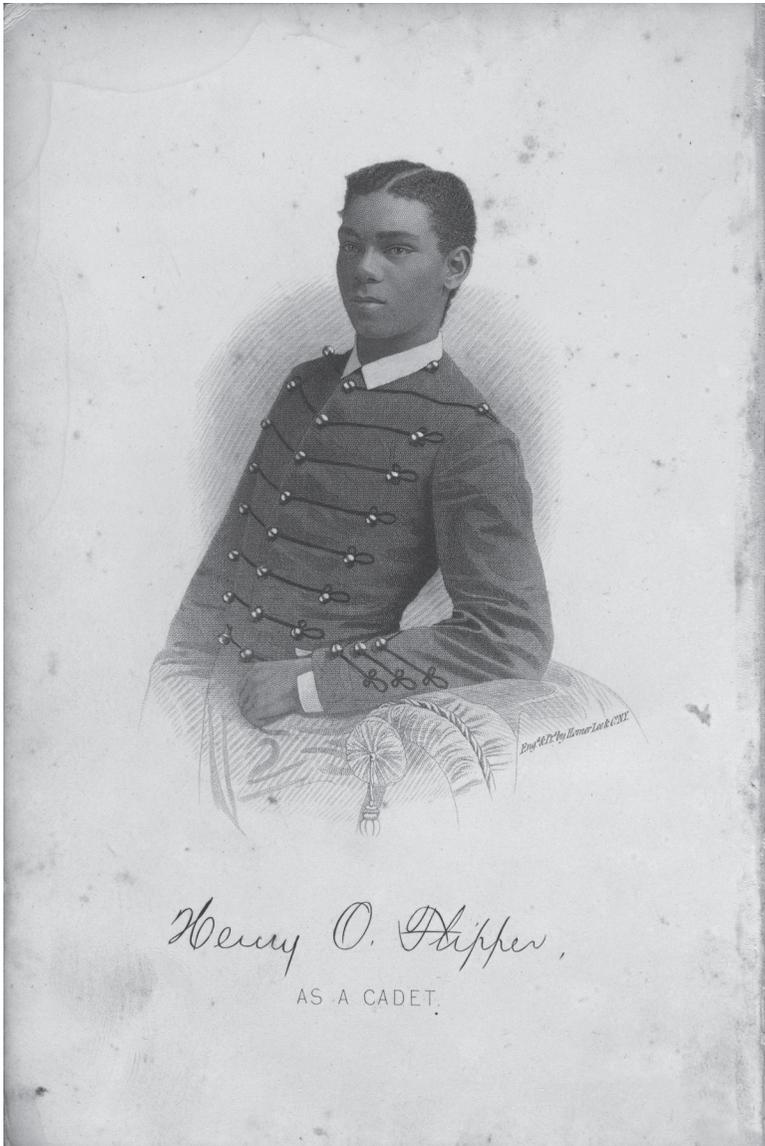


# HENRY O. FLIPPER

*West Point's First Black Graduate*

AN ANNOTATED AUTOBIOGRAPHY



Homer Lee engraved this image of Flipper "as a cadet" from a photograph. Readers in 1878 encountered the portrait immediately upon opening the volume. *Courtesy of the United States Military Academy Library Special Collections and Archives.*

# HENRY O. FLIPPER

## *West Point's First Black Graduate*

AN ANNOTATED AUTOBIOGRAPHY

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WEST POINT  
PRESS

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*The editors dedicate this volume to  
West Point cadets—past, present, and future—who inspire us  
by demonstrating the highest qualities of leadership,  
self-discipline, and perseverance.*



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The United States Military Academy is a wonderful place to work—from conception to completion, this project depended on support and encouragement from various corners of West Point. We are grateful to Brigadier General Shane Reeves, who had the vision to ask that we pursue this project. Once launched, we were in the capable hands of the West Point Press, which we have found to be an incredibly supportive publishing house. The volume became what it is in large part because of the hard work and effort of the director and managing editor of the press, Colonel Jordon Swain and Dr. Lynn Messina. We are also thankful to our leaders and colleagues in the Department of History and Department of English and World Languages at the United States Military Academy, whose support was invaluable. Moreover, we are deeply grateful for the herculean efforts of the staff of the United States Military Academy Library and the Library Special Collections and Archives. That entire organization contributed to this work in various ways. We owe particular thanks to the following individuals, whose efforts were nothing short of essential to our work: Dr. Kirsten Cooper, Corey Flatt, Lisa Gomez, Susan Lintelmann, Casey Madrick, and Elaine McConnell.

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Last but certainly not least, we owe so much gratitude to our families. They supported us throughout with love and

inquisitiveness, and at times more than a little patience. This volume is a testament to their support.

*Rory McGovern and Tony McGowan*  
*West Point, NY—September 2024*

# Foreword

The year 1976 was monumental for the U.S. Military Academy at West Point. The United States celebrated 200 years of declared independence. A widespread breach of the Academy's sacred Honor Code left West Point in the public spotlight and internally undergoing unprecedented efforts to identify and hold accountable all violators and tolerators while seeking to restore the integrity of the Code within the student body known as the "Corps of Cadets."

The year 1976 likewise marked the last year that West Point was an all-male institution and the first year of a coed Corps of Cadets. The degree of cultural and social change, both outside and within the Academy, created an inexorable swell of permanence despite strong resistance by traditionalists to the changes being made.

Also in 1976, the first African American to graduate from West Point had the characterization of his military service reversed to "honorable." It was 99 years from the seminal achievement of Henry Ossian Flipper's graduation. A change long overdue, the reversal renewed the story of Henry Flipper and his journey as part of another period of extraordinary social change in America that was resisted fiercely by traditionalists.

From a personal point of view, West Point is where in 1976 I encountered Flipper's story and joined in his legacy. I remember wanting to learn more about him, as he was largely unknown to me prior to the reversal of his characterization of service. I remember well seeing the newly unveiled bust of Flipper and peering into his sculpted eyes to see myself in his situation, putting my own West Point experience into a more resilient context. From 1976 to the present, I have been, and will remain, devoted to his examples of character, courage, commitment, resilience, and achievement. He was and is a guiding light for me and for many.

There is so much to learn about Henry O. Flipper. What really happened to him at West Point? What was occurring around him? What was he thinking and feeling? How did he succeed when five other African Americans who had been granted admission before him were driven away by those who could not accept the

possibility of formerly enslaved men becoming leaders of men—both Black and white?

The definitive source of information about Flipper's experience has been his own writing on his attendance and graduation from West Point. The recollections are fresh, given the publication of his memoir one year after his graduation while still serving as a Regular Army Lieutenant of Cavalry. However, the memoir is significantly nuanced. The language used is different from modern usages. The terms are mysterious and encoded in West Point jargon that not even all living graduates will fully understand. Perhaps most importantly, it is nuanced in pointing out the indignities and injustices he overcame while continuing to serve with some of the perpetrators.

This book pierces through the nuances and adds context and clarity to Flipper's own words. The resulting annotated autobiography takes the story from being effectively a two-dimensional image into a three-dimensional one. The editorial team conducted extensive research into the annals of history and the archives of West Point to find extraordinary precision about Flipper's journey *in situ*, that is, in the circumstances of the moment. It is a compelling product and fits Flipper into the broader tapestries of West Point and America in the 1870s.

Remarkably, Flipper emerges even more worthy of praise and admiration for what he accomplished against seemingly insurmountable odds. The reader can sense how formidable the resistance was, how the institution of West Point enabled his ostracism and silencing while also guiding him to the point of graduating, how ever-present was the sense of doubt about his chances of succeeding, and how Flipper was not entirely alone as an African American at West Point, as the stories of others who were there with him are also illuminated.

Attending West Point was and is a challenging experience. It is a crucible for building leaders of character who can endure hardship and still pursue and achieve excellence in the missions set before them. That is standard fare for West Point cadets from generation to generation. In the case of Henry O. Flipper, the standard experience, as challenging as it is intended to be, was multiplied by the institutional and individual perpetrations of racism and ostracism. Yet, he made it. West Point and America have never been the same. This is a must-read for any serious student of American history. Congratulations to the editors and

the West Point Press for letting me see Henry Ossian Flipper, West Point Class of 1877, in three-dimensional clarity.

*General Vincent K. Brooks, U.S. Army (Ret.)*

*General Vincent Brooks served over 42 years, from his entry into the United States Military Academy in 1976 until his retirement from active duty on the first day of 2019. He served as a general officer from 2002 to 2019 in key positions in the Pentagon with the Joint Staff and the Department of the Army. He was field commander conducting operations in the Balkans, in Iraq, throughout the Middle East and Central Asia, throughout the Indo-Pacific region, and in Korea and Japan. He added to Flipper's legacy by being appointed the Cadet Brigade Commander or "First Captain"—the top-ranking position that can be held by a cadet. Brooks was the first African American to hold the prestigious position.*

## A Note to Our Readers

This richly annotated edition of Henry Flipper's autobiography is the culmination of an interdisciplinary collaboration between faculty and cadets in the oft-entangled fields of history and English. Readers will find historical and literary approaches to the text in our introduction, annotations, and afterword. In particular, Rory McGovern, a historian, is the primary author of the first half of the introduction, which is given to the historical context of the attempt to integrate West Point during Reconstruction. Tony McGowan, a literary scholar, is the primary author of the second half of the introduction, which is given to the publication and material history of Flipper's book, as well as to Flipper's broader place in the literary tradition.

Facsimile editions of texts long out of print present books to modern readers exactly as they would have appeared to contemporary readers. Because our aim is to guide modern readers and researchers to better understand Flipper's autobiography, we have not produced a facsimile edition. To preserve Flipper's original voice and intent, however, we have endeavored as much as possible to preserve the volume as it appeared in 1878. The pagination has changed, but all sixteen chapters of Flipper's memoir are transcribed exactly as they were originally published in 1878. We carefully differentiate two original illustrations—of Flipper as a cadet and later as a Second Lieutenant—and Flipper's ten footnotes from our own. Our own notes serve as signposts to modern readers, explaining the significance of people, places, and events that Flipper identifies in shorthand; providing additional context and subtext to help readers better understand Flipper's experiences; identifying areas in which Flipper pulled his punches or presented an ambiguous or incomplete narrative; and exploring the literary qualities of the memoir as an early work of African American autobiography. Our illustrations are meant to guide readers to better visualize Flipper's world and experiences. In the case of Flipper's many paratextual borrowings—e.g., interpellated Academy documents and newspaper articles—we have differentiated the print to indicate borrowed materials wherever Flipper's original publisher, Homer Lee & Co., did so in the original volume.

Following the main text, an afterword to this annotated edition considers the reception of *The Colored Cadet at West Point* and Flipper's life after graduation, legacy, and memory. At the end of the volume is an appendix, which presents Black cadets' reading habits from 1870 to 1877 in the hopes that it may feed future scholarship on Black experiences of West Point during Reconstruction. We hope you enjoy this annotated edition.



## Editors' Introduction

HENRY O. FLIPPER is an enigma. In 1877 he became the first Black man to graduate from the United States Military Academy at West Point, New York. That achievement took considerable determination, endurance, and perseverance, as the propriety and place of Black cadets and officers were at the time controversial and heavily contested within the U.S. Army and American society alike. For Flipper and other Black cadets, there was a significant degree of activism inherent in even reporting for duty at West Point. There was even more activism inherent in graduating. As a Black man with an officer's commission in 1877, Flipper became a living embodiment of questions concerning citizenship, opportunity, rights, and equality that had spilled so much blood and ink during the Civil War and Reconstruction and which had yet to be resolved. He was in every sense a pioneer for civil rights and equality; yet he neither saw himself as a pioneer nor ever, it seems, completely accepted a need for such pioneers. Flipper believed he struggled for an individual cause, not a collective one.

His autobiography is likewise enigmatic.<sup>1</sup> It is at turns hopeful and rueful, and everything in between. It both inspires and disappoints, often on the same page. It is a story of the power of optimism and determination. It is also a cautionary tale about the

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1. In modern usage, Flipper's account splits the difference between the literary genres of *memoir* and *autobiography*. Memoirs typically relate experiences and feelings from a specific—often short—period of an author's much longer life, while autobiographies typically provide a nonfiction account of an author's entire life up to the moment of writing. Flipper's book, *The Colored Cadet at West Point. Autobiography of Lieut. Henry Ossian Flipper, U.S.A., First Graduate of Color from the U.S. Military Academy*, centers on only his four years at West Point and so bears consideration as a focused memoir. That said, the book does first sketch Flipper's family origins and life before the Academy and, after the main effort, it does take us slightly past Flipper's West Point years and right up to the writer's 1878 posting at "Fort Sill, Indian Ter[ritory]," as noted in the volume's short preface. In this way it bears consideration as a proper autobiography. Perhaps the best way to think about this question of nomenclature is to remember Flipper's youth—that he was such a young autobiographer that his production seems more like a memoir. In any case, we prefer "autobiography" throughout because Flipper did. "Autobiography" was clearly a meaningful term for Flipper, and we intend to remain faithful to the author's original intent.

dangers of blind faith. It is a narrative of progress and regression, as well as an exploration of the complex intersection of and relationship between the two. Much like its author, Flipper's autobiography is a study of dichotomies.

It is also complex, conveying as much meaning in what Flipper left unstated as in what he included. This complexity is partly a mere function of passing time. In 1878, Flipper published *The Colored Cadet at West Point: Autobiography of Lieut. Henry Ossian Flipper, U.S.A., First Graduate of Color from the U.S. Military Academy* through a little-known New York engraver and publisher, Homer Lee & Co. He wrote for a contemporary audience, not a future one. An average American reader in 1878 was much better equipped than a twenty-first-century reader to understand parts of the volume that elide, hint at, or briefly point to features of Reconstruction-era politics, society, and culture. But the complexity is also a function of self-censorship. While self-censorship is an issue that readers of any memoir or autobiography should account for, it is much more acute in *The Colored Cadet at West Point* because of Flipper's unique position. During Reconstruction, apart from appointments for distinguished Civil War veterans or occasional appointments arranged by well-connected political sponsors, all paths to a Regular Army officer's commission passed through the United States Military Academy. West Point was the living, breathing heart of the Army. As a brand new second lieutenant in the United States Army with every expectation of a full, multi-decade career ahead of him, publicly criticizing West Point in the autobiography would have been an act of career suicide. Flipper had every reason to paint the Academy, its leaders, and its graduates in a positive light. Modern readers should keep this in mind, read carefully, and consider where Flipper's narrative cannot be taken simply at face value.

It is in that spirit that we offer this annotated volume. We intend it to help modern readers navigate and interpret the *The Colored Cadet at West Point*—and in doing so, to better contextualize and understand Flipper, his times, his experiences at West Point, and his autobiography as a contribution to American literature in its own right. Ultimately, it is an aspirational project that we hope will frame and inform future scholarship. Toward this end, our introduction endeavors to place Flipper, his experiences at West Point, and his autobiography in the proper historical and literary context. We have organized the introduction in the form of an hourglass,

starting with the broadest historical context of Reconstruction and Black service in the U.S. Army, then presenting a narrower contextual frame about the United States Military Academy and Reconstruction-era integration at West Point, before relating the narrowest contextual framing of Flipper's experiences at West Point from 1873 to 1877. The introduction then transitions to contextualizing Flipper's account of his West Point experiences, moving from narrowest to broadest frames by first analyzing Flipper's motives and intent for writing his narrative and the timing and publication process of the original work while also situating the form, voice, and style of Flipper's work within broader norms of nineteenth-century American literature.

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Henry O. Flipper's life was framed and driven by the central social and political issues of his time: slavery, emancipation, and their consequences. Born enslaved in Thomasville, Georgia, on March 31, 1856, Flipper was the first of Isabella Buckhalter's and Festus Flipper's five sons. Reuben H. Lucky, a local Methodist minister, claimed Isabella as his property, and the slave dealer Ephraim G. Ponder claimed ownership of Festus. A skilled shoemaker, Ponder allowed Festus to dedicate some free time to work for his own wages. This placed Festus in the unusual position of amassing enough means to provide his enslaver a loan to cover the purchase of Isabella and young Henry to avoid splitting up the family as Ponder prepared to move to Atlanta, Georgia, in 1859. Flipper's experience was atypical of plantation slavery in Georgia, characterized more by small-scale productive labor than by the daily demands of a farm or plantation. He received some schooling at home from 1862 to 1864, but this was interrupted when the household fled to Macon, Georgia, as William Tecumseh Sherman's armies approached Atlanta.

The war ended in 1865, and the Flipper family was uncontestedly free. Emancipation and Reconstruction allowed Festus Flipper to thrive in Atlanta as an independent shoemaker and enabled the Flipper children to benefit from formal schooling and college preparation at the Storrs School—one of many schools for the formerly enslaved established in the South during the early years of Reconstruction—and, later, the new Atlanta University. The Flipper family's rising social stature and access to educational

opportunities placed Henry O. Flipper in an excellent position to be nominated for a cadetship once key members of Congress determined the time was right to integrate the United States Military Academy.

## Black Military Service

Racial integration at West Point was a process that sprang from interrupted antecedents. Foremost among these was the tradition of Black military service. Black soldiers contributed much to victory in the Revolution, with most accepted estimates holding that approximately 5,000 Revolutionary soldiers and sailors were of African descent. African Americans were generally denied the opportunity to serve after the war, a restriction codified in federal law with the Militia Act of 1792. But exigencies and emergencies during the War of 1812 caused anxious officers and recruiters to make exceptions once again. Nevertheless, as years and decades passed and plantation slavery expanded, proponents of slavery became more rigid and extreme in their justifications of the institution, and the will to arm and train Black soldiers vanished. African Americans could not serve openly in the Mexican-American War, nor could they enlist in the Army to put down a slaveholders' rebellion at the outset of the Civil War.<sup>2</sup>

The Civil War, however, proved longer and harder than expected. At first content merely to restore the Union, the federal government came to adopt emancipation as its policy and war aim with the Emancipation Proclamation, signed in September 1862 and taking effect on January 1, 1863. In addition to proclaiming free those enslaved in states and territories in rebellion against the United States—a caveat which excluded loyal states that permitted slavery—the Proclamation authorized the Army to recruit and employ Black soldiers.<sup>3</sup>

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2. Judith L. Van Buskirk, *Standing in Their Own Light: African American Patriots in the American Revolution* (University of Oklahoma Press, 2017), 3; Debra Sheffer, "African American Soldiers: The Struggle for Equality Through Service in the Civil War and Great War," in *Wars Civil and Great: The American Experience in the Civil War and World War I*, eds. David J. Silbey and Kanisorn Wongsrichanalai (University Press of Kansas, 2023): 73–75.

3. Noah Andre Trudeau, *Like Men of War: Black Troops in the Civil War, 1862–1865*, 2nd ed. (University Press of Kansas, 2023), 19–21.

This authorization ratified and exponentially expanded previously unsanctioned efforts to raise Black regiments. Although the Second Confiscation Act and Militia Act (1862) broadened federal authority to employ Black men for military purposes, President Abraham Lincoln remained wary of officially sanctioning what he knew would be a controversial policy. Taking a broad view of their authority under the new acts, some subordinate commanders began to organize Black troops on their own. As early as the spring of 1862, Major General David Hunter had begun organizing the 1st South Carolina Volunteers of African Descent from among those who had been enslaved in and near Beaufort, South Carolina, which had become the headquarters and base of operations for the Union Army's Department of the South after the successful Port Royal campaign in November 1861. Senator James Lane of Kansas similarly organized the 1st Kansas Colored Infantry Regiment shortly thereafter. In addition, after capturing New Orleans, Union forces accepted the services of several regiments of the Louisiana Native Guards, local militia units that even included Black officers.<sup>4</sup>

Black service expanded rapidly, providing invaluable reinforcements as the war entered its most critical phase. Over 180,000 Black men enlisted in the Army, organized in the United States Colored Troops (USCT) bureau of the War Department. They performed heroically, were widely recognized for extraordinary valor at the battles of Port Hudson, Milliken's Bend, Fort Wagner, Olustee, and Nashville, and rendered important service in every major theater of the war.<sup>5</sup> Black soldiers had more than proven themselves, and as the War Department planned the gradual transition from an enormous wartime volunteer army to a smaller postwar regular army, it included plans for six segregated regiments in the regular establishment. After budget cuts forced further reductions to the planned postwar force, the number of Black regiments fell to four: the 9th and 10th U.S. Cavalry Regiments, as well as the

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4. Trudeau, *Like Men of War*, 15–19 and 30–35; Sheffer, "African American Soldiers," 75–76; James McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 500–502.

5. For overviews of Black service during the Civil War, see Trudeau, *Like Men of War*, and Joseph T. Glatthaar, *Forged in Battle: The Civil War Alliance of Black Soldiers and White Officers* (Meridian, 1990).

24th and 25th Infantry Regiments. Those regiments, however, were to be commanded by white officers.<sup>6</sup>

Commissioning Black officers was much more controversial than authorizing and sustaining Black enlisted service. It took two hard years of war for a critical mass of the Northern public to tolerate Black military service—but most continued to believe that African Americans were inferior in both mind and spirit, and thus unfit to command. Combining that sentiment with an unwillingness to face the potential backlash from the social implications of Black officers outranking white soldiers, the War Department at first refused to authorize commissions for Black men to serve as infantry, artillery, or cavalry officers in United States Colored Troops (USCT) regiments. Prior to 1865, it granted commissions to only a handful of Black men to serve as regimental chaplains or medical officers. After determined advocacy from Massachusetts Governor John A. Andrew—who sponsored and organized six Black regiments, three from Massachusetts and three from North Carolina—the War Department granted a small number of commissions to Black officers of the line (infantry, artillery, or cavalry officers) during the waning months of the war in 1865. These were volunteer commissions, however. As volunteer units demobilized in 1865 and 1866, Black officers departed the ranks. The Regular Army officer corps remained exclusively white. Black access to the officer corps became an important political and social question during Reconstruction, one intimately connected to broader political and social developments that defined Reconstruction.<sup>7</sup>

## Reconstruction

Reconstruction was both an era and a process. The traditional and still predominant interpretation places Reconstruction in the years spanning 1865 through 1877—from the end of the Civil War until the newly elected Rutherford B. Hayes administration ceased using the Army to enforce federal law in the South. This interpretation centers on Reconstruction in the South, presenting as the problems at the core of Reconstruction the often-dueling questions of how

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6. Russell Weigley, *History of the United States Army*, enlarged ed. (Indiana University Press, 1984), 267.

7. Glatthaar, *Forged in Battle*, 280; Trudeau, *Like Men of War*, 364–65.

to reintegrate former Confederate states into a Re-United States, and how to define and secure the status of approximately four million formerly enslaved people.<sup>8</sup> More recently, some historians have explored a broader conception of Reconstruction, which identifies Reconstruction's animating issues as those of citizenship ranging beyond the formerly enslaved in the South, labor and social mobility, the purpose and scope of government, territorial expansion, and education. This interpretation is more expansive in both place and time, locating Reconstruction throughout the country, rather than just in the South, and allowing for more ambiguous start and end points that stretch beyond the usual 1865–1877 framing.<sup>9</sup> To understand Flipper, his experiences, his autobiography, and the larger process of integration at West Point, it is most useful to merge these two interpretations. The most important issues of Reconstruction were about the reintegration of seceded states and the place and rights of the formerly enslaved within American society. However, the process of addressing those questions began earlier than 1865 and played out well beyond the South, extending even to the Hudson River Valley and the United States Military Academy.

As a process, Reconstruction began during the Civil War as an extension of the war effort. The problem of governing seceded states arose early in the war. The Army had already re-established control over much of Tennessee and Arkansas, New Orleans and surrounding areas, and coastal areas in southeastern Virginia,

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8. See, for example, Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863–1877*, Perennial Classics Edition (Perennial Classics, 2002); Michael W. Fitzgerald, *Splendid Failure: Postwar Reconstruction in the American South* (Ivan R. Dee, 2007); and Mark Wahlgren Summers, *The Ordeal of the Reunion: A New History of Reconstruction* (University of North Carolina Press, 2014). Generally related in time and place but with a narrative more centered upon Black agency during Reconstruction is W. E. B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction: An Essay Toward a History of the Part which Black Folk Played in the Attempt to Reconstruct Democracy in America, 1860–1880* (Harcourt, Brace, and Company, 1935).

9. Heather Cox Richardson, *The Death of Reconstruction: Race, Labor, and Politics in the Post-Civil War North, 1865–1901* (Harvard University Press, 2004); Heather Cox Richardson, *West from Appomattox: The Reconstruction of America after the Civil War* (Yale University Press, 2007); Hilary Green, *Educational Reconstruction: African American Schools in the Urban South, 1865–1890* (Fordham University Press, 2016); and Richard White, *The Republic for Which It Stands: The United States During Reconstruction and the Gilded Age, 1865–1896* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

eastern North Carolina, and southeastern South Carolina by the time the war was little more than a year old in summer 1862. Wartime Reconstruction was highly improvisational due to shifting exigencies of the war. The administration appointed military governors to administer areas that fell back under federal control while political leaders debated the conditions by which rebelling states would regain the full rights and privileges of statehood.<sup>10</sup>

Questions about the rights, place, and status of the formerly enslaved arose early in the war as well. Even before the Emancipation Proclamation, many enslaved people viewed Union field armies as what one historian has described as “armies of deliverance” carrying the promise of freedom with every advance. From the very beginning of the war, Northern armies attracted those attempting to escape their enslavement. Absent firm policy directives in the war’s early stages, the fate of the escaped depended upon the inclinations of commanders in the field. Some returned enslaved men and women to their owners, insisting that to do otherwise amounted to theft of private property. Others conscientiously offered safe haven to those seeking freedom, offering explanations that ranged from moral critiques of slavery to a legalistic argument that, because Confederates used some slave labor for military purposes, any enslaved person could be considered contraband of war liable to confiscation in order to deny military resources to the Confederacy. The latter views, both moral and legal, became official policy, and communities of freedpeople became salient features of Southern regions under Union control, particularly in the sea islands and coastal areas of Georgia and the Carolinas. In these communities, the improvisational air of early Reconstruction continued as various Northern abolitionist and philanthropic organizations and networks—rather than the army or the government—mobilized to provide relief, aid, and education to those communities.<sup>11</sup>

While still dependent upon grassroots energy and action, the government took steps to lend more structure and coordination to Reconstruction in the late stages of the war. Controversy arose over the conditions for reintegrating the rebelling states. Seeing a rapid

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10. Foner, *Reconstruction*, chap. 1–2.

11. Elizabeth R. Varon, *Armies of Deliverance: A New History of the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 10–13, 32–33, and 190–194; Elizabeth D. Leonard, *Benjamin Franklin Butler: A Noisy, Fearless Life* (University of North Carolina Press, 2022), 65–71; McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 499–504.

restoration of the Union as the key to a lasting peace, Lincoln proposed in December 1863 a lenient program in which a Confederate state could establish a new state government after 10 percent of its adult male population swore oaths of loyalty to the United States and the state acknowledged the freedom of the formerly enslaved. Republicans in Congress favored more punitive conditions. They countered Lincoln's proposal with the Wade-Davis Bill, which required reintegrating states to acknowledge and accept emancipation, bar high-ranking Confederate officers and civic leaders from political office, and administer oaths of allegiance to at least 50 percent of the adult male population. Lincoln refused to sign the bill, and the policy for reintegrating Confederate states remained in doubt as the war ended. Disagreement between the White House and Congress became even more severe after Lincoln's assassination. His successor was Andrew Johnson, a former Democrat from Tennessee who was a strong enough opponent of secession to continue coming to work in the U.S. Senate after his state seceded. Lincoln admired Johnson's loyalty, appointed him military governor of Tennessee, and then elevated him to the vice presidency in the election of 1864. Though loyal to the Union, Johnson was not a racial egalitarian and held considerable sympathy for the South. His vision for reintegrating seceded states was even more lenient than Lincoln's, and he and Congressional Republicans remained at loggerheads until his term ended in March 1869.<sup>12</sup>

Congress and the White House proved better able to assert—to varying degrees—the rights, place, and status of the formerly enslaved, and to give better structure and substance to freedpeople's relief in the waning stages of the war and its immediate aftermath. Late-war improvisations—such as the Sea Islands Experiment, which at its core was a loosely connected network of abolitionists and philanthropic organizations that attempted to prepare the formerly enslaved in South Carolina for citizenship through education; or William Tecumseh Sherman's Special Field Orders Number 15, which attempted to provide relief to freedpeople by redistributing abandoned farmland to formerly enslaved families—gave way to public-private enterprises centered upon the Freedmen's Bureau. Established as an arm of the War Department led by the ardently abolitionist Major General Oliver O. Howard,

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12. Foner, *Reconstruction*, 73–74 and 176–316; and Fitzgerald, *Splendid Failure*, 22–46.

the Freedmen's Bureau was prominent in many forms of freedpeople's relief—from education to labor rights. Beyond relief efforts, first Lincoln and then Congressional Republicans wrote the most fundamental status and rights of African Americans into the constitution. Passed in January 1865 and ratified that December, the Thirteenth Amendment enshrined emancipation and the abolition of slavery in the U.S. Constitution. Passed in 1866 and ratified in 1868, the Fourteenth Amendment extended the rights and privileges of citizenship to the formerly enslaved. In combination, the two amendments represented a sea change in constitutional law. Where several amendments in the Bill of Rights purposefully restrained government action in order to preserve and protect individual liberties, the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Amendments charged the federal government to take positive action to preserve and protect individual rights and liberties.<sup>13</sup>

Action was somewhat restrained at first. After Abraham Lincoln's assassination at Ford's Theater on April 14, 1865, President Andrew Johnson proved inclined to accept much in order to reunite the country more speedily. He even supported Georgia's selection of former Vice President of the Confederacy Alexander Stephens as part of a new congressional delegation from Georgia in 1866. Congressional leaders already mistrusted Johnson as a former slaveholder. Where they had acknowledged, sometimes grudgingly, executive authority over the war effort, the leniency Johnson was willing to show even the most senior leaders of the Southern rebellion pushed congressional Republicans to assert more authority over Reconstruction. They passed the first three Reconstruction Acts in the spring and summer of 1867. The Reconstruction Acts provided for military rule over former Confederate states other than Tennessee—which had been readmitted in 1866—and codified readmission terms for former Confederate states which included, among other things, ratification of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Amendments. Congressional leaders also attempted to restrain Johnson in several ways, most notably in the Tenure of Office Act. Passed in early 1867 by overwhelming majorities in both the Senate and the House of Representatives over Johnson's veto, the Tenure of Office Act prevented the president from removing federal officials appointed with the advice and consent of the Senate from office

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13. Varon, *Armies of Deliverance*, 190–94 and 428; Foner, *Reconstruction*, 67–71, 142–70, 251–61; Richardson, *The Death of Reconstruction*, 14 and 31–32.

without the Senate approving the removal. Johnson's subsequent attempt to dismiss Secretary of War Edwin Stanton prompted his impeachment in early 1868. The Senate narrowly acquitted Johnson only after he acquiesced to congressional authority over Reconstruction, and Congress was ready to act on that authority.<sup>14</sup>

In many ways, 1869–1873 was the peak of Reconstruction. Throughout 1868, Reconstruction was a Congressional affair. Beginning in 1869, the newly elected Ulysses S. Grant administration, much more aligned with Congressional Republicans, became a more equal partner. Both sought to secure and codify African American civil rights. The Fifteenth Amendment received Congressional approval in February 1869 and was ratified in February 1870, granting all men the right to vote without regard to race. As white Southern resentment of new rights and status afforded to the formerly enslaved metastasized into organized violence, resistance, and terror, in 1870–71 Congress passed the Enforcement Acts—a series of laws that not only established criminal codes to allow officials to enforce the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments, but also empowered the executive branch to intervene when the rights and privileges enshrined in those amendments were threatened. Grant needed little prodding. He unhesitatingly deployed portions of the Army to dismantle the Ku Klux Klan in South Carolina in 1871–73 and acted with similar firmness elsewhere.<sup>15</sup>

At no other time in Reconstruction did the federal government prove more able and more willing to act to enforce its promises. Backlash to government action and the devastation the Panic of 1873 wrought on the American economy altered Reconstruction's political and social context in ways that created the conditions for its downfall. That timing is important to Flipper's experiences—just as the course of Reconstruction helped bring him to West Point

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14. Foner, *Reconstruction*, chap. 5–7.

15. Foner, *Reconstruction*, chap. 8–10; Fitzgerald, *Splendid Failure*, chap. 5–6; Robert Wooster, *The United States Army and the Making of America: From Confederation to Empire, 1775–1903* (University Press of Kansas, 2021), 229; Thomas Glenn Nester, "The Limit of Endurance Has Been Reached: The 7th U.S. Cavalry Regiment, Racial Terror and Reconstruction, 1871–1876" (PhD Dissertation, Texas A&M University, 2010).

in 1873, its decline would also frame and shape his experiences at and after West Point.<sup>16</sup>

Of equal importance, a widely perceived distinction between political equality and social equality for African Americans fueled some of the backlash against Reconstruction. In simple terms, political equality—sometimes called civil or civic equality—referred to equality under the law and the basic rights and privileges of citizenship. Given the experience of the war and the ratification of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Amendments, a critical mass of Americans was at least willing to accept, in some cases grudgingly, the notion that African Americans enjoyed political equality. Social equality—a much more egalitarian concept that allowed for equal access, opportunity, and association—was much more controversial and sparked varying degrees of apathy and resistance from most white Americans throughout Reconstruction.<sup>17</sup>

## Integrating West Point

These trends framed and drove both the policy and experience of racial integration at West Point during Reconstruction. Black access to the officer corps was thoroughly intertwined with broader questions about the place and status of the formerly enslaved in American society. Because the vast majority of cadet appointments to West Point came from sitting congressmen, integration at West Point was also framed in large part by when and how former Confederate states rejoined the Union. Just over 80 percent of African Americans enumerated in the 1870 census resided in states that had rebelled from 1861 to 1865.<sup>18</sup> The young men among them had no viable path to West Point until Congress readmitted those states and seated their representatives, and even then not unless the political environment in those states produced representatives willing to nominate young Black men. Those who did secure nominations soon found their experiences defined in large part by

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16. Foner, *Reconstruction*, 512–24. The decline of Reconstruction and its impact on Flipper's life and experiences are the subject of a longer discussion in this volume's afterword.

17. For a succinct explanation of Reconstruction-era distinctions between social and civic equality, see Fitzgerald, *Splendid Failure*, 120, and Foner, *Reconstruction*, 230–31.

18. U.S. Census Bureau, *The Statistics of the Population of the United States*, Ninth Census vol. I (Government Printing Office, 1872), 5.

the sharp distinctions most Americans drew between political and social equality.

Many Americans considered racial integration at West Point a matter of social equality for two key reasons. First, it tacitly implied a place for African Americans within the middle class. The U.S. Army officer corps in the late nineteenth century was a middle-class bastion and, outside of direct appointments into new regiments given mostly to distinguished volunteer officers from the Civil War, the United States Military Academy was the only way to secure an officer's commission.<sup>19</sup> Second and perhaps more importantly, many Americans believed that an inevitable byproduct of integrating West Point was the comingling of white and Black Americans. Editors of a professional journal that reliably reflected mainstream views of the Army officer corps opined at length on the matter in ways that would have resonated with many white Americans in the 1870s:

The laws of the Army, the regulations of the Military Academy, and the very rudiments of discipline, fix unalterably the social relation of cadets, and put the Anglo-Saxon and African on equality. They must sleep together, mess together, room together, drill and march together, and associate together. This is forcing the social problem in the wrong place and by wrong means—the law. In the nature of things it is creating mischief, and must prove on trial damaging to the very purpose the friends of the African race intend to promote—the elevation of the colored race. Garrisons in the Army are constituted as communities or families. When social relations among officers are of the closest and most confidential intimacy, any disturbing element entering these relations is at once destructive of that harmony and agreement lying at the very foundation of discipline and military order. The soldiers mess and bunk together, and with them social differences would subvert all subordination and create irrepressible disorders and irregularities. These are patent facts, and they would seem to decide for the present, at least, the question of mixing white and colored soldiers or placing colored commissioned officers in command

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19. For a social history of the postwar officer corps, see Edward M. Coffman, *The Old Army: A Portrait of the American Army in Peacetime* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), chap. V.

of white soldiers. Sift out the 30,000 troops now in our Army, and from them all not one company could be organized that would consent to be commanded by a colored officer. The wives of officers, as a rule, are among the most highly cultivated, refined, and accomplished women of the land. Their refined and humanizing influence gives to garrison life all its charming fascination; and on all our frontiers they share with their husbands their perils, and promote, wherever they go, that higher humanity of discipline, mixing mercy and love with the sterner justice and severity of martial and camp law. Where these women are, the common curses of garrison life—gambling, debauchery, profligacy, profanity, whiskey, quarreling, and jealousies—are not. Destroy garrison life as is made by these self-sacrificing and true-hearted women, and you will effectually destroy the Army. But no more certain plan could be devised to effect this destruction than to send among them colored commissioned officers.<sup>20</sup>

It is worth noting that this editorial commentary ran in the period's most popular military journal at a time when integration at West Point had already begun. If there were to be Black officers, as the editors of the *Army and Navy Journal* so feared, they had to go through West Point.

From its very founding, the United States Military Academy has always been shaped by broader political and social currents. Thomas Jefferson worked with political allies in Congress to establish the United States Military Academy in 1802. Prior to his election, many contemporary observers thought it unlikely that he would support a national military academy. It had been championed by leaders of the Federalist Party while many of their rivals in Jefferson's Democratic-Republican Party resisted it and most other measures designed to strengthen the Regular Army, arguing that a strong regular military establishment was a threat to a free republic. Many have argued that Thomas Jefferson ultimately established the United States Military Academy to create a national institution dedicated to the sciences and engineering. But as historian Theodore Crackel points out in *West Point: A Bicentennial History* (2002), more evidence suggests that the Academy was part of a

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20. "The Army and West Point," *The United States Army and Navy Journal and Gazette of the Regular and Volunteer Forces*, vol. 8 (February 25, 1871): 444.

broader program of military reform, which was in turn part of a much broader effort to reform the government and key national institutions that Jefferson believed had been so dominated by the Federalist Party they had become arms of it. With cadetships available only to those with political appointments and eventually congressional nominations, Jefferson attempted to infuse the officer corps with ideals more consistent with his own, and to expand access to the U.S. Army officer corps well beyond a relatively limited set of elite, wealthy families.<sup>21</sup>

By the time Flipper arrived in 1873, West Point had evolved from uncertain and somewhat improvisational beginnings into an educational institution bound by tradition and an academic program that emphasized science and engineering above all, based on the belief that they instilled the most suitable mental habits and discipline for Army officers. Sylvanus Thayer—who served as superintendent from 1817 to 1833, the Academy's most formative years—defined West Point's character and curriculum for much of the rest of the century. Under Thayer, cadets spent their first two years studying mathematics and French—the former to prepare them for further study in science and engineering, and the latter because the legacy of Napoleon loomed large enough for Thayer to be convinced that the best military theories and treatises had been produced by French officers and thinkers. Cadets spent their last two years studying natural and experimental philosophy (generally analogous to a physics course), chemistry, geology, mineralogy, drawing (in order to accurately sketch maps and battlefield terrain), history, ethics, law, and tactics. They learned largely by rote recitation—memorizing their lessons by night and then reciting them or otherwise demonstrating mastery of the material in class the next day—and sometimes by attending lectures. Little changed after Thayer's departure. The curriculum was subject to some adaptation: instruction in tactics was spread throughout all four years; Spanish became part of the curriculum after the Army's various missions brought it into increasing contact with Spanish-speaking people; and the Academy adopted a five-year curriculum prior to the Civil War.

The war brought the return of a four-year curriculum but changed little else. West Point's long-serving faculty pointed to the

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21. Theodore J. Crackel, *West Point: A Bicentennial History* (University Press of Kansas, 2002), 46–51.

victories and illustrious war records of its graduates as proof that the curriculum and pedagogy were both proper and effective. Although other American colleges and universities began to embrace new and more modern pedagogies and curricula in the late nineteenth century, the United States Military Academy remained on its traditional path. Henry O. Flipper and his contemporaries continued to learn by rote recitation and the occasional lecture in a curriculum that largely reflected Thayer's design.<sup>22</sup>

Although not the Academy's prime means of developing cadets to become officers, military training was naturally a substantial part of the cadets' West Point careers. For the most part, modern professions and conceptions of professionalism did not become a feature of American society until the Gilded Age and Progressive Era. The U.S. Army reflected that trend, with an officer development model that relied more upon experience, talent, and chance than formal training. Accordingly, military training at West Point for most of the nineteenth century was more rudimentary and practical than theoretical. The cadets studied infantry, cavalry, and artillery equipment and tactics during the academic year throughout their four years, but the annual summer encampments were where most of the military training took place. Summer encampments were held from mid- or late June until the end of August. All cadets had to attend them in their first, second, and fourth summers at West Point. The first summer encampment was an important milestone—new cadets became acculturated to the Academy and the Army by learning customs and courtesies, basic infantry drill, and artillery drill, as well as by enduring more than a little hazing. In their second summer, cadets participated in more infantry, cavalry, and artillery drills, and some of them began to hone leadership techniques by acting as squad leaders responsible for drilling small numbers of newly arrived cadets. In their fourth summer, cadets assumed positions of responsibility during infantry, artillery, and cavalry drills and learned basic practice in such areas as military engineering (constructing field fortifications and pontoon bridges), signaling, and telegraphy. Such training was not designed to produce experts. Rather, it was meant to produce lieutenants familiar with the range of duties their regiments might require of them, so

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22. Crackel, *West Point*, 81–145; Betros, *Carved from Granite*, 8–22. Flipper includes an outline of his curriculum in chapter II.

that they might then develop expertise by learning from experience throughout their careers.<sup>23</sup>

Coursework and military training defined the cadet experience. West Point in the 1870s was an isolated place, spartan by design, and offering little in the way of distractions and diversions. With one regular passenger rail line servicing it from the opposite side of the Hudson, West Point was not a convenient place to get to; hence few who did not have business there tried. Visitors came mainly to observe proceedings and mingle with cadets during the summer encampments after training concluded, or to attend West Point's famous hops. These dances were far and away the highlight of West Point's social scene. They occurred most often during the summer, but also at regular intervals throughout the year. Hops were at once the height and the limit of an average cadet's ability to interact socially with the world beyond West Point. Cadets were generally restricted to the grounds of the Academy unless they received specific permission otherwise. They were allowed an extended visit home or elsewhere exactly once in their four years at the Academy, during the summer between the end of their second year (third-class year) and the beginning of their third year (second-class year) at the Academy.<sup>24</sup>

Overall, cadets relied entirely upon each other for meaningful relationships and social interaction. With little time that was truly their own, they often had to find excitement and social potential in routine things. Without the benefit of indoor plumbing, cadets in the 1870s were authorized one bath a week, and often—at least as weather and seasons allowed—made it a swimming excursion in the Hudson River with their classmates. On Saturdays, cadets were allowed to use the library, although they could not check out material without special permission from the superintendent. Also on weekends, cadets could arrange with the cavalry detachment to check out a horse to ride around Academy grounds and their immediate environs, sometimes riding in small groups up to crumbling Revolutionary War fortifications overlooking the Academy from hilltops above it.<sup>25</sup>

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23. For an analysis of the U.S. Army's method of developing officers in the late-nineteenth century, see McGovern, "The School of Experience." Refer to chap. V, VII, and VIII for Flipper's experiences with military training at West Point.

24. On cadet life, see Stephen E. Ambrose, *Duty Honor Country: A History of West Point* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1966), 147–66 and 219–21.

25. Hugh Lenox Scott, *Some Memories of a Soldier* (The Century Co., 1928), 12–23.

Forging such close bonds with classmates was important. The nineteenth-century U.S. Army was exceedingly small, and close bonds within a class of 46—the average size of a graduating class in the 1870s—produced a formidable professional network for decades to come. More immediately, strong social bonds with classmates and members of other classes helped cadets survive to graduation. They made life tolerable in an otherwise sparse existence. Graduates gave friends and acquaintances a literal and figurative leg up when they bequeathed to them extra sets of the notoriously hard-to-clean white cadet pants when they graduated. Most importantly, cadets leaned on each other to navigate a tough and demanding academic program that weeded out an average of 41 percent of all cadets in the decade following the Civil War. A small minority of cadets was naturally talented at every course they encountered. All others relied upon friends to tutor them or help them study—to “bone” or “bone up” as they would have called it—in courses at which they struggled. Because failing a course invariably led to dismissal from the Academy, having friends to turn to in times of scholarly duress significantly increased a cadet’s chances of graduating.<sup>26</sup>

Cadets were able to bond with each other in part because many came from similar circumstances. Most were comfortably middle class. To gain admission, an aspiring cadet needed to secure a nomination from his congressman (which would, in turn, produce an appointment from the Secretary of War), and then upon reporting to officials at West Point, pass a medical examination and a particularly rigorous academic examination. It took considerable preparation to pass the latter. Between 1870 and 1875, the average failure rate on the entrance exam was 32.1 percent, with a high of 44.8 percent in 1870.<sup>27</sup> Absent serious and sustained engage-

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26. For cadets relying upon each other, see William Harding Carter to “Ma,” November 5, 1871, Box 6, William Harding Carter Papers, U.S. Army Heritage and Education Center, Carlisle, PA (hereafter referred to as USAHEC); and Scott, *Some Memories of a Soldier*, 14. Statistics derived from data come from “Table showing States from which were appointed candidates rejected by the Academic Board from 1838 to 1874, inclusive,” and “Statement showing number of candidates for cadetships appointed to the United States Military Academy, number rejected, and number admitted, from 1838 to 1874, inclusive,” in *Annual Report of the Board of Visitors of the United States Military Academy Made to the Secretary of War for the Year 1875*, USMA Library Special Collections and Archives, 8–11.

