encountered thousands of cheering supporters in Madison, Wisconsin, in Illinois, and in Nashville, Tennessee, but as they moved south, Jim Crow greeted them. Bivens writes that in depot waiting rooms and lunchrooms signs read, “Niggers are not allowed inside.” Bivens states “[w]e were traveling in palace cars and the people were surprised that we did not occupy the ‘Jim Crow’ cars, the curse of the South” (emphasis in original). As they stepped out of their assigned positions as a subclass, African American soldiers met tremendous resistance at home, which erupted in harassment and carnage. T. Thomas Fortune reported that upon returning home, black soldiers in Virginia, Georgia, and Florida were subjected to brutal attacks by the “mobocratic ruffianism of Southern soldiers,” and in Georgia white soldiers shot black soldiers “in cold blood.” They refused to tolerate this abuse, however. Private George Washington returned to the United States only to face being maligned and attacked by a white man with a razor. Private Stephan Patterson, who attended the trial of Washington’s attacker, stated, “'[w]e did our duty in Cuba, and we don’t think we should be insulted because we are black.’”

Heightened U.S. racial violence in the form of lynchings of blacks coincided with the Spanish-American War. While black soldiers fought for the United States, neither the Republican party nor the Democratic party showed
a commitment to protect their political or legal rights. Although the Republican party acknowledged black soldiers' participation in the war and hoped for success in fighting against subjugation and condemned lynching as savage, they made no effort to end it.92

James Weldon Johnson’s awareness of violence that blacks experienced daily propelled him to write articles condemning lynching. He argued that lynch laws, which allowed whites in the South to take black men from their beds and from jail, became so common that it failed to arouse notice from the general public. He maintained that the South would fail to flourish and develop its resources due to the laws. Johnson advanced the idea that mob law remained antithetical to a civilized and morally sound government; therefore the South could not join ranks with other Christian societies until it “abolishes such cruel and barbaric practices.” He contended that the South must practice accountability for the rights and safety of all its citizens.93

Beginning with the Black codes in 1865, state after state adopted restrictive policies against African Americans, including grandfather clauses and various tests and qualifications, which ultimately prevented blacks from voting, while exempting whites from these exams. The 1876 withdrawal of federal troops from the South led white supremacists to run amok attacking blacks. Continuing race riots in African American communities, such as Wilmington, North Carolina in 1898, culminated in the murder and mass exodus of the African Americans there.94 White racialized barbarism proved effective in controlling the black population, given that protection by legal means proved nonexistent. For example, African American women had little legal recourse when assaulted by white or black men.95 Rayford Logan suggests that while the South condoned savagery against African Americans, the Northern press condoned the maintenance of white supremacy through “peaceful means.”96

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**Cole and Johnson’s Social and Political Thought**

Cole and Johnson coupled their black masculinist discourse with Roosevelt’s strenuous life rhetoric, as part of a strategy to aggrandize African Americans and to argue that African Americans remained decorous and deserved citizenship rights.97 The team followed Booker T. Washington’s lead by negotiating their support of Theodore Roosevelt while openly criticizing him. Washington steadfastly endorsed Roosevelt and wielded considerable power due to his relationship with him; however, he publicly castigated Roosevelt in
A New Negro for a New Century for his attempt to emasculate and humiliate the African American soldiers of the Spanish American War. Privately Washington asked Roosevelt to reverse his unjust decision to discharge three troops of black soldiers due to the Brownsville Riot in Texas. Cole and Johnson adopted Washington’s position by aligning themselves with Roosevelt while publicly contesting Roosevelt’s abasement of the valorous African American soldiers of the war in their musical The Shoo Fly Regiment.

In 1934 James Weldon Johnson wrote Negro Americans What Now?, in which he laid out a plan of action to gain rights and conquer white racism in the United States. Johnson argued that neither socialism nor isolationism proved good methods for the enfranchisement of African Americans. He offered that negotiating with whites and forming biracial coalitions with whites in organizations such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People offered the best solution. Cole and Johnson’s strategies in combating racism and their alignment to Roosevelt reflected the times in which they lived and the limited but real power which they wielded. While their allegiance to Roosevelt might appear illogical or counterproductive, their use of musical theater to critique Roosevelt and to ennoble the African American fighters in the Spanish-American war remains clever, cunning, and praiseworthy.