27. “Table showing States from which were appointed candidates rejected by the Academic Board from 1838 to 1874, inclusive,” in *Annual Report of the Board of*

ment in secondary education at home, a prospective cadet would not pass. Even with such engagement, some families were anxious enough to send their sons months in advance to a boarding "school" established by a West Point alumnus to prepare prospective cadets for the entrance exam. Such arrangements were only possible for cadets from wealthy families. In the absence of such arrangements, an education good enough to prepare an aspiring cadet to pass the entrance exam implied an existence at least comfortable enough to support that education, rather than requiring teens to work to support their families. Furthermore, because competitive nominations were still the exception and not the norm, the requirement to obtain a congressional nomination meant that most West Point cadets came from well-connected families that were respected in their communities.<sup>28</sup>

During Reconstruction, however, increasing geographic diversity became a counterweight to such commonalities in class and upbringing. In the decade prior to the Civil War, young men from Southern states that eventually joined the Confederacy accounted for an annual average of 21.4 percent of those nominated and 23.7 percent of those admitted to West Point. For obvious reasons, the Corps of Cadets became decidedly Northern in 1861. Secession prompted the resignation of Southern cadets sympathetic to the cause of a slaveholders' rebellion, and a similar exodus of Southerners from Congress meant that the seceded states were not nominating anyone for cadetships. In any given year during the war, on average, three or four Southerners received appointments and one or two gained admission to West Point, constituting roughly 2 percent of classes admitted between 1861 and 1865. Southerners returned to West Point after the war at a pace slightly slower than that by which their state delegations returned to Congress and resumed nominating prospective cadets. In 1866, one Arkansan

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*Visitors of the United States Military Academy Made to the Secretary of War for the Year 1875*, USMA Library Special Collections and Archives, 8–10.

28. Ernest Garlington from the class of 1876 recalled being a boarding student at a West Point entrance exam preparatory program not far downriver from West Point for two months in the spring of 1872. His classmates in this program made for a privileged group, including the sons of an admiral, a congressman, and two generals. Out of ten or eleven in the group, all but one passed the entrance examination. See E.A. Garlington to General Smith, July 25, 1929, pp. 4–8, Ernest A. Garlington Manuscript Files, USMA Library Special Collections and Archives.

and one North Carolinian gained admission with the class of 1870. In 1867, four Tennesseans joined the Corps of Cadets. From 1868 to 1872, Southerners who had lived with, among, and through slavery and the Civil War comprised an average of 17.6 percent of each class admitted to West Point. In 1873, 22 percent of the admitted class of 1877—including Henry O. Flipper—came from former Confederate states. That percentage climbed to 25.3 percent in 1874, slightly exceeding the pre-war norm.<sup>29</sup>

If the underlying causes of racial integration at West Point were Reconstruction politics and the legacies of African American Civil War service, the return of Southern cadets was—perhaps counterintuitively—the proximate cause. While Congressman Benjamin Butler, an experienced politician and wartime general from Massachusetts, twice attempted to nominate a Black man for cadetships in 1867 and 1868, most of the Black population eligible for appointments to West Point lived in the South. In 1870, 81.5 percent of all Black Americans enumerated by the U.S. census lived in states that had seceded in 1861.<sup>30</sup> Young men among them could not receive an appointment to West Point until Southerners returned to Congress and resumed nominating prospective cadets from their districts. Reconstruction political dynamics and the Fifteenth Amendment, which gave African American men the right to vote, ensured that the Republican Party—still operating under the lingering influence of Abraham Lincoln and therefore the party far more disposed to send Black cadets to West Point—was a powerful if not dominant force in Southern politics and a presence within Southern congressional delegations. Under the unique

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29. All data come from “Table showing States from which were appointed candidates rejected by the Academic Board from 1838 to 1874, inclusive,” and “Statement showing number of candidates for cadetships appointed to the United States Military Academy, number rejected, and number admitted, from 1838 to 1874, inclusive,” in *Annual Report of the Board of Visitors of the United States Military Academy Made to the Secretary of War for the Year 1875*, USMA Library Special Collections and Archives, 8–11. Wartime statistics exclude 1863, during which fully 51.5 percent of admitted cadets bore appointments officially designated as coming from seceded states. It appears that most of these cadets were actually Union soldiers from Northern states, fresh off of battlefields, such as Gettysburg and Vicksburg.

30. U.S. Census Bureau, *The Statistics of the Populations of the United States*, Ninth Census, vol. I, (Government Printing Office, 1872), 5.

political conditions of Reconstruction, means and motives for integrating West Point aligned.<sup>31</sup>

The first two prospective cadets known to be Black arrived at West Point in June 1870. Michael Howard, formerly enslaved in Mississippi and the son of a postwar pillar in his local community who had served under William T. Sherman during the Civil War, was the first to arrive. James Webster Smith—whose father had risen from slavery to become an alderman in postwar Columbia, South Carolina—arrived only days later. The Academy was ill-prepared for their arrival. By their own admission, West Point leaders had taken no precautions to integrate the Corps of Cadets. They likely were not certain and may not have been aware that Howard and Smith were Black, as both received their appointments only weeks before reporting, and none of the paperwork involved in the appointment and admissions process identified race.

Their initial reception did not go smoothly. Prior to officially reporting, Howard was denied a meal at the Rose Hotel, an accommodation for visitors to West Point that sat on a bluff overlooking the river just north of the parade field. While still awaiting their entrance examinations, a prospective cadet from Kentucky slapped Howard multiple times in the face for standing in his way while a group of prospective cadets waited to get their boots blacked. Smith confronted the assailant, only to be threatened with a knife as the rest of the squad of prospective cadets crowded around, urging the Kentuckian to kill Smith and Howard. Only days later, an unseen intruder crept into Howard's and Smith's room as they slept and dumped a bucket of human waste on them. The entrance examination was administered on June 23, 1870, and Michael Howard was dismissed after failing every part of it, having suffered from a dearth of prior education. Smith, on the other hand—who had excelled in Freedman's Bureau schools in South Carolina, had caught the attention of a wealthy benefactor, had attended one of the best secondary schools in New England, and had been admitted to Howard University in Washington, DC—passed the exam that felled 52.9 percent of all prospective cadets who took it that

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31. Adam Domby, "A Nursery of Treason Remade? Reconstruction Politics and the Rise and Fall of West Point's First Black Cadets," in *Race, Politics, and Reconstruction: The First Black Cadets at Old West Point*, eds. Rory McGovern and Ronald G. Machoian (University of Virginia Press, 2024), 16–26.

year. He thus became West Point's first admitted cadet known to be Black.<sup>32</sup>

"Known to be Black" is an important distinction to note. Because no part of the admissions process or West Point experience forced candidates or cadets to identify their race, it is possible that Black cadets attended West Point prior to Smith and graduated prior to Flipper, passing as white. William Achilles Hare, a Black cadet admitted in June 1885, passed as white long enough to write his state representative about his experiences and observations while his classmates accepted him as one of them. According to Hare, "There is considerable color prejudice among the new cadets and it exists among the Southerners especially," who complained when having to stand in formation next to a fellow new cadet who was recognized as Black. "They dare not make any demonstrations of their being prejudiced," Hare noted, "but one can see it in every action they take regarding color." He also recounted a conversation in which a Southern prospective cadet opined that Black cadets should not be permitted "in the academy and that they were beasts," prompting Hare to reply "that they should not permit a rebel to enter this institution." It is unclear at what point he divulged that he was Black, but records show that Hare was dismissed for academic deficiency in January 1886, and Academy officials were still uncertain enough to place a question mark next to his name on a roster of Black cadets and prospective cadets prepared in October 1886 at the request of the War Department. Hare's experience shows both that it was possible for Black cadets to have gone through the Academy passing as white in the past and that the treatment directed against Black cadets was based solely on their race.<sup>33</sup>

The Corps of Cadets instantly recognized James Webster Smith as a Black man and reacted violently and in ways calibrated to actively drive him away. After admission, he spent his first night in summer encampment awake in fear as two cadets stood outside his tent discussing ways to blow it up. His squad leader separated him from the squad and refused to train him. Later, cadets assigned

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32. Rory McGovern, Makonen Campbell, and Louisa Koebrich, "'I Hope to Have Justice Done Me or I Can't Get Along Here': James Webster Smith and West Point," *Journal of Military History* 87 (October 2023), 970–82.

33. Hare quotations taken from Brian G. Shellum, *Black Cadet in a White Bastion: Charles Young at West Point* (Bison Books, 2006), 58–60.

to his table in the mess hall attempted to keep food from him. He was assaulted with a heavy wooden ladle, and later assaulted in his room so viciously that he felt compelled to defend himself with the bayonet he had been issued for drill. Cadets manipulated the disciplinary system in an attempt to force Smith's dismissal through either conviction in a court martial or amassing enough demerits to be dismissed for deficiency in discipline. Officers allowed and, in some cases, even facilitated such abuse and mistreatment. As a result, Smith spent the vast majority of his first year in "close arrest," confined to his room except for classes and other official business, facing one court of inquiry and two courts martial. In the second court martial, Smith was sentenced to dismissal but saw the sentence commuted to repeating his first year by the Grant administration, which was convinced that "the presence of prejudice in the minds of the principal witnesses was decidedly manifested," and that "the ends of public justice will be better subserved, and the policy of the Government—of which the presence of this Cadet in the Military Academy is a signal illustration—be better maintained" by retaining Smith at the Academy.<sup>34</sup>

Smith persisted for four long years before ultimately facing dismissal after failing an examination in natural and experimental philosophy. His persistence was essential to the broader attempt to integrate West Point. The Grant administration's 1871 intervention in Smith's court martial sentence convinced white cadets that active resistance to the policy of integration in ways meant to drive out Black cadets would not work. Instead, they adopted a more passive form of resistance defined by isolation, ostracism, and less severe forms of violence. The central feature was isolation, achieved by the practice of silencing. White cadets assumed that isolation made it only a matter of time before Black cadets would fail out of the Academy. In most cases, they were right. Of twelve cadets admitted to the Academy during the first attempt to integrate West Point (1870–1889), only three graduated. However, the fact that three did graduate owes much to Smith's courageous persistence. By prompting cadets to shift from active to more passive forms of

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34. Quotations from J. Mott to Secretary of War, January 23, 1871, James W. Smith Files, Roll 1, M1002, United States Military Academy Special Collections and Archives, West Point, NY. For a detailed account of Smith's experiences, see McGovern, Campbell, and Koebrich, "I Hope to Have Justice Done Me or I Can't Get Along Here": James Webster Smith and West Point."



A sketch of James W. Smith defending himself at a court martial, featured in *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* on January 28, 1871. Courtesy of the New York Public Library.

resistance to integration, Smith made graduation possible if still not probable for those who followed him.<sup>35</sup>

Black cadets prior to and including Flipper's tenure at West Point fared poorly. Between 1870 and Flipper's graduation in 1877, eleven young African Americans earned appointments to West Point. All but one came from former Confederate states, and most had been enslaved at birth. Among them, only six passed the entrance examination to gain admission, and Flipper was the sole graduate. Of those admitted and ultimately dismissed, two failed natural and experimental philosophy after four years of study at the Academy; one failed mathematics and French in the annual

35. This is the central argument advanced in McGovern, Campbell, and Koebrich, "I Hope to Have Justice Done Me or I Can't Get Along Here": James Webster Smith and West Point." The response of white cadets and faculty to Reconstruction-era integration receives more general treatment in Ronald G. Machoian, "Trying Times on the Hudson: One Cadet's Witness to James Webster Smith's Travails at Old West Point," and Rory McGovern, "'You Need Not Think You Are on an Equality with Your Classmates': Resistance to Integration at West Point," in *Race, Politics, and Reconstruction: The First Black Cadets at Old West Point*, eds. Rory McGovern and Ronald G. Machoian (University of Virginia Press, 2024), chap. 4–5.

exams at the end of his first year of study; and two failed mid-year exams after only six months at West Point, one each in mathematics and French. Coming from areas that had criminalized Black education in their childhood, all had marked disadvantages in their childhood schooling. At the same time, most had been chosen for a reason and were reasonably well prepared to attend West Point, having stood out in freedpeople's schools and, in at least three cases, matriculated at either Howard University or Atlanta University. Because Academy leaders had ensured blind and anonymous grading of entrance examinations since 1870, Black prospective cadets' failures on entrance examinations were most likely legitimate. Nothing ensured similar objectivity in mid-year or end-of-year examinations. While it is possible that disadvantages in childhood education could explain why dismissed Black cadets seemed to fail only natural and experimental philosophy, French, or mathematics, it is equally possible that racism and bias among the faculty in those programs led to unfair grading and evaluations of Black cadets' work.<sup>36</sup>

Such biases were an important characteristic of the environment Flipper entered at West Point. Faculty kept their views well concealed while Flipper was at the Academy, but a spasm of institutional defensiveness in 1880 brought them into public view. Johnson Chestnut Whittaker was a Black cadet who had roomed with Flipper in 1876–77. In spring 1880, he was brutally assaulted in his room. Academy leaders accused Whittaker of faking the entire incident and causing his own injuries. Such a blatant miscarriage of justice caused a national controversy. With West Point facing considerable public criticism, some of its leaders and long-serving faculty responded. Peter Michie, the professor of natural and experimental philosophy and member of West Point's Academic Board, described all Black cadets admitted to West Point in the 1870s as possessing "a marked deficiency in deductive reasoning." Professor of French and another member of the academic board George

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36. "Statement Showing the Number of Colored Persons Appointed Candidates for Admission to the U.S. Military Academy," October 21, 1886, RG404, USMA Library Special Collections and Archives, West Point, NY. On Black nominees' qualifications and prior experiences, see Makonen Campbell and Louisa Koebrich, "The First African American Cadets at West Point," in *Race, Politics, and Reconstruction: The First Black Cadets at Old West Point*, eds. Rory McGovern and Ronald G. Machoian (University of Virginia Press, 2024).

Andrews described the very policy of admitting Black cadets to West Point as a “tyrannical course” because it forced white cadets into close contact with Black cadets.<sup>37</sup>

Most significantly and most revealingly, Major General John M. Schofield—who served as superintendent of West Point from 1876 to 1881—aired his own grievances about integrating West Point in his section of the War Department’s annual report for the year 1880:

The difficulty surrounding this subject [the high dismissal rate of Black cadets] is aggravated by the somewhat common error of ascribing it to an unreasonable prejudice against race or color. The prevailing “prejudice” is rather a just aversion to qualities which the people of the United States have long been accustomed to associate with a state of slavery and intercourse without legal marriage, and of which color and its various shades are only the external signs. That feeling could not be removed by the simple act of enfranchising the slave. It can only be done by the education and moral elevation of the race. That great work has only been commenced, and it must of necessity require much time. To send to West Point for a four years’ competition a young man who was born in slavery is to assume that half a generation has been sufficient to raise a colored man to the social, moral, and intellectual level which the average white man has reached in several hundred years. As well might the common farm-horse be entered in a four-mile race against the best blood inherited from a long line of English racers.<sup>38</sup>

These views came from the very top of the Academy’s hierarchy, from those charged with carrying out the policy of integration.

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37. These quotations come from Michie, “Caste at West Point,” 611; George Andrews, “The Colored Cadets at West Point,” *International Review* (November 1880): 484. For coverage of Whittaker’s assault and trials, see John F. Marszalek, *Assault at West Point: The Court-Martial of Johnson Whittaker* (Collier Books, 1972).

38. U.S. War Department, *Annual Report of the Secretary of War for the Year 1880*, vol. I (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1880), 229. For more on Schofield’s superintendency, as well as his views and actions related to integrating West Point, see Donald B. Connelly, *John M. Schofield and the Politics of Generalship* (University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 249–68.



There was waning energy and commitment to ensuring the policy of integration would be carried out despite such biases at the highest levels of the Academy. While many scholars believe that Reconstruction ended abruptly as a result of a compromise to resolve the contested election of 1876, Flipper attended West Point as it entered a sharp and steep decline. Many Northerners lost interest and enthusiasm for the project. A shrinking Army—once committed to active campaigns against the Ku Klux Klan and other terrorist organizations to enforce the Reconstruction amendments—was increasingly pulled to more traditional frontier and coastal defense missions. By the mid-1870s, it was unable to do more than secure and enforce the immediate vicinity of steadily shrinking Southern garrisons. Through violence, intimidation, and increasing political assertiveness, the antebellum Southern Democratic political elite returned to power, ejecting most Republican officeholders and rendering it considerably less likely that Black cadets would be appointed from the South, where the vast majority of the African American population lived.<sup>39</sup>

To summarize, then, when Flipper arrived at West Point in 1873, he entered a complex and charged environment framed by many forces, often in tension. His path to West Point was laid by the legacy of Black Civil War service, the dynamics of early Reconstruction politics that empowered those willing to push the boundaries of white Americans' beliefs about social equality between the races, and the activism of those who made education a pillar of grassroots activity by and on behalf of the formerly enslaved. At the same time, his experiences at West Point were framed in large part by the Academy's own traditionalism and racist backlash to Reconstruction progress and policies in early 1872. That backlash was somewhat muted by James Webster Smith's perseverance, which forced white resistance to integration to assume a more passive character, ultimately leaving Flipper and other Black cadets with at least some chance, however long, of graduating.

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39. On waning Northern energy and Reconstruction's decline, see Summers, *The Ordeal of the Reunion*, chap. 13–16. For an examination of backsliding in the South, see Michael Perman, *The Road to Redemption: Southern Politics, 1869–1879* (University of North Carolina Press, 1984). On the Army's inability to sustain active operations in the South late in Reconstruction due to competing demands for limited resources in the West, see Wooster, *The United States Army and the Making of America*, 233–40.

## PREFACE.

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THE following pages were written by request. They claim to give an accurate and impartial narrative of my four years' life while a cadet at West Point, as well as a general idea of the institution there. They are almost an exact transcription of notes taken at various times during those four years. Any inconsistencies, real or apparent, in my opinions or in the impressions made upon me, are due to the fact that they were made at different times at a place where the feelings of all were constantly undergoing material change.

They do not pretend to merit. Neither are they written for the purpose of criticising the Military Academy or those in any way connected with it.

My "notes" have been seen and read. If I please those who requested me to publish them I shall be content, as I have no other object in putting them before the public.

H. O. F.

FORT SILL, INDIAN TER., 1878.

The preface from the original 1878 edition of Flipper's autobiography.  
Courtesy of the United States Military Academy Special Collections and Archives.

Flipper's autobiography is in large part a narrative of the environment at West Point. His narrative makes clear that Flipper, in common with just about any person at just about any time, held an incomplete understanding of the myriad forces affecting his world and his life. He was decidedly aware of the racist backlash by his fellow cadets. At the same time, he seemed to have been unaware that the extent of the backlash had been muted by James Webster Smith's staying power. Flipper was aware that survival at West Point demanded of him extreme patience and self-reliance, but he was unaware that this was because Reconstruction and the project to integrate West Point were gradually unraveling around him. Moreover, he was either unaware or unwilling to admit publicly for fear of professional repercussions that part of the need for extreme self-reliance was because the officers and faculty responsible for integrating West Point were undermining the process of integration.

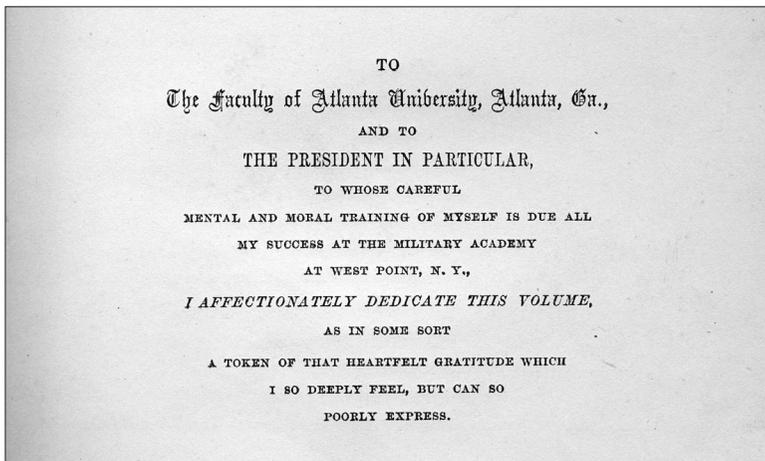
## Motives

It is time we take a closer look at the book itself, starting with scrutiny of Flipper's motives for writing, which run from obvious to elusive.<sup>40</sup> Justly proud of graduating West Point, Flipper simply wanted to celebrate his success and to represent one pinnacle of achievement for freed people in a post-slavery America. Despite recurring assertions to the contrary, Flipper knew he was an "important" trailblazer (103), that the eyes of the nation were upon him, and so he sought to satisfy national fascination about a "colored cadet at West Point" while thanking the people who had helped him along the way. Without question he accomplished this straightforward, composite mission. Beyond that, however, his reasons are less clear. Indeed, Flipper's brief preface, written by himself, helps us very little.

If, as he asserts in his preface, adopting a very traditional form, "[t]he following pages were written by request" (above, 29), we have no record of who made that request. West Point at that time certainly did not. By Flipper's graduation the Academy had little interest in more press litigating his West Point time—or Smith's. The request is as unlikely to have come from former congressman J. C. Freeman, the man who had appointed Flipper to the Academy. In March of 1875, Flipper's ongoing success had helped unseat this Southern Republican. Perhaps a family member had called for the book, or a faculty mentor at the Storr's School, at The Atlanta Normal School, or at Atlanta University. Possibly the first president of Atlanta University, Edmund Asa Ware, encouraged Flipper to write. Flipper had, after all, dedicated the autobiography to Ware, if not by name, before thanking "the Faculty at Atlanta University" for providing the "careful mental and moral training" that conditioned his West Point success (31). In a late *encomium* to these "carpetbaggers," as unreconstructed Southerners would have called them, Flipper amplified his dedicatory gratitude and, then shifting to the third person plural, proffered rare acknowledgment of the larger community of "black . . . citizens" created by the Fourteenth Amendment in 1866. Here is some of Flipper's language, drawn from chapter XV:

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40. Having established the historical context necessary for understanding Flipper, his times, and his experiences, we have turned to contextualizing the autobiography itself. Throughout the remainder of this introduction, we have included in-line parenthetical citations for Flipper quotations that appear in this volume.



The original dedication to the 1878 edition.  
*Courtesy of the United States Military Academy Special Collections and Archives.*

Before closing my narrative I desire to perform a very pleasant duty. I sincerely believe that all my success at West Point is due not so much to my perseverance and general conduct there as to the early moral and mental training I received at the hands of those philanthropic men and women who left their pleasant homes in the North to educate and elevate the black portion of America's citizens, and that, too, to their own discomfort and disadvantage. How they have borne the sneers of the Southern press, the ostracism from society in the South, the dangers of Kuklux in remote counties, to raise up a downtrodden race, not for personal aggrandizement, but for the building up and glory of His kingdom who is no respecter of persons, is surely worthy our deepest gratitude, our heartfelt thanks, and our prayers and blessing. (329)

Flipper's carefully crafted humility here showers praise on his early teachers, but readers should also note a significant silence—the deliberate exclusion of gratitude for anybody at West Point. These bookending moments in the volume, and the quiet snubbing they achieve, suggest a more expansive reason for why Flipper took up his pen “by request.” It is entirely likely, perhaps especially just after his graduation, as he was celebrated at public venues, that he entertained repeated calls from “race men” and sympathetic whites alike for an accounting of his West Point struggles. Flipper's

own sense of civic duty, his sometimes-unsubtle pride at having come through slaughter at West Point, as well as advocates of Reconstruction, radical and otherwise, combined to spur him on.

Nevertheless, Flipper also had a more urgent and pragmatic reason for writing; he was thinking about his future. In several passages, most notably at the very end of the final, appendix-like Smith chapter, he deliberately recuses West Point faculty of blame for his mistreatment. Flipper knew this powerful brotherhood of white commissioned officers and civilians controlled “access” not only to “the very pinnacle of fame,” the achievement of which he “shuddered” to imagine upon first seeing the “stone” academy, but that these men could easily cancel *any* future for him in the officer corps (81). He knew that to advance he needed to exonerate West Point’s faculty formally. He closes the autobiography by asserting that “[a]ll I could say of the professors and officers at the Academy would be unqualifiedly in their favor” (356). Attaching awkwardly to its surroundings, this language comes out of nowhere to conclude the book and is not substantiated by the facts. Flipper’s use of the conditional voice adds a subtle register to his closing words. All he “could” say about the faculty “would” be positive, but, in fact, the book contains no stories about faculty largesse. The passage exemplifies Flipper’s remarkable ability to communicate politically and at crossed purposes. On the one hand, a careful reader, one who notices the performative placement and tenor of the language, can see that Flipper indicts the West Point faculty through faint praise. On the other hand, the power brokers who command his Army future, the men who need to hear and perhaps cite Flipper, are delivered exactly what they want.

## Composition

The book itself is strangely made, a text largely compiled rather than written; it presents as a pastiche of first- and third-person direct narration flooded by interpolated documents. In fact, Flipper’s “autobiography” runs to more than 95,000 words, with his own words accounting for just over 50,000 of the total. He imports almost 45,000 words from journal articles, official West Point documents, and correspondence, as well as passages from poems, lyrics, etc. Because Flipper takes the practice to an extreme, the odd shape of the book cannot be fully explained by the era’s culture of reprinting. One might even reasonably argue that Flipper

emerges as a person of paper, a being triangulated by public discourse, a subject resistant to the first-person ground of his chosen genre, autobiography. In a correlate sense, the structure of the book removes or rescues Flipper from West Point, placing him (and the subject of his cadetship) within a larger discussion of Black national struggles and futures.

The structure of the book points to Flipper's awareness of being the subject of intense national interest, even as he repeatedly refuses the mantle of representativeness. Flipper asserts that he is not interested in the politics of it all, that he is just a cadet keeping his head down, driving toward the North Star of graduation. "So fully was I determined," he writes early in chapter II, "Communications," and "so absolutely was my mind set on West Point, that I persisted in my desire even to getting the appointment, staying at the Academy four years, and finally graduating" (70). One great accomplishment of the book is to continuously lay bare (to the attentive reader) the disjunction between Flipper's hopeful, first-person story of persistent self-reliance and the public saga of Reconstruction's coeval precarity and collapse. Indeed, the wider, impersonal meaning of Flipper's larger Army career exemplifies this sad saga of promise crushed before the juggernaut of Jim Crow America.

Flipper mentions the act of compiling his book only once. This occurs at the beginning of chapter II, right after he seems impelled to correct the record. His interest in West Point begins in "the autumn of 1872," he asserts, when he personally learns of an impending vacancy, and decidedly *not* "in 1865 or 1866," when someone suggested the possibility of his appointment to his father (69). It is classic Flipper that the idea must be his alone. He writes as follows: "At the time I obtained the appointment I had quite forgotten this early recommendation of my father's friend; indeed, I did not recall it until I began compiling my manuscript" (69).

If exactly when Flipper "began compiling" remains an open question, we have learned something about the timing and process through which the autobiography came to press. The book was published in late 1878 in New York City by Homer Lee & Co. Flipper states that the "following pages" are "accurate and impartial"—standard fare for a preface—but he also asserts that they present "almost an exact transcription of notes taken at various times during" his West Point years (29). Indeed, chapter IV, "Cant Terms," chapter V, "Plebe Camp," and chapter VI, "Studies," strike us as projecting the earnest perspective of a young writer directly immersed in a strange

and fascinating new sub-culture. These and other pages *may* have evolved from “notes” Flipper wrote when a cadet, but it is a stretch to believe Flipper’s assertion of an “exact transcription.”

If we cannot yet date the composition of many chapters, some either clearly post-date Flipper’s time at the Academy or bear the mark of fluid construction, as having been made from West Point “notes” as well as from material not available until after his time at the Academy. After June 14, 1877, when Flipper received his West Point “sheepskin,” he was arguably too busy being feted to compose and compile (294). However, when the fanfare died down in late July of 1877, Flipper found himself furloughed, “until the military decided what to do with its first [B]lack officer.”<sup>41</sup> We suspect that the book may have been largely put together during this period, when Flipper was at home in Atlanta, and even extending to after his arrival at Fort Sill on January 2, 1878. Atlanta would certainly have provided more ready access than did “Indian Terr[itory]” to the many sources he built into the book. Still, we think the work continued at Fort Sill, and then at Fort Concho, and at other locations and times before the volume appeared in print on the cusp of 1879.

The last two chapters are the clearest examples of writing done after West Point: chapter XV, “Graduation—In the Army,” and the fascinating final chapter, given largely to the plight and complaint of James Webster Smith. “In the Army” simply had to have been written after the flurry of post-graduation events and celebrations that it records. The “Smith at West Point” chapter, on the other hand, may be an amalgam of work accomplished at and after West Point. Given the Smith documents cached in the chapter pre-date Flipper’s graduation in 1877, he may have compiled these editorials, following along in real time as his former roommate pleaded his case in the *National Republican* and the *New National Era*—important Reconstruction periodicals of the period.

It matters that the Smith chapter opens in the past tense. “James Webster Smith,” it begins, “a native of South Carolina, *was* appointed” (emphasis added, 331). The past tense first captures a simple fact from the past, but it may also deftly note that Smith had *passed* from tuberculosis in November of 1876, when Flipper was working his way through his “Firstie” year. Smith’s death suggests

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41. Jane Eppinga, *Henry Ossian Flipper: West Point’s First Black Graduate* (Republic of Texas Press, 1996), 50.

that Flipper added the chapter as a sort of tribute, a possibility to which we return below and put to the test. After the Smith documents, Flipper interposes four articles about himself, all concerning his status in the Army, and so, of course, the chapter at least partially post-dates his West Point time.

## Homer Lee & Co.

Flipper's publisher, Homer Lee & Co., presents a fascinating mystery. Significantly, Homer Lee is not just the name of an established press but of a singularly talented Ohioan in his late twenties. To date we know little about how Flipper came to work with Lee, and nothing at all for sure about the editorial relationship between the two men. In 1878 Lee was struggling to stand up an engraving business in a since-demolished wood-frame building at 65 Liberty Street in New York City. According to a colorful 1896 "great man" bio-sketch, probably written by Lee himself, Flipper's young publisher found himself

thrown upon his own resources [and] resolved, though he had not yet reached the age of manhood, to embark in business on his own account. He had managed to save about £300, and with this he began an engraving business in Liberty Street, under the firm-name of Homer Lee & Co., in which the "Co." was but a dignified addition, with no representative. But by renting desk-room to a fine-looking old gentleman, he contrived to offset his own very youthful aspect.

According to the same sketch, Lee had few projects and did all the work himself, until, that is, he finally broke into the emergent business of engraving bank notes and became quite successful.<sup>42</sup> The fact that Lee worked alone in 1877–78 may account for the numerous structural quirks in the Flipper volume.<sup>43</sup> But if Lee sometimes struggled as a copyeditor, he proved a master-engraver, as evidenced by the portrait page of Flipper as a cadet,

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42. For more see "Homer Lee" in *Men of the Century: An Historical Work*, ed. Charles Morris, 322. Philadelphia: L.R. Hammersly & Co., 1896); available via Internet Archive, accessed December 19, 2023, [https://archive.org/details/bub\\_gb\\_VtY-AAAAYAAJ/page/n325/mode/1up?q=homer+Lee+](https://archive.org/details/bub_gb_VtY-AAAAYAAJ/page/n325/mode/1up?q=homer+Lee+).

43. For more on this issue see footnote 67 at the end of this introduction.

and the later engraving of him as a new Lieutenant. While Lee's self-described marginal status suggests that more established Northern presses shied away from publishing *Flipper*, a more nuanced picture begins to emerge when we consider the *only* other volumes Lee published as Homer Lee & Co., before he established his far more successful Homer Lee Bank Note Company.

Lee published two other Academy-related titles in 1877–78: *Fag Ends from the Naval Academy*, followed by *West Point Tic Tacs*. If Lee's prefaces to these volumes are to be believed, the first, his Annapolis book, came about when several midshipmen, on leave in New York City from their summer cruise, walked into his Liberty Street establishment asking to have some drawings made. One "wanted a design which an old sailor" could tattoo "on his arm for him" when he returned to his ship. What caught Lee's attention was the young man's "note-book," which was "filled up with autographs of classmates and friends, songs, poems," as well as "amateur efforts at illustration." Sensing a captive Academy market, Lee had the idea to take this raw material, hire professional artists, and make what he hoped would become a landscape-oriented "vade-mecum to cadets," or a portable class handbook, a sort of Annapolis treasury of art and image that would also serve as an autograph book at graduation. "The favor with which 'Fag Ends' was received," writes Lee in *Tic Tacs*, "excited the desire of preparing a book on West Point and Army Life which should surpass every other work of the kind."<sup>44</sup>

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44. See *Fag Ends from the Naval Academy, Illustrated: A Collection of Naval Poems, Songs, and Autographs, Chronologically Arranged* (Homer Lee & Co., 1877), available through HathiTrust, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015016768346&seq=9>. "Fag ends" essentially means cigarette or cigar butts. Frontmatter of the first edition asserts 1877 as the copyright year, but Roman numerals on the title page indicate 1878. See also *West Point Tic Tacs, Illustrated: A Collection of Military Verse, Together with a Special Poem, "Cadet Grey," by Bret Harte* (Homer Lee & Co., 1878), available through Wikipedia Commons, [https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/1/1c/West\\_Point\\_tic\\_tacs\\_-\\_A\\_collection\\_of\\_military\\_verse%2C\\_together\\_with\\_the\\_special\\_poem%2C\\_%22Cadet\\_Grey%2C%22\\_%28IA\\_westpointtictacs00leehrich%29.pdf?uselang=ru](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/1/1c/West_Point_tic_tacs_-_A_collection_of_military_verse%2C_together_with_the_special_poem%2C_%22Cadet_Grey%2C%22_%28IA_westpointtictacs00leehrich%29.pdf?uselang=ru). The noun "Tic Tac" as used in *Flipper*'s era meant both the incessant clicking of a clock and the sound of small artillery.

See, for another "work of the kind," Oliver E. Wood, *The West Point Scrap Book: A Collection of Stories, Songs, and Legends of the United States Military Academy* (D. Van Nostrand, 1871), [https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/9/96/The\\_West\\_Point\\_scrap\\_book\\_-\\_a\\_collection\\_of\\_stories%2C\\_songs%2C\\_and\\_](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/9/96/The_West_Point_scrap_book_-_a_collection_of_stories%2C_songs%2C_and_)

Lee's autograph books were elaborately made, full of rich, Victorian illustrations inspired by the Charles Eastlake tradition, but because all three books, including Flipper's, were military, they carry relatively somber cloth covers more typical of Civil War-era design. While Lee's two vade mecums are more like each other than like Flipper's book, it matters that similar content appears in all three, especially when we pin down the order of publication. We know that the Annapolis book was published first, late in 1877 or early in 1878, followed by the West Point book in 1878. Flipper's volume came last in the sequence, which means that the two autograph books might have provided content ideas for Flipper, Lee, or both.<sup>45</sup> For example, the Annapolis and West Point books each includes glossaries of Academy slang. Was Flipper's chapter IV, "Cant Terms," suggested by this content? Also, *Fag Ends* contains an illustration of "Pleasures" at Annapolis. Might Flipper's chapter XII, "Pleasures and Privileges" have been suggested by it? We note as well that *Tic Tacs* reprints "Information Relative to the Appointment and Admission of Cadets." These pages repeat almost *verbatim* early in Flipper's book.<sup>46</sup> Moreover, both West Point books contain versions of the lyrics for "Benny Havens" and "Army

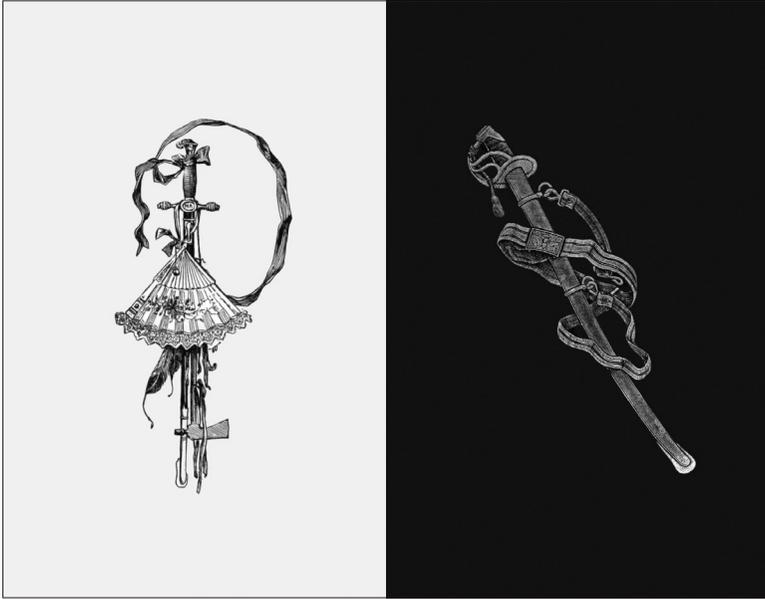
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legends\_of\_the\_United\_States\_military\_academy\_%28IA\_westpointscrapbo00-woodrich%29.pdf. Wood's slightly earlier volume was probably the work that Lee sought to "surpass." And he did so. Wood's book was printed in portrait rather than landscape, had less refined illustrations and lower-grade paper, and was not intended to be an autograph book for cadets. Moreover, all of Wood's stories, lyrics, and poems are unattributed. He gives this reason in his preface: "As many of the authors of contributing pieces have desired that their names should be withheld from the public, it has been considered advisable to refrain from giving any names" (5). Significantly, Wood includes a glossary of West Point slang and many other points of connection with all three of Homer Lee's martial volumes. See more on this in our first note to Flipper's chapter V, "Plebe Camp."

45. A *New York Times* "Literary Note" from December 1878 dates the appearance of Flipper's book on the market to very late 1878 or even early 1879: "The colored cadet who graduated (the first in his race) from the West Point Academy is coming out as an author. Homer Lee & Co. is about to publish *The Colored Cadet at West Point*, wherein Second Lieut. Henry Ossian Flipper gives his experiences at the hands of his white school-fellows and Professors. The book will be looked for and read with curiosity."

46. The pages are reprinted as a "Circular" that Flipper includes in his second chapter, on pages 73–76 and 134–135.

Blue.”<sup>47</sup> Homer Lee’s slightly earlier publications are instructive for another, unfortunate reason; both contain racist material. *West Point Tic Tacs*, for example, prints two racist poems and one racist illustration concerning James Webster Smith. The illustration is signed “Mowbray,” and the poems are by Carver Howland, class of 1876.



At left is a saber from *West Point Tic Tacs* (1878).

The saber on the right comes from the original cover of *The Colored Cadet at West Point* (1878).  
*Courtesy of the United States Military Academy Special Collections and Archives.*

It would be exciting to find archival correspondence between Flipper and Lee, but we have been unable to unearth such a treasure. Hence, many questions remain. Here are some: How did the two men come to work together? Did they only correspond, or did they meet? What were Homer Lee’s politics? What was the state of Flipper’s original manuscript when the partnership began? Did Lee find Flipper’s manuscript thin and advise him on how to thicken it? Moreover, what besides lack of money might explain the presence of only two illustrations in Flipper’s book, especially with

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47. For iterations of these songs see pages 47 and 101 in *West Point Tic Tacs*, and in this volume pages 110 and 241.

a master-engraver at the helm? To answer at least this last question, we need to turn to other West Point autobiographies of the Victorian period.

## Belonging and Exclusion

A long line of West Point *Life* volumes follows Flipper's book, but when we look to his time, and to the period before his West Point years, and when we also exclude volumes centered on a graduate's time *after* the Academy, like Custer's *My Life on the Plains* (1874), we find the literary ledger very nearly blank. The few exceptions bring into stark relief contrasting stories of cadet life—one of white belonging and one of Black exclusion. Here we have space only to consider for contrast a volume by George Crocket Strong, class of 1857, who anonymously published *Cadet Life at West Point* in 1862—five years after he graduated.<sup>48</sup> While we find no clear textual evidence that Flipper drew directly from Strong, we think he could hardly have avoided knowing of it. Like Flipper, Strong writes his way through four years at the Academy. Both Flipper and Strong explore the many milestones of cadet experience, but the books differ vastly in tenor, a point made vivid when we examine their differing modes of engagement with Victorian rhetorical habits.

Where Strong dedicates his book to “‘The Ladies of the Regiment’ the toast of camp and garrison,” Flipper's looks away, and South, to thank his Reconstruction teachers in Atlanta. Strong opens with a *tour de force* sketch of West Point and its environs drawn from Benson J. Lossing's *The Hudson, from the wilderness to the sea*. A prolific pastoral writer and avid historian of the Hudson region, Lossing was one of the first trustees of Vassar College.<sup>49</sup> Strong's use of Lossing not only inscribes him from the start as belonging to the polite, white literary scene of the era, but also enfolds his West Point book neatly within the Romantic, picturesque

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48. George Crocket Strong, *Cadet Life at West Point, by an Officer of the United States Army with a descriptive sketch of West Point, by Benjamin J. Lossing* (Boston: T.O.H.P. Burnham, 1862).

49. See Strong, vii–viii. See also Benson John Lossing, *The Hudson, from the wilderness to the sea* (Troy, NY: H.B. Nims & Co., 1860). A pair of Lossing's “Reminiscences of The Hudson Valley” appeared in the April 1876 *Harper's Monthly Magazine*, where Flipper, reading in the West Point library, may have encountered them.

tradition—company reaching back at least through New York writers like Susan Fenimore Cooper (the daughter of novelist James Fenimore Cooper) and Washington Irving. Via Lossing and after, in his own prose, Strong provides masterful views of all he surveys. Starting from a promontory above the Academy, at “Cro’ Nest,” the narrator carefully ushers the reader from place to place, each vista named and appreciated in turn. The whole Hudson region emerges as a hallowed sanctuary steeped in history, the highland home of “unbroken ranks” of cadets, embraced even in death when, eventually, they are interred in “the shaded, quiet, beautiful retreat” of West Point’s cemetery. Strong and Lossing paint the Hudson Valley and West Point, its heart, as a stronghold of *belonging*.<sup>50</sup>

In contrast, and as if resistant to West Point itself, Flipper distinctly refuses the consolations of Romantic space. Keenly aware of his *exclusion*, he cannot or will not see West Point and paint a picture of it for his reader. Chapter I, “Retrospective,” and chapter II, “Communications,” do the important work of establishing Flipper’s pre-Academy life, but this also means that Flipper fails to picture West Point until the beginning of chapter III, “Reporting.” It is only when he finally takes a ferry from Garrison Landing across to the west side of the Hudson that we get this stark and existential description: “I viewed the little hills about West Point, her stone structures perched thereon, thus rising still higher, as if providing access to the very pinnacle of fame, and shuddered” (81). Thereafter, Flipper forecloses on the landscape, on the place, and on almost every West Point setting, real and imagined, interior and exterior. Indeed, it is exceedingly rare for Flipper to detail *any* scene directly. We never really *see* a barracks room, dining hall, classroom, library, faculty office, parade ground, or the Hudson Highlands

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50. Strong, born in Vermont, wrote near the outbreak of the Civil War, and his West Point emerges as an emblem of national Union. He died as the result of wounds received in the assault on Fort Wagner. A second, notable volume appeared too late to be a source for Flipper. See Dum John, *The Autobiography of a West Pointer: Written at the request of George Washington, General Chewflicker and some Foreign Gentlemen* (New York, Metropolitan Pub. Co., 1882). John Dum is an obvious *nom de plume*; the actual author was Edward Samuel Farrow, 1855–1926, USMA 1876—the class year to graduate just ahead of Flipper. This experimental volume of wit, verse, and illustrations offers another mode of privileged nostalgia for West Point. Its reprinting of the racist poem lampooning James Smith, “The Cullud Cadet,” and of numerous racist drawings underscores the hostile culture Flipper and other Black cadets had to endure.

through Flipper's eyes. Consequently, it is the rare exception when Flipper describes the riding hall in chapter VI, "Studies, etc." There, Flipper's narrative playfully breaks into the form of a play:

Scene I. The riding-hall, a large, spacious, rectangular structure, door on each side and at each end, floor well covered with tan bark, spacious gallery over each side door, staircases outside leading to them. Galleries are occupied, one by ladies, and, perhaps a number of gentlemen, and the other by enlisted men usually. In the centre of the hall are a number of horses, each equipped with a surcingle, blanket, and watering bridle. A soldier stands at the head of each one of them. As curtain rises enter platoon by side door, and marches around the left flank of the line of horses and as far forward as necessary. (141)

Readers may find Flipper's scene description formally refreshing, but it is also terse—just the facts. Jane Eppinga, in her book on Flipper, tells us that while reading we should remember that the autobiography "was written by a nineteenth-century Victorian military student with youthful humor and a tedious expository style."<sup>51</sup> While we will not argue here for the vibrancy of Flipper's prose, we also find this an unfair assessment of his art. Like so many seeming limitations in the book, the absence of place cannot be attributed only to youth or to Flipper's limited writing skills. There is more to it. It is important in this context to remember that Flipper's West Point, an engineering school, placed great emphasis first on seeing, and then on accurately drawing from life. In Flipper's wind-up to the riding scene, where yearling cadets fall from their mounts to "peals of laughter from [the] cruel gallery," he notes that "[t]he entire class attend[s] drawing daily till November 1st, when it is divided into two equal parts or platoons, which [then] attend drawing and riding on alternate days" (130). In fact, Flipper was carefully trained in field-sketching. Significantly, his four years at West Point match the last four years of Robert Walter Weir's tenure as Professor of Drawing. It is hard to imagine that Flipper, a student under this great Hudson River School artist, could have emerged unable to sketch West Point *in prose* if he had so desired. It remains a question, though, whether Flipper's refusal of the era's

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51. Eppinga, *Henry Ossian Flipper*, 23.

veritable obsession with picturesque description was conscious or unconscious. There can be no arguing that Strong's ornate prose and Flipper's stark style contrast love of West Point with tortured ambivalence, a quick nostalgia against a steadfast aversion. Simply put, what the Academy did to Flipper—silenced him—Flipper's art quietly does to the Academy at the level of description.