Cole and Johnson’s connection to Theodore Roosevelt dates back to 1903, when a cartoon appeared with the copyright of the Judge Company of New York. This cartoon depicted Theodore Roosevelt under a tree with a sign hanging on it that reads “Under the Bamboo Tree” (the title of Cole and Johnson’s most famous song). The heading of the cartoon states “Dee-lighted, We’ll cut the canal, and we ain’t going to let any time go to waste.” Roosevelt is pictured as saying “I like Panama under the Bamboo Tree,” while another sign proclaims that “The Panama Canal will be built.” This cartoon points to Roosevelt’s move as president for U.S. expansionism and imperialism, as well as to popular awareness of the music of Cole and Johnson. The Bulletin of Atlanta University describes the president as bestowing “warm praise” on the music of Cole and Johnson.

Although James Weldon Johnson asserted that he knew “nothing about politics or political organization,” when he joined the Colored Republican Club, at the urging of Charles W. Anderson, he remained fully cognizant and aware of the politics of United States racism and its effects on African Americans. In a paper titled “American Democracy and the Negro,” Johnson equates U.S. democracy with unbending discrimination against African Americans denied “equal protection of the laws and common justice in the courts” and equitable and fair education due to the structural and institu-
tional practice of funding black schools with less money than their white counterparts. Johnson argued that U.S. democracy equals debt peonage; segregation; Jim Crow; inequity in industry; and the mobbing, lynching, and “burning at the stake” of African Americans. On January 13, 1923, Johnson openly contested the Harvard University president’s implementation of segregationists’ policies by separating African American students from white students, thus reversing the school’s previous liberal policy. Johnson warned that “Harvard’s surrender of its tradition and the tradition of liberal America to the slaveholder’s prejudice intensifies the very problem which you as Harvard’s spokesperson are professing to meet.”

Johnson’s writings illuminate his consciousness of U.S. politics and its effects on African Americans. While Johnson might not have been trained as a politico, the reality remains that the foundation of his schooling in politics occurred through the politics of U.S. racism. Most importantly, his training as a lawyer also offered him some insight into the machinations of politics.

At the time that Johnson joined the Colored Republican Club, their primary campaign included the reelection of Theodore Roosevelt. James Weldon Johnson held the position of chairman of the House Committee, in charge of the finances of the organization, and eventually became the president of the club. In addition, as part of the Colored Republican Club, Cole and Johnson wrote the campaign song “Teddy.” The team sent a copy of the song to Theodore Roosevelt, who complimented them on it. Johnson identifies his association with the Colored Republican Club as the time in his life when he became interested in and involved with politics. Because of his work with Charles Anderson in helping to reelect Roosevelt, Booker T. Washington encouraged Elihu Root, Roosevelt’s secretary of state, to appoint Johnson to consular posts in Venezuela and Nicaragua. On February 26, 1906, President Roosevelt appointed James Weldon Johnson consul for Cabello, Venezuela. The U.S. State Department denied Johnson’s attempt to obtain a promotion as consul to Nice. He also became a member of the “Black Cabinet,” which consisted of black men who held positions such as registrar of the treasury, the recorder of deeds of the District of Columbia, the auditor of the Navy Department, assistant United States attorney general, a judge of the municipal court, and the collector for the Port of Washington.”

As chief advisor to the president, Booker T. Washington wielded an enormous amount of power and brokered many of these positions. Johnson writes of a relationship with Roosevelt in 1915 in which they spoke of issues concerning the black race and American expansionism.

In writing The Shoo Fly Regiment Cole and Johnson indited a counter-narrative to the attack on the black male by Roosevelt. They also offered an antithesis to the violence against and murder and dehumanization of Afri-
can Americans. By portraying the black male soldier as hero and the black female subject as educated and feminine, Cole and Johnson in effect used the play to condemn U.S. racial violence and the inhumane treatment of African Americans.

**The Black Soldiers in *Shoo Fly Regiment***

The male soldiers in *The Shoo Fly Regiment* and the character of Ned Jackson challenged white America to dare to deny or ignore black patriotism, citizenship, and heroism. Lester A. Walton wrote that white audiences appeared befuddled and perplexed by the serious portrayals of the black soldiers, but that while white audiences displayed their discomfort, black audience members enjoyed the new form of representation. Similar to Buffalo Bill’s Wild West Show, which reenacted history, Cole and Johnson reclaimed African American historical events and, in restoring history, educated audience members. By recounting the accomplishments of the black soldiers, Cole and Johnson discarded Roosevelt’s distorted narrative and recovered an important part of U.S. history in which African Americans played a central role. Cole and Johnson in effect re-centered the black soldiers’ accomplishments in the war.