## Black Cadet Reading

Working with librarians in West Point's Special Collections, we have compiled a record of the books that Flipper and other Black cadets voluntarily read during optional Saturday visits to the Academy library.<sup>52</sup> Books could not be brought back to the barracks, but cadets could sign out volumes and sit with them in the reading room for several hours at a time. There were no recorded library visits by Flipper for his first two years at the Academy, and we surmise that he was simply too busy until his junior, or Cow year. But on October 2, 1875, Flipper began taking full advantage of these reading periods, sitting down to read on 63 separate Saturdays.

It is easy to speculate that these periods of silent immersion were of special interest to all the socially isolated Black cadets, who might find respite in imaginary company and freely engage private and professional interests. On several occasions the record suggests cadets recommended books to each other. For example, on January 20, 1877, Flipper checked out a biography of Empress Josephine. The following Saturday, Johnson C. Whittaker signed out the same volume; he was Flipper's roommate at the time. The author, Cecil B. Hartley, also published biographies of David Crockett and of Daniel Boone. On April 15, 1876, Flipper had signed out a *Life and Times of Daniel Boone*, which may have been the one penned by Hartley—we can no longer be sure—and which may have led to Flipper's interest in the *Life of the Empress Josephine* volume.<sup>53</sup> Moreover, three Black cadets signed out *Nineteen Months a Prisoner of War*—James Smith on October 7, 1871, Henry A. Napier on

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52. Refer to this volume's appendix for an annotated list of Black cadets' reading, from James W. Smith's admission in 1870 to Henry O. Flipper's graduation in 1877.

53. See Cecil B. Hartley, *Life of the Empress Josephine, Wife of Napoleon I* (Philadelphia: G.G. Evans, 1860). This volume is still in West Point's Special Collections. See also Cecil B. Hartley, *Life and Times of Daniel Boone, the Great Western Hunter and Pioneer* (Philadelphia: John H. Potter, 1865).

February 24, 1872, and Flipper on February 26, 1876.<sup>54</sup> Napier was gone by the time Flipper arrived at West Point, but Smith may have recommended the book first to Napier, and then to Flipper. Napier signed out *Nineteen Months* on the line right below the one indicating Smith's borrowing of a volume of Milton's poetry. Interestingly, Napier on that day had for a second time checked out a *Life of Gen. Napier vol. 1*, a hero of the Napoleonic Wars; Napier's reasons were at least prompted by his identification with the general's name.

Of course, a deeper dive might be taken into the reading habits of Flipper and other Black cadets, but here we can remark on significant patterns of interest and influence that we see emerging from the record of Flipper's borrowings.

Flipper first sat down in the reading room on October 2, 1875, and while checking out George Bancroft's *History of the United States from the Discovery of the American Continent, Vol. X*, the volume dedicated to the Revolution, he seems to have intended to start from the nation's beginnings. Two weeks later he shifted, widened his aperture of interest, and began a habit of reading *Harper's Weekly Magazine*, eventually borrowing a dozen issues. *Harper's* did an excellent job of recording the progress and collapse of the Reconstruction; it provided Flipper a valuable window into current and past affairs.

The first novel Flipper checked out was *The Wide, Wide World* (1850) by Susan Warner, who penned the book while living on Constitution Island, just across the river from West Point. A bestselling sentimental and didactic novel about a young woman's journey into Christian faith and adulthood, the book might be thematically bundled with a few others that Flipper read, especially *John Halifax, Gentleman* (1856), by Dinah Craik. This book, like Horatio Alger's *Ragged Dick, or life in New York with the boot-blacks* (1868), was ubiquitous at the time. Flipper's exposure to the Victorian *bildungsroman* reminds us of his youth, that he was readily influenced by middle-class, rags-to-riches narratives. He certainly saw himself as living such a story.<sup>55</sup> Susan Warner's title aptly points away

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54. *Nineteen months a prisoner of war in the hands of the Rebels: experience at Belle Isle, Richmond, Danville, and Andersonville* (New York: Starr & Son, 1865). This short, anonymous volume traces the serial imprisonment of Union soldiers, especially one named "Anderson" during the Civil War.

55. In this literary vein, Flipper also read *Reveries of a Bachelor* (1850), Donald Grant Mitchell's bestseller which, as the title suggests, presents young men with a

from the Hudson region to Flipper's increasingly worldly interests. Historical novels and narratives make up another subgroup of readings, and we count at least eleven times that Flipper sat down to immerse himself in a volume of Sir Walter Scott's *Waverly Novels*, or some other English, continental, or Eastern amalgam of history and plot.

Three books mark an interesting sub-genre of Flipper's expansive interests: In Jules Verne's *Floating City* (1871), Edmund Flagg's *Venice, The City of the Sea* (1853), and Eugene-Emmanuel Voillette-Duc's *Annals of a Fortress* (1876), Flipper, the young engineer, found human-built places and things displacing human characters for centrality. While Verne's *Floating City* retains a plot, the main character of the book is really the eponymous "city" itself, an enormous ship called *The Great Eastern*, at the time and for a long time afterward the largest ship afloat—a true engineering marvel.

Of the several science fiction volumes Flipper read by Verne, one, *From the Earth to the Moon* (1869), which tells of a giant artillery gun capable of sending manned shells to the moon, would have caught his attention immediately. Here is the opening of the first chapter, "The Gun Club":

During the War of the Rebellion, a new and influential club was established in the city of Baltimore in the State of Maryland. It is well known with what energy the taste for military matters became developed amongst that nation of ship-owners, shopkeepers, and mechanics. Simple tradesmen jumped their counters to become extemporized captains, colonels, and generals, without having ever passed the School of Instruction at West Point: nevertheless, they quickly rivalled their compeers of the old continent, and, like them, carried off victories by dint of lavish expenditure in ammuniton, money, and men.<sup>56</sup>

An extremely important subset of Flipper's readings were muscular, nonfiction military narratives, especially "great man" biographies of adventure and battle along the evolving U.S. frontier. *Harper's* carried many Western-themed features and articles, but

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series of aspirational imaginings on pressing matters like whether and how to get married.

56. Jules Verne, *From the Earth to the Moon*, Uniform Edition (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1890), 1.

Flipper also borrowed such volumes as Charles Lester's *The Life of Sam Houston* (1855), Randolph Marcy's (USMA 1832) *Border Reminiscences* (1872), Cecil Hartley's *Life and Times of Daniel Boone* (1865), George M. Custer's (USMA 1861) *Life on the Plains, Or, Personal Experiences with Indians* (1874), and De B. Randolph Keim's *Sheridan's Troopers on the Borders* (1870).<sup>57</sup> These books, while full of seductive adventure and heroism, were not only escapist but also practical for Flipper, as he could readily imagine himself soon engaged on the frontier. We are invited to consider the extent to which Flipper's outsider status enabled him to read critically the Nationalist content of these books, which validated Western expansion, proffered the mythology of Manifest Destiny, and rationalized Indian removal and subjugation. On September 2, 1876, when Flipper perused Keim's volume on Sheridan, he found this prefatory passage, typical of the literature of the era. It merits quoting in full:

Civilization extending in opposite directions, Westward across the great Valley of the Mississippi, and Eastward traversing the auriferous regions of the Rocky Mountains, presents two extensive fields of American Industry, approximating each other, and demanding a more convenient and rapid intercourse. Railways and Telegraphs have boldly penetrated the solitude of the Plains, and the wild Passes of the Mountains reverberate to the rumble of moving trains. The two oceans are already linked together by an Iron Highway. The savage, alarmed at this new encroachment, is ready at any moment for a desperate, probably a final effort to drive out the invaders of his hunting-grounds. Fearful of his future he opposes such encroachments, for in them he sees no benefit to the remnant of his race, who have taken refuge on the plains and in the mountains. The struggle has come, to solve, for all time, the question whether the white or the red man shall prevail in the vast intermediate region between Eastern and Western civilization. The exigencies of modern civilization point to the inevitable doom of the aboriginal people of the United States. Their savage natures, incapable of restraint, render them by instinct foes to progress and the cause of humanity. As with the buffalo

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57. There were numerous Boone biographies, and we are not sure that Flipper read Hartley's popular edition.

the approach of civilization is to them the knell of destruction. As the murderous bullet of the white hunter ruthlessly slaughters the buffalo, so the vices of civilization carry off those of the red men who have outlived their kindred.<sup>58</sup>

Keim rehearses the myth of the vanishing Native American, which had been a mainstay of expansionist art and culture since long before James Fenimore Cooper published his five *Leatherstocking Tales* (1823–1841), especially *The Last of the Mohicans: A Narrative of 1757* (1826). Nothing in the record bears any indication that Henry Flipper did anything but absorb and accede to the violent mythology of American progress.

### **James Webster Smith in *The Colored Cadet at West Point***

Readers will find that the book ends strangely, with an untitled and misnumbered final chapter devoted largely to what, in the table of contents, Flipper names “Smith at West Point.” Internal evidence strongly suggests that Flipper intended chapter XV, “Graduation—In the Army” to be his last, making the Smith chapter a kind of appendix. In the final pages of chapter XV, Flipper regroups from his lengthy curation of public and private writing regarding his graduation to deliberately craft a sense of an ending for his book. Turning away from the Academy and rising in panegyric to a crescendo, Flipper writes, “How my heart looks back and swells with gratitude to these trainers of my youth! My gratitude is deeply felt, but my ability to express it is poor. May Heaven reward them with long years of happiness and usefulness here, and when this life is over, and its battles won, may they enter the bright portals of heaven, and at His feet and from His own hands receive crowns of immortal glory” (287). This passage, taken together with the numbering and titling inconsistencies, suggests that the Smith chapter may have been added last. Elsewhere in this volume, Flipper presents himself as the antithesis of Smith, directly or indirectly casting Smith as the author of his own troubles. Flipper may have experienced some remorse about this as he reflected on Smith’s early death. However, if it was indeed compiled as a kind of memorial

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58. See De Benneville Randolph Keim, *Sheridan’s Troopers on the Borders: A Winter Campaign on the Plains* (Philadelphia: Claxton, Remsen and Haffelfinger, 1870).

to this other brave, path-breaking man, the chapter does so with extremely faint praise. The design of the chapter reveals Flipper's more nuanced reasoning for the eruption and sustained presence of this second, dominant Black voice within the text.

Flipper starts the Smith chapter with a page and a half (five short paragraphs) in a distanced, factual voice that supplants autobiography with biography. We might remember this voice, as it returns us to the third-person perspective that opens the book. There, we met "Henry Ossian Flipper, the eldest of five brothers, and the subject of this narrative" (57). Here, we are given "James Webster Smith, a native of South Carolina" (331). The voice shift almost suggests a reset, that Flipper starts over, beginning a new volume about another man. Why, after all the hard work he has done to distinguish himself from other Black cadets, would he interpose this strong figure, this other voice? To find out we must further consider the shape of the chapter.

Flipper's brief bio-sketch lays out in thumbnail the story of Smith's failed bid to become the first Black graduate. Then, as at the beginning of the book, after "having given . . . a brief account," but this time of Smith, Flipper drops third for first person, this time without asking for "permission." A fully authorized Flipper, now an officer, commands the moment and relinquishes the floor to Smith. He writes, "As to his trials and experiences while a cadet, I shall permit him to speak" (332). Six letters to the editor immediately follow, over seventeen pages, amounting to nearly 9,000 words, in which Smith pleads his case "after his dismissal, to the *New National Era and Citizen*, the political organ of the colored people, published at Washington, D.C." (332). We follow along as an embattled Smith clearly and convincingly reveals the injustices perpetrated against him at West Point.<sup>59</sup> All this suggests that Flipper generously yields the rhetorical floor to

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59. Smith's choice of the *New Era* matters. Frederick Douglass and then his son Lewis H. Douglass edited this newspaper from 1870 to 1874; they were followed by Richard Theodore Greener, who, in 1870, had been Harvard's first Black graduate and then Johnson Chestnut Whittaker's champion. Flipper and Greener knew each other, and Flipper had included Greener's editorials and congratulations earlier in the book. In chapter XV, we find Greener's letter congratulating Flipper on having graduated West Point. There we also learn that Greener had been the author of a letter in the *New Era* about the "snobocracy" at West Point, citations from which appear often in the autobiography.

Smith to foreground the injustices perpetrated against his first roommate, but this is not the case.

After Smith's sixth letter, the chapter takes an odd and distinctly political turn. Flipper inserts ambivalent and then distinctly unflattering articles about Smith. The first, from *The New York Sun*, gathers West Point testimonials and opens with words attributed to an anonymous West Point soldier vouching for Smith's character. Against these voices the anonymous writer juxtaposes the words of one Captain Robert H. Hall, then adjutant of the Academy, whose condemnation of Smith turns the tonal tide of the chapter from tacit hagiography to character assassination. After the subtitle "Naturally Bad," Hall engages in more than one racist trope: "[Smith's] temper was hot, and his disposition not honorable. I can assure you that the officers at this post did every thing [*sic*] in their power to help him along in his studies, as well as to improve his standing with his comrades. But his temper interfered with their efforts in the latter direction, while his dulness [*sic*] precluded his passing through the course of studies prescribed" (347). In a final, scathing Eli Perkins piece addressed "To the Editor of the Daily Graphic," Flipper gives the last word to Smith's various detractors, effectively condemning the recently deceased man without ever having to use his own voice. Then, suddenly, in another strange turn, all talk of Smith stops, and Flipper inserts articles about his own triumph at West Point—a revealing transition within a chapter ostensibly given to Smith. The chapter's reprintings then culminate with an article scolding West Point for Flipper's treatment and blaming the faculty. Flipper then writes the final one hundred words himself, defending West Point's faculty—a tactical move discussed earlier in this introduction. This is the formal evidence of Flipper's *ambivalence* regarding Smith, which in the psychoanalytic sense we should remember does not mean indifference, but the charged welding of love to hate concerning a person or thing.

### **Flipper's Place in the Black Literature and the Gothic Traditions**

Because Flipper's book wrestles with the example of Smith as another way of being Black in the face of white hegemonic force, he strikingly revisits a primal scene within the American Gothic literary tradition—a scene grounded in the horrors of slavery and

clearly expressed in Frederick Douglass's *Narrative* (1845), the most well-known slave narrative and one that Flipper almost certainly knew. Readers often notice the way Douglass understates the moment he escapes slavery—a moment that might loosely correlate with Flipper receiving his “sheepskin” and departing West Point.<sup>60</sup> Douglass wanted to shift the emphasis from his actual escape, not only to shield information about the Underground Railroad but also to emphasize that the climax of his life mapped not to geographical freedom, but to the liberty provided by his inner transformation. For that moment we must look not to his crossing of the Mason-Dixon Line, but to just after he stands up to Edward Covey, the monstrous “slave breaker.” It is a moment that separates two ontologically distinct beings: “I felt as I never felt before,” writes Douglass, before continuing:

It was a glorious resurrection, from the tomb of slavery, to the heaven of freedom. My long-crushed spirit rose, cowardice departed, bold defiance took its place; and I now resolved that, however long I might remain a slave in form, the day had passed forever when I could be a slave in fact. I did not hesitate to let it be known of me, that the white man who expected to succeed in whipping, must also succeed in killing me. . . . From this time I was never again what might be called fairly whipped, though I remained a slave four years afterwards. I had several fights, but was never whipped.<sup>61</sup>

Of course, neither Flipper nor Smith maps perfectly to either Frederick Douglass—pre or post “resurrection.” Neither can the Flipper/Smith dyad be fairly understood through comparison to

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60. See Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself* (Modern Library, 1984).

61. Douglass charges the personal moment of his epiphany with theological language, signaling that he borrows heavily from Spiritual Autobiography, a genre perhaps exemplified in the American tradition by the *Personal Narrative* of Jonathan Edwards (1765). In transferring the trope from the theological (being “resurrect[ed]” in Christ) to the political (finding inner freedom even in the South), Douglass’s figural language wisely remembers that the Abolitionist movement of his time was powered by Church leaders and members. See Douglass, 81–82.

MLK and Malcolm X, as has sometimes occurred.<sup>62</sup> Historical difference collapses in the lazy pursuit of such rough allegories. But we do find it historically significant that the psychological dynamic of Douglass's narrative evolution reverses in Flipper's book, which is to say that, on the cusp of Jim Crow, Flipper makes ascendant the more self-supplicating or accommodating way of being Black, at the expense of Smith's more obstinate or righteous ontological mode.

All this does not mean Flipper *intends* to insert himself within the American Gothic tradition, but rather that consideration of Smith as Flipper's doppelgänger might engender literary-genealogical connection both *back* to American masters of the American Gothic tradition—e.g., Charles Brockden Brown, Edgar Allan Poe, Frederick Douglass—and *forward* through later Black writers like Charles Chesnutt, W. E. B. Du Bois, Ralph Ellison, and Toni Morrison. Flipper's is a rich inheritance, and the editors invite future scholarship in this area.

We have space to consider Flipper against the example of Ellison, who deftly begins *Invisible Man* (1947) by confirming (through exclusion) his entanglement with white American Gothicism: "I am an invisible man," asserts the nameless narrator; "No, I am not a spook like those who haunted Edgar Allan Poe; . . . I am a man of substance, of flesh and bone, fiber and liquids—and I might even be said to possess a mind. I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me."<sup>63</sup> Flipper, we think, looks forward to Ellison's narrator, still struggling with belonging and exclusion in the aftermath of World War II. A remarkable moment early in Ellison's masterpiece transports us to differing ways of being Black also legible in Flipper's book, written on the verge of Reconstruction's collapse. Speaking with power and self-possession, Ellison's *Invisible Man* enters generations of trauma. It is worth quoting in full:

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62. Such comparisons first appeared in the 1960s and shaped histories of West Point and Black cadets' experiences of West Point far too long. See Fleming, *West Point: The Men and Times of the United States Military Academy* (William Morrow, 1965), 213–31, and Stephen Ambrose, *Duty, Honor, Country: A History of West Point* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1966), 231–37. This interpretation is well refuted in Rory McGovern, Makonen Campbell, and Louisa Koebrich, "'I Hope to Have Justice Done Me or I Can't Get Along Here': James Webster Smith and West Point," *Journal of Military History* 87 (October 2023): 964–1003.

63. Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (Vintage, 1995), 3.

I am not ashamed of my grandparents for having been slaves. I am only ashamed of myself for having at one time been ashamed. About eighty-five years ago they were told that they were free, united with others of our country in everything pertaining to the common good, and, in everything social, separate like the fingers of the hand. And they believed it. They exulted in it. They stayed in their place, worked hard, and brought up my father to do the same. But my grandfather is the one. He was an odd old guy, my grandfather, and I am told I take after him. It was he who caused the trouble. On his deathbed he called my father to him and said, "Son, after I'm gone I want you to keep up the good fight. I never told you, but our life is a war and I have been a traitor all my born days, a spy in the enemy's country ever since I give up my gun back in the Reconstruction. Live with your head in the lion's mouth. I want you to overcome 'em with yeses, undermine 'em with grins, agree 'em to death and destruction, let 'em swoller you till they vomit or bust wide open." They thought the old man had gone out of his mind. He had been the meekest of men. The younger children were rushed from the room, the shades drawn and the flame of the lamp turned so low that it sputtered on the wick like the old man's breathing. "Learn it to the younguns," he whispered fiercely; then he died.<sup>64</sup>

From here Ellison's narrator struggles to break out of his own meekness, to dispense with seeking approval in the eyes of others, or *social responsibility*, and to access full humanity, or *social equality*. In this passage Ellison first tips his hat to Booker T. Washington, for to be "united with others of our country in everything pertaining to the common good, and, in everything social, separate like the fingers of the hand" closely follows the language of Washington's famous "Atlanta Compromise Address," given in September 1895. Speaking for his race and hoping to achieve racial *détente* with white supremacist forces in the depths of the lynching era, Washington suggested that "in all things that are purely social we can be as separate as the fingers, yet one as the hand in all things essential

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64. Ellison, 15–16.

to mutual progress.”<sup>65</sup> While we have no evidence that Washington (or Ellison) read Flipper, we should recognize discursive frames that appear in an article Flipper republished from the July 7, 1876, *North American*, a Republican newspaper in Philadelphia:

The cadets come from all parts of the country, from all ranks of the social scale. Amalgamated by the uniform course of studies and the similarity of discipline, the separating fragments at the end of the student life carry similar qualities into the life before them, and step with almost remarkable *social equality* into the world where they must find their level. It would be expecting too much to hope that the companionship which surmounts or breaks down all the barriers of caste, should tread with equal heel the prejudices of color. But it would be more manly in these boys, if they would remember how easy ordinary courtesy would be to them, how much it would lighten the life of a young man *whose rights are equal* to their own. It is useless to ignore the inevitable. This colored boy has his place; he should have fair, encouragement to hold it. Heaping neglect upon him does not overcome the principle involved in his appointment, and while we by no means approve of such appointments we do believe in common justice” (emphasis added, 178).

This is a remarkable passage for drawing the line at caste and before the color line, the crossing of which the writer deems beyond the pale for democratic “social equality.” The language echoes the powerful rhetoric of Washington’s great antagonist, W. E. B. Du Bois, whose advocacy was also, but differently caste-based. Du Bois called for immediate and equal rights for Blacks, but, shifting to the Black side of the color line, he rested that argument upon representative Blacks like Flipper. “The Negro race,” Du Bois wrote, “like all races, is going to be saved by its exceptional men. The problem of education then, among negroes, must first of all deal with the ‘Talented Tenth.’ It is the problem of developing the best of the race

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65. Booker T. Washington, “Address of Booker T. Washington, Principal of the Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute, Tuskegee, Alabama,” September 18, 1895, <https://www.loc.gov/item/90898322>.

that they may guide the Mass away from the contamination and death of the worst.”<sup>66</sup>

The passage Flipper quotes from the *North American* comes a quarter century before what is often called the Washington/Du Bois debate. This gap, from 1876 to at least 1903, speaks to the political stagnation of civil rights work under both the soft and hard weight of white supremacist force, as well as to the collapse of public expression of racial hope immediately following the Reconstruction. Just after quoting the *North American*, Flipper remarks that he has “not always been able to distinguish one class from the other [friend or foe], and [that he has] therefore been quite reticent about [his] life and treatment at West Point” (179). Flipper writes that he has therefore “avoided the newspapers as much as possible” (179). This is of course not strictly true, for the autobiography is awash with evidence that Flipper, both during and immediately after his West Point years, carefully followed the news. Still, the *North American* excerpt nicely exemplifies the difficulty Flipper must have had in discerning friend from foe, for the anonymous author of the *North American* piece closes by splitting the difference: the editorial “we” of the article “believe[s] in common justice,” while at the same time “by no means approves of such appointments” (178).

Flipper also manipulates the delicate politics of having it both ways. For example, in chapter X, “Treatment,” he asserts that, in the cadet corps, race prejudice sometimes coexists with gentlemanly comportment, and that “[t]he officers of the institution have never, so far as I can say, shown any prejudice at all” (181). But in the shrewdest of tells Flipper deploys the modifying phrase, “so far as I can say.” If he does “say,” with his cadetship now behind him, he would, of course, impugn the audience he must win over to survive in the Regular Army. In the end, Flipper’s occluded meanings and protective self-contradictions result in a readership, then and now, still trying to pry him loose from his status as an enigma. West Point’s first Black graduate stands out as an important figure in American history. He entangles “history from below” with aspirational “great man theory” in ways that invite further analysis, which we hope we have suggested by this introduction and the many annotations and illustrations that contextualize the writing.

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66. W. E. B. Du Bois, “The Talented Tenth,” from *The Negro Problem: A Series of Articles by Representative Negroes of To-day* (New York: J. Pott & Company, 1903), 33.

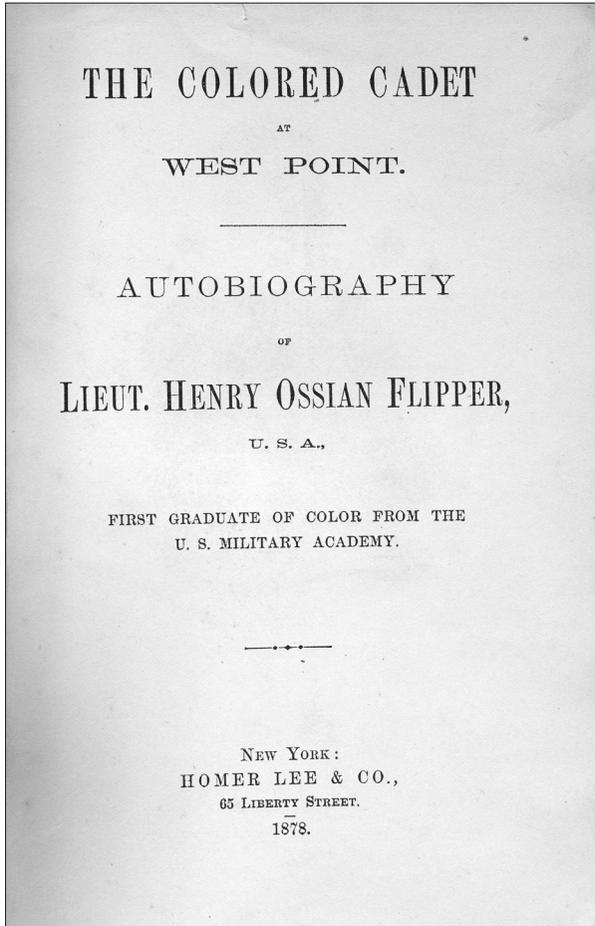
## The Example of Henry Ossian Flipper

The editors of this volume know that the example set by Flipper in this autobiography will resonate with readers for reasons we have not managed to capture. Flipper's mix of youthful hubris and pragmatic self-abnegation will strike many as deft, even progressive—just the right approach for enduring four years as a Black man in a nineteenth-century white bastion. For others, Flipper's protective confidence, his refusal to share epiphany, and the highly restricted window he gives us into his inner life and growth may bar access to the empathetic pleasures of reading provided by less armored, enigmatic subjects. But whatever your take on Flipper's insular, refractive character, his achievement mattered. His suffering and accomplishment opened the door of the Academy to other Black officer candidates. Smith's self-sacrifice altered the culture of Black exclusion just enough for Flipper's different way to work. In the late 1880s, just as the virulent racism of Jim Crow swung the door to West Point firmly closed, two other remarkable young Black men, John Hanks Alexander (1887) and Charles Young (1889), would slip through the opening Smith and Flipper made possible, to suffer in equal measure. Many dark years for the cause of integration followed at West Point. Benjamin O. Davis would not graduate until 1936. Moreover, Wesley Brown would not become the *first* Black Annapolis graduate until 1949.

Flipper in these pages emerges as an intensely pragmatic young man, willing to bear almost unbelievable hardship to “receive the reward” of a West Point “sheepskin,” a prize he deemed the “glorious passport to honor and distinction” (294). But if his pragmatism was driven by a keen awareness of the ruthlessness of established white power, it clearly operated alongside romantic longing and youthful ambition.

To close, we would simply leave you with a quiet vignette. Consider cadet Henry Ossian Flipper, earnest and full of promise on the bright, 84-degree Sunday of May 19, 1877—three short weeks before his graduation. Flipper entered the West Point library, approached the circulation desk one last time, and checked out *Don Quixote*. He settled in to absorb the adventures of a very different cavalryman, old and unhinged, one whose wild, inner *camp volante* had been the stuff of comic legend for generations. How did Cervantes spur Flipper's imagination? In the teeth of enemies, real and imagined, did Flipper reflect on how his nearly fulfilled dream of becoming a United States officer was not a little quixotic?

We imagine he appreciated the irony of his reading selection that day, but we can take this story no further. We and many others have worked to contextualize Flipper's life at West Point, which we think now comes into better focus. The important work of further unfolding the inner life of Henry Flipper has only begun.



The 1878 title page.

*Courtesy of the United States Military Academy Library Special Collections and Archives.*

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The table of contents to the original edition.

*Courtesy of the United States Military Academy Library Special Collections and Archives.<sup>67</sup>*

67. Inconsistencies between the original “Table of Contents” page and the main text may be traceable to faulty oversight by Flipper’s publisher and ostensible editor, Homer Lee, working entirely alone at Liberty Street in New York City. In the original edition, readers would have encountered the following errors: chapter III, “Reporting,” actually started on page 29, not page 30. Chapter IX, “Our Future Heroes,” started on page 114, not page 115. Versions of all “Table of Contents” chapter titles reappear at the beginning of respective chapters, except for the title of the sixteenth, “Smith at West Point.” On the original page 288, this chapter carries no title other than “Chapter XVII,” which is of course off by one. We do not think that a “Chapter XVI” was cut from the final version. While we discuss the importance of the final, James Webster Smith chapter at length earlier in this introduction and in footnotes throughout the volume, here we simply reiterate that Flipper built it largely through the interpellation of a new first-person voice, Smith’s own, as expressed through his complaint in *The New National Era and Citizen*. We can speculate with some confidence that the book was properly meant to end after chapter XV, “Graduation—in the Army,” rendering the Smith chapter a kind of appendix or afterword.

# CHAPTER I.

## RETROSPECT.

**H**ENRY OSSIAN FLIPPER, the eldest of five brothers, and the subject of this narrative, was born in Thomasville, Thomas County, Georgia, on the 21st day of March, 1856.<sup>1</sup> He

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1. Flipper opens this first, retrospective chapter in the third person, a self-distancing point of view normal for biography but not autobiography. Flipper's reason for this jarring rhetorical choice comes into focus when one considers the preceding dedication and preface pages, written by Flipper in the first person. The editors think it an open question whether Flipper cleverly writes his ostracized condition into the very form of his book, prompting his readers to appreciate his self-reliance and isolation at and after West Point, or whether, through an absence of advocates, he was simply reduced to writing his own short "preface," followed by this retrospective chapter. The following paragraphs engage with the violence slavery visited upon Black families, so it is also possible that Flipper adopts the third person to cushion himself emotionally as he endeavors to tell his family history. We think it illustrative to compare Flipper's opening moves with those enshrined in the greatest African American precursor text: *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave. Written by Himself* (1845). Where Douglass confidently opens with "I was born in Tuckahoe," Flipper's precarious authority emerges through his use of the third-person declarative voice: "Henry Ossian Flipper, the eldest of five brothers, and the subject of this narrative, was born in Thomasville, Thomas County, Georgia, on the 21st day of March, 1856."

The renowned abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison and the crusading anti-slavery activist Wendell Phillips had joined forces to contribute a "Preface" and a "Letter," respectively, for Douglass's antebellum book. These prominent white men vouched for Douglass, authenticated his authorship, and made a Black writer palatable for certain white readers. It has now been more than 250 years since Phillis Wheatley, the first American Black woman poet of renown, published her *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral* (1773). In order to publish, Wheatley had to sit through what Henry Louis Gates calls "the primal scene of African-American letters." She was interviewed by 18 prominent white Boston men, who then vouched for her authorship of *Poems*. Scholars now call that event the "Wheatley Court," and see its long shadow whenever similarly race-based power dynamics come into play, for example in the Garrison-Phillips prefatory materials that open Douglass's *Narrative*. The absence of both gatekeepers and champions at the opening of Flipper's volume matters in this larger context, if it is an absence that also speaks directly to his deep desire to be *sui generis*. The white co-editors of the current volume are deeply aware of the complexity of their charge in bringing out this edition. Neither gatekeepers nor champions but scholars fascinated with Henry Ossian Flipper, we are committed to casting off the offices of the Wheatley Court and to advocating for its permanent disbanding. See Frederick Douglass,

and his mother were the property (?) of Rev. Reuben H. Lucky, a Methodist minister of that place.<sup>2</sup> His father, Festus Flipper, by trade a shoemaker and carriage-trimmer, was owned by Ephraim G. Ponder, a successful and influential slave-dealer.

In 1859 Mr. Ponder, having retired from business, returned to Georgia from Virginia with a number of mechanics, all slaves, and among whom was the father of young Flipper. He established a number of manufactories in Atlanta, then a growing inland town of Georgia.<sup>3</sup> He married about this time a beautiful, accomplished, and wealthy lady. “*Flipper*,” as he was generally called, had married before this, and had been taken back alone to his native Virginia to serve an apprenticeship under a carriage-trimmer. This served, Mr. Ponder joined his wife in Thomasville, bringing with him, as stated, a number of mechanics.

All were soon ready for transportation to Atlanta except “*Flipper*.” As he and his wife were each the property (?) of different persons, there was, under the circumstances, every probability of a separation. This, of course, would be to them most displeasing. Accordingly an application was made to Mr. Ponder to purchase the wife and son. This he was, he said, unable to do. He had, at an enormous expense, procured and fitted up a home, and his coffers were nearly, if not quite, empty. Husband and wife then appealed to Mr. Lucky. He, too, was averse to parting them, but could not, at the great price asked for him, purchase the husband. He was willing

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*Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave. Written by Himself* (Boston: The Anti-Slavery Office, 1845), iii–18; Phillis Wheatley, *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral* (London: A. Bell, Aldgate, 1773); and Henry Louis Gates, Jr., *The Trials of Phillis Wheatley: America’s First Black Poet and Her Encounters with the Founding Fathers* (Basic Civitas Books, 2003), 5.

2. Flipper’s parenthetical question mark after “property” is a form now rarely used. Here it queries the continued use of “property” as a descriptor for enslaved persons *after* chattel slavery. Flipper repeats the form in his third paragraph, just below, and it appears eight more times in the book. In six of these instances, Flipper appears to question his word choice. For example, in chapter VI, “*Studies*,” where the form appears after the word “*purposely*,” Flipper may be wondering whether the better choice is “*purposefully*.” James Smith’s articles, which make up the bulk of the last chapter, contain two more iterations of the form; a final instance also appears in the last chapter, this time in an interpolated article from the *Savannah (Ga.) Morning-News*.

3. Before the Civil War, Atlanta had grown to be the fourth largest urban center in Georgia and was approaching 10,000 residents.

however, to sell the wife. An agreement was finally made by which the husband paid from his own pocket the purchase-money of his own wife and child, this sum to be returned to him by Mr. Ponder whenever convenient. The joy of the wife can be conceived. It can not be expressed.

In due time all arrived at Atlanta, where Mr. Ponder had purchased about twenty-five acres of land and had erected thereon, at great expense, a superb mansion for his own family, a number of substantial frame dwellings for his slaves, and three large buildings for manufacturing purposes.

Of sixty-five slaves nearly all of the men were mechanics. All of them except the necessary household servants, a gardener, and a coachman, were permitted to hire their own time. Mr. Ponder would have absolutely nothing to do with their business other than to protect them. So that if any one wanted any article of their manufacture they contracted with the workman and paid him his own price. These bond people were therefore virtually free. They acquired and accumulated wealth, lived happily, and needed but two other things to make them like other human beings, viz., absolute freedom and education. But

“God moves in a mysterious way  
His wonders to perform.”<sup>4</sup>

And through that very mysteriousness this people was destined to attain to the higher enjoyment of life. The country, trembling under the agitation of the slave question, was steadily seeking a condition of equilibrium which could be stable only in the complete

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4. This is the first of Flipper's many citations from the arts, in this case the first two lines of the English Poet William Cowper's six-stanza poem titled "Light Shining out of Darkness," written in 1773. The opening quatrain concludes as follows: "He plants his footstep in the sea, / And rides upon the storm." A later citation (see the epigraph to chapter X, "Treatment") suggests that Flipper knew Cowper's poetry and not just the ubiquitous hymn that the poem inspired, titled "God Moves in Mysterious Ways." Flipper cites the lines to declare God's design *unknowable*, but also to mark providence as *responsible* for both his family's "freedom and education" and the course and righteous outcome of the Civil War. Moreover, the citation suggests that the still-unfolding era of Reconstruction ought to be read as another step in the mysterious plan God has for "these bond people." Referencing providential design early in his book, Flipper makes sure to connect with his more devout readers. For more on William Cowper see "William Cowper," Poetry Foundation, accessed May 22, 2024, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/william-cowper>.

downfall of slavery. Unknown to them, yet existing, the great question of the day was gradually being solved; and in its solution was working out the salvation of an enslaved people. Well did that noblest of women, Mrs. Julia Ward Howe, sing a few years after:

“Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord;  
He is tramping out the vintage where the grapes of wrath  
are stored;  
He hath loosed the fateful lightning of his terrible swift sword;  
This truth is marching on.

“I have seen him in the watch-fires of a hundred circling camps.  
They have builded him an altar in the evening dews and damps;  
I can read his righteous sentence by the dim and flaring lamps;  
His day is marching on.

“I have read a fiery gospel, writ in burnished rows of steel;  
‘As ye deal with my contemnners, so with you my grace shall deal;  
Let the Hero, born of woman, crush the serpent with his heel,  
Since God is marching on.’

“He hath sounded forth the trumpet that shall never call retreat;  
He is sifting out the hearts of men before his judgment-seat;  
Oh! be swift my soul to answer him! be jubilant my feet!  
Our God is marching on.

“In the beauty of the lilies, Christ was born across the sea,  
With a glory in his bosom that transfigures you and me;  
As he died to make men holy, let us die to make men free,  
While God is marching on.”<sup>5</sup>

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5. A fascinating history attaches to Julia Ward Howe’s popular lyric. Visiting Washington in November 1861, Howe reportedly “heard Union troops belting out a well-known marching song called ‘John Brown’s Body’” and almost immediately produced “‘The Battle Hymn of the Republic,’” which sets new lyrics to the same tune. Then, “in February 1862, she sold her poem to the *Atlantic Monthly* . . . for five dollars.” Howe’s rich blend of religious and national imagery heightened patriotic sentiment in the North, even as the concluding verse stirred up controversy by directly aligning the death of Christ with the martyrdom of Union troops for the abolitionist cause: “As he died to make men Holy, let us die to make men free.” Even so, Howe’s lyric overwrites the far more controversial content of “John Brown’s Body.” By replacing Brown with Christ, and then aligning Christ with the Union

Another influence was as steadily tending to the same end. Its object was to educate, to elevate intellectually, and then to let the power thus acquired act.<sup>6</sup>

The mistress of this fortunate household, far from discharging the duties and functions of her station, left them unnoticed, and devoted her whole attention to illegitimate pleasures. The outraged husband appointed a guardian and returned broken-hearted to the bosom of his own family, and devoted himself till death to agricultural pursuits.

The nature of the marriage contract prevented the selling of any of the property without the mutual consent of husband and wife. No such consent was ever asked for by either. No one was, therefore, in that state of affairs, afraid of being sold away from his or her relatives, although their mistress frequently threatened so to sell them. "*I'll send you to Red River,*" was a common menace of hers, but perfectly harmless, for all knew, as well as she did, that it was impossible to carry it into execution.

In this condition of affairs the "servants" were even more contented than ever. They hired their time, as usual, and paid their wages to their mistress, whose only thought or care was to remember when it became due, and then to receive it.

The guardian, an influential stockholder in several railroads, and who resided in another city, made periodical visits to inspect and do whatever was necessary to a proper discharge of his duties.

Circumstances being highly favorable, one of the mechanics, who had acquired the rudiments of an education, applied to this

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soldier, Howe's "Battle Hymn" offers more palatable content; it proved very useful for recruiting purposes in a diversely committed North. See "The Story Behind the Song" at Kennedy Center Education Digital Learning, accessed May 23, 2024, <https://www.kennedy-center.org/education/resources-for-educators/classroom-resources/media-and-interactives/media/music/story-behind-the-song/the-story-behind-the-song/>.

6. Flipper turns here to the liberating influence of education, an important theme in the autobiography. Flipper praises the pragmatic and secular work of those Northern and Southern educators who endeavored, at great personal risk, to facilitate Black education and empowerment before, during, and especially after the Civil War. The following paragraphs show, however, that in Flipper's experience, the seeds of such a liberating influence were first planted by his enslavers, whose disintegrating marriage led them to allow Flipper's education through a combination of acquiescence, apathy, and their own absenteeism. This is another important area in which Flipper's experience of slavery was somewhat exceptional.

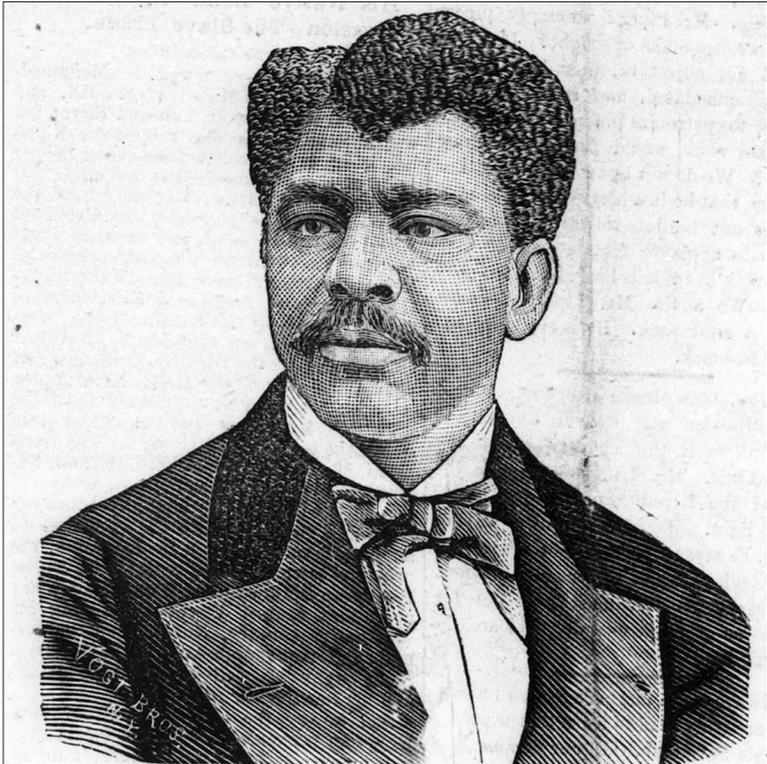
dissolute mistress for permission to teach the children of her “servants.” She readily consented, and, accordingly, a night-school was opened in the very woodshop in which he worked by day. Here young Flipper was initiated into the first of the three mysterious R’s, viz., “*reading ’riting and ’rithmetic*.” Here, in 1864, at eight years of age, his education began. And the first book he ever studied—I dare say ever saw—was a confederate reprint of Webster’s “*Blueback Speller*.” His then tutor has since graduated at Westminster College in Pennsylvania, and is, at the time of this writing, United States Consul at Malaga, Spain, having served in the same capacity for four years at Port Mahon, Spain.<sup>7</sup>

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7. This chapter launches one of Flipper’s major themes—the importance of education for both the enslaved and the newly freed. His recounting of how he learned to read with the “Blueback Speller” recalls Frederick Douglass’s discussion of the emancipatory power of reading, especially in the pages of a specific book: “I was now about twelve years old,” writes Douglass, “and the thought of being *a slave for life* began to bear heavily upon my heart. Just about this time, I got hold of a book entitled ‘The Columbian Orator.’ Every opportunity I got, I used to read this book. Among much of other interesting matter, I found in it a dialogue between a master and his slave.” Where Flipper’s tutor was given permission by Mrs. Ellen Ponder to teach his pupil, Douglass was forced to fend for himself after Mrs. Auld was instructed by her husband to cease instruction; he risked severe punishment if found reading.

The enslaved mechanic who asked for permission to start a night school was most likely the Reverend Frank Quarles; his son, John F. Quarles, who eventually graduated Westminster and became a United States Consul, appears to have been Flipper’s first tutor. According to H. Dewey DeWitt, “a few enlightened slave owners, as well as private groups and churches . . . established ‘schools’ for slaves in the South both before and after the war. For example, a school was operated in Selma, Ala., as early as the 1840s by a Northern body, the Reformed Presbyterians. Some of this group also formed a school, Geneva Hall (later to become Geneva College), in 1842 in Northwood, Ohio, that brought talented young blacks to the college for advanced education. One of these exceptional persons was John F. Quarles, a mulatto who had impressed his former owner with his abilities and was allowed to teach younger slave children to read and write. Among those children was Henry Ossian Flipper and his younger brother [Joseph].” John F. Quarles was Flipper’s tutor in 1864, before Quarles enrolled at Geneva Hall in 1866, and before his transfer to Westminster in 1868. While Flipper celebrates some of this extraordinary man’s accomplishments, he does not note that Quarles was the second Black man to graduate Westminster College (in 1870). Nor does Flipper note that after attending the newly formed Howard University Law School, Quarles became the first Black man to be admitted to the bar in Georgia. Closer to the concerns of this volume, Flipper does not note that after his Spanish consulship, when practicing law in New York, Quarles entered Flipper’s orbit once more. DeWitt notes, “As a Lawyer, Quarles took on cases that were highly publicized. One of these involved

the expulsion of a black cadet, Johnson C. Whittaker, from West Point. . . . It is known that Flipper appealed to Quarles for help but received none; no explanation has yet been unearthed for this unexpected behavior.” According to Jane Eppinga, John Quarles “committed a serious breach of confidence when he took the letter Flipper had written soliciting his services and gave it to New York newspapers for publication.” We think it matters that late in the autobiography Flipper brusquely disavows the influence of John Quarles’s father, the Reverend Frank Quarles (see chapter XV, page 317–318).



A portrait of John F. Quarles in later years. He was Flipper’s first tutor when both were still enslaved by the Ponder family. *Courtesy of the Library of Congress.*

If John Quarles held a grudge over Flipper’s snubbing of his father, this may help explain why he refused to represent Flipper in his time of need. See Douglass, *Narrative*, 52. For more on John F. Quarles, see H. Dewey DeWitt, “A Credit to His Race,” in *Westminster College Magazine*, Winter 2005, <https://www.yumpu.com/en/document/read/24687666>. Quoted material is on pp. 21–22. See also Jane Eppinga, *Henry Ossian Flipper: West Point’s First Black Graduate* (Republic of Texas Press, 1996), 96; and Elizabeth DiRisio, *From the Beginning, Tales of Lawrence County, Pennsylvania* (Self-Published, Amazon Digital Services, 2021).

But alas! even this happy arrangement was destined to be disturbed. This dissolute mistress and her slaves, with all valuable movable property, were compelled to flee before Sherman's victorious arms.<sup>8</sup> Macon, a city just one hundred and three miles southeast of Atlanta, became the new home of the Flippers. A spacious dwelling was secured in West Macon. In a part of this was stored away Mrs. Ponder's plate and furniture, under the guardianship of Flipper, who with his family occupied the rest of the house. Here all was safe. The terrible fate of Atlanta was not extended to Macon. The only cause of alarm was Wilson, who approached the city from the east, and, having thrown in a few shells, withdrew without doing further damage or being molested. Every body was frightened, and it was deemed advisable to transfer Mrs. Ponder's effects to Fort Valley, a small place farther south. However, before this could be done, it became indisputably known that Wilson had withdrawn.<sup>9</sup>

After an uneventful stay—other than this incident just related—of nine months in Macon, the office of custodian was resigned, and although yet a slave, as far as he knew, and without permission from any one, Flipper returned to Atlanta with his wife and two sons, Henry, the elder, and Joseph, the younger. This was in the spring of 1865. Atlanta was in ruins, and it appeared a dreary place indeed to start anew on the unfinished journey of life. Every thing was not destroyed, however. A few houses remained. One of these was occupied. The people were rapidly returning, and the railroads from Atlanta were rapidly being rebuilt.

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8. Flipper alludes to Sherman's March to the Sea, which utilized "destructive war" in a calculated attempt to demoralize the Confederacy and to bring a quick end to the conflict. The 285-mile march through Georgia stretched from Atlanta to Savannah. Sherman's forces reached Savannah in December 1864, which marked a turning point for the Union cause. Conscious of his audience and his Southern roots, Flipper leaves his book open to Southern sympathy by tying "the terrible fate of Atlanta" more to Sherman than to Joseph E. Johnston or John B. Hood, the Confederate generals whom Sherman defeated in the campaign for Atlanta. For more on Sherman's 1864 campaign, see Noah Andre Trudeau, *Southern Storm: Sherman's March to the Sea* (Harper, 2008).

9. Here Flipper references U.S. General James H. Wilson, a famed cavalry officer best known for a daring and incredibly successful monthlong cavalry corps raid throughout Alabama and Georgia in March–April 1865. For more on Wilson's Raid, see James Pickett Jones, *Yankee Blitzkrieg: Wilson's Raid Through Alabama and Georgia* (University of Georgia Press, 1976).

During all this time the education of the young Flippers had been necessarily neglected. In the early spring of 1865, the family of an ex-rebel captain became neighbors of the Flippers, now well to do, and were soon on the most, friendly terms with them. With remarkable condescension the wife of this ex-rebel offered to instruct Henry and Joseph for a small remuneration. The offer was readily and gladly accepted, and the education of the two, so long neglected, was taken up again. This private school of only two pupils existed but a short time. The American Missionary Association having opened better schools, the Flippers were, in March, 1866, transferred to them. They attended school there till in 1867 the famous Storrs' School was opened under the control of the American Missionary Association, when they went there.<sup>10</sup> In 1869, the Atlanta University having been opened under the same auspices, they entered there. At the time of receiving his appointment Henry was a member of the freshman class of the collegiate department. His class graduated there in June, 1876, just one year before he did at West Point.

The following article from a Thomasville paper, published in June, 1874, will give further information concerning his early life:<sup>11</sup>

“It is not generally known that Atlanta has a negro cadet at the United States National Military Academy at West Point. This cadet is a mulatto boy named Flipper. He is about twenty years old, a stoutish fellow, weighing perhaps one hundred and fifty pounds, and a smart, bright, intelligent boy. His father is a shoemaker, and gave him the euphonious name of Henry Ossian Flipper.

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10. The Storrs School for Freedmen was opened in March 1867. *Harper's Weekly* magazine ran an illustration of the new building on March 30 of that year.

11. This point in the autobiography inaugurates Flipper's extensive use of paratextual material. From here the text will often dragoon other voices, and from many types of sources. As explored more fully in our introduction, Flipper's engagement with the culture of reprinting results in a book that is more than half voices not his own. Most often these sources are citations (and even entire articles) from contemporary journals. Voices from thriving pro-Reconstruction newspapers and periodicals outnumber others, but Flipper also includes anti-Reconstruction voices, personal and professional letters, literature, lyrics, Academy documents, and other sources. While our introduction explores why Flipper might have done this, the short answer may be captured in a single word: *ethos*. Flipper desired to increase his credibility, to enmesh the singularity of his seemingly silenced voice with voices in the *zeitgeist* of his time. It is also possible that his original West Point “notes” were simply too short to make a book on their own. These and other motives are likely all at play; the result is what we have come to think of in geological terms as a conglomerate text full of inclusions held together by differing adhesive strategies.

“Flipper has been at the great soldier factory of the nation for a year. He was recommended there by our late Congressman from the Fifth District, the Hon. J. C. Freeman.<sup>12</sup> Flipper has made a right booming student. In a class of ninety-nine he stood about the middle, and triumphantly passed his examination, and has risen from the fourth to the third class without difficulty.

“The only two colored boys at the Academy were the famous Smith and the Atlanta Flipper. It is thought that Smith at the last examination failed. If so, Atlanta will have the distinguished honor of having the sole African representative at West Point.<sup>13</sup>

“Flipper has had the privilege of eating at the same table with the poor white trash; but Smith and Flipper bunked together in the same room alone, without white companions.

“It is an astonishing fact that, socially, the boys from the Northern and Western States will have nothing to do with these colored brothers. Flipper and Smith were socially ostracized. Not even the Massachusetts boys will associate with them. Smith has been a little rebellious, and attempted to thrust himself on the white boys; but the sensible Flipper accepted the situation, and proudly refused to intrude himself on the white boys.

“The feeling of ostracism is so strong that a white boy who dared to recognize a colored cadet would be himself ostracized by the other white cubs, even of radical extraction.’

“We copy the above from the *Atlanta Herald* of last week, for the purpose of remarking that among colored men we know of none more honorable or more deserving than Flipper, the father of the colored West Point student of that name. Flipper lived for many years in Thomasville as the servant of Mr. E. G. Ponder—was the best bootmaker we ever knew, and his character and deportment were

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12. James C. Freeman (1820–1885) was a moderate Republican who represented Georgia’s 5th Congressional District from 1873 to 1875. There is no reliable record of Freeman’s motivations for nominating Flipper to attend West Point. He had enslaved over 100 people before the Civil War but had opposed both secession and the war. His district was 51 percent white and 49 percent Black, leading him to chart a course that cautiously supported civil rights for freedpeople during his term in Congress.

See “Freeman, James Crawford,” *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress*, <https://bioguide.congress.gov/search/bio/F000362>, accessed October 2, 2023. For more, see Adam Domby, “A Nursery of Treason Remade? Reconstruction Politics and the Rise and Fall of West Point’s First Black Cadets,” in *Race, Politics, and Reconstruction: The First Black Cadets at Old West Point*, eds. Rory McGovern and Ronald G. Machoian (University of Virginia Press, 2024), 25–26.

13. In 1870, James Webster Smith became the first Black cadet admitted to West Point. This paratextual reference is the first of 113 name checks of Smith in the volume. Advisor, alter-ego, doppelgänger, foil, co-traveler, pathbreaker, martyr—Smith’s haunting of Flipper’s text and imagination presents one of the great themes and puzzles of the autobiography. For more on Smith, see Rory McGovern, Makonen Campbell, and Louisa Koebrich, “‘I Hope to Have Justice Done Me or I Can’t Get Along Here’: James Webster Smith and West Point,” *Journal of Military History* 87 (October 2023): 964–1003.

ever those of a sensible, unassuming, gentlemanly white man. Flipper possessed the confidence and respect of his master and all who knew him. His wife, the mother of young Flipper, was Isabella, a servant in the family of Rev. R. H. Lucky, of Thomasville, and bore a character equal to that of her husband. Young Flipper was baptized in his infancy by the venerable Bishop Early. From these antecedents we should as soon expect young Flipper to make his mark as any other colored youth in the country."

(From the *Louisville Ledger*.)

"It is just possible that some of our readers may not know who Flipper is. For their benefit we make haste to explain that Flipper is the solitary colored cadet now at West Point. He is in the third class, and stands forty-six in the class, which numbers eighty-five members. This is a very fair standing, and Flipper's friends declare that he is getting along finely in his studies, and that he is quite up to the standard of the average West Point student. Nevertheless they intimate that he will never graduate. Flipper, they say, may get as far as the first class, but there he will be 'slaughtered.'

"A correspondent of the *New York Times* takes issue with this opinion. He says there are many 'old heads' who believe Flipper will graduate with honor, and he thinks so too. The grounds for his belief, as he gives them, are that the officers are gentlemen, and so are the professors; that they believe merit should be rewarded wherever found; and that they all speak well of Flipper, who is a hard student, as his position in his class proves. From this correspondent we learn that Flipper is from Georgia; that he has a light, coffee-colored complexion, and that he 'minds his business and does not intrude his company upon the other cadets,' though why this should be put down in the list of his merits it is not easy to understand, since, if he graduates, as this writer believes he will, he will have the right to associate on terms of perfect equality with the other cadets, and may in time come to command some of them. We are afraid there is some little muddle of inconsistency in the brain of the *Times*' correspondent.

"The *Chicago Tribune* seems to find it difficult to come to any conclusion concerning Flipper's chances for graduating. It says: 'It is freely asserted that Flipper will never be allowed to graduate; that the prejudice of the regular army instructors against the colored race is insurmountable, and that they will drive away from the Academy by persecution of some petty sort any colored boy who may obtain admittance there. The story does not seem to have any substantial basis; still, it possesses considerable vitality.'

"We don't profess to understand exactly what sort of a story that is which has 'considerable vitality' without any substantial basis, and can only conclude that the *darkness of the subject* has engendered a little confusion in the mind of the *Tribune* as well as in that of the writer of the *Times*. But the *Tribune* acquires more confidence as it warms in the discussion, and it assures us finally that 'there is, of course, no doubt that some colored boys are capable of receiving a military education; and eventually the presence of colored officers in the regular army must be an accepted fact.' Well, we don't know about that 'accepted fact.' The white man is mighty uncertain, and the nigger won't do to trust to, in view of which truths it would be unwise to bet too high on the 'colored officers,' for some years to come at least.

“But let not Flipper wring his flippers in despair, notwithstanding. Let him think of Smith, and take heart of hope. Smith was another colored cadet who was sent to West Point from South Carolina. Smith mastered readin’, ’ritin’, and ’rithmetic, but chemistry mastered Smith.’ They gave him three trials, but it was to no purpose; so they had to change his base and send him back to South Carolina. But what of that? They’ve just made him inspector of militia in South Carolina, with the rank of brigadier-general. How long might he have remained in the army before he would have become ‘General Smith?’ Why, even Fred Grant’s only a lieutenant-colonel. Smith evidently has reason to congratulate himself upon being ‘plucked;’ and so the young gentleman from Georgia, with the ‘light, coffee-colored complexion,’ if he meets with a similar misfortune, may console himself with the hope that to him also in his extremity will be extended from some source a helping flipper.”

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\* *Cadet Smith failed in Natural and Experimental Philosophy. In Chemistry he was up to the average. He was never appointed Inspector-General of South Carolina. He was Commandant of Cadets in the South Carolina Agricultural Institute at Orangeburg, S. C., which position he held till his death November 29th, 1876.*<sup>14</sup>

14. This note inaugurates Flipper’s curation of Smith’s presence in the book, as well as Flipper’s role in crafting the way history would remember Smith.

## CHAPTER II.

### COMMUNICATIONS, ETC.

HAVING given in the previous chapter a brief account of myself—dropping now, by permission, the third person—prior to my appointment, I shall here give in full what led me to seek that appointment, and how I obtained it.<sup>1</sup> It was while sitting “in his father’s quiet shoeshop on Decatur Street”—as a local paper had it—that I overheard a conversation concerning the then cadet from my own district. In the course of the conversation I learned that this cadet was to graduate the following June; and that therefore a vacancy would occur. This was in the autumn of 1872, and before the election. It occurred to me that I might fill that vacancy, and I accordingly determined to make an endeavor to do so, provided the Republican nominee for Congress should be elected. He was elected. I applied for and obtained the appointment. In 1865 or 1866—I do not now remember which: perhaps it was even later than either—it was suggested to my father to send me to West Point. He was unwilling to do so, and, not knowing very much about the place, was reluctant to make any inquiries. I was then of course too young for admission, being only ten or twelve years old; and knowing nothing of the place myself, I did not care to venture the attempt to become a cadet.

At the time I obtained the appointment I had quite forgotten this early recommendation of my father’s friend; indeed, I did not recall it until I began compiling my manuscript.<sup>2</sup>

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1. Flipper’s assertion that he shifts from third-person perspective back to the first-person “by permission” may seem to suggest an editorial presence in the making of his autobiography, but it is also possible that he playfully gives permission to himself for the voice shift, or that he imagines himself as having asked and tacitly been given permission by his readers.

2. “In 1865 or 1866” there had not yet been a publicly identified African American admitted to West Point. The first of 12 admitted in the nineteenth century was James W. Smith, in the fall of 1870. While it is possible that his early teachers and mentors at Atlanta University suggested West Point, Flipper focuses here instead on his father’s early unwillingness to support his appointment; he crafts a history where his own, singular volition becomes “what led [him] to seek [an] appointment.” Self-reliance is one of Flipper’s major themes throughout his autobiography.

The suggestion given me by the conversation above mentioned was at once acted upon, and decision made in a very short time; and so fully was I determined, so absolutely was my mind set on West Point, that I persisted in my desire even to getting the appointment, staying at the Academy four years, and finally graduating. The following communications will explain how I got the appointment.\*

*Reply No. 1*

GRIFFIN, January 23, 1873.

MR. H. O. FLIPPER.

DEAR SIR: Your letter of the 21st, asking me, as member-elect to Congress from this State, to appoint you cadet to West Point, was received this morning. You are a stranger to me, and before I can comply with your request you must get your teacher, Mr. James L. Dunning, P.M., Colonel H. P. Fanorr, and other Republicans to indorse for you. Give me assurance you are worthy and well qualified and I will recommend you.\*

Yours respectfully,

J. C. FREEMAN.

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\* *It has been impossible for the author to obtain copies of his own letters to the Hon. Congressman who appointed him, which is to be regretted. The replies are inserted in such order that they will readily suggest the tenor of the first communications.*<sup>3</sup>

3. Flipper did not win an appointment to West Point on his own, and many who helped are named or alluded to in these early chapters. Here is the briefest sketch of one such advocate, as an example of the kind of scholarly work Flipper's autobiography still invites: James L. Dunning was the owner of the Atlanta Machine Works and "a member of the city's small, secret circle of Union Loyalists" during the war. His factory was confiscated when he "refused to accept Confederate contracts," and he spent time in prison for the offense. According to one source, in 1865 "the first post-war Union flag was raised on the public square [in Atlanta] by Unionist James L. Dunning." On September 28th, 1867, *The Daily Opinion* (Atlanta, GA) reported that Dunning led eight other men to petition for an "act incorporating themselves . . . by the name and style of the 'Lincoln National Monument Association;' . . . that the object of the association is the purchase of grounds, in or near Atlanta, Georgia, and the erection of a Monument in Commemoration of Abraham Lincoln." After the war, Dunning worked as a Freedman's Bureau agent in and around Atlanta, and this may have been when he first became acquainted with Flipper. Subsequently, he was the U.S. postmaster for Atlanta and served on Atlanta University's Board of Visitors, where he would have had more encounters with Flipper during the latter's short enrollment there.

The quotations above come from, respectively: Stephen Davis, "Civil War: Atlanta Home Front," in *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, modified August 25, 2020, <https://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/history-archaeology/civil-war-atlanta-home-front/>; Barbara Brackman, "Civil War Quilts," *Library*

*Reply No. 2.*

GRIFFIN, March 22, 1873.

MR. H. O. FLIPPER.

DEAR SIR: On my arrival from Washington I found your letter of the 19th. I have received an invitation from the War Department to appoint, or nominate, a legally qualified cadet to the United States Military Academy from my district.

As you were the first applicant, I am disposed to give you the first chance; but the requirements are rigid and strict, and I think you had best come down and see them. If after reading them you think you can undergo the examination without doubt, I will nominate you. But I do not want my nominee to fail to get in.

Yours very respectfully,

J. C. FREEMAN.

*Reply No. 3.*

GRIFFIN, GA., March 26, 1873.

MR. H. O. FLIPPER.

DEAR SIR: Your letter of the 24th to hand, and contents noted. While your education may be sufficient, it requires many other qualifications—such as age, height, form, etc.; soundness of lungs, limbs, etc. I will send you up the requirements, if you desire them, and call upon three competent gentlemen to examine you, if you desire it. Let me hear from you again on the subject.

Yours respectfully,

J. C. FREEMAN.

*Reply No. 4.*

GRIFFIN, March 28, 1873.

MR. H. O. FLIPPER.

DEAR SIR: Yours of 26th at hand. I have concluded to send the paper sent me to J. A. Holtzclaw, of Atlanta, present Collector of Internal Revenue. You can call on him and examine for yourself. If you then think you can pass, I will designate three men to examine you, and if they pronounce you up to the requirements I will appoint you.

Yours truly,

J. C. FREEMAN.

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of Congress: Liljenquist Family Collection, November 8, 2023, <https://civilwarquilts.blogspot.com/2023/11/atlanta-garden-11-stars-stripe.html>; *The Daily Opinion* (Atlanta, GA), 1867–1868, September 28, 1867, page 4, <https://gahistoricnewspapers.galileo.usg.edu/lccn/sn89053694/1867-09-28/ed-1/seq-4/>. For evidence of Dunning's postwar activities, see records related to James L. Dunning in both the Records of the Field Offices for the State of Georgia, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1865–1872, publication number M1903, RG 105, National Archives and Records Administration II, College Park, MD; and the Barred and Disallowed Case Files of the Southern Claims Commission, 1871–1880, publication number M1407, RG 233, National Archives and Records Administration I, Washington, DC—all records digitally available on Ancestry.com.

*Reply No. 5.*

GRIFFIN, April 5, 1873.

MR. H. O. FLIPPER.

DEAR SIR: The board of examiners pronounce you qualified to enter the Military Academy at West Point. You will oblige me by sending me your given name in full, also your age to a month, and the length of time you have lived in the Fifth District, or in or near Atlanta. I will appoint you, and send on the papers to the Secretary of War, who will notify you of the same. From this letter to me you will have to be at West Point by the 25th day of May, 1873.

Yours respectfully,

J. C. FREEMAN.

P.S.—You can send letter to me without a stamp.<sup>4</sup>

*Reply No. 6.*

GRIFFIN, April 17, 1873.

MR. HENRY O. FLIPPER.

DEAR SIR: I this day inclose you papers from the War Department. You can carefully read and then make up your mind whether you accept the position assigned you. If you should sign up, direct and forward to proper authorities, Washington, D. C. If you do not accept, return the paper to my address, Griffin, Ga.

I am yours very respectfully,

J. C. FREEMAN.

The papers, three in number, referred to in the above letter, are the following:

WAR DEPARTMENT, }  
WASHINGTON, April 11, 1873. }

SIR: You are hereby informed that the President has *conditionally* selected you for appointment as a Cadet of the United States Military Academy at West Point.

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4. "The Frank" or "Franking privileges" derives from the Latin word *francus*, meaning "free." It refers to the ability to send mail by one's signature rather than postage. The practice has origins that go back to 1660 in the British House of Commons. Members of the U.S. Congress and those with whom they communicated enjoyed this unfettered privilege up through 1873. Due to abuses, the privilege was severely restricted at the end of 1873, not to be restored until 1895. Since then, "the Frank" has often been abused, and since 1895 the practice has been subject to increasing restriction and oversight. See Roman J. Hoyos, "The People's Privilege: The Franking Privilege, Constituent Correspondence, and Political Representation in Mid-Nineteenth Century America." *Law and History Review* 31, no. 1 (2013): 101–38.

Should you desire the appointment, you will report in person to the Superintendent of the Academy between the 20th and 25th days of May, 1873, when, if found on due examination to possess the qualifications required by law and set forth in the circular hereunto appended, you will be admitted, with pay from July 1st, 1873, to serve until the following January, at which time you will be examined before the Academic Board of the Academy. Should the result of this examination be favorable, and the reports of your personal, military, and moral deportment be satisfactory, your warrant of appointment, to be dated July 1st, 1873, will be delivered to you; but should the result of your examination, or your conduct reports be unfavorable, you will be discharged from the military service, unless otherwise recommended, for special reasons, by the Academic Board, but will receive an allowance for travelling expenses to your home.

Your attention is particularly directed to the accompanying circular, and it is to be distinctly understood that this notification confers upon you no right to enter the Military Academy unless your qualifications agree fully with its requirements, and unless you report for examination within the time specified.

You are requested to immediately inform the Department of your acceptance or declination of the contemplated appointment upon the conditions annexed.

GEO. M. ROBESON,

*ACTING Secretary of War.*

HENRY O. FLIPPER, Atlanta, Georgia.

Through HON. J. C. FREEMAN, M. C.

#### CIRCULAR.

I. Candidates *must* be actual *bona fide* residents of the Congressional district or Territory for which their appointments are made, and must be over *seventeen* and under *twenty-two* years of age at the time of entrance into the Military Academy; but any person who has served honorably and faithfully not less than one year as an officer or enlisted man in the army of the United States, either as a Volunteer, or in the Regular service, during the war for the suppression of the rebellion, shall be eligible for appointment up to the age of twenty-four years. They must be at least five feet in height, and free from any infectious or immoral disorder, and, generally, from any deformity, disease, or infirmity which may render them unfit for arduous military service. They must be proficient in *Reading* and *Writing*; in the elements of *English Grammar*; in *Descriptive Geography*, particularly of our own country, and in the *History of the United States*.

In *Arithmetic*, the various operations in *addition*, *subtraction*, *multiplication*, and *division*, *reduction*, simple and compound *proportion*, and vulgar and decimal *fractions*, must be thoroughly understood and readily performed.

The following are the leading physical disqualifications:

1. Feeble constitution and muscular tenuity; unsound health from whatever cause; indications of former disease; glandular swellings, or other symptoms of scrofula.
2. Chronic cutaneous affections, especially of the scalp.
3. Severe injuries of the bones of the head; convulsions.
4. Impaired vision, from whatever cause; inflammatory affections of the eyelids; immobility or irregularity of the iris; fistula, lachrymalis, etc., etc.

5. Deafness; copious discharge from the ears.
6. Loss of many teeth, or the teeth generally unsound.
7. Impediment of speech.
8. Want of due capacity of the chest, and any other indication of a liability to a pulmonic disease.
9. Impaired or inadequate efficiency of one or both of the superior extremities on account of fractures, especially of the clavicle, contraction of a joint, extenuation, deformity, etc., etc.
10. An unusual excurvature or incurvature of the spine.
11. Hernia.
12. A varicose state of the veins of the scrotum or spermatic cord (when large), sarcocele, hydrocele, hemorrhoids, fistulas.
13. Impaired or inadequate efficiency of one or of both of the inferior extremities on account of varicose veins, fractures, malformation (flat feet, etc.), lameness, contraction, unequal length, bunions, overlying or supernumerary toes, etc., etc.
14. Ulcers, or unsound cicatrices of ulcers likely to break out afresh.

Every person appointed, upon arrival at West Point, is submitted to a rigid medical examination, and if any causes of disqualification are found to exist in him to such a degree as may now or hereafter impair his efficiency, he is rejected.

No person who has served in any capacity in the military or naval service of the so-called Confederate States during the late rebellion can receive an appointment as cadet at the Military Academy.

II. The pay of a cadet is \$500 per annum, with one ration per day, to commence with his admission into the Military Academy, and is sufficient, with proper economy, for his support.

III. Each cadet must keep himself supplied with the following mentioned articles, viz.:

One gray cloth coatee; one gray cloth riding-jacket; one regulation great-coat; two pairs of gray cloth pantaloons, for winter; six pairs of drilling pantaloons for summer; one fatigue-jacket for the encampment; one black dress cap; one forage cap; one black stock; \*two pairs of ankle-boots; \*six pairs of white gloves; two sets of white belts; \*seven shirts and twelve collars; \*six pairs winter socks; \*six pairs summer socks; \*four pairs summer drawers; \*three pairs winter drawers; \*six pocket-handkerchiefs; \*six towels; \*one clothes-bag, made of ticking; \*one clothes-brush; \*one hair-brush; \*one tooth-brush; \*one comb; one mattress; one pillow; \*two pillow-cases; \*two pairs sheets; \*one pair blankets; \*one quilted bed-cover; one chair; one tumbler; \*one trunk; one account-book; and will unite with his room-mate in purchasing, for their common use, one looking-glass, one wash-stand, one wash-basin, one pail, and one broom, and shall he required to have one table, of the pattern that may be prescribed by the Superintendent.

The articles marked thus \* candidates are required to bring with them; the others are to be had at West Point at regulated prices, and it is better for a candidate to take with him as little clothing of any description as is possible (excepting what is marked), and no more money than will defray his travelling expenses; but for the parent or guardian to send to "The Treasurer of the Military Academy" a sum sufficient for his necessary expenses until he is admitted, and for his clothes, etc., thereafter.

The expenses of the candidate for board, washing, lights, etc., prior to admission, will be about \$5 per week, and immediately after being admitted to the Institution he must be provided with an outfit of uniform, etc., the cost of which will be \$88.79. If, upon arrival, he has the necessary sum to his credit on the books of the Treasurer, he will start with many advantages, in a pecuniary point of view, over those whose means are more limited, and who must, if they arrive, as many do, totally unprovided in this way, go in debt on the credit of their pay—a burden from which it requires many months to free themselves; while, if any accident compels them to leave the Academy, they must of necessity be in a destitute condition.

No cadet can receive money, or any other supplies, from his parents, or from any person whomsoever, without permission from the Superintendent.

IV. If the candidate be a minor, his acceptance must be accompanied by the written consent of his parent or guardian to his signing articles, binding himself to serve the United States eight years from the time of his admission into the Military Academy, unless sooner discharged.

V. During the months of July and August the cadets live in camp, engaged only in military duties and exercises and receiving practical military instruction.

The academic duties and exercises commence on the 1st of September, and continue till about the end of June.

The newly appointed cadets are examined at the Academy prior to admission, and those not properly qualified are rejected.

Examinations of the several classes are held in January and June, and at the former such of the new cadets as are found proficient in studies and have been correct in conduct are given the particular standing in their class to which their merits entitle them. After either examination cadets found deficient in conduct or studies are discharged from the Academy, unless, for special reasons in each case, the Academic Board should otherwise recommend.

These examinations are very thorough, and require from the cadet a close and persevering attention to study, without evasion or slighting of any part of the course, as no relaxations of any kind can be made by the examiners.

VI. A sound body and constitution, a fixed degree of preparation, good natural capacity, an aptitude for study, industrious habits, perseverance, an obedient and orderly disposition, and a correct moral deportment are such essential qualifications that candidates knowingly deficient in any of these respects should not, as many do, subject themselves and their friends to the chances of future mortification and disappointment, by accepting appointments to the Academy and entering upon a career which they can not successfully pursue.

*Method of Examining Candidates for Admission into the Military Academy.*

Candidates must be able to read with facility from any book, giving the proper intonation and pauses, and to write portions that are read aloud for that purpose, spelling the words and punctuating the sentences properly.

IN ARITHMETIC they must be able to perform with facility examples under the four ground rules, and hence must be familiar with the tables of addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division, and be able to perform examples in reduction and in vulgar and decimal fractions, such as—

Add  $\frac{2}{3}$  to  $\frac{3}{4}$ ; subtract  $\frac{2}{5}$  from  $\frac{5}{6}$ ; multiply  $\frac{3}{4}$  by  $\frac{7}{8}$ ; divide  $\frac{2}{5}$  by  $\frac{3}{8}$ ;

Add together two hundred and thirty-four thousandths (.234), twenty-six thousandths (.026), and three thousandths (.003).

Subtract one hundred and sixty-one ten thousandths (.0161) from twenty-five hundredths (.25).

Multiply or divide twenty-six hundredths (.26) by sixteen thousandths (.016).

They must also be able to change vulgar fractions into decimal fractions, and decimals into vulgar fractions, with examples like the following:

Change  $15/16$  into a decimal fraction of the same value.

Change one hundred and two thousandths (.102) into a vulgar fraction of the same value.

In simple and compound proportion, examples of various kinds will be given, and candidates will be expected to understand the principles of the rules which they follow.

In ENGLISH GRAMMAR candidates will be required to exhibit a familiarity with the nine parts of speech and the rules in relation thereto; must be able to parse any ordinary sentence given to them, and, generally, must understand those portions of the subject usually taught in the higher academies and schools throughout the country, comprehended under the heads of Orthography, Etymology, Syntax, and Prosody.

In DESCRIPTIVE GEOGRAPHY they are to name, locate, and describe the natural grand and political divisions of the earth, and be able to delineate any one of the States or Territories of the American Union, with its principal cities, rivers, lakes, seaports, and mountains.

In HISTORY they must be able to name the periods of the discovery and settlement of the North American continent, of the rise and progress of the United States, and of the successive wars and political administrations through which the country has passed.

## THE COURSE OF STUDY AND BOOKS USED AT THE MILITARY ACADEMY.

[Books marked thus \* are for reference only.]

### *First Year — Fourth Class*

DEPARTMENT.	TEXT-BOOKS.
Mathematics.....	Davies' Bourdon's Algebra. Davies' Legendre's Geometry and Trigonometry. Church's Descriptive Geometry
French Language.....	Bolmar's Levizac's Grammar and Verb Book. Agnel's Tabular System. Berard's Leçons Françaises. *Spier's and Surenne's Dictionary.
Tactics of Artillery and Infantry.	Practical Instruction in the Schools of the Soldier, Company, and Battalion. Practical Instruction in Artillery.
Use of Small Arms.....	Instruction in Fencing and Bayonet Exercise.

### *Second Year — Third Class*

Mathematics.....	Church's Descriptive Geometry, with its application to Spherical Projections. Church's Shades, Shadows, and Perspective. Davies' Surveying. Church's Analytical Geometry. Church's Calculus.
French Language.....	Bolmar's Levizac's Grammar and Verb Book. Berard's Leçons Françaises. Chapsal's Leçons et Modèles de Littérature Française. Agnel's Tabular System. Rowan's Morceaux Choisis des Auteurs Modernes. *Spier's and Surenne's Dictionary.
Spanish.....	Josse's Grammar. Morales' Progressive Reader. Ollendorff's Oral Method applied to the Spanish, by Velasquez and Simonné. *Seoane's Neuman and Beretti's Dictionary.
Drawing.....	Topography, etc. Art of Penmanship.
Tactics of Infantry, Artillery, and Cavalry.	Practical Instruction in the Schools of the Soldier, Company, and Battalion. Practical Instruction in Artillery and Cavalry.

### *Third Year — Second Class*

Natural and Experimental Philosophy.	Bartlett's Mechanics. Bartlett's Acoustics and Optics. Bartlett's Astronomy.
Chemistry.....	Fowne's Chemistry. Chemical Physics, from Miller.
Drawing.....	Landscape. Pencil and Colors.
Tactics of Infantry, Artillery, and Cavalry.	United States Tactics for Garrison, Siege, and Field Artillery. United States Tactics for Infantry. Practical Instruction in the Schools of the Soldier, Company, and Battalion. Practical Instruction in Artillery and Cavalry.
Practical Military Engineering.	Myers' Manual of Signals. Practical and Theoretical Instruction in Military Signaling and Telegraphy.

*Fourth Year — First Class*

Military and Civil Engineering, and Science of War.	Mahan's Field Fortification. Mahan's Outlines of Permanent Fortification. Mahan's Civil Engineering. Mahan's Fortification and Stereotomy. Mahan's Advanced Guard and Outpost, etc. * Moseley's Mechanics of Engineering.
Mineralogy and Geology.....	Dana's Mineralogy. Hitchcock's Geology.
Ethics and Law.....	French's Practical Ethics. Halleck's International Law. Kent's Commentaries (portion on Constitutional Law). Law and Military Law, by Prof. French. Benét's Military Law and the Practice of Courts-Martial.
Tactics of Artillery, Cavalry, and Infantry.	United States Tactics for Cavalry. Practical Instruction in the Schools of the Soldier, Company, and Battalion. Practical Instruction in Artillery and Cavalry.
Ordnance and Gunnery.....	Benton's Ordnance and Gunnery. Practical Pyrotechny.
Practical Military Engineering.	Practical Instruction in fabricating Fascines, Sap Faggots, Gabions, Hurdles, Sap-rollers, etc.; manner of laying out and constructing Gun and Mortar Batteries, Field Fortifications, and Works of Siege; formation of Stockades, Abatis, and other military obstacles; and throwing and dismantling Pontoon Bridges. Myers' Manual of Signals. Practical Instruction in Military Signaling and Telegraphy.

The second paper was a printed blank, a letter of acceptance or non-acceptance, to be filled up, as the case may be, signed by myself, countersigned by my father, and returned to Washington, D. C.

The third, which follows, is simply a memorandum for use of the candidate.

## MEMORANDUM.

It is suggested to all candidates for admission into the Military Academy that, before leaving their place of residence for West Point, they should cause themselves to be thoroughly examined by a competent physician, and by a teacher or instructor in good standing. By such an examination any serious physical disqualification, or deficiency in mental preparation, would be revealed, and the candidate probably spared the expense and trouble of a useless journey and the mortification of rejection. The circular appended to the letter of appointment should be carefully studied by the candidate and the examiners.

It should be understood that the informal examination herein recommended is solely for the convenience and benefit of the candidate himself, and can in no manner affect the decision of the Academic and Medical Examining Boards at West Point.

NOTE.—There being no provision whatever for the payment of the travelling expenses of either accepted or rejected candidates for admission, no candidate should fail to provide himself in advance with the means of returning to his home, in case of his rejection before either of the Examining Boards, as he may otherwise be put to considerable trouble, inconvenience, and even suffering, on account of his destitute situation. If admitted, the money brought by him to meet such a contingency can be deposited with the Treasurer on account of his equipment as a cadet, or returned to his friends.

After I had secured the appointment the editor of one of our local papers, which was at the time publishing—weekly, I think—brief biographies of some of the leading men of the city, together with cuts of the persons themselves, desired to thus bring me into notoriety. I was duly consulted, and, objecting, the publication did not occur. My chief reason for objecting was merely this: I feared some evil might befall me while passing through Georgia en route for West Point, if too great a knowledge of me should precede me, such, for instance, as a publication of that kind would give.

At this interview several other persons—white, of course—were present, and one of them—after relating the trials of Cadet Smith and the circumstances of his dismissal, which, *apropos*, had not yet occurred, as he would have me believe—advised me to abandon altogether the idea of going to West Point, for, said he, “Them northern boys wont treat you right.” I have a due proportion of stubbornness in me, I believe, as all of the negro race are said to have, and my Southern friend might as well have advised an angel to rebel as to have counselled me to resign and not go. He was convinced, too, before we separated, that no change in my determination was at all likely to occur. Next day, in a short article, the fact of my appointment was mentioned, and my age and degree of education. Some days after this, while in the post-office, a gentleman beckoned to me, and we withdrew from the crowd. He mentioned this article, and after relating—indeed, repeating, to my amusement, the many hardships to which I should be subjected, and after telling me he had a very promising son—candid, wasn’t he?—whom he desired to have educated at West Point, offered me for my appointment the rather large sum of five thousand dollars. This I refused instantly. I had so set my mind on West Point that, having the appointment, neither threats nor excessive bribes could induce me to relinquish it, even if I had not possessed sufficient strength of character to resist them otherwise. However, as I was a minor, I referred him to my father. I have no information that he ever consulted him. If he had, my reply to him would have been

sustained. I afterward had reason to believe the offer was made merely to test me, as I received from strangers expressions of confidence in me and in my doing faithfully all that might devolve upon me from my appointment.<sup>5</sup>

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5. An 1873 bribe of “five thousand dollars” would today exceed \$130,000. This is the first explicit “test” of Flipper’s “strength of character” in the book, but the moment also attests to his father’s evolved commitment to his son’s resoluteness. We have no reason to doubt the veracity of Flipper’s story, and the moment exemplifies how Flipper’s political autobiography engages with an important aspect of the American *spiritual* autobiography, such as perhaps the greatest early example, *The Personal Narrative* of Jonathan Edwards (c. 1739). Where Flipper performs for his readers an unwavering confidence in his personal ability to complete West Point—a confidence pinned to a moment before his arrival—Jonathan Edwards’s spiritual journey involves continuous temptation, excessive introspection, and backsliding into sin, all before his final conversion. Flipper presents himself as a rock of already-fixed determination, and his book is far less intimate or revelatory of personal imperfection or growth than is Edwards’s *Narrative*. Even the great political *Autobiography* (or “memoir”) of Benjamin Franklin (1791) presents a nuanced narrative of personal growth. Consider, for example, Franklin’s famously programmatic (and ironic) self-improvement scheme as outlined in “Part Two” of the *Autobiography*: “It was about this time I conceived the bold and arduous Project of arriving at moral Perfection. I wish’d to live without committing any Fault at any time.” In neither irony nor honesty does the enigmatically armored Flipper ever really allow us to experience his personal precarity of spirit or character, though he gives us a clear window into the fragility of his public situation. See Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Vol. 16. Letters and Personal Writings*, ed. George S. Claghorn (Yale University Press, 1998); and Benjamin Franklin, *Benjamin Franklin’s Autobiography*, ed. J. A. Leo Lemay and P. M. Zall (Norton, 1986), 66.

## CHAPTER III.

### REPORTING.

MAY 20th, 1873! Auspicious day! From the deck of the little ferry-boat that steamed its way across from Garrison's on that eventful afternoon I viewed the hills about West Point, her stone structures perched thereon, thus rising still higher, as if providing access to the very pinnacle of fame, and shuddered. With my mind full of the horrors of the treatment of all former cadets of color, and the dread of inevitable ostracism, I approached tremblingly yet confidently.<sup>1</sup>

The little vessel having been moored, I stepped ashore and inquired of a soldier there where candidates should report. He very kindly gave me all needed information, wished me much success, for which I thanked him, and set out for the designated place. I soon reached it, and walked directly into the adjutant's office. He received me kindly, asked for my certificate of appointment, and receiving that—or assurance that I had it: I do not now remember which—directed me to write in a book there for the purpose the name and occupation of my father, the State, Congressional district, county and city of his residence, my own full name, age, State,

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1. "Garrison's" refers to what was then known as Garrison's Landing (now the hamlet of Garrison, part of the town of Philipstown, New York). In the late-nineteenth century, it was a train station and ferry dock downhill from several homes and farmsteads on the east bank of the Hudson River, directly across from West Point. Passenger service on trains running north from New York City was more routine on the rail line running north along the east bank. Most nineteenth-century cadets began their West Point careers exactly as Flipper did, nervously getting off the train and boarded the ferry for a slow crossing of the Hudson, then walking uphill from the dock at West Point to report at the formidable-looking administration building.

Where Flipper's experience departed from that of most other nineteenth-century cadets was in his sense of the looming inevitability of social ostracism. Flipper confirms that he had heard of and was troubled by reports of poor treatment of James W. Smith and other Black cadets at West Point. But framing it as "inevitable ostracism" might have been a thought that Flipper applied retrospectively when compiling his autobiography shortly before or after his graduation in 1877. The extent and tone of Flipper's many discussions of isolation and ostracism throughout his autobiography reveal that they both surprised and deeply affected him.



This photograph, circa 1870–1872, captures what would have been Flipper’s view of West Point as he stepped off the ferry and inquired where to report.  
*Courtesy of the United States Military Academy Library Special Collections and Archives.*

county, and place of my birth, and my occupation when at home. This done I was sent in charge of an orderly to cadet barracks, where my “plebe quarters” were assigned me.

The impression made upon me by what I saw while going from the adjutant’s office to barracks was certainly not very encouraging. The rear windows were crowded with cadets watching my unpretending passage of the area of barracks with apparently as much astonishment and interest as they would, perhaps, have watched Hannibal crossing the Alps. Their words, jeers, etc., were most insulting.<sup>2</sup>

Having reached another office, I was shown in by the orderly. I walked in, hat in hand—nay, rather started in—when three cadets, who were seated in the room, simultaneously sprang to their feet, and welcomed me somewhat after this fashion:

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2. In all likelihood, this is a powerful understatement. Of his own first day at West Point in May 1870, James W. Smith recalled, “The cadets call us [Smith and Michael Howard] ‘niggers,’ of course,” and that he and Howard “could hear nothing else but that word ringing out on all sides, from every window, and nook, and niche continually.” See James W. Smith to “Friend and Benefactor” [David A. Clark], June 1, 1870, included as an exhibit appended to the Transcript of Court of Inquiry addressed to Thomas M. Vincent, Assistant Adjutant General, James W. Smith Files, M1002, USMA Library Special Collections and Archives, West Point, NY.

“Well, sir, what do you mean by coming into this office in that manner, sir? Get out of here, sir.”

I walked out, followed by one of them, who, in a similar strain, ordered me to button my coat, get my hands around—“fins” he said—heels together, and head up.

“Now, sir,” said he, leaving me, “when you are ready to come in, knock at that door,” emphasizing the word “knock.”

The door was open. I knocked. He replied, “Come in.” I went in. I took my position in front of and facing him, my heels together, head up, the palms of my hands to the front, and my little fingers on the seams of my pantaloons, in which position we habitually carried them. After correcting my position and making it sufficiently military to suit himself, one of them, in a much milder tone, asked what I desired of them. I told him I had been sent by the adjutant to report there. He arose, and directing me to follow him, conducted me to the bath-rooms. Having discharged the necessary duty there, I returned and was again put in charge of the orderly, who carried me to the hospital. There I was subjected to a rigid physical examination, which I “stood” with the greatest ease. I was given a certificate of ability by the surgeon, and by him sent again to the adjutant, who in turn sent me to the treasurer.<sup>3</sup> From him I returned alone to barracks.

The reception given to “plebes” upon reporting is often very much more severe than that given me. Even members of my own class can testify to this.<sup>4</sup> This reception has, however, I think, been best described in an anonymous work, where it is thus set forth:

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3. Prospective cadets—those who had received Congressional nominations—had to pass two examinations before gaining full admission to the Academy: an academic exam and a medical exam. The medical exam came first. Flipper’s class included 230 prospective cadets in the summer of 1873. Of these, 74 were not granted the physician’s certificate of ability, making for a 32.2 percent medical rejection rate. The rejection rate for Flipper’s class was somewhat higher than the norm. From the end of the Civil War in 1865 to the class of 1877 reporting to West Point in 1873, the average medical rejection rate was 25.2 percent. See *List of Cadets Admitted to the United States Military Academy, West Point, N.Y., From its Origin till September 1, 1901, with Tables Exhibiting the Results of Examinations for Admission, and the Corps to which the Graduates have been Promoted* (Government Printing Office, 1902), 116.

4. This introduces a strand of criticism leveled against Black cadets consistently during the 1870s. White cadets had a very specific conception of hazing, and they insisted that they did not apply it to Black cadets. This is in part because cadets

“How dare you come into the presence of your superior officer in that grossly careless and unmilitary manner? I’ll have you imprisoned. Stand, attention, sir!” (Even louder than before.) “Heels-together-and-on-the-same-line, toes-equally-turned-out, little-fingers-on-the-seams-of-your-pantaloons, button-your-coat, draw-in-your-chin, throw-out-your-chest, cast-your-eyes-fifteen-paces-to-the-front, don’t-let-me-see-you-wearing-standing-collars-again. Stand-steady, sir. You’ve evidently mistaken your profession, sir. In any other service, or at the seat of war, sir, you would have been shot, sir, without trial, sir, for such conduct, sir.”<sup>5</sup>

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viewed hazing as a means of welcoming new arrivals to the larger group—a rite of passage to acceptance within the community. As Flipper will show later, white cadets in the Reconstruction era never intended to accept Black cadets as full members of the Corps of Cadets, and therefore never considered their many and varied ways of mistreating Black cadets to fall in the realm of hazing. See Rory McGovern, Makonen Campbell, and Louisa Koebrich, “‘I Hope to Have Justice Done Me or I Can’t Get Along Here’: James Webster Smith and West Point,” *Journal of Military History* 87, no. 4 (October 2023): 973 and 983.