The U.S. refusal to appoint African American officers in the Spanish-American War informed Cole and Johnson’s decision to make J. Rosamond Johnson’s character, Edward Jackson, an officer in the production, and to costume him in an officers’ uniform. A review in *The New York Age* informed readers that J. Rosamond Johnson’s Edward Jackson held the position of sergeant, while Bob Cole’s Hunter Wilson initially held the position of private. Both characters received commendations and a higher position in the military on their return from the Philippines. Theodore Pankey also portrayed an officer, while the other male members of the cast portrayed soldiers. In one photograph J. Rosamond Johnson’s costumes actually resembled General Wesley Merritt’s uniform. Johnson’s uniform appeared to be black or blue with a round hat, officer’s stripes, and medal on his chest. He also wore a sword and dagger, which signifies his rank as an officer. Bob Cole’s uniform also resembled an officer’s uniform. He wore a beige uniform with officer’s stripes, a dagger, and binoculars (figure 8).

In another photograph of the team (see figure 12), J. Rosamond Johnson appears in a beige uniform, with officers’ stripes on his arm and chest, a stiff hat with a rim, a medal insignia, and a gun prominently displayed at his side. The inclusion of officers within the production critiqued U.S. hypocrisy and racism. The very presence of black soldiers on the stage in *The Shoo Fly Regi-
perhaps focused audience attention on the fact that the United States government expected African American soldiers to fight in Cuba to free black, mulatto, and white Cubans from Spanish rule while the United States denied African Americans freedom. The weapons on Cole and Johnson’s bodies also referenced the black and white Cuban insurrection against Spain and perchance suggested to viewers black insurrection in the United States. African American soldiers on stage also threatened to bring to light the fact that the black officers made up 40 percent of the Cuban army, while African Americans fought in segregated units and their government refused to commission black officers. Cole and Johnson placed unconcealed messages of
protest within the production by presenting themselves in officers’ uniforms with guns, swords, and daggers.

In replicating the actual acts of black soldiers during war, Cole and Johnson made the flag the most prominent symbol of their heroism. During the Civil War, Sergeant William Carney, who became the flag bearer of the fifty-fourth Massachusetts Regiment, witnessed the color bearer fall in battle. Carney recalled, “I seized the flag and made rapid strides to the front with my regiment, bearing the flag aloft.” All of the white officers lay dead and Carney suffered gunshot wounds, but he continued forward bearing the flag. Upon finding the only surviving officer, Captain Luis F. Emilio, Carney recalled that amid the shouts of the few survivors of the battle that “I responded, amid loud hurrahs, ‘Though shot and shell fell all around, boys, the old flag never touched the ground.”

Similarly, in 1898, at the height of the war, the professional black soldiers in many cases carried the flags of their regiments as well as the flags of the amateur white soldiers who joined the war to prove their masculinity. During the Battle of San Juan Hill, when the Tenth Calvary rushed to support the Rough Riders, Sergeant Peter McCown of Troop E held aloft the colors of the company even while facing an onslaught of bullets. McCown shouted “Let them shoot, they can’t hit this flag.” When the Spanish army did in fact puncture McCown’s flag, he held it aloft and emerged from the battle unharmed. First Sergeant George Berry of the Tenth Cavalry also showed daring and heroism when charging up San Juan Hill in the face of heavy fire “he waved aloft the Stars and Stripes, and planted the colors of his regiment. . . . As he mounted the hill he kept calling as he ran, “‘Dress on the colors, boys! Dress on the colors!’” Inspired by these acts of courage and heroism, Cole and Johnson incorporated “the old flag” in the show, making it the focal point of the finale of The Shoo Fly Regiment. Their song “The Old Flag Never Touched the Ground,” which they dedicated to Sergeant Carney, took center stage in the scene. The show resonated with the historical context of not only the Spanish American War, but the Civil War and the Haitian Revolution as well.

In the show, J. Rosamond Johnson and his “soldiers” captured Allen Hill, replicating the capture of San Juan Hill. Like Sergeant Carney, Sergeant Peter McCown, and First Sergeant George Berry, he stood holding the flag overhead on Allen Hill. The Indianapolis Freeman informed their readers that Johnson’s Ned Jackson in “a very worthy piece of acting stood waving the American flag insisting that it never touched the ground.” They also noted that Cole and Johnson recreated on stage actual events, and that the male chorus, like their real-life counterparts, “march[ed] under ‘Old Glory,’ prepared to lay down
even life itself at that altar of patriotism.” The song and the finale symbolized not only a reappropriation of African American history but also the realization of citizenship rights for African Americans. Cole and Johnson’s script proclaimed that “When the cry came ‘Off to war!’ to the front we proudly bore.” The scene positioned the African American as a patriot.