5. The “anonymous work” from which Flipper drew is unknown. The fact that it resonated well enough with Flipper to merit inclusion in his autobiography suggest that his reception in the adjutant’s office was similar to the account and therefore generally similar to the reception of many of his white peers. Flipper refers to this comical exchange as “hazing.” In cadet parlance of the time, “hazing” and “devil-ing” were interchangeable terms that applied to a wide range of activity meant to assert power within a hierarchical order in which new cadets and “plebes” were firmly at the bottom. That activity ranged from the nonsensical and comical (as in this exchange), to the more cruel and mean-spirited (as in littering the ground with small pieces of trash and then compelling the newly arrived to clean it up) and beyond, to more physical forms of hazing (as in forcing a cadet to assume an uncomfortable posture for a lengthy period of time). Violence was another matter. While cadets at times arranged for fights to take place out of sight to resolve perceived affronts, they considered physical violence beyond the realm of “hazing” or “devil-ing.” When Flipper arrived in 1873, West Point was actively attempting to address disciplinary issues that had become acute enough to be considered a national scandal. In 1871, the War Department had ordered West Point’s leaders to focus on improving discipline. Hazing then became “doubtless forbidden,” as Flipper described it, though still often winked at and looked away from by many officers assigned to West Point.

On hazing, see Stephen Ambrose, *Duty, Honor, Country: A History of West Point* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1966), 222–31; Theodore J. Crackel, *West Point: A Bicentennial History* (University Press of Kansas, 2002), 141–45; Lance Betros, *Carved from Granite: West Point Since 1902* (Texas A&M University Press, 2012), 22–24; Donald B. Connelly, “The Rocky Road to Reform: John M. Schofield at West Point, 1876–1881,” in ed. Lance Betros, *West Point: Two Centuries and Beyond*

The effect of such words can be easily imagined. A “plebe” will at once recognize the necessity for absolute obedience, even if he does know all this is hazing, and that it is doubtless forbidden. Still “plebes” almost invariably tremble while it lasts, and when in their own quarters laugh over it, and even practise it upon each other for mutual amusement.

On the way to barracks I met the squad of “beasts” marching to dinner.<sup>6</sup> I was ordered to fall in, did so, marched to the mess hall, and ate my first dinner at West Point. After dinner we were marched again to barracks and dismissed. I hastened to my quarters, and a short while after was turned out to take possession of my baggage. I lugged it to my room, was shown the directions on the back of the door for arrangement of articles, and ordered to obey them within half an hour. The parts of the regulations referred to are the following:

#### SPECIAL REGULATIONS FOR BARRACKS.

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##### ORDERLIES OF ROOMS.

The particular attention of Orderlies is directed to those paragraphs of the Regulations for the U. S. Military Academy specifying their duties.

##### CADETS.

The hours of Recitation of each Cadet will be posted on the back of the door of his room.<sup>7</sup> When a room is being washed out by the policeman, on reporting to the Officer of the Day, and stating to him the number of some room in his own Division he wishes to visit, a Cadet will be permitted to visit that particular room until his own can be occupied. The uniform coat will be worn from 8 till 10 A.M.; at Inspection before 10 A.M. the coat will be buttoned throughout; at Sunday Morning Inspection gloves and side-arms will also be worn. After 10 A.M. any uniform garment or dressing-gown may be worn in their own rooms, but at no time will Cadets be in their shirt-sleeves unnecessarily. During the “Call to Quarters,” between “Inspection Call” in the morning and “Tattoo,” the following Arrangement of Furniture, etc., will be required:

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(McWhiney Foundation Press, 2004), 175–78; and Hugh Lenox Scott, *Some Memories of a Soldier* (The Century Co., 1928), 14.

6. “Beasts” refers in this case to prospective cadets awaiting examination and admission to the Academy. The term also applied to newly admitted cadets completing their first summer encampment after passing their entrance examinations (usually in June) and before beginning classes (usually on or around September 1 in any given year).

7. “The hours of Recitation” refers to a daily class schedule.



A cadet's room, circa 1875.

*Courtesy of the United States Military Academy Library Special Collections and Archives.*

#### ACCOUTREMENTS.

*Dress Cap*—On gun-rack shelf.

*Cartridge Boxes, Waist Belts, Sabres, Forage Caps*—Hung on pegs near gun-rack shelf.

*Muskets*—In gun-rack, Bayonets in the scabbards.

*Spurs*—Hung on peg with Sabres.

#### BEDSTEADS AND BEDDING.

*Bedsteads*—In alcove, against side wall of the room, the head against the back wall.

*Bedding*—Mattress to be folded once; Blankets and Comforters, each one to be neatly and separately folded, so that the folds shall be of the width of an ordinary pillow, and piled at the head of the BEDSTEAD in the following order, viz.: MATTRESS, SHEETS, PILLOWS, BLANKETS, and COMFORTERS, the front edge of sheets, pillows, etc., to be vertical. On Sunday afternoons the BEDS may be made down and used.

#### CLOTHES-PRESS.

*Books*—On the top of the Press, against the wall, and with the backs to the front. BRUSHES (tooth and hair), COMBS, SHAVING IMPLEMENTS and MATERIALS, such small boxes as may be allowed, vials, etc., to be neatly arranged

on the upper shelf. BELTS, COLLARS, GLOVES, HANDKERCHIEFS, SOCKS, etc., to be neatly arranged on the second shelf from the top. SHEETS, PILLOW-CASES, SHIRTS, DRAWERS, WHITE PANTS, etc., to be neatly arranged on the other shelves, the heaviest articles on the lower shelves.

*Arrangement*—All articles of the same kind are to be carefully and neatly placed in separate piles. The folded edges of these articles to be to the front, and even with the front edge of the shelf. Nothing will be allowed between these piles of clothing and the back of the press, unless the want of room on the front edge renders it necessary.

*Dirty Clothes*—To be kept in clothes-bag.

*Shoes and Over-Shoes*—To be kept clean, dusted, and arranged in a line where they can be seen by the Inspector, either at the foot of the bedstead or at the side near the foot.

*Woollen Clothing, Dressing-Gown, and Clothes-Bag*—To be hung on the pegs in alcove in the following general order, from the front of the alcove to the back: Over-Coat, Dressing-Gown, Uniform Coats, Jackets, Pants, Clothes-Bag.

#### FURNITURE.

*Broom*—To be kept behind the door. TIN BOX for CLEANING MATERIALS—To be kept clean and in the fire-place. SPITTOON—To be kept on one side of the hearth near mantel-piece. CHAIRS and TABLES—On no occasion to be in alcoves, the chairs, when not in use, to be against the owners' tables. LOOKING-GLASS—At the centre of the mantel-piece. WASH-STAND—To be kept clean, in front and against alcove partition. WASH-BASIN—To be kept clean, and inverted on the top of the wash-stand. WATER-BUCKET—To be kept on shelf of wash-stand. SLOP-BUCKET—To be kept near to and on side of wash-stand, opposite door.<sup>8</sup> Baskets, Pictures, Clocks, Statues, Trunks, and large Boxes will NOT be allowed in quarters.

*Curtains*—WINDOW-CURTAINS—Only uniform allowed, and to be kept drawn back during the day. ALCOVE-CURTAINS—Only uniform allowed, and to be kept drawn, except between "Tattoo" and "Reveille" and when dressing. CURTAINS OF CLOTHES-PRESS—To be kept drawn, except when policing room.

#### FLOOR.

To be kept clean, and free from grease-spots and stains.

#### WALLS AND WOOD-WORK.

To be kept free from cobwebs, and not to be injured by nails or otherwise.

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8. Cadets used their slop buckets to collect both material and human waste, especially in the evening. Cadets could and sometimes did use their slop buckets as a means of hazing and ostracization. One night in early June 1870, after reporting as West Point's first Black prospective cadets, Michael Howard and James W. Smith awoke to one of their peers barging in and emptying his slop bucket all over them as they slept in their beds. See Testimony of James W. Smith, Untitled Transcript of Court of Inquiry addressed to Thomas M. Vincent, Assistant Adjutant General, 11, James W. Smith Files, M1002, USMA Library Special Collections and Archives, West Point, NY.

## HEATING APPARATUS, SCREEN AND TOP.

To be kept clean, and not to be scratched or defaced.

These Regulations will be strictly obeyed and enforced.

BY ORDER OF LIEUT.-COLONEL UPTON,

GEORGE L. TURNER,

*CADET Lieut. and Adjutant.*

HEADQUARTERS, CORPS OF CADETS,  
*West Point, N.Y., Sept. 4, 1873.*

At the end of the time specified every article was arranged and the cadet corporal returned to inspect. He walked deliberately to the clothes-press, and, informing me that every thing was arranged wrong, threw every article upon the floor, repeated his order, and withdrew. And thus three times in less than two hours did I arrange and he disarrange my effects. I was not troubled again by him till after supper, when he inspected again, merely opening the door, however, and looking in. He told me I could not go to sleep till "tattoo." Now tattoo, as he evidently used it, referred in some manner to time, and with such reference I had not the remotest idea of what it meant. I had no knowledge whatever of military terms or customs. However, as I was also told that I could do any thing—writing, etc.—I might wish to do, I found sufficient to keep me awake until he again returned and told me it was then tattoo, that I could retire then or at any time within half an hour, and that at the end of that time the light *must* be extinguished and I *must* be in bed. I instantly extinguished it and retired.

Thus passed my first half day at West Point, and thus began the military career of the fifth colored cadet. The other four were Smith of South Carolina, Napier of Tennessee, Howard of Mississippi, and Gibbs of Florida.<sup>9</sup>

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9. Flipper was actually West Point's sixth Black prospective cadet and became the fourth admitted. Michael Howard was the first to report to West Point in May 1870. Howard, however, never matriculated as a cadet because he failed the entrance examination which Flipper describes later in this chapter. The other three who were admitted as cadets were James W. Smith, Henry A. Napier, and Thomas van Rensselaer Gibbs. Smith earned admission in June 1870 and bore an incredible burden as West Point's first Black cadet. There was such active resistance to his presence at West Point that he spent most of the academic year 1870–1871 under arrest and subject to one formal court of inquiry and two courts-martial. He endured and remained at the Academy until dismissed in June 1874 after being found deficient

What I had seen and experienced during the few hours from my arrival till tattoo filled me with fear and apprehension. I expected every moment to be insulted or struck, and was not long in persuading myself that the various reports which I had heard concerning Smith were true—I had not seen him yet, or, if I had, had not recognized him—and that my life there was to be all torture and anguish.<sup>10</sup> I was uneasy and miserable, ever thinking of the regulations, verbal or written, which had been given me. How they haunted me! I kept repeating them over and over, fearful lest I might forget and violate them, and be dismissed. If I wanted any thing or wished to go anywhere, I must get permission of the cadet officers on duty over us. To get such permission I must enter their

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in natural and experimental philosophy (a nineteenth-century discipline most closely related to physics). Napier, James E. Rector, and Gibbs—who reported to West Point in May 1871, August 1871, and May 1872, respectively—had short West Point tenures and had been dismissed for academic deficiencies prior to Flipper’s arrival. Rector never made it past the entrance examination. Napier fell victim to the June 1872 examinations after the Academic Board declared him deficient in mathematics and French. Gibbs lasted only six months, declared by the Academic Board to be deficient in mathematics in January 1873.

Black cadets may have faced extra scrutiny from at least some of their professors in these examinations; Napier and Gibbs had attended Howard University, where the faculty held them in high regard. Both also built impactful and accomplished careers after leaving West Point—Napier as a highly regarded educator from a family of educators in Nashville, Tennessee; and Gibbs as a political leader and state legislator in Florida.

For data on Black cadets, see “Statement Showing the Number of Colored Persons Appointed to the U.S. Military Academy,” October 21, 1886, RG 404, USMA Library Special Collections and Archives, West Point, NY. For evidence that at least some West Point faculty were unwilling to accept that Black cadets were prepared for and capable of succeeding at West Point, see George L. Andrews, “West Point and the Colored Cadets” *The International Review*, IX (November 1880): 477–98. Andrews was the professor of French at West Point and served on the Academic Board. In this article, he states outright on page 484 that he had a poor opinion of all of the Black cadets admitted to West Point in the 1870s, and he described the government’s policy of integrating West Point as a “tyrannical course” that forced integration upon unwilling white cadets.

10. There had been considerable newspaper coverage of Smith during his torturous first year at the Academy in 1870–1871. Much of it painted Smith in a bad light. But he did receive sympathetic coverage from some corners (see, for example, “The Colored Cadet Persecution,” *New York Daily Tribune*, January 23, 1871). We do not know which reports about Smith that Flipper read, but it is clear that his sources were sympathetic to Smith and his especially tormented experiences at West Point.

office cleanly and neatly dressed, and, taking my place in the centre of the room, must salute, report my entrance, make known my wants, salute again, and report my departure.\* At the instant I heard the sound of a drum I must turn out at a run and take my place in the ranks.

At five o'clock the next morning two unusual sounds greeted my ears—the *reveille*, and a voice in the hall below calling out in a loud martial tone:

“Candidates, turn out promptly!” In an astonishingly short time I had dressed, “turned out,” and was in ranks. We stood there as motionless as statues till the fifers and drummers had marched up to barracks, the rolls of the companies had been called, and they themselves dismissed. We were then dismissed, our roll having been also called. We withdrew at a run to our quarters and got them ready for inspection, which, we were informed, would take place at the expiration of half an hour. At the end of this time our quarters were inspected by a corporal. In my own room he upset my bedding, kicked my shoes into the middle of the room, and ordered me to arrange them again and in better order. This order was obeyed immediately. And this upsetting was done in every room, as I learned afterward from the occupants, who, strange to say, manifested no prejudice then. ’Twas not long ere they learned that they were prejudiced, and that they abhorred even the sight of a “*d—d nigger*.”<sup>12</sup>

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\* *Somewhat after this fashion:*

“Candidate F—, *United States Military Academy*, reports his entrance into this office, sir.”

“Well, sir, *what do you want in this office?*”

“*I desire permission, sir, to walk on public lands till retreat.*”

“No, sir, *you can’t walk on public lands till retreat. Get out of my sight.*”

“Candidate F—, *United States Military Academy*, reports his departure from this office, sir.”

12. Here Flipper strikes the first chord in a theme that he underscores often throughout the text: his perception that some intangible aspect of the environment at West Point drew racist thought and behavior out of many white cadets who at first appeared to be neither racist nor inclined to discriminate. Flipper never makes that point quite as directly as this summary of it; instead he makes it through the combined weight of many comments similar to the final two sentences in this paragraph. Modern readers must remember that at the time he published, Flipper was a newly commissioned lieutenant at the beginning of what he believed would be his lifelong career. In the context of the late-nineteenth century U.S. Army, direct

Just before, or perhaps just after breakfast, our quarters were again inspected. This time I was somewhat surprised to hear the corporal say, "Very well, Mr. Flipper, very well, sir."

And this with other things shows there was a friendly feeling toward me from the first. After having thus expressed himself, he directed me to print my name on each of four pieces of paper, and to tack them up in certain places in the room, which he indicated to me. I did this several times before I could please him; but at last succeeded. Another corporal visited me during the day and declared everything out of order, although I had not touched a single thing after once satisfying the first corporal. Of course I had to rearrange them to suit him, in which I also finally succeeded.

At eleven o'clock the mail came. I received a letter, and to my astonishment its postmark was "West Point, N. Y., May 21st." Of course I was at a loss to know who the writer was. I turned it over and over, looked at it, studied the postmark, finally opened it and read it.\*

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criticisms of West Point would have placed that career in jeopardy. It took some boldness to include even indirect critiques such as this.

\* *This letter by some means has been misplaced, and all efforts to find it, or to discover what its exact contents were, have failed. However, it was from James Webster Smith, the first and then only cadet of color at West Point. It reassured me very much, telling me not to fear either blows or insults, and advising me to avoid any forward conduct if I wished also to avoid certain consequences, "which," said the writer, "I have learned from sad experience," would be otherwise inevitable. It was a sad letter. I don't think any thing has so affected me or so influenced my conduct at West Point as its melancholy tone. That "sad experience" gave me a world of warning. I looked upon it as implying the confession of some great error made by him at some previous time, and of its sadder consequences.*<sup>13</sup>

13. There is much to unpack here. First, we see that James W. Smith took it upon himself to guide and mentor Black cadets who followed in his footsteps, trying to ensure that they profited from his prior experiences in a way that could make their West Point experiences less tortured and, hopefully, successful. Flipper's emphasis on the letter's "melancholy tone" also suggests that Smith—then entering his fourth year at West Point (although only a rising "cow," or junior, because he had been made to repeat his first year)—was in a depressed condition after enduring years of abuse and isolation. Smith's advice "not to fear either blows or insults" reveals plainly that both physical and verbal abuse were routine features of Black cadets' experiences at West Point. Finally, Flipper's summary of Smith's admonition "to avoid any forward conduct if I wished also to avoid certain circumstances" was a warning about and criticism of—so tactfully worded as to be almost completely disguised—the many miscarriages of military justice that Smith endured. A pattern that emerged in Smith's time at West Point was that whenever he

This was another surprise—a welcome surprise, however. I read it over several times. It showed me plainly that Smith had not been dismissed, as had been reported to me at home. I at once formed a better opinion of West Point than I before had, and from that day my fears gradually wore away.<sup>14</sup>

The candidates now reported rapidly, and we, who had reported the day previous, were comparatively undisturbed. At four o'clock I visited Smith at his quarters by permission. My visit was necessarily a short one, as he was then preparing for drill. It sufficed, however, for us to become acquainted, and for me to receive some valuable advice. An hour and place were designated for us to meet next day, and I took my leave of him. The "plebes" turned out en masse, walked around the grounds and witnessed the drilling of the battalion. We enjoyed it immensely. They were that day skirmishing and using blank cartridges. We thought the drill superb. I was asked by a fellow-"plebe," "Think you'll like that?"

"Oh yes," said I, "when I can do it as easily as they do."

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fought back against his abusers, a great many cadets would testify that he had started the incident; and that whenever he reported to authorities that cadets had mistreated him, multiple cadets would testify that he had lied—often prompting the commandant to bring charges of rendering false reports against Smith. In this context, Smith's advice to Flipper most likely was that it was best, if possible, to accept and endure abuse in order to avoid needing to endure abuse, official censure, and disciplinary action simultaneously. For a detailed analysis of Smith's experiences at West Point, see Rory McGovern, Makonen Campbell, and Louisa Koebrich, "'I Hope to Have Justice Done Me or I Can't Get Along Here': James Webster Smith and West Point," *Journal of Military History* 87, no. 4 (October 2023): 964–1003.

14. Given how important Flipper says the letter was to his outlook in those early days, it is somewhat strange that the lines quoted above appear in Flipper's autobiography as a footnote rather than as part of the main text. This is an early example of how Smith haunts Flipper's work, and how Flipper responded to competing impulses about Smith. On the one hand, he clearly appreciated and sympathized with Smith, as he pointed out in his summary of the letter (see the previous note). On the other hand, Flipper deliberately sought to distance himself from Smith. Noting that he interpreted Smith's letter "as implying the confession of some great error," Flipper portrays Smith as being at least somewhat responsible for his own troubles. He also juxtaposes Smith's "sad letter" and its "melancholy tone" with his own response to the letter: "I at once formed a better opinion of West Point than I before had, and from that day my fears gradually wore away." Here and elsewhere in this volume, Flipper alternates between portraying Smith as a tragic hero and presenting himself as the antithesis of Smith.

We had quite a lengthy conversation about the fine appearance of the cadets, their forms, so straight and manly, evoking our greatest admiration. This, alas! was our only conversation on any subject. The gentleman discovered ere long that he too was prejudiced, and thus one by one they “cut” me, whether for prudential reasons or not I can not presume to say.<sup>15</sup>

I went into the office one day, and standing uncovered at about the middle of the room, in the position of the soldier, saluted and thus addressed a cadet officer present:

“Candidate Flipper, United States Military Academy, reports his entrance into this office, sir.”

“Well, what do you want?” was the rather gruff reply.

“I desire permission to visit Smith, sir,” answered I, thoughtlessly saying “Smith,” instead of “Mr” or “Cadet Smith.”

He instantly sprang from his seat into rather close proximity to my person and angrily yelled:

“Well, sir, I want to hear you say ‘Mr. Smith.’ I want you to understand, sir, he is a cadet and you’re a ‘plebe,’ and I don’t want to see such familiarity on your part again, sir,” putting particular emphasis on “Mr.”

Having thus delivered himself he resumed his seat, leaving me, I imagine, more scared than otherwise.

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15. Note here that Flipper expands upon his implied claim that for many white cadets, racist intolerance was a trait learned and developed at West Point, not before (see footnote 12 in this chapter).

Flipper’s use of “cut” refers to the practice of silencing cadets. The Corps of Cadets “cut” or “silenced” cadets who lied, stole, or otherwise acted in ways considered dishonorable. Silenced cadets faced complete ostracism. Cadets voted in class cohorts to silence their peers and then refused to speak or interact with them in any way unless official duties required it. By design, this practice often led silenced cadets to resign or fail out of the Academy, unable to work with fellow cadets to improve in subjects to which they were not naturally inclined. During West Point’s first experience with racial integration from 1870 to 1889, white cadets silenced all of their Black peers.

For more on the practice of silencing, see Unpublished Memoir, pages 12–13 and 22–25, Eben Swift Files, USMA Library Special Collections and Archives, West Point, NY; Peter S. Michie, *The Life and Letters of Emory Upton, Colonel of the Fourth Regiment of Artillery and Brevet Major-General, U.S. Army* (New York: D. Appleton, 1885), 252; Brian K. Shellum, *Black Cadet in a White Bastion*, 40; and Rory McGovern, Makonen Campbell, and Louisa Koebrich, “‘I Hope to Have Justice Done Me or I Can’t Get Along Here’: James Webster Smith and West Point,” *Journal of Military History* 87, no. 4 (October 2023): 989.

“What do you want?” asked he again, after a pause of a moment or so.

“Permission to visit Mr. Smith.”

Without condescending to notice for the time my request he gave the interview a rather ludicrous turn, I thought, by questioning me somewhat after this manner:

“Can you dance, Mr. Flipper?”

Having answered this to his entire satisfaction, he further asked:

“Expect to attend the hops this summer?”

“Oh no, sir,” replied I, smiling, as he also was, for I had just discovered the drift of his questions.<sup>16</sup> After mischievously studying my countenance for a moment, he returned to the original subject and queried, “Where do you want to go?”

I told him.

“Well, get out of my sight.”

I considered the permission granted, and hastily withdrew to take advantage of it.

Between breakfast and supper those of us who had been there at least a day had quite a pleasant time. We were not troubled with incessant inspections or otherwise. We either studied for examination or walked around the grounds. At or near seven o’clock, the time of retreat parade, we were formed near our barracks and inspected. Our ranks were opened and the cadet lieutenant inspected our clothing and appearance generally. A not infrequent occurrence on these occasions was:

“Well, mister, what did you shave with—a shoehorn?”

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16. “Hops” were dances, the highlight of cadets’ social lives both during summer encampment and during the academic year. This line of questioning was cruel, and Flipper knew it. It was well known that white cadets had up to that point prevented Black cadets from attending any hops. Seeing that Smith’s brother and two young Black women were at the encampment to observe the parade that preceded a hop in summer 1871, cadets grew concerned that James W. Smith and Henry A. Napier would attend the hop. They responded by manipulating the disciplinary system to prevent Smith’s attendance. An upperclassman ordered Smith to tie down part of a tent; once complete, another cadet untied it. The upperclassman who gave the original order then reported to the officer of the day that Smith had disrespected him and disobeyed lawful orders. The officer of the day then placed Smith under arrest. Authorities accepted the upper-classman’s story and punished Smith by restricting his privileges for five weeks, preventing Smith and deterring Napier from attending any of the hops. Smith recounted this tale in a letter published in the *New National Era* on August 19, 1874, which is reprinted in chapter XVII of this volume.

At this we would smile, when the lieutenant, sergeant, or corporal would jump at us and yell:

“Wipe that smile off your face, sir! What do you mean, sir, by laughing in ranks?”

If any one attempted to reply he was instantly silenced with—

“Well, sir, don’t reply to me in ranks.”

The inspection would be continued. Some one, unable to restrain himself—the whole affair was so ridiculous—would laugh right out in ranks. He was a doomed man.

“What do you mean, sir, by laughing in ranks, sir?”

Having been once directed not to reply in ranks, the poor “plebe” would stand mute.

“Well, Sir, don’t you intend to answer me?”

“Yes, Sir.”

“Well, sir, step it out. What were you grinning at?”

“Nothing, sir.”

“Nothing! Well, sir, you’re a pretty thing to be grinning at nothing. Get in ranks.”

The inspection would, after many such interruptions, be continued. Ranks would at length be closed and the command, “In place, rest!” given. The battalion would march in from parade at double time and form in the area to our rear. The delinquencies of the day previous would then be published by the cadet adjutant.

What most strikes a “plebe” is this same publication. He hasn’t the remotest idea of what it is. Not a word uttered by the adjutant is understood by him. He stands and wonders what it is. A perfect jargon of words, unintelligible and meaningless to him! I remember distinctly how I used to wonder, and how I was laughed at when I asked for information concerning it. We “plebes” used to speak of it often, and wonder if it was not French. When we were better acquainted with the rules and customs of the Academy we learned what it was. It was something of this nature, read from the “Delinquency Book:”

DELINQUENCIES, TUESDAY, OCT. 12.

ADAMS.—Late at reveille roll-call.

BEJAY.—Sentinel not coming to “Arms, Port,” when addressed by the officer of the day.

SAME.—Not conversant with orders at same.

BARNES.—Same at same.

SAME.—Sentinel, neglect of duty, not requiring cadet leaving his post to report his departure and destination.

SAME.—Hanging head, 4 P.M.

BULOW.—Dust on mantel at inspection, 9.30 A.M.

SAME.—Executing manual of arms with pointer in section-room, 9 A.M.

SAME.—Using profane expression, 1 P.M.

CULLEN.—Out of bed at taps.

DOUNS.—Light in quarters, 11 P.M.

SAME.—Not prepared on 47 Velasquez.\*

On the 26th of May, another colored candidate reported. It is said he made the best show at the preliminary examination. Unfortunately, however, he was “found” at the following semi-annual examination. He was brought up to my quarters by a corporal, and I was ordered to give him all instruction which had previously been given me. This I did, and his first days at West Point were much more pleasant than mine had been.

The candidates had now all reported, and Monday afternoon, May 28th, we were each given by the Adjutant in person a slip of paper upon which was written the number of each man’s name in an alphabetically arranged roll. This we had special directions to preserve. The next day we were marched up to the Drawing Academy, and examined in grammar, history, and geography; the following day in orthography and reading. On the same day, also, we were required to write out a list of all the textbooks we had used in our previous school-days. The day following we were divided into sections and marched to the library, where the Academic Board was in readiness to examine us in mathematics. It took quite a while to examine our class of more than one hundred members thus

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\* *For these delinquencies the cadets are allowed to write explanations. If the offence is absence from quarters or any duty without authority, or is one committed in the Academical Department, called an Academical Delinquency, such as not being prepared on some lesson, an explanation is required and must be written. For all other offences the cadet can write an explanation or not as he chooses. If the explanation is satisfactory, the offence is removed and he gets no demerits, otherwise he does. For form of explanation see Chapter X, latter part.*<sup>17</sup>

17. This unnamed cadet was John Washington Williams from Virginia. Records show that Williams actually reported on May 24. Williams was dismissed from the Academy for academic deficiency after failing his French exam in January 1874. His congressman unsuccessfully appealed to academy officials to reinstate Williams and give him a second chance. While at West Point, he shared a room with Smith and Flipper. On Williams, see “Statement Showing the Number of Colored Persons Appointed to the U.S. Military Academy,” October 21, 1886, RG 404, USMA Library Special Collections and Archives, West Point, NY; and John Washington Williams Files, Roll 2, M1002, USMA Library Special Collections and Archives, West Point, NY.

orally. I am not positive about the dates of the examination. I know it occurred in the immediate vicinity of those named.

Not many days after this the result of the examination was made known to us. The familiar cry, "Candidates, turn out promptly," made at about noon, informed us that something unusual was about to occur. It was a fearful moment, and yet I was sure I had "passed." The only questions I failed on were in geography. I stood motionless while the order was being read until I heard my name among the accepted ones. I felt as if a great burden had been removed from my mind. It was a beginning, and if not a good one, certainly not a bad one.<sup>18</sup> What has been the ending? Let the sequel show.

Now that the examination was over and the deficient ones gone, we were turned out for drill every morning at half-past five o'clock and at four in the afternoon. We were divided into squads of one each, and drilled twice a day in the "settings up" until about June 20th. After a few drills, however, the squads were consolidated into others of four, six, and eight each. The surplus drill-masters were "turned in." Their hopes were withered, for it was almost a certainty that those who were "turned in" would not be "made." They

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18. Flipper has just described the entrance examination. The depth of his concern was not unique—West Point's entrance examinations at that time were severely attritional. In the two decades prior to and including Flipper's arrival at West Point, an average of 22 percent of prospective cadets failed the entrance academic examinations each year. Attrition rose significantly in the 1870s after decisions made in 1869 to increase the rigor of the examination. During Flipper's time at West Point (1873–1877), the entrance examinations had an average annual failure rate of 39.8 percent of prospective cadets who took the exams. Statistical data excludes those prospective cadets who were turned away after their initial medical examinations, had their appointments canceled, declined their appointments, or failed to report.

All data has been derived from "Statement showing number of candidates for cadetships appointed to the United States Military Academy, number rejected, and number admitted, from 1838 to 1901, inclusive" in *List of Cadets Admitted to the United States Military Academy, West Point, N.Y., From its Origin till September 1, 1901, with Tables Exhibiting the Results of Examinations for Admission, and the Corps to which the Graduates have been Promoted* (Government Printing Office, 1902), 116. On the decision to make the entrance examination more rigorous, see Testimony of Thomas Pitcher, Untitled Transcript of Court of Inquiry addressed to Thomas M. Vincent, Assistant Adjutant General, James W. Smith Files, M1002, USMA Library Special Collections and Archives, West Point, NY, pp. 35–37; and Special Meeting of the Academic Board, March 28, 1870, *U.S. Military Academy Staff Records*, vol. 8, USMA Library Special Collections and Archives, West Point, NY, pp. 255–59.

expected to be “made” on their proficiency in drilling, and when it was shown by being “turned in” that others had been thought better drill-masters, they were not a little disappointed. How they “boned” tactics! What proficiency they manifested! How they yelled out their commands! What eagerness they showed to correct errors, etc. And yet some could not overcome their propensity for hazing, and these were of course turned in. Not always thus, however. Those who were not “turned in” were not always “made” corporals. Often those who were so treated “got the chevrons” after all.

“Plebe drill,” or, more familiarly, “squad drill,” has always been a source of great amusement to citizens, but what a horror to plebes. Those torturous twistings and twirlings, stretching every nerve, straining every sinew, almost twisting the joints out of place and making life one long agonizing effort. Was there ever a “plebe,” or recruit, who did not hate, did not shudder at the mere mention of squad drill? I did. Others did. I remember distinctly my first experience of it. I formed an opinion, a morbid dislike of it then, and have not changed it. The benefit, however, of “squad drill” can not be overestimated. It makes the most crooked, distorted creature an erect, noble, and manly being, provided, of course, this distortion be a result of habit and not a natural deformity, the result of laziness in one’s walking, such as hanging the head, dropping the shoulders, not straightening the legs, and crossing them when walking.

Squad drill is one of the painful necessities of military discipline, and no one regrets his experience of it, however displeasing it may have been at the time. It is squad drill and hazing that so successfully mould the coarser characters who come to West Point into officers and gentlemen.<sup>19</sup> They teach him how to govern and

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19. Hazing at West Point became a significant problem after the Civil War and had risen to the point of a national scandal in the 1870–1871 academic year when the entire graduating class of 1871 took it upon themselves to expel informally three plebes caught in a lie. The class took the offending plebes from their barracks room, escorted them to the gates of West Point, gave them money for travel and sustenance until they could reach relatives, and told them not to come back. Hazing was only one of a number of disciplinary issues at West Point after the Civil War. The War Department shook up the academy’s leadership to address the problem, bringing in a new commandant in 1870 and a new superintendent in 1871. But as Flipper’s comments demonstrate, the new leaders faced a difficult task in ending hazing when cadets—Flipper apparently among them—believed hazing positively shaped the character of future officers. As we see in Flipper’s description of hazing

be governed. They are more effectual in polishing his asperities of disposition and forming his character than any amount of regulations could be. They tame him, so to speak.

Squad drill was at once a punishment, a mode of hazing, and a drill. For the least show of grossness one was sure to be punished with "settings up, second time!" "settings up, fourth time!" "Continue the motion, settings up second (or fourth) time!" We would be kept at these motions until we could scarcely move. Of course all this was contrary to orders. The drill-master would be careful not to be "hived." If he saw an officer even looking at him, he would add the command "three," which caused a discontinuance of the motion. He would change, however, to one of the other exercises immediately, and thus keep the plebes continually in motion. When he thought the punishment sufficient he would discontinue it by the command, "three," and give "place, rest." When the "place, rest" had been just about sufficient to allow the plebe to get cool and in a measure rested, the drill would be resumed by the command "'tion, squad" (abbreviated from "attention" and pronounced "shun"). If the plebe was slow, "place, rest" was again given, and

"When I give the command 'tion, squad,' I want to see you spring up with life."

"'Tion, squad!"

Plebe is slow again.

"Well, mister, wake up. This is no trifling matter. Understand?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, sir, don't reply to me in ranks."

And many times and terms even more severe than these.

Now that Williams and myself were admitted, the newspapers made their usual comments on such occurrences. I shall quote a single one from *The New National Era and Citizen*, published in Washington, D.C., and the political organ of the colored people. The article, however, as I present it, is taken from another paper, having been by it taken from the *Era and Citizen*:<sup>20</sup>

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as a part of squad drill, though, his conception of what constituted hazing was relatively benign. On hazing and indiscipline in the Corps of Cadets after the Civil War, refer to footnote 5 in this chapter.

20. Originally titled *The New Era*, the newspaper began publishing on a weekly basis in Washington, D.C., in 1870 as a joint venture between civil rights activist J. Sella Martin and Frederick Douglass. Martin was a poor manager, however, and in 1871 Frederick Douglass purchased sole ownership of the paper

“COLORED CADETS AT WEST POINT.

“*The New National Era and Citizen*, which is the national organ of the colored people, contains a sensible article this week on the status of colored cadets at West Point. After referring to the colored young men, ‘Plebes’ Flipper of Georgia, and Williams of Virginia, who have passed the examination requisite for entering the Academy, the *Era and Citizen* says: ‘Now that they are in, the stiff and starched protégés of the Government make haste to tell the reporters that “none of the fellows would hurt them, but every fellow would let them alone.” Our reporter seems to think that “to be let alone” a terrible doom. So it is, if one is sent to Coventry by gentlemen. So it is, if one is neglected by those who, in point of education, thrift, and morality are our equals or superiors. So it is not, if done by the low-minded, the ignorant, and the snobbish. If it be possible, among the four hundred young charity students of the Government, that Cadet Smith, for instance, finds no warm friends, and has won no respect after the gallant fight he has made for four years—a harder contest than he will ever have in the sterner field—then we despair of the material which West Point is turning out. If this be true, it is training selfish, snobbish martinets—not knightly soldiers, not Havelocks, Hardinges, and Kearneys—but the lowest type of disciplined and educated force and brutality—the Bluchers and Marlboroughs. We scarcely believe this, however, and we know that any young man, whether he be poor or black, or both, may enter any first-class college in America and find warm sympathetic friends, both among students and faculty, if he but prove himself to be possessed of some good qualities. . . . If the Smiths, Flippers, and Williamses in their honorable school-boy careers can not meet social as well as intellectual recognition while at West Point, let them study on and acquit themselves like men, for they will meet, out in the world, a worthy reception among men of worth, who have put by the prejudices of race and the shackles of ignorance. Emerson says somewhere that “Solitude, the nurse of Genius, is the foe of mediocrity.” If our young men of ability have the stuff in them to make men out of, they need not fear “to be let alone” for a while; they will ultimately come to the surface and attain worthy recognition.’

“That is plain, practical talk. We like it. It has the ring of the true metal. It shows that the writer has faith in the ultimate triumph of manhood. It is another form for expressing a firm belief that real worth will find a reward. Never has any bond people emerged from slavery into a condition full of such grand opportunities and splendid possibilities as those which are within the reach of the colored people of the United States; but if those opportunities are to be made available, if

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and its printing plant, becoming the managing editor. Douglass changed its name to *The New National Era* and expanded its coverage and circulation on a national scale. Above all, the paper covered Congress, the Freedmen’s Bureau, education, Reconstruction policy, campaigns against the Ku Klux Klan, civil rights issues, and women’s rights issues. It became *The New National Era and Citizen* after an 1873 merger with the previously independent newspaper *New Citizen*. Riven by both debt and tensions between editors and investors, however, *The New National Era and Citizen* stopped publishing at the end of October 1874. For information about and access to all issues of *The New National Era* and *The New National Era and Citizen*, see Library of Congress, “New National Era (Washington, D.C.) 1870–1874,” accessed December 28, 2023, <https://www.loc.gov/item/sn84026753/>.

those possibilities are to be realized, the colored people must move into the forefront of action and study and work in their own behalf. The colored cadets at West Point, the colored students in the public schools, the colored men in the professions, the trades, and on the plantations, can not be idlers if they are to compete with the white race in the acquisition of knowledge and property. But they have examples of notable achievements in their own ranks which should convince them that they have not the slightest reason to despair of success. The doors stand wide open, from the plantation to the National Capitol, and every American citizen can, if he will, attain worthy recognition."<sup>21</sup>

And thus, ere we had entered upon our new duties, were we forewarned of the kind of treatment we should expect. To be "sent to Coventry," "to be let severely alone," are indeed terrible dooms, but we cared naught for them. "To be let alone" was what we wished. To be left to our own resources for study and improvement, for enjoyment in whatever way we chose to seek it, was what we desired. We cared not for social recognition. We did not expect it, nor were we disappointed in not getting it. We would not seek it. We would not obtrude ourselves upon them. We would not accept

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21. Flipper's decision to introduce the *New National Era and Citizen* here by way of another, unidentified paper is interesting and suggests Flipper saw his volume reaching an audience that was predominantly white. While the *New National Era and Citizen* was one of the most well-established Black newspapers of its time, Flipper introduces its opinions not by quoting the *New National Era and Citizen* itself, but by quoting a different newspaper's quotations, engagement with, and endorsement of it. The use of *they* and *their* in the line "They have notable examples of achievements in their own ranks" makes clear that the article was written by a white writer and for a white audience. The shift in perspective makes a significant difference. The *New National Era and Citizen* clearly suggested that the practice of silencing and isolating Black cadets at West Point revealed a severe want of character in the Academy and its cadets; but with their own determined character, Black cadets could succeed and gain the full fruits of enduring such trials after graduating, and perhaps after concluding their military service. The white newspaper, on the other hand, took the *New National Era and Citizen's* words and reshaped them into a message that there was something noble in the isolation Black cadets faced at West Point because it gave them the opportunity to succeed entirely on their own, endorsing the spin rather than the original substance. Flipper could easily have quoted the *New National Era and Citizen*—we can be certain he read it because he quotes it at length elsewhere in the volume, particularly in chapter XVII. His decision to introduce *The New National Era and Citizen* through a white newspaper's lens suggests that Flipper perceived the latter view would resonate best with an intended audience that was largely white.

recognition unless it was made willingly.<sup>22</sup> We would be of them at least independent. We would mark out for ourselves a uniform course of conduct and follow it rigidly. These were our resolutions. So long as we were in the right we knew we should be recognized by those whose views were not limited or bound by such narrow confines as prejudice and caste, whether they were at West Point or elsewhere. Confident that right on our own part would secure us just treatment from others, that “if we but prove ourselves possessed of some good qualities” we could find friends among both faculty and students.

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22. In this passage, Flipper plays to his audience. After the Civil War, Americans made much of the distinction between political (or civil) equality and social equality. They considered political equality to mean issues of citizenship, voting, and general access to the political sphere. They considered social equality to be an issue of access to public and private spaces and opportunities. A critical mass of white Americans, especially in the ruling Republican Party, emerged from the Civil War prepared to accept—in some cases grudgingly—political and civil equality for Black Americans. Social equality was a much more controversial and contested issue. In fact, a common argument of those who resisted racial integration at West Point in the 1870s and 1880s was that it constituted a premature claim to social equality for and by Black Americans. On the distinction between concepts of political and social equality in Reconstruction-Era America, see Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863–1877*, Perennial Classics Edition (Perennial Classics, 2002), 230–45 and Michael W. Fitzgerald, *Splendid Failure: Postwar Reconstruction in the American South* (Ivan R. Dee, 2007), 119–20.

In refusing to accept recognition bestowed grudgingly, Flipper conveys a message that neither he nor other Black cadets asserted any claim to social equality, only the opportunity to work towards it. This was a message well calibrated to gain approval from a white American audience in 1878. A larger question, though, is whether Flipper or his fellow cadets genuinely believed that. James W. Smith certainly did not; his surviving letters and court testimony reveal a young man ready and eager to stake his rightful claim to social equality. For Smith's views, see James W. Smith Files, Roll 1, M1002, USMA Library Special Collections and Archives, West Point, NY.

Flipper does not seem to have embraced the views he presents in this passage. No topic receives more poignant and frequent treatment in Flipper's autobiography than silencing and isolation. He claims in this passage, “‘To be let alone’ was what we wished.” But the omnipresence of isolation and a lack of recognition in subsequent chapters shows that he did in fact desire recognition and acceptance, and being denied it affected him deeply and lastingly. Ultimately, Flipper seems to have believed that he and others like him had a right to social equality, but that the best way to achieve social equality was to carefully avoid advocating for it and thereby avert the backlash of white Americans not yet prepared to accept it. Readers of his volume should keep this in mind—Flipper earnestly navigated a complex world, but his interpretation of both that world and his path within it fundamentally shaped what he believed he could and should write about it.

I came to West Point, notwithstanding I had heard so much about the Academy well fit to dishearten and keep one away. And then, too, at the time I had no object in seeking the appointment other than to gratify an ordinary ambition. Several friends were opposed to my accepting it, and even persuaded me, or rather attempted to persuade me, to give up the idea altogether. I was inexorable. I had set my mind upon West Point, and no amount of persuasion, and no number of harrowing narratives of bad treatment, could have induced me to relinquish the object I had in view. But I was right. The work I chose, and from which I could not flinch without dishonor, proved far more important than either my friends or myself at first thought it would be.<sup>23</sup>

Let me not, however, anticipate. Of this importance more anon.

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23. At least one recent piece of scholarship—Le’Trice D. Donaldson, *Duty Beyond the Battlefield: African American Soldiers Fight for Racial Uplift, Citizenship, and Manhood, 1870–1920* (Southern Illinois University Press, 2020), chapter 4—charges Flipper with ambivalence about applying his military service to the broader cause of racial uplift. This passage, among others in the volume, suggests that Flipper was very conscious of his status as a trailblazer and the broader significance of his experiences.



## CHAPTER IV.

### CANT TERMS, ETC.<sup>1</sup>

AS a narrative of this description is very apt to be dry and uninteresting, I have thought it possible to remove in a measure this objection by using as often as convenient the cant lingo of the corps. A vocabulary which shall contain it all, or nearly all, becomes necessary. I have taken great care to make it as full as possible, and at the same time as intelligible as possible.

There are a few cant words and expressions which are directly personal, and in many cases self-explanatory. They are for such reasons omitted.<sup>2</sup>

“Animal,” “animile,” “beast,” “reptile.”—Synonymous terms applied to candidates for admission into the Academy.

“Plebe.”—A candidate after admission, a new cadet. After the candidates are examined and the proficient ones admitted, these latter are known officially as “new cadets,” but in the cant vernacular of

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1. This chapter is couched in brutal irony. If Flipper smartly included this glossary because of its obvious reader appeal, he was himself largely cut off from using the language it compiles. The entries are unalphabetized and haphazardly constructed, but readers can still glean Flipper’s delight for the subject. That delight underscores the simple violence the chapter records without explicit comment—that even this everyday aspect of academy life was not available to him. Of note are the expressions “To be white,” and “To treat white,” as Flipper passes silently over these race-based and loaded idioms. Flipper’s significant understatement reverberates with the larger meditation in the autobiography about what it does and does not mean to be “a gentleman,” a category of social being that for him entangles with but finally exceeds determination by race. Flipper’s list reveals to contemporary readers just how quickly insular “cant terms” can evolve; very few of the terms here are still in circulation. Cadets might still speak of a “Prof,” or the “Supe,” and they may “turn in” after “Chem.,” “Math.,” or “Phil.,” while hoping not to become a “turnback,” but these are the only terms from Flipper’s argot with meanings even near the ones he logs. A “stayback” now denotes a cadet authorized to remain in barracks—one excused, for example, from morning classes after returning to post late the evening before. If a “beast” no longer denotes a cadet candidate, the term survives in the expression, “beast barracks,” which is still given to the summer training provided arriving candidates.

2. Flipper likely alludes to slurs applied to him as well as to Blacks in general. While, for example, the n-word does not appear in this glossary, it does appear 37 times in the larger narrative.

the corps they are dubbed “plebes,” and they retain this designation till the candidates of the next year report. They are then called “yearlings,” a title applied usually to them in camp only. After the encampment they become “furloughmen” until they return from furlough in August of the following year. They then are “second-classmen,” and are so officially and *à la cadet* throughout the year. From this time till they graduate they are known as the “graduating class,” so that, except the second class, each class has its own peculiar cant designation.

Candidates generally report in May—about the 20th—and during July and August are in camp. This is their “plebe camp.” The next is their, “yearling camp.” During the next, they are *en congé*, and the next and last is their “first-class camp.” Of “plebe camp,” “yearling camp,” and “first-class camp,” more anon.

“Rapid.”—A “plebe” is said to be “rapid” when he shows a disposition to resist hazing, or to “bone familiarity” with older cadets—*i. e.*, upper classmen.

“Sep.”—A cadet who reported for admission in September.

“Fins.”—A term applied to the hands generally, of course to the hands of “plebes.”

“Prelim.”—A preliminary examination.

“Pred.”—A predecessor.

“Pony.”—A key, *a corrigé*.<sup>3</sup>

“To bone.”—To study, to endeavor to do well in any particular; for instance, to “bone demerits” is to strive to get as few as possible.

“To bone popularity.”—This alludes to a habit practised, especially by, “yearlings” while in camp, and is equivalent to our everyday expression in civil life, *viz.*, “to get in with.”

“To bugle it.”—To avoid a recitation. To avoid a recitation is an act seldom done by any cadet. It is in fact standing at the board during the whole time of recitation without turning around, and thus making known a readiness to recite. At the Academy a bugle takes the place of the bell in civil schools. When the bugle

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3. A “pony” does not refer to the sort of “key” that might unlock a door, but as informed by the French word “*corrigé*,” to the sort of answer key, or today’s “cheat sheet,” that might aid a cadet in completing a military or academic assignment. This appears to be the only, if slight, suggestion of academic dishonesty in the book. A “pony” might be shared between cadets and suggests an elaborate system of academic support, wherein cadets sought to help each other “bone up” for examinations. Flipper would not have had access to this system of support. For more on this passive form of sabotage see chapter XI, note 9.

is blown those sections at recitation are dismissed, and others come in. Now, if one faces the board till the bugle blows, there is not then enough time for him to recite, and he is said to have "bugled it." Some instructors will call on any one who shows a disposition to do so, and will require him to tell what he knows about his subject.

"Busted," "broken."—These words apply only to cadet officers who are reduced to ranks.

"A cold case."—A sure thing, a foregone conclusion.

To "get chevrons."—To receive an appointment in the battalion organization. Each year, on the day the graduates receive their diplomas, and just after—possibly just before—they are relieved from further duty at the Academy, the order fixing the appointments for the next year is read, and those of the year previous revoked. It has been customary to appoint the officers, captains, and lieutenants from the first class, the sergeants from the second, and the corporals from the third. This custom has at times, and for reasons, been departed from, and the officers chosen as seemed best.

For any offence of a grave nature, any one who has chevrons is liable to lose them, or, in other words, to be reduced to ranks.

"A cit."—Any citizen.

"To crawl over."—To haze, generally in the severest manner possible.

"A chapel."—An attendance at church.

"To curse out."—To reprimand, to reprove, and also simply to interview. This expression does not by any means imply the use of oaths.

"To cut," "To cut cold."—To avoid, to ostracize.

"Debauch."—Any ceremony or any thing unusual. It may be a pleasant chat, a drill, or any thing that is out of the usual routine.

"To drive a squad."—To march it.

"Dropped."—Not promoted.

"To eat up."—See "To crawl over."

"Exaggerations."—It is a habit of the cadets to exaggerate on certain occasions, and especially when policing. "A log of wood," "a saw-mill," "a forest," and kindred expressions, are applied to any fragment of wood of any description that may be lying about. A feather is "a pillow;" a straw, "a broom factory;" a pin, an "iron foundry;" a cotton string, "a cotton factory;" and I have known a

“plebe” to be told to “get up that sugar refinery,” which “refinery” was a cube of sugar crushed by some one treading upon it.

Any thing—whatever it may be—which must be policed, is usually known by some word or term suggested by its use or the method or the place of its manufacture.

“To find.”—To declare deficient in studies or discipline.

An “extra” is an extra tour of guard duty given as punishment. Cadets on “extra” are equipped as for parade, and walk in the area of Cadet Barracks from two o’clock until retreat, or from two to five hours, on Saturday or other days of the week. An “extra” is sometimes called a “Saturday Punishment.”

“A fem,” “femme.”—Any female person.

“A file.”—Any male person.

“Fessed,” “fessed cold,” “fessed frigid,” “fessed out,” and “fessed through.”—Made a bad recitation, failed.

“To get off.”—To perpetrate.

“A gag,” “Grin,” “Grind.”—Something witty, a repartee.

“To hive.”—To detect, used in a good and bad sense. Also to take, to steal.

“To hoop up.”—To hasten, to hurry.

“H. M. P.”—Hop manager’s privileges.

“A keen.”—See “Gag,” etc.

“To leap on.”—See “To crawl over.”

“Made.”—Given an appointment, given chevrons as an officer in the battalion organization.

“A make.”—Such an appointment.

“Maxed.”—Made a thorough recitation.

“Ath.”—The last one.

“To pile in.”—To retire.

“To pink.”—To report for any offence.

“To plant.”—To bury with military honors.

“To police one’s self.”—To bathe.

“To pot.”—“To pink,” which see.

“Prof.”—Professor.

“To put in.”—To submit in writing.

“To put into the battalion.”—To assign to a company, as in case of new cadets.

“Ragged,” “ragged out.”—Made a good recitation.

“Reveilles.”—Old shoes, easy and comfortable, worn to reveille roll-call.

“Reekless, ricochet.”—Careless, indifferent.

- "To run it."—To do any thing forbidden. To risk.  
 "To run it on."—To impose upon.  
 "Shout."—Excellent, *i. e.*, will create much comment and praise.  
 "Sketch-house."—The Drawing Academy.  
 "To skin."—See "To pink" (most common).  
 "To be spooney."—To be gallant.  
 "To spoon."—To be attentive to ladies.  
 "A spoon."—A sweetheart.  
 "Shungudgeon."—A stew.  
 "Supe."—Superintendent.  
 "To step out."—See "To hoop up."  
 "Topog."—A topographical drawing.  
 "To turn in."—To repair to one's quarters.  
 "To be sent in."—To order any thing sent in.  
 "To turn out."—To come out, or send out.  
 "To be white," "To treat white."—To be polite, courteous,  
 and gentlemanly.  
 "To wheaten."—To be excused by surgeon.  
 "To yank."—To seize upon violently.  
 "O. G. P."—Old guard privileges.  
 "Chem."—Chemistry.  
 "Math."—Mathematics.  
 "Phil."—Philosophy.  
 "Rocks."—Mineralogy.  
 "Wigwag."—Signalling.  
 "To get out of."—To shun, to shirk.  
 "Thing."—A "plebe."  
 "To extinguish."—To distinguish.  
 "To go for."—To haze.  
 "House."—Room, quarters.  
 "To freeze to."—To hold firmly.  
 "To wipe out."—To destroy.  
 "Limbo."—Confinement.  
 "Solemncholy."—Sad, dejected.  
 "Plebeskin."—A rubber overcoat issued to new cadets.  
 "Turnbacks."—Cadets turned back to a lower class.  
 "Div," "subdiv."—Division, subdivision.  
 "Devils."—Fellows familiarly.  
 "Tab."—Tabular system of French.  
 "To celebrate."—To do.

“A stayback.”—A graduate detained at graduation to instruct the new cadets.\*

“Scratch day.”—A day when lessons are hard or numerous.

“Gum game.”—A joke.

“To fudge.”—To copy.

BENNY HAVENS O.<sup>4</sup>

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\* *When the cadets are in barracks, the officer of the guard on Sundays either has or assumes authority to detain from church, for any emergency that might arise, one or two or more members of his guard, in addition to those on post on duty. Cadets so detained are called “staybacks.”*

4. Flipper’s inclusion of the popular song, “Benny Havens O” in a chapter about “Cant Terms” can make better sense if we consider how these famous lyrics invest in the shared “lingo of the corps.” The infamous Benny Havens was an early provisioner of “liquors and viands” to cadets who later became the longtime proprietor of an eponymously named tavern near West Point. The words of the song are set to the tune of “The Wearing of the Green.” According to the *New York Sun*, the first verses were composed collaboratively in the summer of 1838 by Cadet Ripley Allen Arnold (USMA Class of 1838), Cadet John Thomas Metcalfe (Class of 1838), and a second lieutenant and Army surgeon named Dr. Lucius O’Brien, who was visiting his friend Arnold at West Point. According to Cullum’s *Register of Cadets*, Arnold served with distinction from the Seminole War through the Mexican War, before he was “murdered, Sep. 6, 1853, at Ft. Graham, Tex.: Aged 36.” Metcalfe commanded the Augusta Arsenal, Ga., 1838; and then, in the Florida War, 1838–1839, commanded Garey’s Ferry Ordnance Depot. He became a doctor, had a long and distinguished medical career, and died at the age of 82 in Cold Spring, just across the Hudson from the Academy. O’Brien served in the Seminole War with the 3rd and 8th Infantry, and the closing verse commemorates his death at Forte Brooke, near Tampa, on January 7, 1841. It is uncertain what version of the lyric Flipper drew from, but an exceptional 1855 songbook publishes eighteen verses to “Benny Havens, Oh!” The six verses reproduced in the autobiography include significant variation from that edition, suggesting the song’s long history of revision. Flipper seems to have authored the two bracketed passages. The first sets the scene, while the second provides transition to the more somber closing remembrance of O’Brien, which, according to “a graduate,” is said to have been “added by [one] Leadbeater, of the Engineers.” See “To the West Point Cadets & Graduates, ‘Benny Havens, Oh!’ A favorite song as sung at West Point” (Buffalo, NY: J. Sage & Sons, 1855), <https://levysheetmusic.mse.jhu.edu/sites/default/files/collection-pdfs/levy-044-010.pdf>; “Singing ‘Benny Havens, Oh!’ They Answer Duty’s Call,” *New York Sun*, June 4, 1916; and entries for Ripley Allen Arnold (Cullum No. 973) and John Thomas Metcalfe (Cullum No. 947) in George W. Cullum, *Biographical Register of the Officers and Graduates of the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, N.Y., from Its Establishment, in 1802, to 1890; with the Early History of the United States Military Academy*, 3rd ed., vol. 1 (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1891), 699 and 722.

[A number of cadets sitting or lounging about the room. One at table pouring out the drinks. As soon as he is done he takes up his own glass, and says to the others, "Come, fellows," and then all together standing:]

— — — Stand up in a row,

For sentimental drinking we're going for to go;  
 In the army there's sobriety, promotion's very slow,  
 So we'll cheer our hearts with choruses of Benny Havens' O.  
 Of Benny Havens' O, of Benny Havens' O,  
 We'll cheer our hearts with choruses of Benny Havens' O.

When you and I and Benny, and General Jackson too,  
 Are brought before the final Board our course of life t' review,  
 May we never "fess" on any point, but then be told to go  
 To join the army of the blest at Benny Havens' O.  
 At Benny Havens' O, at Benny Havens' O,  
 To join the army of the blest at Benny Havens' O.

To the ladies of the army let our bumpers ever flow,  
 Companions of our exile, our shield 'gainst every woe,  
 May they see their husbands generals with double pay to show,  
 And indulge in reminiscences of Benny Havens' O.  
 Of Benny Havens O, of Benny Havens' O,  
 And indulge in reminiscences of Benny Havens' O.

'Tis said by commentators, in the land where we must go  
 We follow the same handicraft we followed here below;  
 If this be true philosophy (the sexton, he says no),  
 What days of dance and song we'll have at Benny Havens' O.  
 At Benny Havens' O, at Benny Havens' O,  
 What days of dance and song we'll have at Benny Havens' O!

To the ladies of the Empire State, whose hearts and albums too  
 Bear sad remembrance of the wrongs we stripling soldiers do,  
 We bid you all a kind farewell, the best recompense we know—  
 Our loves and rhymings had their source at Benny Havens' O.  
 At Benny Havens' O, at Benny Havens' O,  
 Our loves and rhymings had their source at Benny Havens' O.

[Then, with due solemnity, every head uncovered and bowed low, they sing:]

There comes a voice from Florida, from Tampa's lonely shore;  
 It is the wail of gallant men, O'Brien is no more;  
 In the land of sun and flowers his head lies pillowed low,  
 No more to sing *petite coquille* at Benny Havens' O.  
 At Benny Havens' O, at Benny Havens' O,  
 No more to sing *petite coquille* at Benny Havens' O, etc.



## CHAPTER V.

### PLEBE CAMP.

“PLEBE CAMP!” The very words are suggestive. Those who have been cadets know what “plebe camp” is. To a plebe just beginning his military career the first experience of camp is most trying. To him every thing is new. Every one seems determined to impose upon him, and each individual “plebe” fancies at times he’s picked out from all the rest as an especially good subject for this abuse (?). It is not indeed a very pleasant prospect before him, nor should he expect it to be. But what must be his feelings when some old cadet paints for his pleasure camp scenes and experiences? Whatever he may have known of camp life before seems as naught to him now. It is a new sort of life he is to lead there, and he feels himself, although curious and anxious to test it, somewhat shy of entering such a place. There is no alternative. He accepts it resignedly and goes ahead. It is not always with smiling countenance that he marches out and surveys the site after reveille. Indeed, those who do have almost certainly received a highly colored sketch of camp life, and are hastening to sad disappointment, and not at all to the joys they’ve been led to expect. He marches into the company streets. He surveys them carefully and recognizes what is meant by “the plebes have to do all the policing,” servants being an unknown luxury. He also sees the sentry-boxes and the paths the sentinels tread, and shudders as he recollects the tales of midnight adventure which some wily cadet has narrated to him. Imagination begins her cruel work. Already he sees himself lying at the bottom of Fort Clinton Ditch tied in a blanket, or perhaps fetterless and free, but helpless. Or he may imagine his hands are tied to one, and his feet to the other tent-pole, and himself struggling for freedom as he recognizes that the reveille gun has been fired and those merciless fifers and drummers are rapidly finishing the reveille. And, horror of horrors! mayhap his fancies picture him standing tremblingly on post at midnight’s solemn hour, his gun just balanced in his hands, while numbers of cadets in hideous sheets and other ghostly

garb approach or are already standing around torturing him.<sup>1</sup> And again, perchance, he challenges some approaching person in one

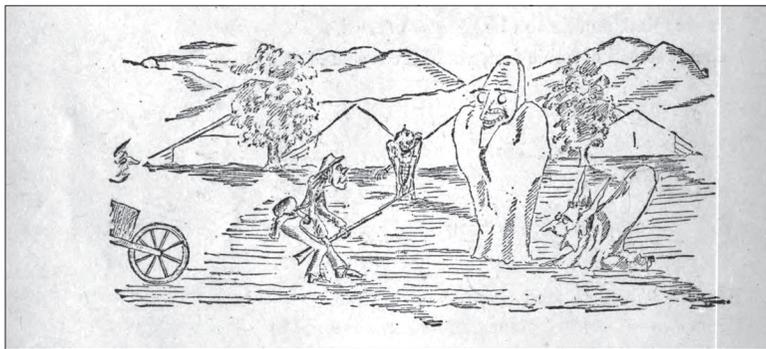
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1. The illustrations of the “haunting” of Plebe sentry duty by upperclassmen come from two sources. The first is from Oliver E. Wood’s *The West Point Scrap Book: A Collection of Stories, Songs, and Legends of the United States Military Academy* (1871). The line drawing, titled “Hobgoblins on Post” joined many others illustrating a long, unattributed narrative poem titled “West Point Life” which was “Read Before the Dialectic Society, March 5th, 1859.” The second illustration, attributed to I. Hopkins, accompanies a poem attributed to “Wickliffe—’72” titled “Ghosts, First Night on Post” in Homer Lee’s *West Point Tic Tacs* (1878). Only one Wickliffe has graduated West Point—a Charles Wickliffe, in 1839. Because Flipper, the anonymous *Scrapbook* poet, and “Wickliffe” all reference similarly comedic “midnight” horrors of sentry duty, we might conclude that the “hazing” of a Plebe on such duty had long involved this boyish behavior. Alternately, perhaps Flipper borrows here from his reading of *Tic Tacs*, which itself intentionally retools the trope as found in Wood’s volume. Here are a few relevant lines from “West Point Life,” from Wood’s volume:

July the Fourth at last arrives—you think it rather hard—  
 When on this day of Liberty, the “Plebes” must go on guard.  
 You go on post, the night arrives, you scarcely are alive,  
 But still a lonely watch you’re keeping down on “No. 5.”  
 First you like this quiet post, the path’s so nicely levelled;  
 Soon you share the fate of *ham*—that is, you’re nicely “devilied.”  
 Bodies vast of men approach, and sound their rude alarms;  
 From divers punches you receive, you find they all have *arms*.  
 Baggage-wagons, ropes, and ghosts upon your post appear,  
 Teeth begin to chatter though of course, it’s not through fear.

A spirit white you seize upon, and hold it on your post,  
 Until the corporal arrives, when you give up the ghost.  
 When in a one-wheeled cart you fall, that’s moving up behind,  
 To rapidly desert your post you’re forcibly *inclined*.

The “Wickliffe” poem follows the publication of this poem from the *Scrapbook* by seven years and contains the same narrative sequence—a haunting followed by the upending of the Plebe into a “barrow”—here a “cart.” This suggests what we might call deep borrowing by “Wickliffe” from the anonymous poet collected in Wood’s *Scrapbook*. More deliberate scholarship is called for on the relationship between all these volumes; the intertextual story of influence is richer than can be fully unfolded here. See Oliver E. Wood, *The West Point Scrap Book: A Collection of Stories, Songs, and Legends of the United States Military Academy* (New York: D. Van Nostrand, 1871), 82; and Homer Lee, *West Point Tic Tacs* (New York: Homer Lee & Co., 1878), 77–95. See also *West Point Tic Tacs, Illustrated: A Collection of Military Verse, Together with a Special Poem, “Cadet Grey,”* by Bret Harte (New York: Homer Lee & Co., 1878), 55, Wikipedia Commons, accessed June 14, 2024, [https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/1/1c/West\\_Point\\_tic\\_](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/1/1c/West_Point_tic_)



"Hobgoblins on Post" in a woodcut prepared for Oliver Wood for *The West Point Scrap Book: A Collection of Stories, Songs, and Legends of the United States Military Academy* (New York: D. Van Nostrand, 1871).



"Ghosts, First Night on Post," as drawn by I. Hopkins.

*Courtesy of the United States Military Academy Library Special Collections and Archives.*

direction, and finds to his dismay the officer of the day, the officer of the guard, and a corporal are crossing and recrossing his post, or having already advanced without being challenged, are demanding why it is, and why he has been so negligent.

Just after reveille on the morning of June 22d the companies were marched to their company streets, and the "plebes" assigned to each followed in rear. At the time only the tent floors and cord stays were on the ground. These former the plebes were ordered to align. This we did while the old cadets looked on, occasionally correcting or making some suggestion. It required considerable time to do this, as we were inexperienced and had to await some explanation of what we were to do.

When at last we were done, tents, or rather tent floors, were assigned to us. We thence returned to barracks and to breakfast. Our more bulky effects were carried into camp on wagons before breakfast, while the lighter articles were moved over by our own hands. By, or perhaps before, eleven o'clock every thing had been taken to camp. By twelve we were in ranks ready to march in. At the last stroke of the clock the column was put in march, and we marched in with all the "glory of war." We stacked arms in the company streets, broke ranks, and each repaired to the tent assigned him, which had by this time been brought over and placed folded on the tent floors. They were rapidly prepared for raising, and at a signal made on a drum the tents were raised simultaneously, 'mid rousing cheers, which told that another "camp" was begun.

After this we had dinner, and then we put our tents in order. At four o'clock the police-call was sounded, and all the "plebes" were turned out to police the company streets. This new phase of West Point life—and its phases rapidly developed themselves—was a hard one indeed. The duties are menial, and very few discharge them without some show of displeasure, and often of temper. None are exempt. It is not hard work, and yet every one objects to doing it. The third and fourth classes, by regulations, are required to do the policing. When I was a plebe, the plebes did it all. Many indeed tried to shirk it, but they were invariably "hived." Every plebe who attempted any such thing was closely watched and made to work. The old cadets generally chose such men for "special dutymen," and required them to bring water, pile bedding, sweep the floor, and

do all sorts of menial services. Of course all this last is prohibited, and therefore risky. Somebody is “hived” and severely punished almost every year for allowing plebes to perform menial duties for him. But what of that? The more dangerous it becomes the more is it practised. Forbidden things always have an alluring sweetness about them. More caution, however, is observed. If, for instance, a cadet should want a pail of water, he causes a plebe to empty his (the plebe’s) into his own (the cadet’s). If it should be empty, he sends him to the hydrant to fill it, and, when he returns, gets possession of it as before. An officer seeing a plebe with his own pail—recognizable by his own name being on it in huge Roman characters—going for water would say nothing to him. If the name, however, should be that of a cadet, the plebe would be fortunate if he escaped an investigation or a reprimand on the spot, and the cadet, too, if he were not put in arrest for allowing a new cadet to perform menial services for him. If he wants a dipper of iced-water, he calls out to the first plebe he sees in some such manner as this: “Oh! Mr.—, don’t you want to *borrow* my dipper for a little while?” The plebe of course understands this. He may smile possibly, and if not serving some punishment will go for the water.

Plebes are also required to clean the equipments of the older cadets. They do it cheerfully, and, strange to say, are as careful not to be “hived” as the cadet whose accoutrements they are cleaning. I say “required.” I do not mean that regulations or orders require this of the new cadets, but that the cadets by way of hazing do. From the heartrending tales of hazing at West Point, which citizens sometimes read of, one would think the plebes would offer some resistance or would complain to the authorities. These tales are for the most part untrue. In earlier days perhaps hazing was practised in a more inhuman manner than now. It may be impossible, and indeed is, for a plebe to cross a company street without having some one yell out to him: “Get your hands around, mister. Hold your head up;” but all that is required by tactics. Perhaps the frequency and unnecessary repetition of these cautions give them the appearance of hazing. However that may be, there seems to be no way to impress upon a plebe the necessity of carrying his “palms to the front,” or his “head up.” To report him and give him demerits merely causes him to laugh and joke over the number of them that have been recorded against him.

I do not mean to defend hazing in any sense of the word; but I do believe that it is indispensable as practised at the Academy. It

would simply be impossible to mould and polish the social amalgamation at West Point without it. Some of the rough specimens annually admitted care nothing for regulations. It is fun to them to be punished. Nothing so effectually makes a plebe submissive as hazing. That contemptuous look and imperious bearing lowers a plebe, I sometimes think, in his own estimation. He is in a manner cowed and made to feel that he must obey, and not disobey; to feel that he is a plebe, and must expect a plebe's portion. He is taught by it to stay in his place, and not to "bone popularity" with the older cadets.

It is frequently said that "plebe camp" and "plebe life" are the severest parts of life at West Point. To some they are, and to others they are not. With my own self I was almost entirely free from hazing, and while there were features in "plebe life" which I disliked, I did nevertheless have a far easier and better time than my own white classmates.<sup>2</sup> Even white plebes often go through their camp pleasantly and profitably. Only those who shirk duty have to suffer any unusual punishment or hazing.

I have known plebes to be permitted to do any thing they chose while off duty. I have known others to have been kept working on their guns or other equipments whole days for several days at a time. It mattered not how clean they were, or how soon the work was done.

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2. For more on "hazing" see chapter III, notes 4 and 5; and chapter VII, note 7. The assertion that he was less subject to hazing than his classmates might seem counter-intuitive to readers expecting that he would have been severely hazed due to racism in the Corps of Cadets. It is somewhat accurate for an unexpected reason. Hazing can be variously defined, and in its less virulent forms it can signal within certain subcultures that the recipient matters and has insider rather than outsider status. Ironically, to be hazed can be a mark of acceptance; white cadets would have had to feel Flipper fully belonged to their subculture for them to have hazed him in ways consistent with their understanding of hazing. In starker terms, one might say that the opposite of love is sometimes not abuse, but rather neglect. If hazing was a form of acceptance, as cadets at the time believed it was, Flipper and other Black cadets experienced a remarkable form of what many years later, also within the context of American racial politics, Daniel Patrick Moynihan would call "benign neglect." But it is important to note that there was nothing benign in the treatment afforded Flipper and other Black cadets, and that the abuse they endured fell well within modern conceptions of hazing. The topic may be of interest to scholars looking into the wider history of racial "treatment" in America during the late nineteenth century. See Daniel P. Moynihan, "Memorandum for the President, January 16, 1970," Richard Nixon Presidential Library and Museum, accessed June 21, 2024, <https://www.nixonlibrary.gov/sites/default/files/virtuallibrary/documents/jul10/53.pdf>.

I've known them to be many times interrupted for the mere sake of hazing, and perhaps to be sent somewhere or to do something which was unnecessary and would have been as well undone. Plebes who tent with first-classmen keep their own tents in order, and are never permitted by their tentmates to do any thing of the kind for others unless when wanted, are entirely unoccupied, and then usually their services are asked for. A classmate of mine, when a plebe, tented with a first-classman. He was doing something for himself one day in a free-and-easy manner, and had no thought of disturbing any one. A yearling corporal, who was passing, saw him, thought he was having too good and soft a time of it, and ordered him out to tighten cords, an act then highly uncalled for, save as a means of hazing. The first-classman happened to come up just as the plebe began to interfere with the cords, and asked him who told him to do that. He told him, and was at once directed to leave them and return to whatever he was doing before being interrupted. The yearling, confident in his red tape and his mightiness, ordered the plebe out again. His corporalship soon discovered his mistake, for the first-classman gave the plebe full information as to what could be required of him, and told him to disobey any improper order of the corporal's which was plainly given to haze him. The affair was made personal. A fight ensued. The corporal was worsted, to the delight, I imagine, of the plebes.

Again, I've known plebes to be stopped from work—if they were doing something for a cadet—to transfer it to some other one who was accustomed to shirk all the duty he could, or who did things slowly and slovenly. Indeed I may assert generally that plebes who are willing to work have little to do outside of their regular duty, and fare in plebe camp quite as well as yearlings; while those who are stubborn and careless are required to do most all the work. Cadets purposely select them and make them work. They, too, are very frequently objects of hazing in its severest form. At best, though, plebe camp is rather hard, its numerous drills, together with guard and police duty, make it the severest and most undesirable portion of the four years a cadet spends at the Academy.

To get up at five o'clock and be present at reveille roll-call, to police for half an hour, to have squad drill during the next hour, to put one's tent in order after that, and then to prepare one's self for breakfast at seven, make up a rather trying round of duties. To discharge them all—and that must certainly be done—keeps one busy; but who would not prefer little extra work—and not hard work at that—in the cooler part of the day to an equal amount in



Cadets on parade during summer encampment, circa 1873.

*Courtesy of the United States Military Academy Library Special Collections and Archives.*

the heated portion of it? I am sure the plebes do. I know the corporals and other officers who drill them do, although they lose their after-reveille sleep.

After breakfast comes troop parade at eight o'clock, guard mounting immediately after, and the establishment of the "color line."<sup>3</sup> Arms and accoutrements must be in perfect order. The

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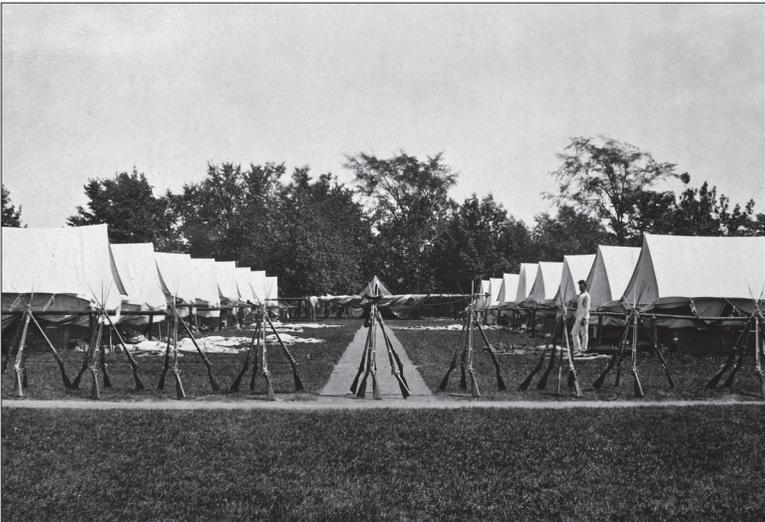
3. The "color line" to which Flipper refers here is simply the physical line on the ground at the edge of the summer encampment over which cadets could stack arms and the colors, or flags, and therefore establish a relaxed camp setting. In chapter VII Flipper describes it further: "Another delight of the yearling is to 'bone colors.' Immediately in front of camp proper is a narrow path extending entirely across the ground, and known as the 'color line.' On the 1st of August—sometimes before—the 'color line' is established, this name being applied also to the purpose of the color line. This ceremony consists in stacking arms just in rear of the color line, and placing the colors on the two stacks nearest the centre of the line" (158). Flipper seems to make no coded or direct reference to a quite different "color line," which became an essential term in critical discussions of race in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The term began to be used to describe segregation in 1874, but it was not until 1881 that Frederick Douglass published his influential essay, "The Color Line." In 1899, Charles Waddell Chesnut then published *The Wife of His Youth and Other Stories of the Color Line*; and in 1903, W. E. B. Du Bois asserted that "the problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color line." The

plebes clean them during the afternoon, so that before parade it is seldom necessary to do more than wipe off dust, or adjust a belt, or something of the kind.

After establishing the "color line," which is done about 8.30 A.M., all cadets, save those on guard and those marching on, have time to do whatever they choose. The cadets generally repair to the guard tents to see lady friends and other acquaintances, while the plebes either interest themselves in the inspection of "color men," or make ready for artillery drill at nine. The latter drill, commencing

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term appears in Flipper's book fourteen times, and it is not until the twelfth and fourteenth times that it is used in the emerging, racial sense. In the twelfth usage, Flipper draws from the title of an article in the *Philadelphia Times*, where the term clearly means the line separating the races (223). In the fourteenth usage, which Flipper says he reprints from a "Canadian reader[']s" letter to the *Christian Union*, this is the language: "A second [letter] is from a Canadian reader, who objects to our condemnation of the Anglo-Saxon race, and insists that we should have reserved it for the Yankees. In Canada, he assures us, the color line is unknown, and that negroes and Anglo-Saxons mingle in the same school and in the same sports without original prejudice. Strange to say the white men are not colored by the intercourse" (305). See Frederick Douglass, "The Color Line," *The North American Review*, Vol. 132 (1881); Charles Waddell Chesnut, *The Wife of His Youth, and Other Stories of the Color Line* (Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1899); and W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk, Essays and Sketches* (Chicago: A. C. McClurg & Co., 1903), vii.



The "color line" in an early-1870s summer encampment, with arms stacked.  
 Courtesy of the United States Military Academy Library Special Collections and Archives.

at 9 A.M., continues for one hour. The yearlings and plebes receive instruction in the manual and nomenclature of the piece. The drill is not very trying unless the heavy guns are used—I mean unless they are drilled at the battery of twelve-pounders. Of late both classes have been drilled at batteries of three-inch rifles. These are light and easily manœuvred, and unless the heat be intense the drill is a very pleasant one.

The first class, during this same hour, are drilled at the siege or seacoast battery. The work here is sometimes hard and sometimes not. When firing, the drill is pleasant and interesting, but when we have mechanical manœuvres all this pleasantness vanishes. Then we have hard work. Dismounting and mounting is not a very pleasant recreation.

At eleven o'clock, every day for a week or ten days, the plebes have manual drill. This is entirely in the shade, and when "In place, rest," is frequently given, is not at all displeasing, except when some yearling corporal evinces a disposition to haze. At five o'clock this drill is repeated. Then comes parade, supper, tattoo, and best of all a long night's rest. The last two drills continue for a few days only, and sometimes do not take place at all.

The third class, or the yearlings, have dancing from eleven to twelve, and the plebes from then till one.<sup>4</sup> In the afternoon the plebes have nothing to do in the way of duty till four o'clock. The camp is then policed, and when that is done there may or may not be any further duty to discharge till retreat parade. After the plebes are put in the battalion—that is, after they begin drilling, etc., with their companies—all cadets attend company drill at five o'clock. After attending a few of these drills the first class is excused from further attendance during the encampment. One officer and the

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4. Cadets who practiced dancing in these classes took each other as partners, without women present. According to *West Point Magazine*, "Even before there was a United States Military Academy, there was dancing at West Point. George Washington had a ballroom built on what became the Plain and danced the night away to celebrate the May 31st, 1782, birthday of the Dauphin of France." In 1823 "Lorenzo Papanti, who went on to open a famous dance academy in Boston," became the first Master of Department and Dancing at West Point, though there had been instructors before him. Dancing continued as part of the curriculum until the 1950s, as taught by the Department of Physical Education. See Keith J. Hamel, "Classes of Bygone Days: Dancing, Drawing, Military Hygiene, Ordnance and Riding," *West Point Magazine* (Summer 2016), 43.

requisite number of privates, however, are detailed from the class each day to act as officers at these drills.

I omitted to say that the first class received in the forenoon instruction in practical military engineering and ordnance.

What most tries plebes, and yearlings, too, is guard duty. If their classes are small, each member of them is put on guard every third or fourth day. To the plebes, being something entirely new, guard duty is very, very obnoxious.

During the day they fare well enough, but as soon as night comes "well enough" disappears. They are liable at any moment to be visited by cadets on a hazing tour from the body of the camp, or by the officers and non-commissioned officers of the guard. The latter generally leave the post of the guard in groups of three or four. After getting into camp they separate, and manage to come upon a sentinel simultaneously and from all points of the compass. If the sentinel isn't cool, he will challenge and advance one, and possibly let the others come upon him unchallenged and unseen even. Then woe be to him! He'll be "*crawled over*" for a certainty, and to make his crimes appear as bad as possible, will be reported for "neglect of duty while a sentinel, allowing the officers and non-commissioned officers of the guard to advance upon him, and to cross his post repeatedly without being challenged." He knows the report to be true, and if he submits an explanation for the offence his inexperience will be considered, and he will probably get no demerits for his neglect of duty.

But the best joke of all is in their manner of calling off the half-hours at night, and of challenging. Sometimes we hear No. 2 call off, "No. 2, ten o'clock, and all is well," in a most natural and unconcerned tone of voice, while No. 3 may sing out, "No. 3, ten o'clock and all is well-l-l," changing his tone only on the last word. Then No. 4, with another variation, may call off, "No. 4, ten o'clock, and all-l-l-l's well," changing his tone on "all-l-l-l's," and speaking the rest, especially the last word, in a low and natural manner of voice, and sometimes abruptly. And so on along the entire chain of sentinels, each one calls off in a manner different from that of the rest. Sometimes the calling off is scarcely to be heard, sometimes it is loud and full, and again it is distinct but squeakish. It is indeed most delightful to be in one's tent and here the plebes call off in the still quiet hours of the night. One can't well help laughing, and yet all plebes, more or less, call off in the same manner.

Plebe sentinels are very troublesome sometimes to the non-commissioned officers of the guard. They receive their orders time after time, and when inspected for them most frequently spit them out with ease and readiness; but just as soon as night comes, and there is a chance to apply them, they "fess utterly cold," and in the simplest things at that. Nine plebes out of ten almost invariably challenge thus, "Who comes *here?*" "Who stands *here?*" "Who goes *here?*" as the case may be, notwithstanding they have been repeatedly instructed orally, and have seen the words, as they should be, in the regulations. If a person is going, and is a hundred yards or so off, it is still, "Who goes *here?*" Everything is "*here.*"

One night the officer of the day concealed himself near a sentinel's post, and suddenly appeared on it. The plebe threw his gun down to the proper position and yelled out, "Who comes *here?*" The officer of the day stopped short, whereupon the plebe jumped at him and shouted, "Who stands *here?*" Immediately the officer started off, saying as he did so, "I'm not standing; I'm going." Then of course the challenge was again changed to, "Who goes *here?*" "I'm not going; I'm coming," said the officer, facing about and approaching the sentinel. This was kept up for a considerable time, till the officer of the day got near a sentry-box and suddenly disappeared. The plebe knew he was there, and yelled in a louder tone than before, "Who stands *here?*" "Sentry-box," was the solemn and ghostly response.

It is hardly reasonable, I think, to say the plebe was frightened; but he actually stood there motionless, repeating his challenge over and over again, "Who stands *here?*"

There was a light battery in park near by, and through this, aided by the gloom, the officer of the day managed to pass unobserved along, but not on the sentinel's post. He then got upon it and advanced on him, making the while much noise with his sword and his heavy tread. He walked directly up to the sentinel unchallenged, and startled him by asking, "What are you standing here yelling for?"

The plebe told him that the officer of the day had been upon his post, and he had seen him go behind the sentry-box. And all this to the officer of the day, standing there before him, "Well, sir, whom do you take me to be?"

The plebe looks, and for the first time brought to full consciousness, recognizes the officer of the day. Of course he is surprised, and the more so when the officer of the day inspects for his—the

plebe's—satisfaction the sentry-box, and finds no one there. He “eats” that plebe up entirely, and then sends a corporal around to instruct him in his orders. When the corporal comes it may be just as difficult to advance him. He may, when challenged, advance without replying, or, if he replies, he may say, “Steamboat,” “Captain Jack, Queen of the Modocs,” as one did say to me, or something or somebody else not entitled to the countersign. Possibly the plebe remembers this, and he may command “Halt!” and call another corporal. This latter may come on a run at “charge bayonets,” and may not stop till within a foot or so of the sentinel. He then gets another “cursing out.” By this time the corporal who first came and was halted has advanced unchallenged and unnoticed since the arrival of the second. And then another cursing out. Thus it is that plebe camp is made so hard.

Surely the officers and noncommissioned officers are right in testing by all manner of ruses the ability of the sentinels. It is their duty to instruct them, to see that they know their orders, and are not afraid to apply them.

Sometimes plebes enjoy it, and like to be cursed out. Sometimes they purposely advance toward a party improperly, to see what will be said to them. It is fun to some, and to others most serious. At best it gives a plebe a poor opinion of West Point, and while he may bear it meekly he nevertheless sighs for the

“— touch of a vanished hand,”

the caressing hand of a loving mother or sister.<sup>5</sup> I know I used to hate the very name of camp, and I had an easier time, too, than the other plebes.

Of course the plebes, being inexperienced for the most part, are high privates in the rear rank.” For another reason, also, this is the case. The first and second classes have the right established by immemorial custom of marching in the front rank, which right necessarily keeps the plebes in the rear rank, and the yearlings too, except so many as are required in the front rank for

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5. Flipper quotes from Alfred Lord Tennyson's poem, “Break, Break, Break” which figures the sea breaking on “cold gray stones” as an emblem of mourning for the loss of “a day that is dead” and that “will never come back” to the speaker. Tennyson was one of the best known and often cited poets of the Victorian period; here his language supports Flipper's sentimental reflection on the difficulty of Plebe camp life. See Alfred Lord Tennyson, “Break, Break, Break,” The Poetry Foundation, accessed June 21, 2024, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/45318/break-break-break>.

the proper formation of the company. Another reason, perhaps, may be given to the same end. We have what we call class rank, or, in other words, class standing. Every class has certain privileges and immunities, which the junior classes do not enjoy; for example, first-classmen, and second-classmen too—by General Orders of September, 1876—are excused from guard duty in the capacity of privates, and are detailed—first-classmen for officers of the day and officers of the guard, and second-classmen for non-commissioned officers of the guard. All members of the third and fourth classes are privates, and from them the privates of the guard are detailed. All officers, commissioned and non-commissioned, are exempt from “*Saturday punishment.*” I mean they do not walk extra tours of guard for punishment. The noncommissioned officers are sometimes required to serve such punishments by discharging the duties of corporal or sergeant in connection with the punishment squad. Third- and fourth-classmen enjoy no such immunities. Plebes, then, having no rank whatever, being in fact conditional cadets until they shall have received their warrants in the following January, must give way to those who have. One half or more of the privates of the company must be in the front rank. This half is made up of those who rank highest, first-classmen and second-classmen, and also, if necessary, a number of third-classmen. Plebes must then, except in rare cases, march in the rear rank, and from the time they are put in the battalion till the close of the summer encampment, they are required to carry their hands with palms to the front as prescribed in the tactics.

All this is kept up till the close of camp, and makes, I think, plebe camp the most trying part of one’s cadet life.

On the 28th of August the furloughmen return, and report to the commandant at two o’clock for duty.

In the afternoon the battalion is sized and quarters are assigned under the supervision of the assistant-instructors of tactics.

At parade the appointment of officers and noncommissioned officers for the ensuing year is published, and also orders for the discontinuance of the encampment.

In the evening the “twenty-eighth hop” takes place, and is the last of the season. On the 29th—and beginning at reveille—the cadets move their effects into winter quarters in barracks. All heavy articles are moved in on wagons, while all lighter ones are carried over by cadets themselves. By seven o’clock every thing is moved away from camp, save each cadet’s accoutrements.

Breakfast is served at 7 A.M., and immediately afterward comes “troop” and guard-mounting, after which the entire camp is thoroughly policed. This requires an hour or more, and when all is done the “general” is sounded. At this the companies are formed under arm in their respective company streets. The arms are then stacked and ranks broken. At least two cadets repair to each tent, and at the first tap of the drum remove and roll up all the cords save the corner ones. At the second tap, while one cadet steadies the tent the other removes and rolls the corner cords nearest him. The tents in the body of the encampment are moved. Back two feet, more or less, from the color line, while the guard tents and those of the company officers are moved in a northerly direction. At the third tap the tents fall simultaneously toward the color line and the south cardinal point, amid rousing cheers. The tents being neatly rolled up and placed on the floors, the companies are reformed and on the centre.<sup>6</sup> The battalion then marches out to take up its winter quarters in barracks.

When camp is over the plebes are no longer required to depress their toes or to carry their hands with palms to the front. They are, in fact, “cadets and gentlemen,” and must take care of themselves.

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6. Here Flipper’s narrative includes a significant silence. After “Plebe Camp,” cadets leave their tents “neatly rolled up and placed on the floors.” Then what happens to them? Earlier in the chapter, who places the tents and tent floors on the campgrounds? Attentive readers will notice the elided presence of support labor. During the long history of West Point some of these workers were people of color. Little is known about them now, though more might be discovered through diligent scholarly work. See chapter VII, note 9 for an extended discussion on the hidden presence of African Americans at West Point outside of the Corps of Cadets.



## CHAPTER VI.

### STUDIES, ETC.<sup>1</sup>

THE academic year begins July 1st, and continues till about June 20th the following year. As soon after this as practicable—depending upon what time the examination is finished—the corps moves into camp, with the exception of the second class, who go on furlough instead.

Between the 20th of August and the 1st of September, the “Seps,” or those candidates who were unable to do so in the spring previous, report. Before the 1st they have been examined and the deficient ones dismissed. On the 1st, unless that be Sunday, academic duties begin. The classes are arranged into a number of sections, according to their class rank, as determined at the previous annual examination, or according to rank in some particular study—for instance, for instruction in engineering the first class is arranged according to merit in philosophy, and not according to general merit or class rank. The fourth, or “plebe” class, however, is arranged alphabetically since they as yet have no class rank.

The first class study, during the first term, engineering law, and ordnance and gunnery. They recite on civil engineering from 8 to

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1. While some disciplinary fields mentioned in this chapter are perhaps self-explanatory, or at least bear close resemblance to the subjects as they have evolved and are still studied, others will be unfamiliar to readers. For example, Flipper writes in these opening paragraphs of “natural and experimental philosophy.” Flipper attended West Point on the cusp of major advancements in the sciences, but Natural Philosophy for him was still a composite of subjects deemed in the domain of physics or nature—things not man-made, so subjects like biology, anthropology, zoology, and perhaps, especially, yesterday’s version of today’s physics. Chemistry, which was often deemed part of natural philosophy, was taught separately at the Academy. One cutting-edge textbook of the period defined and refined the broad area of interest as follows: “The term Natural Philosophy was used by Newton, and is still used in British Universities, to denote the investigation of laws in the material world, and the deduction of results not directly observed. Observation, classification, and description of phenomena necessarily precede Natural Philosophy in every department of natural science. The earlier stage is, in some branches, commonly called Natural History; and it might with equal propriety be so called in all others.” See William Thomson and Peter Guthrie Tait, *Treatise on Natural Philosophy* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1867), v.

11 A.M. daily, on ordnance and gunnery from 2 to 4 P.M., alternating with law.

The second class have natural and experimental philosophy from 8 to 11 A.M. daily, and chemistry, alternating with riding, from 11 A.M. to 1 P.M.; also drawing in pencil from 2 to 4 P.M. For instruction in this department the class is divided into two as nearly equal parts as practicable, which alternate in attendance at the Drawing Academy.<sup>2</sup>

The third class have pure mathematics, analytical Geometry, descriptive geometry, and the principles of shades, shadows, and perspective, from 8 to 11 A.M. daily. They also have French from 11 A.M., till 1 P.M., alternating with Spanish.

The entire class attend drawing daily till November 1st, when it is divided into two equal parts or platoons, which attend drawing and riding on alternate days. Riding! “Yearling riding!” I must advert to that before I go further. First let me describe it. A platoon of yearlings, twenty, thirty, forty perhaps; as many horses; a spacious riding-hall, with galleries that seat but too many mischievous young ladies, and whose interior is well supplied with tan bark, make up the principal objects in the play. Nay, I omit the most important characters, the Instructor and the necessary number of enlisted, men.

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2. Keith Hamel writes in *West Point Magazine* that “Cavalry training, sometimes called ‘horsemanship’ or ‘riding,’ began in 1839 [at West Point] and was one of the three essential military skills taught by the Tactics Department (the others being Artillery and Infantry). As it was split with other military disciplines, Cavalry training at West Point only taught cadets the rudimentary elements of horsemanship. During four years at USMA, a cadet would ride 220 hours on average (in comparison, during two years at the military at St. Cyr in France, a student would ride approximately 2,000 hours). Still, USMA’s riding program became known for its indoor equestrian facility, the largest of its kind at the time when it was opened in 1855, which allowed cadets to ride year long [sic] . . . Riding classes ceased at USMA in 1947, but horsemanship was brought back as a club team in 1967.”