They used the musical to reappropriate the black soldier’s history of valor in battle and changed black representation by inverting familiar stereotypes of black men as the happy, lazy Sambo, the fast-moving but slow-witted Jim Crow, and the loudly dressed, grandiosely speaking Zip Coon. In their place Cole and Johnson offered the audience black soldiers as courageous heroes of the war, patriots worthy of citizenship rights. The team’s progressive political agenda worked to educate and reappropriate.

Mirroring the African American community, Cole and Johnson held the hope that fighting in war proved blacks eligible for equality and full citizenship in the United States, and The Shoo Fly Regiment reflected this hope. The World, a white-owned newspaper, declared, “Men who have proved their willingness to die for their country are surely entitled, for themselves and for their people, to the ordinary guarantees of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness which every white American claims as a birthright.”

By introducing the black soldiers on stage as military officers, Cole and Johnson used the image of the black male soldier as a form of protest against white-on-black violence. The team envisioned solidarity between the brown-skinned Filipinos, Cubans, and blacks in the war. Placing black soldiers on stage symbolized a strong political stance against white violence, indicating that African Americans would no longer take abuse by whites, that blacks would fight back. This is what J. Rosamond Johnson and the other black actors in uniform stood for, as evidenced by alliances between the Filipino characters and the African American characters within the production. However, this strategy also ran the risk of connecting black inclusion to participation in policing white supremacy’s boundaries of exclusion and subordination.

The Filipino Characters in Shoo Fly Regiment

The two Filipino characters within The Shoo Fly Regiment reflected the duality of hegemony and imperialism. Siren Nevarro portrayed Grizelle, the Filipino Dancer, and Herbert Amos played the Filipino Spy. Bob Cole’s scrapbook allows us to understand his awareness of the duality of U.S. racism and brings to light Cole’s empathy for the Filipino subject due to his
own brushes with U.S. racism and subjugation. Bob Cole saved an illustration from The World dated November 13, 1898 (figure 9). The illustration shows a map of the Philippines and a man representing the U.S. government looking at the map. The man appears to be contemplating taking over the Philippines. Next to this man stands Lady Justice with her weights and sword with the word “justice” printed on it. With her left hand she opens a curtain, revealing an illustration of a black man hanging from a tree with a noose around his neck, along with pictures of black men lying dead after being shot by a group of white men who could represent either the Spanish army or white Americans. This illustration clearly demonstrates Cole’s knowledge of the nature of U.S. overseas imperialism and the subjugation of African Americans. A year after this illustration appeared, J. Rosamond Johnson and
Figure 10. Siren Nevarro, Grizelle, The Filipino Dancer. *The New York Age*. October 21, 1909, 6

Figure 11. Theodore Pankey. Lieutenant Dixon. *The New York Age*. January 21, 1909, 6
James Weldon Johnson wrote the ill-fated *Tolosa*, which satirized the “new American Imperialism.”

Cole created Siren Nevarro’s Grizelle in *The Shoo Fly Regiment* as an ally and love interest to Theodore Pankey’s Lieutenant Dixon (figures 10 and 11). Grizelle appeared in three scenes: as a featured dancer in a ballet, in a duet with Bob Cole entitled “Down in the Philippines,” and in the production number that featured the song “On the Gay Luneta” sung by Lieutenant Dixon and danced by Grizelle. Cole and Johnson centered the number on the interracial romance between the two characters in the Philippines and simultaneously broke the love scene taboo and the taboo against interracial romance. With the placement of African Americans and Filipinos in romantic settings, Cole and Johnson contested and fully abnegated these taboos.

The lyrics reflected the romantic nature of the scene. “Twas on the gay Luneta, / One moonlight night I met her, / I never will forget her, This gay Grizelle. / Her midnight Eyes were beaming; / Now I am always dreaming, / Yes! always dreaming of my sweet Manila Belle.” This romance replicated actual relationships between black men and Filipino and Cuban women during the Spanish American War. African American rebel David Fagen, who defected and joined the Philippine insurrection against the United States, married a Filipino woman, and many of the five hundred African American men who chose to stay in the Philippines married Filipino women. African American Dr. Curtis, the first lieutenant and company soldier and hospital steward for the Eighth Illinois, recounted that African American soldiers “play[ed] Romeo to Cuban Juliet’s” and numerous marriages occurred between African American soldiers and Cuban women of the “pale-face and long-haired variety.” Miscegenation, interracial sex, and marriage remain key themes in wars of conquest, and the Spanish-American War proved no exception. World War I led to intermixtures between Africans and German women, producing the Reinhold Children. World War II led to relationships between white and black soldiers with Japanese, Italian, and German women in Europe, Japan, and Hawaii that in some cases led to cohabitation or marriage. Paul Spickard reasons that in many cases starving women in Japan and Germany bartered their bodies for food and shelter due to the dire conditions of the war.