Hamel also notes that “Congress authorized the Academy to hire an instructor of drawing on February 28, 1803, and President Jefferson appointed Francois Desiré Mason.” The notable Hudson River School painter Robert Walter Weir began as a teacher of drawing in August 1834, and, as we note in our introduction, Flipper’s four years at the Academy map to Weir’s last four years as Professor of Drawing. Drawing remained integral to the education of officers until “Superintendent Garrison Davidson, Class of 1927, seeking to ‘eliminate the irrelevant and obsolete’ in USMA’s curriculum, abolished the drawing course in 1957.” See Keith J. Hamel, “Classes of Bygone Days: Dancing, Drawing, Military Hygiene, Ordnance and Riding,” *West Point Magazine* (Summer 2016), 42–44.



Built in 1838 and embellished with a clock tower in the late 1850s, the academic building was the focal point of the academic year. Often referred to as "the Academy," it housed section rooms, professors' offices, a laboratory, a drawing academy, sculpture and picture galleries, a gymnasium, a fencing hall, an ordnance museum, and a collection of minerals and fossils.

*Courtesy of the United States Military Academy Library Special Collections and Archives.*

ACT I.  
SCENE I.

Area of barracks. At guard-house door stands an orderly, with drum in hands. In the area a number of cadets, some in every-day attire, others dressed *à la cavalier*. These *à la cavalier* fellows are going to take their first lesson in riding. About four-fifths of them were never on a horse in their lives, and hence what dire expectations hover over their ordinarily placid heads! They have heard from the upper classmen what trials the novice experiences in his first efforts, and they do not go to the riding-hall without some dread. Four o'clock and ten minutes. The drum is beaten.

*Officer of the Day*.—Form your platoon! Right, face! Call your roll!

*Section Marcher*.—Bejay! Barnes! Du Furing! Swikeheimer! Du Flicket, etc.

*Platoon* (answering to their names).—Here! Here-re- re! ho-o-o! hi-i-i! har-ar-ar! Heer-r!

*Section Marcher* (facing about salutes).—All are present, sir!

*Officer of the Day* (returning salute).—March off your platoon, sir!

*Section Marcher* (facing about).—Left face! forward. March! (Curtain falls.)

ACT II.  
SCENE I.<sup>3</sup>

The riding-hall, a large, spacious, rectangular structure, door on each side and at each end, floor well covered with tan bark, spacious gallery over each side door, staircases outside leading to them. Galleries are occupied, one by ladies, and, perhaps a number of gentlemen, and the other by enlisted men usually. In the centre of the hall are a number of horses, each equipped with a surcingle, blanket, and watering bridle.<sup>4</sup> A soldier stands at the head of each one of them. As curtain rises enter platoon by side door, and marches around the left flank of the line of horses and as far forward as necessary.

*Section Marcher.*—Platoon, halt! left, face! (Saluting Instructor)  
All are present, sir!

*Instructor* (saluting).—The Section Marcher will take his place on the left.

He then gives all necessary instruction.

“To mount the trooper the Instructor first causes him to stand to horse by the command ‘*Stand to horse!*’ At this command—”  
Well, see “*Cavalry Tactics.*”

We’ve got the trooper mounted now. After some further explanation the Instructor forms them into a column of files by the commands:

“By file, by the right (or left) flank. March!”

They are now going around the hall at a walk, a slow, snail-like pace, but what figures some of them present! Still all goes on quite well. The Instructor is speaking:

“To trot,” says he, “raise the hands” (“yearlings” use both hands) “slightly. This is to apprise the horse that you want his attention. Then lower the hands slightly, and at the same time gently press the horse with the legs until he takes the gait desired. As soon

3. Flipper inventively and humorously presents the experience of riding at the Academy in the form of a play, complete with scene description and stage direction. Oliver E. Wood does not use a play format, but in his earlier *West Point Scrapbook* he does pen or collect a long comedic prose narrative titled “My Equestrian Experience,” replete with many of the plot elements included in Flipper’s telling of his equestrian trials. One notable difference is the absence in Wood’s telling of what Flipper will soon call the “cruel gallery.” See Oliver E. Wood, *The West Point Scrap Book, a Collection of Stories, Songs, and Legends* (D. Van Nostrand, 1871), 184–91.

4. A saddle and full bridle are notably missing here. A “surcingle” is a strap that holds a blanket in place. A “watering bridle” is the simplest of snaffle-bit bridles; it *can* be used when riding but is better suited for leading a horse when dismounted. Flipper depends on a bit of knowledge here for the reader to appreciate that instructors are setting up cadets for a fall.

as he does, relax the pressure." A long pause. The occupants of the galleries are looking anxiously on. They know what is coming next. They have seen these drills over and over again. And so each trooper awaits anxiously the next command. Alas! it comes! "Trot!"

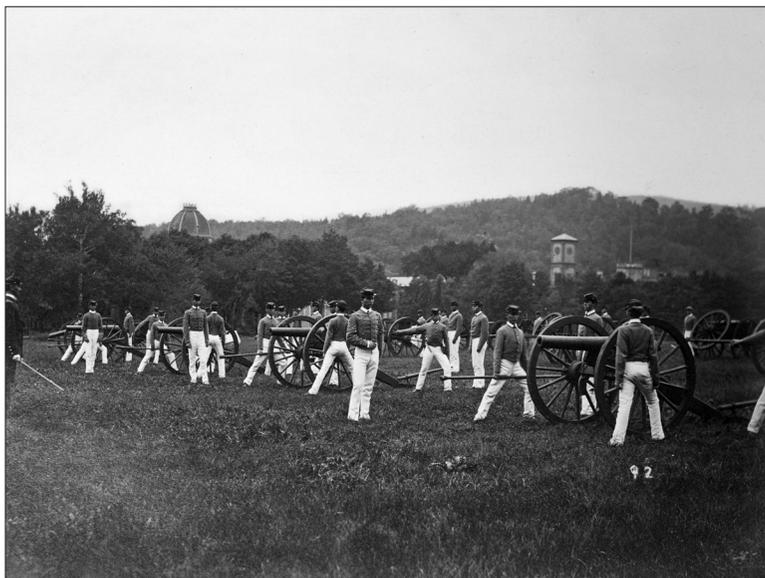
What peals of laughter from that cruel gallery! But why? Ah! See there that trooper struggling in the tan bark while a soldier pursues his steed. He is not hurt. He gets up, brushes away the tan bark, remounts and starts off again. But there, he's off again! He's continually falling off or jumping off purposely (?). What confusion! There comes one at a full gallop, sticking on as best he can; but there, the poor fellow is off. The horses are running away. The troopers are dropping off everywhere in the hall. No one is hurt. Alas! they pressed too hard to keep on, and instead of relaxing the pressure at the desired gait, the trot, they kept on pressing, the horse taking the trot, the gallop, the run, and the trooper, alas! the dust. Again they had the reins too long, and instead of holding on by the flat of the thighs with their feet parallel to the horse, we see them making all sorts of angles. But that gallery! that gallery! how I used to wish it wasn't there! The very sight of a lady under such circumstances is most embarrassing.

Fair ones, why will you thus torture the "yearlings" by your at other times so desirable presence?

The fourth class have pure mathematics, and algebra, daily from 8 to 11 A.M., and French also, daily, from 2 to 4 P.M. Beginning on October 15th, or as near that time as practicable, they have fencing, and the use of the bayonet and small-sword.

During the month of September cadets of all classes, or the battalion, are instructed in the infantry tactics in the "School of the Battalion." Near the end of the month it is customary to excuse the officers of the first class from these drills, and to detail privates to perform their duties for one drill only at a time. The other classes are in ranks, or the line of file-closers, according as they are sergeants, guides, or privates.

During October the several classes receive practical instruction as follows: The first class in military engineering, the manner of making and recording the details of a military reconnoissance, and field sketching; the second class in siege and sea-coast artillery, and military signalling and telegraphy. The class is divided into two parts, composed of the odd and even numbers, which attend drills on alternate days—that is, artillery one day and signalling the next; the third class in light or field artillery, and the theory and principles of "target practice." Sometimes this latter is given during camp, as is most



“Foot battery” instruction in the mid-1870s.

*Courtesy of the United States Military Academy Library Special Collections and Archives.*

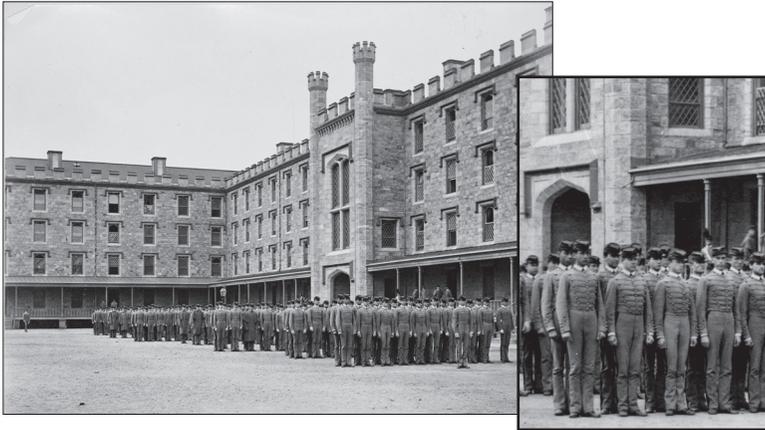
convenient. Sometimes, also, they receive instruction in ordnance. This, however, is generally deferred till they become first-classmen.

For further instruction of the first class the following part of the personnel of a light battery is detailed from that class, viz.: three chiefs of platoon, one chief of caissons, one guidon, and six chiefs of section. Each member of the class is detailed for each of these offices in his proper order.

The fourth class receives instruction in field artillery at the “foot batteries.” This instruction is limited to the nomenclature and manual of the piece. Here, also, to assist the instructor, a chief of piece for each piece is detailed. They are required to correct all errors made by the plebes, and sometimes even to drill them. Hence a knowledge of tactics is indispensable, and the means of fixing such knowledge in the mind is afforded.

Sometimes also two first-classmen are required to assist at the siege or sea-coast batteries.

Every day throughout the year a guard is mounted. It consists of two officers of the guard—sometimes only one—one sergeant, three corporals—or more—and twenty-four privates—sometimes, also, eighteen or twenty-one in camp, and twenty-seven in barracks. Every day, also, there is one officer of the day detailed from the first class.



Cadets in formation near their barracks, circa 1874–1875. Henry O. Flipper stands at the far left of the second rank. *Courtesy of the United States Military Academy Library Special Collections and Archives.*

The weather permitting, we have “dress parade” daily. When unfavorable, on account of snow, rain, or severe cold, we have “undress parade”—that is, parade without arms and in undress or fatigue uniform, the object being to get us all together to publish the orders, etc., for the morrow. After November 1st we usually have “undress parade,” and then “supper mess parade.” Between these two ceremonies the cadets amuse themselves at the gymnasium, dancing or skating, or “spooneying,” or at the library; generally, I think—the upper classmen at any rate—at the library.<sup>5</sup> After supper we have recreation and then study. And thus we “live and do” till January.

The semi-annual examination begins January 1st, or as soon thereafter as practicable. The plebes are examined first, and started in their new studies as soon as possible. After the plebes the other classes are examined in the order of their rank—that is, first class, second class, and third class—and of the importance of their studies, engineering being first, then philosophy, and mathematics, etc.

The examination being over, the deficient ones, after receiving orders from the Secretary of War, are dismissed. Studies are then resumed as follows:

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5. Note the subtle shift here; Flipper speaks from a distinctly distanced perspective of “the cadets” as they partake of pleasures not available to him. For more on Flipper’s subtle rhetoric of exclusion see chapter XII, note 2.

For the first class military engineering, ordnance, and gunnery, constitutional law, military law, rules of evidence, practice of courts-martial, mineralogy, and geology, strategy, and grand tactics, and the throwing and dismantling of pontoon bridges. For the second class, acoustics and optics, astronomy, analytical mechanics in review; infantry, artillery, and cavalry tactics; drawing, riding, and signalling. For the third class, calculus, surveying, geometry, and riding. Immediately after the examination the entire third class receive instruction in mechanical drawing before they begin their other mathematical studies. For the fourth class the studies are plane geometry, trigonometry, descriptive geometry, and fencing, including the use of the small-sword, broad-sword, and bayonet.

Parades, guard duty, etc., remain as previously described until about the middle of March usually. At that time the ordinary routine of drills, dress parades, etc., is resumed; but drills in this order, viz., from March 15th to April 1st instruction in the school of the company; in artillery tactics, as before described during April; and in infantry tactics, in the "School of the Battalion," during May. The annual examination takes place in June. The following diary, made for the purpose of insertion here, will best explain what generally occurs during the month:

MEMORANDA.<sup>6</sup>

*Thursday, June 1, 1876.*—Resumed white pants at 5.10 P.M. Received Board of Visitors by a review at 5.10 P.M. Examination begun at 9 A.M. First class, engineering. Salute of fifteen guns at meridian to Board of Visitors.

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6. Flipper calls the following pages a "diary, made for the purpose of insertion here," a rare passage that speaks to the process by which his autobiography came to be. The editors believe that the following memoranda pages present one of the only clearly discernible early or core documents in the autobiography. Flipper's capture of exacting detail—e.g., "Resumed white pants at 5.10 P.M."—suggests that the entries were written at the time, each day, from June 1 to 19, 1876, and that the pages entered the autobiography with little or no alteration after his graduation, during the time Flipper finally "compiled his manuscript" in Atlanta (see page 69 in chapter II). Most importantly, Flipper's prefatory comment on the "diary" strongly suggests that, when he wrote the entries, he was already envisioning the larger book. We can therefore tentatively date Flipper's idea for the book to June 1, 1876, or just before.

*Friday, June 2.*—First class, engineering finished. Second class, philosophy commenced. Siege battery drill at 5.10 P.M.

*Saturday, June 3.*—Second class, philosophy continued.

*Monday, June 5.*—Light battery at 5.10 P.M. A yearling lost his “white continuations.” Plebes went to parade.

*Tuesday, June 6.*—Fourth class, entire in French. Examination written. Second class, philosophy finished. First class, mineralogy and geology begun. Third class, mathematics begun. Battalion drill at 5.10 P.M.

*Wednesday, June 7.*—Second class turned out, marched to sea-coast battery at 11 A.M. Three detachments selected. Rest marched back and dismissed. Cavalry drill at 5.10 P.M. Six second-classmen turned out. Plebes put in battalion.

*Thursday, June 8.*—Plebes put on guard. Pontoon bridging, 5.10 P.M.

*Friday, June 9.*—Battalion skirmish drill 5.10 P.M. Deployed to front at double time. Second, fourth, and seventh companies reserve. Almost all manoeuvres at double time. Deployed by numbers and charged. Marched in in line, band on right. Broke into column of companies to the left, changed direction to the right, obliqued to the left, moved forward and formed “front into line, faced to the rear.” Arms inspected, ammunition returned. Dismissed.

*Saturday, June 10.*—Third class, mathematics finished. Miss Phillips sang to cadets in mess hall after supper.<sup>7</sup> First class, ordnance begun.

*Sunday, June 11.*—Graduating sermon by Hon.—, of Princeton, N. J., closing “hime,” “When shall we meet again?” Graduating dinner at 2 P.M.

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7. We believe this may have been Adelaide Phillipps, the popular singer, who was near the end of her long career. From 1876 to 1879, she toured and sang across the United States as the leader of the Adelaide Phillipps Opera Company.

*Monday, June 12.*—Detail from first class to ride in hall. Use of sabre and pistol on horseback. First class, ordnance finished. Law begun.

*Tuesday, June 13.*—First class finished. Board divided into committees. Second class, chemistry begun. Graduating parade. Corps cheered by graduates after parade. Hop in evening; also German; whole continuing till 3 A.M. Rumor has it two first-classmen, Slocum and Guilfoyle, are “found” in ordnance and engineering.

*Wednesday, June 14.*—Fourth class, mathematics begun. Salute seventeen guns at 10 A.M. in honor of arrival at post of General Sherman and Colonel Poe of his staff. Graduating exercises from 11 A.M. till near 1 P.M. Addresses to graduates.<sup>8</sup> Mortar practice and fireworks at night.

This ended the “gala” days at West Point in '76.

*Thursday, June 15.*—Usual routine of duties resumed. Company drills in the afternoon from 5.10 to 6.10 P.M. Rather unusual, but we're going to the Centennial. Rumor has it we encamp Saturday the 17th for ten days.

*Friday, June 16.*—Dom Pedro, emperador de la Brasil estaba recibiendo para un “review” a las cuatro horas y quarenta y cinco minutos. El embarcó por la ciudad de Nueva York inmediatamente. Second class, chemistry finished. Third class, French begun.<sup>9</sup>

*Saturday, June 17.*—Third class, French finished. Third class, Spanish begun. “Camp rumor” not true.<sup>10</sup>

8. See chapter XII, note 11 for an extended excerpt and some discussion of Sherman's graduation address.

9. Flipper flexes his beginner's knowledge of Spanish to log the fact that Dom Pedro II of Brazil had been the guest of honor at a parade, or “review,” on the Plain at West Point, before embarking for New York City.

10. The “[c]amp rumor” of the Corps' departure on June 17 may not have been true, but the Corps of Cadets did decamp for the International Exhibition of Arts, Manufactures, and Products of the Soil and Mine, which was at the time taking place in Philadelphia. The “Centennial Exposition,” as it was more commonly called, ran from May 10 to November 10, 1876. See chapter IX for Flipper's recounting of the encampment at Philadelphia. There, after interpolating an article from the *Philadelphia Times*, Flipper writes only forty-five words, eight

*Monday, June 19.*—Moved into camp, aligned tent floors at 5 A.M. in the rain. Required by order to move in effects at 9 A.M., and to march in and pitch tents at 12 M. Rained in torrents. Marched in, etc., at 9 A.M. Effects moved in afterwards. Rain ceased by 12 M. Marched in. Second class, tactics finished. Third class, Spanish finished.

Ordinarily as soon as the examination is over the third class take advantage of the two months' furlough allowed them, while other classes go into camp. This encampment begins June 17th, or a day or two earlier or later, according to circumstances. This brings me to the end of the first year. I have described camp life, and also, I observe, each of the remaining years of cadet life. On July 1st the plebes

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of them quotes from the preceding article, and only to complain about the lack of amenities in the cadet camp. But if we cannot assign a motive with certainty, Flipper's failure to provide personal reflections on the Philadelphia encampment may reflect his inability to write what he actually thought. The Exhibition operated as something like the final nail in the coffin of Reconstruction. According to one source, "The aftermath of the Civil War weighed heavily in the 1876 Centennial celebrations. An explicit purpose of the Centennial Exposition was postbellum reconciliation of the former belligerents. The Exposition took place at the very moment southern white 'redeemers' were completing their seizure of state legislatures in the name of white supremacy, an activity that the Exposition's leaders chose to ignore. Accordingly, Black people were excluded from the Exposition's vision of 'The Union One and Indivisible.'" In addition, Flipper may have had another disappointment. A few months before his trip to the Exhibition, on May 6, 1876, he sat down in the West Point Library during his free time to read George Custer's *My Life on the Plains. Or, Personal Experiences with Indians* (New York: Sheldon and Company, 1874). Flipper, whose later writing reveals that he fully supported government policies of Native American removal and subjugation, may have been looking forward to meeting Custer, whose subsequent "ill-timed death at the Battle of the Little Bighorn on June 25, 1876 scuttled his plan to arrive at the Centennial Exposition as the conquering hero of the Great Plains."

Quotations are from John L. Pluckett, "Gender and Race at the Centennial Exposition," *West Philadelphia Collaborative History*, accessed June 22, 2024, <https://collaborativehistory.gse.upenn.edu/stories/gender-and-race-centennial-exposition>. See also our annotated record of the reading habits of Reconstruction-era Black cadets in Appendix A. Flipper's commitment to expansion comes across clearly in his post-West Point writing, ably compiled in Henry Ossian Flipper, *Black Frontiersman: The Memoirs of Henry O. Flipper, First Black Graduate of West Point*, ed. Theodore Harris (Texas Christian University Press, 1997). For a nuanced discussion of African-American views of and relationship to late nineteenth-century campaigns of subjugation, see David J. Sibley, *A War of Frontier and Empire: The Philippine-American War, 1899–1902* (Hill and Wang, 2007), 108–10.

become the fourth class; the original fourth the third; the third, now on furlough, the second; and the second the first. I have given in an earlier part of my narrative the studies, etc., of these several classes.

The plebe, or fourth class of the previous year, are now become yearlings, and are therefore in their "yearling camp." At the end of every month an extract from the class and conduct report of each cadet is sent to his parents or guardian for their information. I insert a copy of one of these monthly reports.

## United States Military Academy,

*WEST Point, N.Y., March 26, 1875.*

EXTRACT from the Class and Conduct Reports of the MILITARY  
ACADEMY for the month of February, 1875, furnished for  
the information of Parents and Guardians,

### THIRD CLASS—Composed of 83 Members.

*Cadet Henry O. Flipper*

Was, in Mathematics.....	No. 48
“ French.....	No. 48
“ Spanish.....	No. 37
“ Drawing .....	No. 40

His demerit for the month is 2, and since the commencement of the  
academic half year, 23.

*Robt. H. Hall,*  
CAPTAIN 10th Infantry,  
ADJUTANT Military Academy.

### REGULATIONS FOR THE MILITARY ACADEMY.

*Par. 71.*—When any Cadet shall have a total of numbers [*of demerit*] thus recorded, exceeding one hundred in six months, he shall be declared deficient in discipline.

*Par. 153.*—No Cadet shall apply for, or receive money, or any other supplies from his parents, or from any person whomsoever, without permission of the Superintendent.

*Note.*—The attention of Parents and Guardians is invited to the foregoing Regulations. The permission referred to in paragraph 153 must be obtained before the shipment to the cadet of the supplies desired.





CIVIL ENGINEERING												
October, 1876.	T.	31	:	:	467	350	Strains on "Warren girder" due to weight at middle point.	334-5				
Day.....	M.	30	:	:	453	335	Questions.	....				
Date.....	S.	28	:	:	434	318	Cofferdams.	297-302				
Section.....	F.	27	:	:	413	297	Foundations under water, water excluded.	290-292				
No. in do.....	T.	26	:	:	377	277	<i>a.</i>	....				
Lesson	W.	25	:	:	330	243	Rubble, ashlar, and cutstone masonry.	237-243				
	T.	24	:	:	†299	222	<i>a. §</i>	....				
	M.	23	:	:	12	57	Construction of geometrical stairway.	55-6				
	S.	21	:	:	9	47	Dimensions of voussoirs of groined arch, construction of.	43-4				
	F.	20	:	:	8	43	<i>a.</i>	....				
	T.	19	:	:	*5	31	Right section, plan, and elevation of a given wall.	23-4				
	W.	18	:	:	434	318	<i>a.</i>	....				
	T.	17	:	:	421	302	Questions.	....				
	M.	16	:	:	402	290	Grillage and platform.	288-9				
	S.	14	:	:	377	277	Masonry, its preservation, etc.	274-6				
	F.	13	:	:	258	263	Ovals of three centers.	259-60				
	T.	12	:	:	337	251	<i>a.</i>	....				
	W.	11	:	:	317	236	Retaining walls, face and back parallel.	220				
	T.	10	:	:	302	224	Reservoir walls and dams.	222-3				
	M.	9	:	:	289	211	<i>a.</i>	....				
	S.	7	:	:	265	198	Strains on given inclined beam.	183-6				
	F.	6	:	:	258	183	<i>a.</i>	....				
	T.	5	:	:	230	163	Strains on curved beam, approximate.	160-1				
	W.	4	:	:	219	147	<i>a.</i>	....				
	T.	3	:	:	205	134	Questions.	....				
	M.	2	6	12	187	117	Beam, one end fixed, other resting on support, bending m't, shearing strain, etc. of.	113-4				
					To Art....		Subject of Recitation					
					Page.....			Pp.....				







CIVIL ENGINEERING											
<i>December, 1876.</i>											
Day.....	S.	30	·	·	End	·	Kinds of canals.		453-4		
Date.....	F.	28	·	·	600	439	Roads generally.		410-14		
Section.....	T.	28	·	·	545	410	Strains on roof-truss rafters trisected by struts.		403-5		
No. in do.....	W.	27	·	·	495	372	Burr and New York canal trusses.		859-60		
Lesson	T.	26	·	·	463	347	<i>a</i>		....		
	M.	25	·	·	§	·	<i>a</i>		....		
	S.	23	·	·	434	318	Questions.		....		
	F.	22	·	·	387	282	Foundations in compressible soils and firm ones, but affected by water.		280-2		
	T.	21	·	·	346	255	Stability of arches against rotation and sliding.		224-7		
	W.	20	·	·	301	224	Open-built beam, triangular bracing, uniform load, struts.		193		
	T.	19	·	·	263	194	Inclined beam.		183-6		
	M.	18	·	·	230	163	Solid of equal resistance.		140-1-3		
	S.	16	·	·	210	139	Questions.		....		
	F.	15	·	·	187	117	*M.S. and Y. of horizontal beam, uniformly loaded, one end fixed, other not.		113		
	T.	14	·	·	176	103	<i>a</i>		....		
	W.	13	·	·	164	88	Bar of uniform strength to resist elongation.		86-7		
	T.	12	·	·	147	72	Perpetual kilns, products of calcination, pozzuolana. "Bugled it."		44-51		
	M.	11	·	·	¶66	32	Concrete and patent stones.		29-31		
	S.	9	·	·	End	·	<i>a</i>		....		
	F.	8	·	·	·	·	Groined arch.		434		
	T.	7	·	·	†1	35	Questions.		....		
	W.	6	·	·	·	·			....		
	T.	5	·	·	·	·			....		
	M.	4	·	·	·	·			....		
	S.	2	·	·	·	·			....		
	F.	1	5	12	*	·			....		
							Subject of Recitation				
									Pp.....		













ORDNANCE AND GUNNERY.											
<i>October, 1876.</i>											
Day.....	T.	F.	W.	M.	T.	T.	F.	W.	M.	T.	
Date.....	3	5	9	11	13	17	19	23	25	27	31
Section.....	7	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
No. in do.....	9	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
Lesson	To Art....	*11	26-34	53	83	106	117	136	152	166	179
	Page.....	20	58	90	116	138	154	174	189	204	217
Subject of Recitation		Inspection of powder and densimeter.	General formula for quantity of powder consumed in a given time.	Questions.	Inspection of projectiles.	Wrought iron.	Trunnions, preponderance, rimbases, cascabel, and handles on guns.	Three-inch rifle-guns.	Star gauge, trunion rule, and trunion square.	a	Questions.
	Pp.....	6-7	46-7	...	90-2	143-4	160-3	181	200-3	...	...
	Maximum.....	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
	Mark per recitation.....	..	2-8	3-0	2-0	..	..	2-6	..	2-9	2-1
	Do. per week.....	..	5-4	..	..	..	..	8-9	..	..	..
	Avg per w'k.....	..	2-7	..	..	..	..	2-9	..	2-6	..
	Do. per month....	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	2-7
	Rank in section....	..	3	..	..	..	..	1	..	6	..
	Do. per month....	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	6
	Do. class.....	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	64
<p>REMARKS.—* Review. This lesson includes pamphlet. Omissions same as on advance, and arts. 155, 156, to "In 1860," p. 192, art. 189, "Lance," pp. 279, 280, arts. 289-52, inclusive, and 259.</p>											



ORDNANCE AND GUNNERY.																									
	M.	W.	F.	T.	T.	M.	W.	F.	T.	T.	Maximum.....	9	6	..	6	..	9	..	9	..	6	..			
<i>December, 1876.</i>																									
Day.....	4	6	8	12	14	18	20	22	26	28	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
Date.....	4	6	8	12	14	18	20	22	26	28	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
Section.....	7	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
No. in do.....	9	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
Lesson	To Art....	371	403	183	113	152	187	229	376	403	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	1-93
	Page.....	360	381	116	151	189	225	261	366	381	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
Subject of Recitation	Military fireworks.	364-5	82-3	Questions.	154-5	..	Seacoast carriage.	243-4-5	Construction of case and anvil of the metallic case cartridge.	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
	Combustion of gunpowder.	39-44	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
Pp.....	356-8	364-5	82-3	154-5	..	..	243-4-5	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..

REMARKS.— Omit arts. 349, 350, 351, 352, 353, 354, 355, 377, 378, last half of 382, 383, 384, 385, 386, 387, 388, 393, 394, 395, 396.  
 † General review. This lesson commences at art. 39, p. 71; omits arts. 75 to 79, inclusive.  
 ‡ In addition this lesson includes from beginning of text to art. 39, p. 71  
 \* This lesson included a pamphlet furnished by the Ordnance Department.

## CHAPTER VII.

### YEARLING CAMP.<sup>1</sup>

IN this chapter I shall describe only those phases of cadet life which are experienced by “yearlings” in their “yearling camp.”<sup>2</sup>

Beginning July 5th, or as soon after as practicable, the third class receive practical instruction in the nomenclature and manual of the field-piece. This drill continues till August 1st, when they begin the “School of the Battery.”<sup>3</sup>

The class attend dancing daily. Attendance at dancing is optional with that part of the third class called “yearlings,” and compulsory for the “Seps,” who of course do not become yearlings till the following September.<sup>4</sup> The third class also receive instruction in the duties of a military laboratory, and “target practice.” These instructions are not always given during camp. They may be given in the autumn or spring.<sup>5</sup>

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1. The term “yearling,” characterizing a “third-class” cadet or “sophomore,” derives from a husbandry term describing a young animal not yet matured as a “cow,” which referred to a “second-class” cadet, or “junior” in modern usage.

2. Summer encampment at West Point involved three classes of cadets: plebes, yearlings, and firsties. Cows were away on their summer furlough. Refer to chapter XIII for Flipper’s discussion of furlough. Yearlings and firsties had training and supervisory responsibility for the encampment, which included habituating plebes to West Point and military life.

3. While the plebe class focused on menial tasks around camp and learning basic drill, yearling cadets were now exposed to the tactical and technical aspects of the profession of arms. Field artillery featured prominently in their summer training as most West Point graduates moved on to assignments in the infantry, cavalry, or artillery. Beyond training during summer encampments, cadets encountered gunnery and its associated subjects of geometry, topography, and chemistry throughout their academic careers. See Lance Betros, *Carved from Granite: West Point Since 1902* (Texas A&M University Press, 2012), 17–21.

4. “Seps” were the portion of any given class that reported to West Point in early September of their plebe year and therefore missed plebe encampment. They were not recognized as yearlings until they completed their first summer encampment and were prepared to start the academic year.

5. The “military laboratory” to which Flipper refers is the ordnance laboratory. Built in the 1840s, West Point’s ordnance laboratory was where cadets learned about the design and production of artillery, small arms, and munitions. See Jon

Another delight of the yearling is to “bone colors.” Immediately in front of camp proper is a narrow path extending entirely across the ground, and known as the “color line.” On the 1st of August—sometimes before—the “color line” is established, this name being applied also to the purpose of the color line. This ceremony consists in stacking arms just in rear of the color line, and placing colors on the two stacks nearest the centre of the line.

From the privates of the guard three are chosen to guard the stacks and to require every one who crosses the color line or passes within fifteen paces of the colors to salute them. These three sentinels are known as the “colors,” or “color men,” and are numbered “first,” “second,” and “third.”

Those are chosen who are neatest and most soldier-like in their appearance. Cadets prepare themselves specially for this, and they toss up their guns to the adjutant at guard-mounting. This signifies that they intend competing for “colors.” The adjutant falls them out after the guard has marched to its post, and inspects them. Absolute cleanliness is necessary. Any spot of dirt, dust, or any thing unclean will often defeat one. Yearlings “bone” their guns and accoutrements for “colors,” and sometimes get them every time they toss up.

A “color man” must use only those equipments issued to him. He cannot borrow those of a man who has “boned them up” and expect to get colors. Sometimes—but rarely—plebes compete and win.

The inducement for this extra labor is simply this: Instead of being on duty twenty-four hours, color men are relieved from 4 P.M. till 8 A.M. the next day, when they march off. They of course enjoy all other privileges given the “Old Guard.”

“*Sentinels for the Color Line.*—The sentinels for the color line will be permitted to go to their tents from the time the stacks are broken till 8 A.M. the following morning, when they will rejoin the guard. They will be excused from marching to meals, but will report to the officer of the guard at the roll-call for each meal, and also at tattoo and reveille.”—(From *Résumé of Existing Orders, U.S.C.C.*)<sup>6</sup>

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C. Malinowski, *The West Point Landscape, 1802–1860* (West Point Press, 2024), 112–115.

6. “The colors” referred to here are the emblems of a military unit that identify it in battle; they symbolize the presence of the unit’s commander and function as a rallying point for soldiers scattered or lost in the course of a march or battle. During a noisy battle, viewing the movement of the colors could be the only way

It is the yearling who does most of the hazing. Just emerged from his chrysalis state, having the year before received similar treatment at the hands of other yearlings, he retaliates, so to speak, upon the now plebe, and finds in such retaliation his share of enjoyment.

The practice, however, is losing ground. The cadets are more generous, and, with few exceptions, never interfere with a plebe. This is certainly an advance in the right direction; for although hazing does comprise some good, it is, notwithstanding, a low practice, one which manliness alone should condemn. None need information and assistance more than plebes, and it is unkind to refuse it; nay, it is even not humane to refuse it and also to haze the asker. Such conduct, more than any thing else, discourages and disheartens him. It takes from him all desire to do and earn, to study or strive for success. At best it can be defended only as being effective where regulations are not, viz., in the cases of rough specimens who now not infrequently manage to win their appointments.<sup>7</sup>

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a soldier could tell whether he was advancing or falling back. The loss of a unit's colors was considered a severe mark of dishonor for the unit and shame to all who served under them.

"Boning the colors" was one of the ways cadets could evade the tedium of lengthy overnight guard shifts during summer encampment. Other special privileges that signified a degree of independence from the group, such as not having to march to meals, are also indicated. Flipper is describing the method by which cadets were chosen for this distinguished duty. It involved rigorous preparation of uniform, belts, brass, and weapon to present an immaculate and distinguished appearance befitting one who guards the colors. That this duty was coveted is attested to by the fact that yearlings made it a point of honor to keep the duty among themselves; to lose out to a plebe would have been a mark of failure.

7. Although hazing was strictly forbidden, Flipper acknowledges that the practice was alive and well. Every plebe resented the "fourth-class" treatment he received, and now that he was "third-class" and no longer at the bottom of the social hierarchy, the temptation to dish out was strong. Flipper's editorial on hazing is interesting, progressive even, but also not surprising. Given his social status within the Corps of Cadets, he would not have been permitted to engage in hazing white plebes. This detachment from the ritual practice that for many decades was the singular hallmark for acceptance into the Corps of Cadets allowed Flipper to thoughtfully consider how officers should relate to enlisted soldiers. One of the many criticisms that West Point graduates endured, thanks in large part to the initiatory system of hazing, was an inability to connect with soldiers in a meaningful way. Demeaning was not leading, but West Point had a reputation of producing leaders who lacked empathy or compassion for their social inferiors. It may have been an unfair characterization, but Flipper's thoughts on the matter

Formerly in yearling camp the corporals were all “acting sergeants.” They were so acting in the absence of the de facto sergeants. These corporals got the idea into their heads that to retain their appointments they had to do a certain amount of “skinning,” and often “skins” were more fancied than real. This was a rather sad condition of affairs.

Plebes would find their demerits accumulating and become disheartened. It was all due to this unnecessary rigor, and “being military,” which some of the yearling corporals affected. No one bears, or rather did bear, such a reputation as the yearling corporal. As such he was disliked by everybody, and plebes have frequently fought them for their unmanly treatment. This, however, was. It is no more. We have no yearling corporals, and plebes fare better generally than ever before. Not because all yearling corporals thus subserved their ambition by reporting men for little things that might as well have been overlooked, did they get this bad reputation, but rather because with it they coupled the severest hazing, and sometimes even insults. That was unmanly as well as mean. Hazing could be endured, but not always insults.<sup>8</sup>

Whether for this reason or not I cannot say, the authorities now appoint the corporals from the second class, men who are more dignified and courteous in their conduct toward all, and especially toward plebes. The advantages of this system are evident.

One scarcely appreciates cadet life—if such appreciation is possible—till he becomes a yearling. It is not till in yearling camp that a cadet begins to “spoon.” Not till then is he permitted to attend the hops, and of course he has but little opportunity to cultivate

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reveal the basic objection to the practice. For more on hazing, refer to chapter III, footnotes 4 and 5; chapter V, footnote 2; and chapter VII, footnote 7.

8. The allocation of cadet ranks has fluctuated throughout the Academy’s history. Plebes have always been cadet privates—the very bottom of the hierarchy. In Flipper’s time, some upperclassmen received appointments as cadet noncommissioned officers, and some first-class cadets received appointments to serve as cadet officers. As with hazing, some cadets too young or immature for the authorities their rank bestowed could let power go to their heads and thought their position entitled them to dole out personal and petty harassment. Flipper was neither the first nor the last to recognize this pernicious phenomenon. For an example of cadet noncommissioned officers abusing their authority, turn to James W. Smith’s experience in Rory McGovern, Makonen Campbell, and Louisa Koebrich, “‘I Hope to Have Justice Done Me or I Can’t Get Along Here’: James Webster Smith and West Point,” *Journal of Military History* 87, no. 4 (October 2023): 983.



Louis D. Bentz, West Point's long-serving bugler.

*Courtesy of the United States Military Academy Library Special Collections and Archives.*

female society, nor is he expected to do so till then, for to assume any familiarity with the upper classes would be considered rather in advance of his "plebeship's" rights. How then can he—he is little more than a stranger—become acquainted with the fair ones who either dwell at or are visiting West Point. Indeed, knowing "femmes" are quite as prone to haze as the cadets, and most unmercifully cut the unfortunate plebe. Some are also so very haughty: they will admit only first-classmen to their acquaintance and favor.

But Mr. Plebe, having become a yearling finds that the "Mr." is dropped, and that he is allowed all necessary familiarity. He then begins to enjoy his cadetship, a position which for pleasure and happiness has untold advantages, for what woman can resist those glorious buttons? A yearling has another advantage. The furlough class is absent, and the plebes—well, they are "plebes." Sufficient,

isn't it? The spooneying must all be done, then, by the first and third classes. Often a great number of the first class are bachelors, or not inclined to be spooney; and that duty then of course devolves on the more gallant part of that class and the yearlings.

The hop managers of the third class have been mentioned elsewhere. They enjoy peculiar facilities for pleasure, and, where a good selection has been made, do much to dispel the monotony of academic military life. Indeed, they do very much toward inducing others to cultivate a high sense of gallantry and respect for women. The refining influence of female society has greater play, and its good results are inevitable.

But what a wretched existence was mine when all this was denied me! One would be unwilling to believe I had not, from October, 1875, till May, 1876, spoken to a female of any age, and yet it was so. There was no society for me to enjoy—no friends, male or female, for me to visit, or with whom I could have any social intercourse, so absolute was my isolation.\* Indeed, I had

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\* *I could and did have a pleasant chat every day, more or less, with "Bentz the bugler," the tailor, barber, commissary clerk, the policeman who scrubbed out my room and brought around the mail, the treasurer's clerk, cadets occasionally, and others. The statement made in some of the newspapers, that from one year's end to another I never heard the sound of my own voice, except in the recitation room, is thus seen to be untrue.*<sup>9</sup>

9. The juxtaposition of Flipper's footnote with the line that he footnoted reveals much about his unique position. In the main text, Flipper characterizes his isolation as "absolute." But in his footnote, Flipper takes pains to say that newspaper accounts which characterize his isolation as absolute are inaccurate. As noted in the Editors' Introduction, there were natural limits to Flipper's ability to criticize the United States Military Academy. Flipper's footnote—clearly meant to soften the institutional criticism implied by describing his West Point existence as "wretched" and his isolation as "absolute"—shows that he is aware of those limits and recognizes that being seen as too critical of West Point would jeopardize his career in an Army officered almost entirely by West Pointers.

Furthermore, Flipper's list of those who would willingly converse with him beyond the course of official duties further illustrates West Point's social and racial divisions, underscoring Flipper's status as an outsider. "Bentz the bugler" was Louis D. Bentz, a long-serving and much-loved fixture of West Point. Cadets jokingly, if somewhat routinely, attempted to sabotage his bugle in the hopes of getting extra sleep. He was adored by the Corps, and in many cases ended up being the only enlisted man whose photograph cadets included in their class albums. At the same time, cadets and officers alike adhered to a fairly rigid and hierarchical social structure in which officers and cadets did not mix with enlisted soldiers. The inclusion of Bentz at the very



This early-1870s photograph of the back of West Point's hospital shows what appears to be a Black or biracial laborer seated among the trees at the right of the frame. Often hidden in plain sight, African Americans were employed in various capacities on West Point throughout the nineteenth century well before the first Black cadets arrived.

*Image courtesy of the United States Library Special Collections and Archives.*

top of Flipper's list of those willing to break his isolation says much about Bentz's humanity and decency, but it says more about how thoroughly isolated and excluded Flipper was.

The remainder of the list hints at the reality of a racial caste system. There were a number of Black and mixed-race people working in various capacities on West Point, often hiding in plain sight, as you can see in the photograph included above. We cannot positively identify the tailor or the commissary clerk Flipper singled out. However, the barber was Joseph Simpson, who also performed janitorial duties on West Point from time to time and operated a soda fountain for the cadets. The 1875 New York State census identifies Simpson as a 64-year-old mixed-race man who lived on West Point with his family and another biracial couple. His wife, Hannah, was a West Point institution in her own right, helping to run the soda fountain and remembered by cadets from the 1830s onward for apparently delicious baked

friends who often visited me, but they did so only when the weather was favorable. In the winter season, when nature, usually so attractive, presented nothing to amuse or dispel one's gloom, and when, therefore, something or some one suited for that purpose was so desirable, no one of course visited me. But I will not murmur. I suppose this was but another constituent of that mechanical mixture of ills and anxieties and suspense that characterized my cadet life. At any rate I can console myself in my victory over prejudice, whether that victory be admitted or not. I know I have so lived that they could find in me no fault different from those at least common to themselves, and have thus forced upon their consciences a just and merited recognition whether or not they are disposed to follow conscience and openly accept my claim to their brotherly love.

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goods that she offered for sale. The census also lists their son, Thomas, as a machinist, indicating he was a skilled laborer capable of repairing and operating heavy equipment. The 1870 federal census lists Thomas as a barber, showing that he was employed on West Point in a variety of capacities just like his father. The other couple living with the Simpsons were also part of the West Point community, with husband George employed as a steward at the Rose Hotel, overlooking the Hudson River just north of the summer encampment area. One alumnus noted in 1880 that Joseph and his family were known to befriend West Point's Black cadets; in fact, the Simpsons' daughter married James Webster Smith after he departed West Point.

Ultimately, West Point had a small Black community well before it admitted its first Black cadets, and Flipper hints that they and the redoubtable Bentz were the most reliable social outlet for Black cadets. But given the reality of a strictly regimented cadet life, access to those outlets was limited, offering respite from isolation in the form of "a pleasant chat every day, more or less."

See Census of the State of New York, 1875, Highland, Orange, New York, Sheet 45; and U.S. Census, 1870, Cornwall, Orange, New York, Roll M593-1067, Page 299A, both available on Ancestry.com. See also George C. Strong, *Cadet Life at West Point* (Boston: T.O.H.P. Burnham, 1862), 51 and 127-128; Albert E. Church, *Personal Reminiscences of the Military Academy from 1824 to 1831* (U.S.M.A Press, 1879), 16 and 64; H.H.S., "Recollections of Cadet Life Forty Years Ago," *Frank Leslie's Popular Monthly*, vol. XII, no. 1 (July 1881): 15; and testimony of Hannah Smith transcribed in "The West Point Cadet Case," *The Army and Navy Journal*, May 1, 1880: 801.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### FIRST-CLASS CAMP.

IT is a common saying among cadets that “first-class camp is just like furlough.” I rather think the assertion is an inheritance from former days and the cadets of those days, for the similarity at present between first-class camp and furlough is beyond our conception.<sup>1</sup> There is none, or if any it is chimerical, depending entirely on circumstances. In the case of a small class it would be greater than in that of a large one. For instance, in “train drill” a certain number of men are required. No more are necessary. It would be inexpedient to employ a whole class when the class had more men in it than were required for the drill. In such cases the supernumeraries are instructed in something else, and alternate with those who attend train drill. In the case of a small class all attend the same drill daily, and that other duty or drill is reserved for autumn. Thus there is less drill in camp, and it becomes more like furlough when there is none at all.<sup>2</sup>

Again, first-classmen enjoy more privileges than others, and for this reason their camp is more like furlough. If, however, there are numerous drills, the analogy will fail; for how can duty, drills, etc., coexist with privileges such as first-class privileges? Time which otherwise would be devoted to enjoyment of privileges is now consumed in drills. Still there is much in it which makes first-class camp the most delightful part of a cadet’s life. There are more privileges, the duties are lighter and more attractive, and make it withal more enjoyable. First, members of the class attend drill both as assistants and as students. They are detailed as chiefs of platoon, chiefs of section, chiefs of caissons, and as guidons at the light battery; as chiefs of pieces at the several foot batteries; attend themselves at the siege or sea-coast batteries, train drill, pontoon drill,

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1. “Furlough” is a period of leave for those in the military. Flipper provides more on his views of furlough, if disappointingly little on his experiences with it, in chapter XIII.