Siren Nevarro choreographed *The Shoo Fly Regiment*. Nevarro might well have performed her dances on pointe because, as the *New York Age* reported, she was “perhaps the only African American woman who has mastered the difficult art of toe dancing.” Cole and Johnson’s use of Nevarro as the choreographer of the show indicates that they included black
women in their creative process, influenced by the active roles their mothers and wives played in business, industry, and African American female uplift. Between 1909 and 1910 Siren Nevarro toured the United States after leaving *The Shoo Fly Regiment*, as part of the vaudeville team Brown and Nevarro.  

Grizelle, the sympathetic character, and the Filipino Spy within *The Shoo Fly Regiment* mirror the complex nature of U.S. imperialism and its relation to African Americans. African Americans held several viewpoints concerning the Filipinos and the Spanish-American War, and Cole and Johnson’s political thought on this matter remained multilayered. The drawing of “the other” as black regardless of the nationality of the nonwhite persons remains linked in the United States history of racism. The U.S. government made a concerted effort to construct Filipinos and Cubans as blacks, thus racially inferior, not capable of self-government or citizenship rights, and irrevocably unassimilable. Within the imagining of these nonwhite people as black, and Roosevelt’s narrative of the black soldier, lay the constant fear of African American, Filipino, Native American, and Cuban insurrection in the United States, the Philippines, and Cuba.

African Americans interpreted the classification of the Cubans and the Filipinos in several ways. Influenced by the oppressive nature of U.S. racism, which left blacks powerless, many in the black community opposed black participation in the process of imperial expansion. An article in the *Colored American* entitled “Negro and Filipino” (1901) argued that while the U.S. government purported to protect the Filipinos’ rights and liberate them from Spanish rule, the U.S. government undermined the rights of African Americans through the denial of voting rights and by tolerating lynchings and burnings in New York, Akron, and New Orleans. The article drew comparisons to the Filipino plight and questioned a country that would claim to protect Filipino rights while denying African American rights. Some African American soldiers took this idea a step further and made the connections between their oppression in the United States and that of the Filipinos. These African American soldiers encountered racism, discrimination, and Jim Crow at the hands of white soldiers in the Philippines, and they saw this same white military personnel treat the Filipinos in the same manner. Because of this, many African American soldiers connected their oppression with the suppression of the Filipinos and defected to the Filipino side during the war. Some of the black press took a strong stance against U.S. imperialism, found solidarity with the Filipinos, drew comparisons with their experiences, and remained vehemently against a U.S. colonial project that included the subjugation of Filipinos through Jim Crow laws, disenfran-
chisement, prejudice, and brutality. Other blacks argued that participation in the war would affirm black male patriotism and masculinity, and work as an “anti-racist” influence in the United States, an argument advanced often by the black community and its soldiers in the many wars and conflicts since. Similarly, some black-owned newspapers expressed a desire for African American inclusion in the “imperial project” as mediators between the colonies and the United States.

**Conclusion**

Cole and Johnson incorporated a progressive political agenda in which they used the framework of the Spanish-American War, the manliness movement, black power, the conquest of the West, sports, and interracial romance to transfigure theater and society for African Americans.

They adopted the hypermasculine African American übermensch persona of Jack Johnson and brought to the stage the African American heroes of the Spanish-American War, with allusions to brave Afro-Cubans of that same war and the Afro-Haitians of the Haitian Revolution. Cole and Johnson coupled this vision with ideologies of both W. E. B. Du Bois and Booker T. Washington, two seemingly opposing forces, to reconfigure the role of black males as masculine and victorious both off the stage and on it. They restored the black male body from that of degradation to power and used the tools of the dominant culture—masculinity, war, and conquest—to elevate the status of the black male. The model of the new African American superman adopted by Cole and Johnson, which united political activism, black power, and athletic prowess, emerged in their productions and endures in the fame of black champions to this day.
Figure 12. Bob Cole and J. Rosamond Johnson in *Shoo Fly Regiment*. Dr. Jewel Plummer Cobb Collection.