2. The “train drill” Flipper refers to is the technique for the various methods of long-distance communications, such as flag- or fire-signaling, establishing telegraph lines and stations, and the use of code to transmit and interpret messages.

engineering, ordnance, and astronomy, and they are also detailed as officers of the guard. These duties are generally not very difficult nor unpleasant to discharge. Second, from the nature of the privileges allowed first-classmen, they have more opportunity for pleasure than other cadets, and therefore avoid the rather serious consequences of their monotonous academic military life. A solitary monotonous life is rather apt to engender a dislike for mankind, and no high sense of honor or respect for women. I deem these privileges of especial importance, as they enable one to avoid that danger and to cultivate the highest possible regard for women, and those virtues and other Christian attributes of which they are the better exponents. A soldier is particularly liable to fall into this *sans-souci* way of looking at life, and those to whom its pleasures, as well as its ills, are largely due.<sup>3</sup> We are indebted to our fellows for every thing which affects our life as regards its happiness or unhappiness, and this latter misfortune will rarely be ours if we properly appreciate our friends and those who can and will make life less wretched. To shut one's self up in one's self is merely to trust, or rather to set up, one's own judgment as superior to the world's. That cannot be, nor can there be happiness in such false views of our organization as being of and for each other.<sup>4</sup>

At this point of the course many of the first-class have attained their majority. They are men, and in one year more will be officers of the army.<sup>5</sup> It becomes them, therefore, to lay aside the ordinary

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3. *Sans-souci* is a French term that translates to "without worry."

4. There is more in this paragraph than appears in a casual reading. Flipper's language is oddly stilted and theoretical, most likely because he describes things which he observed and hoped for but did not experience. The most genuinely personal part of Flipper's narrative in this paragraph is his remark that "a solitary monotonous life is rather apt to engender a dislike for mankind." The Corps of Cadets silenced Flipper throughout his time at West Point, including his first-class year. Flipper may have genuinely believed, as he wrote, "We are indebted to our fellows for every thing which affects our life as regards its happiness or unhappiness, and this latter misfortune will rarely be ours if we properly appreciate our friends and those who can and will make life less wretched." Nevertheless, he would have been painfully aware that those who did make his life less wretched were limited to the appallingly short list of people he identified in chapter VII, and that his interactions with them were limited to "a pleasant chat every day, more or less." See chapter VII, note 9. In the paragraph that includes footnote 9, Flipper characterized his existence as "wretched" and his isolation as "absolute," further underscoring the point that, here in chapter VIII, Flipper describes things that he observed and hoped for but did not experience.

5. Ernest Garlington—a member of the class of 1876—agreed with Flipper's assessment that Academy officials treated first-class cadets as officers when he



Summer encampment for first-classmen was not all business. Both images here depict groups of first-classmen from the class of 1876 at the summer encampment in 1875. Above are the “Mulligan Guards,” adorned with grotesque masks intended to play upon racial and ethnic stereotypes. Below are “the alumni,” young cadets comically dressed as living caricatures of their perception of aging graduates who were veterans of the Civil War. As discussed in footnote 8 in this chapter, Flipper’s silence on such groups and humor most likely means his classmates excluded him from their antics. The photo of the “Mulligan Guards” in particular shows the sentiments at the root of that exclusion.

*Courtesy of the United States Military Academy Library Special Collections and Archives.*



student's *rôle*, and assume a more dignified one, one more in conformity with their age and position. They leave all cadet *rôles*, etc., to the younger classes, and put on the proper dignity of men.<sup>6</sup>

There are for them more privileges. They are more independent—more like men; and consequently they find another kind of

later recalled that “students of the senior class were treated as men.” Flipper continued to be ostracized, though, so this is almost certainly another instance of Flipper describing the environment he observed rather than what he experienced. Nevertheless, his trust in the institution is evident here as elsewhere in this volume. For more on the senior class, see Ernest Garlington to General Smith, July 15, 1929, Ernest A. Garlington Manuscript File, United States Military Academy Library Special Collections and Archives, West Point, NY.

6. Flipper's use of the French language is a point of real curiosity in this paragraph, as the English translation of *rôle* is role. This may be another example of Flipper subtly proclaiming his rightful place among the officer corps and the broader community of West Point alumni. Nineteenth-century Western militaries consciously navigated a world Napoleon made. Since Sylvanus Thayer's tenure as superintendent of West Point (1817–1833), all cadets studied French so they could study works about Napoleon, military theory, and tactics in their original French. The language proved to be a major obstacle for Black cadets in the 1870s. Of four admitted Black cadets who had been dismissed for academic deficiency prior to Flipper's graduation in 1877, two—Henry A. Napier and John Washington Williams—had been declared deficient in French. Undoubtedly, a lack of access to primary and secondary education until after the Civil War contributed to their difficulties with French, as all Black cadets admitted during and prior to Flipper's tenure at West Point came from the South. But it may also have been an act of sabotage by George Andrews, West Point's long-serving professor of French, who aired publicly his views that Black cadets were intellectually unfit for West Point and that integrating West Point was actually an act of tyranny carried out by successive presidential administrations. Flipper, however, passed French comfortably, ranking 42 out of 100 members of the plebe class to pass French in the 1873–74 academic year, and 51 out of 84 members of the yearling class to pass French in the 1874–75 academic year. By adorning his narrative with French terms, Flipper simultaneously asserts his place among West Point graduates and celebrates mastering a course of study that had felled half of the Black cadets who had departed the Academy prior to 1877.

See “Statement Showing the Number of Colored Persons Appointed Candidate for Admission to the U.S. Military Academy,” October 21, 1886, RG 404, USMA Library Special Collections and Archives, West Point, NY, for data on Black cadets and prospective cadets in the 1870s and 1880s; “Henry Ossian Flipper's Academic Record while a Cadet at the United States Military Academy, 1873–1877,” Henry O. Flipper Vertical Files, USMA Library Special Collections and Archives, West Point, NY, for a summary of Flipper's standing in each subject in the curriculum; and George L. Andrews, “West Point and the Colored Cadets” *The International Review*, IX (November 1880), 477–98, for an opinion piece in which Andrews broadcast to the general public his views on integrating West Point.



Overlooking the Hudson River, the siege battery was where cadets trained on heavy artillery pieces.  
*Courtesy of the United States Military Academy Library Special Collections and Archives.*



enjoyment in camp than that of the cadet. It is a general, a proper, a rational sort of pleasure such as one would enjoy at home among relatives or friends, and hence the similarity between first-class camp and furlough.<sup>7</sup>

But it is not thus with all first-classmen. Many, indeed the majority, are cadets till they graduate. They see every thing as a cadet, enjoy every thing as a cadet, and find the duties, etc., of first-class camp as irksome as those of plebe or yearling camp. Of course such men see no similarity between first-class camp and furlough. It is their misfortune. We should enjoy as many things as we can, and not sorrow over them. We should not make our life one of sorrow when it could as well be one of comfort and pleasure. I don't mean comfort and pleasure in an epicurean sense, but in a moral one. Still first-classmen do have many duties to perform, but there is withal one consolation at least, there are no upper classmen to keep the plebe or yearling in his place. There is no feeling of humbleness because of junior rank, for the first class is the first in rank, and therefore need humble itself to none other than the proper authorities.<sup>8</sup>

Again, their honor, as "cadets and gentlemen," is relied upon as surety for obedience and regard for regulations. They are not subject to constant watching as plebes are. The rigor of discipline is not so severe upon them as upon others. It was expended upon them during their earlier years at the Academy, and, as a natural consequence, any violation of regulations, etc., by a first-classman,

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7. In this passage, Flipper reflects the masculine idealism that permeated West Point. It naturally follows that since First Class cadets have attained the age of emancipation, they are "men" worthy of greater dignity; within less than a year they will also be "officers," dignified now as gentlemen enjoying all the privileges due to their station. This is why leisure is so closely—or ought to be—associated with First Class camp.

8. Once again, the description becomes somewhat stilted and vague when Flipper delves into things which he most likely did not experience. Still silenced during his first-class camp, Flipper could not have experienced the relaxed camaraderie that characterized most cadets' experiences of first-class camp. Many of these paragraphs must have been rooted in Flipper's observations of others rather than his own experiences. This underscores and gives deeper meaning to Flipper's description of a "moral" rather than "epicurean" pleasure rooted in the fact that first-classmen outranked all other cadets. Silenced and denied the typical revelry that most first-classmen enjoyed in camp, Flipper could speak from considerable experience about finding some way to enjoy rather than sorrow over his environment, and the consolation of at least not needing to feel "humbleness because of junior rank."

merits and receives a severer punishment than would be visited upon a junior classman for a like infringement on his part.

The duties of first-classmen in first-class camp are as follows: The officer of the day and two officers of the guard are detailed each day from the class. Their duties are precisely those of similar officers in the regular army. The junior officer of the guard daily reports to the observatory to find the error of the tower clock. Also each day are detailed the necessary assistants for the several light batteries, who are on foot or mounted, as the case may require.<sup>9</sup> The remainder of the class receive instructions in the service of the siege and sea-coast artillery. These drills come in the early forenoon. After them come ordnance and engineering.

The entire class is divided as equally as may be into two parts, which alternate in attendance at ordnance and engineering.

In ordnance the instructions are on the preparation of military fireworks, fixing of ammunition and packing it, the battery wagon and forge. This instruction is thoroughly practical. The cadets make the cases for rockets, paper shells, etc., and fill them, leaving them ready for immediate use. The stands of fixed ammunition prepared are the grape and canister, and shell and shot, with their sabots.<sup>10</sup>

The battery wagon and forge are packed as prescribed in the "Ordnance Manual."

The instructions in engineering are also practical and military. They are in the modes of throwing and dismantling pontoon bridges, construction of fascines, gabions, hurdles, etc., and revetting batteries with them. Sometimes also during camp, more often after, foot reconnaissances are made. A morning and night detail is

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9. This refers to artillery training. Refer to chapter VII, note 3.

10. Such instruction took place in and as part of the "military laboratory" that Flipper mentioned briefly in the previous chapter (refer to chapter VII, note 5), underscoring Flipper's point that the major difference between yearling camp and first-class camp was less in training content than in the fact that first-classmen were in positions of authority while training. There were some elements of training reserved solely for first-classmen—practical instruction in technical skills with which all nineteenth-century army officers were expected to have some familiarity: basic military engineering, signaling, and telegraphy—which Flipper outlines in the remainder of the chapter. But while he describes them as "of the greatest importance," his comparatively short treatment of training that was unique to the first-class encampment reveals that he viewed it as a secondary feature of lesser interest and importance. For more, see Stephen Ambrose, *Duty, Honor, Country: A History of West Point* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1966), 158.

made daily from the class to receive practical instruction in astronomy in the field observatory.

Night signalling with torches, and telegraphy by day, form other sources of instruction for the first class.

Telegraphy, or train drill, as the drill is called, consists in erecting the telegraph line and opening communication between two stations, and when this is done, in communicating so as to acquire a practical knowledge of the instruments and their use.

These various drills—all of them occurring daily, Sunday of course excepted, and for part of them Saturday also—complete the course of instruction given the first class only during their first-class camp. It will be observed that they all of them are of a military nature and of the greatest importance. The instruction is thorough accordingly.

I have sufficiently described, I think, a cadet's first-class camp. I shall, therefore, close the chapter here.

# CHAPTER IX.

## OUR FUTURE HEROES.<sup>1</sup>

### THE WEST POINT CADETS' VACATION.

*Ten Days of Centennial Sport for Prospective Warriors—  
The Miseries of three hundred Young Gentlemen who are limited  
to Ten Pairs of White Trousers each.*

“ALMOST at the foot of George’s Hill, and not far to the westward of Machinery Hall, is the camp of the West Point cadets. From morning till night the domestic economy of the three hundred young gentlemen who compose the corps is closely watched, and their guard mountings and dress parades attract throngs of spectators. It would be hard to find anywhere a body of young men so manly in appearance, so perfect in discipline, and so soldier-like and intelligent. The system of competitive examination for admission, so largely adopted within the past few years in many of our large cities, has resulted in recruiting the corps with lads of bright intellect and more than ordinary attainments, while the strict physical examination has rigorously excluded all but those of good form and perfect health. The competitive system has also given to the Academy students who want to learn, instead of lads who are content to scramble through the prescribed course as best they can, escaping the disgrace of being “found” (a cadet term equivalent to the old college word “plucked”) by nearly a hair’s-breadth.

“*The camp.*—The camp is laid out in regulation style, and has four company streets. Near the western limit of the Centennial grounds are the tents of the commandant and the cadet captains and lieutenants. Below, on a gentle incline, are the wall tents, occupied by the cadets. Each of these has a board floor, and it is so arranged that when desired it may be thrown open on all sides. From two to four narrow iron cots, a bucket for water, an occasional chair, and now and then a mirror, comprise the furniture. But scanty as it is, every article of this little outfit has a place, and must be kept in it, or woe to the unlucky wight upon whom the duty of housekeeping devolves for the day. The bucket must stand on the

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1. The title and subtitle of this chapter, as well as all but its final paragraph, come from a front-page article in *The Philadelphia Times* reporting on West Point’s attendance at the Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia. The Centennial Exposition was a celebration of both the past and the future, hosted in Philadelphia during the 100th anniversary of American independence, with featured exhibitions on modern inventions and technologies drawing considerable attention and excitement. Flipper’s actual experience in Philadelphia is elusive in this chapter—readers must wait until chapter XI, in which he provides a brief glimpse of his interactions with fellow cadets in Philadelphia. For the original article, see “Our Future Heroes,” *The Philadelphia Times*, July 6, 1876, p. 1.



A view of the United States Military Academy encampment by George's Hill at Philadelphia's 1876 Centennial Exposition. In the middle ground, an audience has gathered to watch cadets parade in the middle and right of the frame. Behind the audience, a small train carries visitors to the exposition.

*Courtesy of the Library of Congress.*

left-hand side of the tent, in front; the beds must be made at a certain hour and in a certain style—for the coming heroes of America have to be their own chambermaids; while valises and other baggage must be stowed away in as orderly a way as possible. Every morning the tents are inspected, and any lack of neatness or order insures for the chambermaid of the day a misconduct mark. It may be easily conceived that under a regime so strict as this the cadets are particularly careful as to their quarters, inasmuch as one hundred of these marks mean dismissal from the Academy.

“At daybreak the reveille sounds, and the cadets turn out for roll-call. Then come breakfast, guard mounting, and camp and general police duty, which consume the time until 8.30 A.M., from which hour those who are not on guard have the freedom of the Centennial grounds. At 5 P.M. they must fall in for dress parade; at 9 they answer to ‘tattoo’ roll-call, and a few minutes later ‘taps’ or ‘lights out’ consigns them to darkness and quiet.

“*West Point Aristocracy.*—Small as is this corps, it is still patent that the distinction of caste is very strong. A first-classman—cadet officers are selected from this class—looks down upon lower grade men, while second-class cadets view their juniors with something nearly allied to contempt, and third-class men are amusingly patronizing in their treatment of ‘plebes’ or new-comers. For the first year of their Academy life the ‘plebes’ have rather a hard time of it; but no sooner

do they emerge from their chrysalis state than they are as hard upon their unfortunate successors as the third-class men of the year before were upon them.

“The cadets are delighted with their reception and kind treatment in Philadelphia, and look upon their ten days’ visit to the Centennial as a most pleasant break in the monotony of Academy life. That they maintain the reputation of the Academy for gallantry and devotion to the fair sex is evidenced by the presence of numbers of beautiful young ladies in their camp after dress parade every evening. Given, a pretty girl, the twilight of a summer evening, and a youth in uniform, and the result is easily guessed.

“The Cadet Corps is to return to West Point to-morrow morning. There the cadets are to go into camp until September. General Sherman at one time purposed to have them march from this city to the Academy, but it was finally decided that the march would consume time which might be more profitably devoted to drill.<sup>2</sup>

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2. Flipper has removed an important part of the article, one that refutes his characterization in the previous chapter that the Corps of Cadets was slowly becoming more accepting of him because of his good conduct and demonstrated merit. In the original article, this paragraph closes the “West Point Aristocracy” section. The next section is titled “The Color Line,” which opens with the following lines that Flipper did not include in his transcription of the article:

One of the first class men is Mr. Flipper, of Georgia, a young colored man. “We don’t have anything to do with him off duty,” said one of the Cadets, yesterday. “Of course, we have to eat with him, and drill with him, and go on guard with him, but that ends it. Outside of duty, we don’t know him.” “Is he intelligent?” “Yes; he stands high in his class and I see no reason to doubt that he will graduate next June. He has the negro features strongly developed, but in color he is rather light.”

The article then continues with what Flipper quotes in the next paragraph. Flipper does include the removed portion of the article in chapter XI (see chapter XI, note 6). He quotes the material as coming from *The Times* but does not draw the connection to the rest of the article quoted here.

We cannot know with certainty why Flipper removed those deeply personal lines from an article he otherwise included in its entirety. Perhaps they were too hurtful. But we cannot ignore the fact that he did remove them, and that they did not accord with the larger narrative he has attempted to present to this point: that the average cadet was by nature somewhat egalitarian but was led astray by some larger influence in the environment at West Point; and that he had won over most of his fellow cadets by patiently persisting, turning the other cheek, and demonstrating both merit and exemplary character. Such dissonance is most likely why Flipper removed the offending passage from this chapter, leaving it unaddressed until chapter XI. Regardless of his motives, the original article makes it clear that Flipper’s experience in Philadelphia was much the same as it was at West Point—solitary and silenced. See “Our Future Heroes,” *The Philadelphia Times*, July 6, 1876, p. 1.

“One of the complaints of the cadets is that in the arrangements for their visit, the Quartermaster’s Department was stricken with a spasm of economy as regarded transportation, and each of the future heroes was limited to the miserably insufficient allowance of ten pairs of white trousers.

“The cadets speak in warmly eulogistic terms of the Seventh New York, to whose kindly attentions, they say, much of their pleasure is due.”

Of this article, which was taken from the *Philadelphia Times*, I need only say, those “two or four narrow iron cots” and that “occasional chair” existed solely in the imagination of the reporter, as they were nowhere visible within the limits of our encampment.<sup>3</sup>

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3. Soldiers are practical creatures. While civilians would expect to see bed frames and chairs, cadets would not have had the luxury to carry such heavy and bulky items in a field encampment. Flipper’s understated critique of the reporter’s imagination is emblematic of his personal separation from civilian society and his inner desire to identify with “real” soldiers who would disparage such frivolous creature comforts.

It remains surprising, given the full text of the article as discussed in the previous note, that Flipper felt compelled to intervene only on the issue of camp furniture.

## CHAPTER X.

### TREATMENT.

“A brave and honorable and courteous man  
Will not insult me; and none other can.”—Cowper.<sup>1</sup>

“HOW do they treat you?” “How do you get along?” and multitudes of analogous questions have been asked me over and over again. Many have asked them for mere curiosity’s sake, and to all such my answers have been as short and abrupt as was consistent with common politeness. I have observed that it is this class of people who start rumors, sometimes harmless, but more often the cause of needless trouble and ill-feeling. I have considered such a class dangerous, and have therefore avoided them as much as it was possible. I will mention a single instance where such danger has been made manifest.

A Democratic newspaper, published I know not where, in summing up the faults of the Republican party, took occasion to advert to West Point. It asserted in bold characters that I had stolen a number of articles from two cadets, had by them been detected in the very act, had been seen by several other cadets who had been summoned for the purpose that they might testify against me, had been reported to the proper authorities, the affair had been thoroughly

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1. The earliest source of this commonplace expression may be Seneca, to whom is attributed this version: “A Gentleman would not insult me; no other man can.” Flipper’s attribution to the antislavery British poet William Cowper (1731–1800) closely echoes the version more often attributed to the poet: “A moral, sensible, and well-bred man / Will not insult me; no other can.” The lines also reverberate in racialized American contexts with a variation attributed to Frederick Douglass, which the editors have so far been unable to pin to a specific text by that author: “A gentleman will not insult me, and no man not a gentleman can insult me.” All variations of the expression are enthymemes, or syllogisms that elide or make implicit a premise. The implicit assertion is at least that no man can insult the speaker. See Roy Sorenson, “Stoic Silencing of Insults: How to Sabotage Wrongful Speech,” in *Oxford Studies in Normative Ethics*, ed. Mark C. Timmons (Oxford University Press, 2018), 274–96.

\* *This article was cut from a newspaper, and, together with the name of the paper, was posted in a conspicuous place, where other cadets, as well as myself, saw and read it.*

investigated by them, my guilt established beyond the possibility of doubt, and yet my accusers had actually been dismissed while I was retained.\* This is cited as an example of Republican rule; and the writer had the effrontery to ask, "How long shall such things be?" I did not reply to it then, nor do I intend to do so now. Such assertions from such sources need no replies. I merely mention the incident to show how wholly given to party prejudices some men can be. They seem to have no thought of right and justice, but favor whatever promotes the aims and interests of their own party, a party not Democratic but hellish. How different is the following article from the Philadelphia *North American*, of July 7th, 1876:

"It is very little to the credit of the West Point cadets, a body of young men in whose superior discipline and thoroughly excellent deportment we feel in common with nearly all others a gratified pride, that they should be so ungenerous and unjust as they confess themselves to be in their treatment of the colored boy, who, like themselves, has been made a ward of the nation. We know nothing of this young man's personal character or habits, but we have seen no unkind criticism of them. For that reason we condemn as beneath contempt the spirit which drives him to an isolation, in bearing which the black shows himself the superior of the white. We do not ask nor do we care to encourage any thing more than decent courtesy. But the young gentlemen who boast of holding only official intercourse with their comrade should remember that no one of them stands before the country in any different light from him. West Point is an academy for the training of young men, presumably representative of the people, for a career sufficiently honorable to gratify any ambition. The cadets come from all parts of the country, from all ranks of the social scale. Amalgamated by the uniform course of studies and the similarity of discipline, the separating fragments at the end of the student life carry similar qualities into the life before them, and step with almost remarkable social equality into the world where they must find their level. It would be expecting too much to hope that the companionship which surmounts or breaks down all the barriers of caste, should tread with equal heel the prejudices of color. But it would be more manly in these boys, if they would remember how easy ordinary courtesy would be to them, how much it would lighten the life of a young man whose rights are equal to their own. It is useless to ignore the inevitable. This colored boy has his place; he should have fair, encouragement to hold it. Heaping neglect upon him does not overcome the principle involved in his appointment, and while we by no means approve of such appointments we do believe in common justice."

On the other hand, many have desired this information for a practical use, and that, too, whether they were prejudiced or not. That is, if friends, they were anxious to know how I fared, whether or not I was to be a success, and if a success to use that fact in the interest of the people; and if enemies, they wanted naturally to

know the same things in order to use the knowledge to the injury of the people if I proved a failure.

I have not always been able to distinguish one class from the other, and have therefore been quite reticent about my life and treatment at West Point. I have, too, avoided the newspapers as much as possible. I succeeded in this so well that it was scarcely known that I was at the Academy. Much surprise was manifested when I appeared in Philadelphia at the Centennial. One gentleman said to me in the Government building: "You are quite an exhibition yourself. No one was expecting to see a colored cadet."

But I wander from my theme. It is a remarkable fact that the new cadets, in only a very few instances, show any unwillingness to speak or fraternize. It is not till they come in contact with the rougher elements of the corps that they manifest any disposition to avoid one. It was so in my own class, and has been so in all succeeding classes.

When I was a plebe those of us who lived on the same floor of barracks visited each other, borrowed books, heard each other recite when preparing for examination, and were really on most intimate terms. But alas! in less than a month they learned to call me "nigger," and ceased altogether to visit me. We did the Point together, shared with each other whatever we purchased at the sutler's, and knew not what prejudice was.<sup>2</sup> Alas! we were soon to be informed! In camp, brought into close contact with the old cadets, these once friends discovered that they were prejudiced, and learned to abhor even the presence or sight of a "d—d nigger."<sup>3</sup>

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2. A sutler was authorized to sell recreational goods on or near military posts or reservations. A sutler's inventory could include anything that was not deemed militarily necessary, such as candy, cigars, tea, and various snacks.

3. Flipper makes an important point here, though his meaning is somewhat obscured. Opening the paragraph with "When I was a plebe" makes it appear that Flipper claims to have then enjoyed fair treatment and to have then been "on most intimate terms" with his peers. But Flipper also characterizes his peers' sharp and sudden rejection of him and asserts that the parroting of racist terms happened "in less than a month" while "in camp, [and] brought into close contact with old cadets." This shows that the time in which Flipper felt accepted by his peers was limited to the few weeks between arriving at West Point and joining the summer encampment after passing the entrance exam. In a somewhat guarded way, then, Flipper asserts that West Point quickly bred and perpetuated intolerance within and among those otherwise not inclined to it. Suggesting that most cadets were tolerant but susceptible to an influential racist minority of powerful upperclassmen

Just two years after my entrance into the Academy, I met in New York a young man who was a plebe at the time I was, and who then associated with me. He recognized me, hurried to me from across the street, shook my hand heartily, and expressed great delight at seeing me. He showed me the photograph of a classmate, told me where I could find him, evidently ignorant of my ostracism, and, wishing me all sorts of success, took his leave. After he left me I involuntarily asked myself, "Would it have been thus if he had not been 'found on his prelim?'" Possibly not, but it is very, very doubtful.

There are some, indeed the majority of the corps are such, who treat me on all occasions with proper politeness. They are gentlemen themselves, and treat others as it becomes gentlemen to do. They do not associate, nor do they speak other than officially, except in a few cases. They are perhaps as much prejudiced as the others, but prejudice does not prevent all from being gentlemen. On the other hand, there are some from the very lowest classes of our population. They are uncouth and rough in appearance, have only a rudimentary education, have little or no idea of courtesy, use the very worst language, and in most cases are much inferior to the average negro. What can be expected of such people? They are low, and their conduct must be in keeping with their breeding. I am not at all surprised to find it so. Indeed, in ordinary civil life I should consider such people beneath me in the social scale, should even reckon some of them as roughs, and consequently give them a wide berth.

What surprises me most is the control this class seems to have over the other. It is in this class I have observed most prejudice, and from it, or rather by it, the other becomes tainted. It seems to rule the corps by fear. Indeed, I know there are many who would associate, who would treat me as a brother cadet, were they not held in constant dread of this class. The bullies, the fighting men of the corps are in it. It rules by fear, and whoever disobeys its beck is "cut." The rest of the corps follows like so many menials subject to command. In short, there is a fearful lack of backbone. There is, it seems at first sight, more prejudice at West Point than elsewhere. It is not really so I think.

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reflects not only Flipper's faith in both the Academy and the army's officer corps, but also his struggle to rationalize his mistreatment without overtly criticizing the character of cadets.

The officers of the institution have never, so far as I can say, shown any prejudice at all. They have treated me with uniform courtesy and impartiality. The cadets, at least some of them, away from West Point, have also treated me with such gentlemanly propriety. The want of backbone predominates to such an alarming extent at West Point they are afraid to do so there. I will mention a few cases under this subject of treatment.

During my first-class camp I was rather surprised on one occasion to have a plebe—we had been to the Centennial Exhibition and returned, and of course my status must have been known to him—come to my tent to borrow ink of me. I readily complied with his request, feeling proud of what I thought was the beginning of a new era in my cadet life. I felt he would surely prove himself manly enough, after thus recognizing me, to keep it up, and thus bring others under his influence to the same cause. And I was still further assured in this when I observed he made his visits frequent and open. At length, sure of my willingness to oblige him, he came to me, and, after expressing a desire to “bone up”<sup>4</sup> a part of the fourth-class course, and the need he felt for such “boning,” begged me to lend him my algebra. I of course readily consented, gave him my key, and sent him to my trunk in the trunk rooms to get it. He went. He got it, and returned the key. He went into ecstasies, and made no end of thanks to me for my kindness, etc. All this naturally confirmed my opinion and hope of better recognition ultimately. Indeed, I was glad of an opportunity to prove that I was not unkind or ungenerous. I supposed he would keep the book till about September, at which time he would get one of his own, as every cadet at that time was required to procure a full course of text-books, these being necessary for reference, etc., in future life. And so he did. Some time after borrowing the book, he came to me and asked for India ink. I handed him a stick, or rather part of one, and received as usual his many thanks. Several days after this, and at night, during my absence—I was, if I remember aright, at Fort Clinton making a series of observations with a zenith telescope in the observatory there—he came to the rear of my tent, raised the wall near one corner, and placed the ink on the floor, just inside the wall, which he left down as he found it.

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4. To “bone up” means to study or attempt to learn a large quantity of information quickly.

I found the ink there when I returned. I was utterly disgusted with the man. The low, unmanly way in which he acted was wholly without my approval. If he was disposed to be friendly, why be cowardly about it? If he must recognize me secretly, why, I would rather not have such recognition. Acting a lie to his fellow-cadets by appearing to be inimical to me and my interests, while he pretended the reverse to me, proved him to have a baseness of character with which I didn't care to identify myself.

September came at last, and my algebra was returned. The book was the one I had used my first year at the Academy. I had preserved it, as I have all of my books, for future use and as a sort of souvenir of my cadet life. It was for that sole reason of great value to me. I enjoined upon him to take care of the book, and in nowise to injure it. My name was on the back, on the cover, and my initial, "F," in two other places on the cover. When the book was returned he had cut the calfskin from the cover, so as to remove my name. The result was a horrible disfiguration of the book, and a serious impairment of its durability. The mere sight of the book angered me, and I found it difficult to refrain from manifesting as much. He undoubtedly did it to conceal the fact that the book was borrowed from me. Such unmanliness, such cowardice, such baseness even, was most disgusting; and I felt very much as if I would like to—well, I don't know that I would. There was no reason at all for mutilating the book. If he was not man enough to use it with my name on it, why did he borrow it and agree not to injure it? On that sole condition I lent it. Why did he not borrow some one else's and return mine?

I have been asked, "What is the general feeling of the corps towards you? Is it a kindly one, or is it an unfriendly one. Do they purposely ill-treat you or do they avoid you merely?" I have found it rather difficult to answer unqualifiedly such questions; and yet I believe, and have always believed, that the general feeling of the corps towards me was a kindly one.<sup>5</sup> This has been manifested in

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5. Once again, Flipper's explanation of his mistreatment reveals an abiding belief in an inherently honorable Corps of Cadets. We cannot know with certainty whether he genuinely believed, wanted to believe, or wanted to project to a public audience a belief "that the general feeling of the corps toward me was a kindly one." Much evidence suggests that his white peers were purposefully malicious toward him and other Black cadets at the time. Ernest Garlington was a white cadet who graduated in 1876 and had attended West Point alongside five Black cadets, including Flipper. In his own recollections of West Point, Garlington plainly stated that there

multitudes of ways, on innumerable occasions, and under the most various circumstances. And while there are some who treat me at times in an unbecoming manner, the majority of the corps have ever treated me as I would desire to be treated. I mean, of course, by this assertion that they have treated me as I expected and really desired them to treat me, so long as they were prejudiced. They have held certain opinions more or less prejudicial to me and my interests, but so long as they have not exercised their theories to my displeasure or discomfort, or so long as they have "let me severely alone," I had no just reason for complaint. Again, others, who have no theory of their own, and almost no manliness, have been accustomed "to pick quarrels," or to endeavor to do so, to satisfy I don't know what; and while they have had no real opinions of their own, they have not respected those of others. Their feeling toward me has been any thing but one of justice, and yet at times even they have shown a remarkable tendency to recognize me as having certain rights entitled to their respect, if not their appreciation.

As I have been practically isolated from the cadets, I have had little or no intercourse with them. I have therefore had but little chance to know what was really the feeling of the corps as a unit toward myself. Judging, however, from such evidences as I have, I am forced to conclude that it is as given above, viz., a feeling of kindness, restrained kindness if you please.

Here are some of the evidences which have come under my notice.

I once heard a cadet make the following unchristian remark about myself when a classmate had been accidentally hurt at light-battery drill: "I wish it had been the nigger, and it had killed him." I couldn't help looking at him, and I did; but that, and

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was no "social intercourse between the white cadets and the negro cadets" because such an association would mean that "they occupied the same status as the white cadets." Additionally, Garlington's classmate Eben Swift makes it abundantly clear in his own unpublished memoir that white West Point cadets disdainfully parodied their Black classmates in doggerels and minstrel shows. This suggests much more than mere avoidance and challenges Flipper's belief that the Corps of Cadets felt kindly toward him and others like him.

See Ernest Garlington to General Smith, July 15, 1929, p. 42, Ernest A. Garlington Manuscript File, United States Military Academy Library Special Collections and Archives, West Point, NY; and Eben Swift, "Unpublished Memoir" (handwritten copy), pp. 48-49, Eben Swift Manuscript Files, United States Military Academy Library Special Collections and Archives, West Point, NY.

nothing more. Some time after this, at cavalry drill, we were side by side, and I had a rather vicious horse, one in fact which I could not manage. He gave a sudden jump unexpectedly to me. I almost lost my seat in the saddle. This cadet seized me by the arm, and in a tone of voice that was evidently kind and generous, said to me, "For heaven's sake be careful. You'll be thrown and get hurt if you don't." How different from that other wish given above!

Another evidence, and an important one, may be given in these words. It is customary for the senior, or, as we say, the first class, to choose, each member, a horse, and ride him exclusively during the term. The choice is usually made by lot, and each man chooses according to the number he draws. By remarkable good fortune I drew No. 1, and had therefore the first choice of all the horses in the stables.

As soon as the numbers drawn were published, several classmates hastened to me for the purpose of effecting an exchange of choice. It will at once be seen that any such change would in no manner benefit me, for if I lost the first choice I might also lose the chance of selecting a good horse. With the avowed intention of proving that I had at least a generous disposition, and also that I was not disposed to consider, in my reciprocal relations with the cadets, how I had been, and was even then treated by them, I consented to exchange my first choice for the fourteenth.

This agreement was made with the first that asked for an exchange. Several others came, and, when informed of the previous agreement, of course went their way. A day or two after this a number of cadets were discussing the choice of horses, etc., and reverted to the exchange which I had made. One of them suggested that if an exchange of a choice higher than fourteen were suggested to me, I might accept it.

What an idea, he must have had of my character to suppose me base enough to disregard an agreement I had already made!

However, all in the crowd were not as base as he was, and one of them was man enough to say:

"Oh no! that would be imposing upon Mr. Flipper's good nature." He went on to show how ungentlemanly and unbecoming in a "cadet and gentleman" such an act would be. The idea was abandoned, or at least was never broached to me, and if it had been I would never have entertained it. Such an act on the part of the cadet could have arisen only from a high sense of manly honor or from a feeling of kindness.

There are multitudes of little acts of kindness similar to these, and even different ones. I need not—indeed as I do not remember them all I cannot—mention them all. They all show, however, that the cadets are not avowedly inclined to ill-treat me, but rather to assist me to make my life under the circumstances as pleasant as can be. And there may be outside influences, such as relatives or friends, which bias their own better judgments and keep them from fully and openly recognizing me. For however hard either way may be, it is far easier to do as friends wish than as conscience may dictate, when conscience and friends differ. Under such conditions it would manifestly be unjust for me to expect recognition of them, even though they themselves were disposed to make it. I am sure this is at least a Christian view of the case, and with such view I have ever kept aloof from the cadets. I have not obtruded myself upon them, nor in any way attempted to force recognition from them. This has proved itself to be by far the better way, and I don't think it could well be otherwise.

The one principle which has controlled my conduct while a cadet, and which is apparent throughout my narrative, is briefly this: to find, if possible, for every insult or other offence a reason or motive which is consistent with the character of a gentleman.<sup>6</sup> Whenever I have been insulted, or any thing has been done or said

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6. Flipper's wording in this sentence is vague, perhaps deliberately so. It is unclear whether he sought to find gentlemanly motives in mistreatment because he genuinely believed they were there, or if he did so more as a defensive response meant to fortify his faith in West Point and the Army, as well as his sense of belonging at West Point and within the Army. It could have been both. The latter is an understandable response to his unique circumstances, and the former is consistent with the views of committed West Point institutionalists, among whom Flipper attempts to position himself throughout his memoir. One such institutionalist was Peter Michie, an instructor at West Point during the Reconstruction era, who in late 1880 wrote an impassioned defense against charges that West Point was a breeding ground of aristocracy and racial animus. He celebrated the character of both the institution and the Corps of Cadets, responding to critics by claiming that "the one sure, strong safeguard of the Military Academy is the degree to which its pupils hold sacred their word of honor." He used this sense of honor as evidence that blind racial animus could not exist at West Point. This created a self-reinforcing narrative that West Pointers could not be intolerant, dishonest, or behave dishonorably, because West Point cadets were honorable and fair-minded and would never lie. Flipper's search for gentlemanly qualities in his tormentors shows him to be a West Point institutionalist in much the same way Michie was. See Peter S. Michie, "Caste at West Point," *The North American Review* 130, no. 283 (June 1880): 608.

to me which might have that construction, I have endeavored to find some excuse, some reason for it, which was not founded on prejudice or on baseness of character or any other ungentlemanly attribute; or, in other words, I wanted to prove that it was not done because of my color. If I could find such a reason—and I have found them—I have been disposed not only to overlook the offence, but to forgive and forget it. Thus there are many cadets who would associate, etc., were they not restrained by the force of opinion of relatives and friends. This cringing dependence, this vassalage, this mesmerism we may call it, we all know exists. Why, many a cadet has openly confessed to me that he did not recognize us because he was afraid of being “cut.”<sup>7</sup>

Again, I find some too high-toned, too punctilious, to recognize me. I attribute this not to the loftiness of their highnesses nor to prejudice, but to the depth of their ignorance, and of course I forgive and forget. Others again are so “reckless,” so “don’t care” disposed, that they treat me as fancy dictates, now friendly, now vacillating, and now inimical. With these I simply do as the Romans do. If they are friendly, so am I; if they scorn me, I do not obtrude myself upon them; if they are indifferent, I am indifferent too.

There is a rather remarkable case under this subject which has caused me no little surprise and disappointment. I refer to those cadets appointed by colored members of Congress.

It was quite natural to expect of them better treatment than of others, and yet if in any thing at all they differed from the former, they were the more reserved and discourteous. They most “severely let me alone.” They never associated, nor did they speak, except officially, and then they always spoke in a haughty and insolent

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7. The process of “cutting” a cadet from the corps was a well-known practice of socially isolating and ostracizing a cadet for a perceived violation of the norms of the Academy. In a letter lengthy enough to be an unpublished memoir, Ernest Garlington recounted his experience in facilitating a cadet being “cut.” The upper-classmen of West Point attempted to cut Cadet Robinson, a plebe, because he reported a senior cadet for asking him to pile that cadet’s bedding. Garlington was charged with letting Cadet Robinson know that he had been “cut” after a resolution was run and passed along to the firstie class, with the promise of retribution for those who violated the resolution. Flipper’s assertion that a cadet would refuse to engage with them out a fear of social isolation was a genuine and pressing concern. See Ernest Garlington to General Smith, July 15, 1929, p. 35, Ernest A. Garlington Manuscript Files, United States Military Academy Library Special Collections and Archives, West Point, NY.

manner that was to me most exasperating. And in one case in particular was this so. One of those so appointed was the son of the colored Congressman who sent him there, and from him at least good treatment was reasonably expected. There have been only two such appointments to my knowledge, and it is a singular fact that they were both overbearing, conceited, and by no means popular with their comrades. The status of one was but little better than my own, and only in that his comrades would speak and associate. He was not “cut,” but avoided as much as possible without making the offence too patent.<sup>8</sup>

There was a cadet in the corps with myself who invariably dropped his head whenever our eyes met. His complexion was any thing but white, his features were rough and homely, and his person almost entirely without symmetry or beauty. From this singular circumstance and his physique, I draw the conclusion that he was more African than Anglo-Saxon. Indeed, I once heard as much insinuated by a fellow-cadet, to whom his reply was: “It’s an honor to be black.”<sup>9</sup>

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8. Flipper attended West Point as Reconstruction entered its final phase. Most of his tenure at West Point coincided with the 43rd and 44th Congresses, which sat from March 1873 to March 1875 and March 1875 to March 1877, respectively, a period which marked the high tide of Black Congressional membership until the 91st Congress convened in 1969. While Flipper was a cadet, only three cadets bearing nominations from Black members of Congress gained admission to the Academy. They included William T. Howard—a South Carolinian admitted in 1872 with the class of 1876 who never graduated; Thomas A.G. Simms—another South Carolinian admitted in 1873 with the class of 1877 who also never graduated; and James Watson, who gained admission from Mississippi in 1876 and graduated with the class of 1880. Because none of the three was the son of a Black congressman, Flipper’s statement is not entirely true, though he may reasonably have mistaken the son of a state legislator for the son of a federal congressman. If true, that cadet would have had to hide in plain sight and rely upon the comparative anonymity of state legislators relative to members of Congress. According to American social norms at the time, any amount of Black ancestry made a person Black. Sons of Black parents could only escape the harassment, ostracism, and isolation that so plagued Flipper and other Black cadets if their parentage was somehow kept secret or otherwise hidden. For African American membership in Congress, see U.S. House of Representatives, *Black Americans in Congress, 1870–2007* (Government Printing Office, 2008), Appendix B.

9. Flipper plainly asserts here that while he was a cadet, there was another Black or biracial cadet who passed as white to avoid harassment. It is possible that his anecdote could have been a misinterpreted pun rooted in a name—Flipper’s classmate William Murray Black graduated at the top of the class of 1877, excelled in a long

Near the close of this chapter I have occasion to speak of fear. There I mean by fear a sort of shrinking demeanor or disposition to accept insults and other petty persecutions as just dues, or to leave them unpunished from actual cowardice, to which fear some have been pleased to attribute my generally good treatment. This latter fact has been by many, to my personal knowledge, attributed to fear in another quarter, viz., in the cadets themselves. It has many times been said to me by persons at West Point and elsewhere: "I don't suppose many of those fellows would care to encounter you?"

This idea was doubtless founded upon my physical proportions—I am six feet one and three-quarter inches high, and weigh one hundred and seventy-five pounds. In behalf of the corps of cadets I would disclaim any such notions of fear,

*First.* Because the conception of the idea is not logical. I was not the tallest, nor yet the largest man in the corps, nor even did I give any evidence of a disposition to fight or bully others.

*Second.* Because I did not come to West Point purposely to "go through on my muscle." I am not a fighting character, as the cadets—those who know me—can well testify.

*Third.* Because it is ungenerous to attribute what can result from man's better nature only to such base causes as fear or cowardice. This seems to be about the only way in which many have endeavored to explain the difference between my life at West Point

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career in which he rose to the rank of major general, and served as Chief of the Corps of Engineers during World War I. Given humor conventions of the time, it is entirely possible that Flipper overheard a play on Black's name. It is equally possible, however, that Flipper was keenly aware of one or more Black cadets passing as white. Cadet William Achilles Hare, an African American cadet admitted to West Point in 1885, was not immediately recognized as a Black man. Not long into his short tenure at West Point, Hare wrote to Senator John P. Green to explain the mistreatment Black cadets were experiencing at the Academy from the unique perspective of a Black cadet to whom white cadets aired their grievances about Black cadets because they neither knew nor suspected his racial status. In the end, Hare decided to reveal his status as an act of solidarity that cost him dearly—Hare departed West Point after being found deficient in both academics and discipline in January 1886. But Hare's ordeal reveals that other young Black men could have hidden themselves within West Point's white community before, during, or after Henry O. Flipper's cadetship. On William A. Hare, see Brian G. Shellum, *Black Cadet in a White Bastion: Charles Young at West Point* (University of Nebraska Press, 2006), 60; and "Statement Showing the Number of Colored Persons Appointed to the U.S. Military Academy," October 21, 1886, RG 404, United States Military Academy Library Special Collections and Archives.

and that of other colored cadets. They seem to think that my physique inspired a sort of fear in the cadets, and forced them at least to let me alone, while the former ones, smaller in size, did therefore create no such fear until by persistent retaliation it was shown they were able to defend themselves.

Now this, I think, is the most shallow of all reasoning and entirely unworthy our further notice.

*Fourth.* I should be grieved to suppose any one feared me. It is not my desire to go through life feared by any one. I can derive no pleasure from any thing which is accorded me through motives of fear. The grant must be spontaneous and voluntary to give me the most pleasure. I want nothing, not even recognition, unless it be freely given, hence have I not forced myself upon my comrades.

“But the sensible Flipper accepted the situation, and proudly refused to intrude himself on the white boys.”—*Atlanta (Ga.) Herald.*

*Fifth.* Because it is incompatible with the dignity of a “cadet and a gentleman” for one to fear another.<sup>10</sup>

*Sixth.* Because it is positively absurd to suppose that one man of three hundred more or less would be feared by the rest individually and collectively, and no rational being would for an instant entertain any such idea. There is, however, a single case which may imply fear on the part of the cadet most concerned. A number of plebes, among them a colored one, were standing on the stoop of barracks. There were also several cadets standing in the doorway, and a sentinel was posted in the hall. This latter individual went up to one of the cadets and said to him, “Make that nigger out there get his hands around,” referring to this plebe mentioned above.<sup>11</sup>

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10. It is interesting that Flipper states fearing other cadets was “incompatible” with central tenets of the cadet identity. At the same time, he attributes his mistreatment to the ability of the most prejudiced cadets to rule the corps through fear. This comparison highlights a tension between Flipper’s view of the nature of cadets, their actions, and their individual and collective character. As noted previously, Flipper’s assessment of the inherently honorable nature of the corps reflects the self-perpetuating institutionalism prevalent among the West Point community at that time.

11. The plebe in question had to have been Johnson Chestnut Whittaker, who was the only other Black cadet admitted to West Point while Flipper was an upperclassman—which is implied in the next paragraph. Whittaker arrived at West Point on August 25, 1876, as Flipper was nearing the end of first-class camp and about to start his final academic year. See “Statement Showing the Number of Colored Persons Appointed Candidates for Admission to the U.S. Military Academy,

I happened to come down stairs just at that time, and as soon as he uttered those words he turned and saw me. He hung his head, and in a cowardly manner sneaked off, while the cadets in the door also dispersed with lowered heads. Was it fear? Verily I know not. Possibly it was shame.

Again I recall a rather peculiar circumstance which will perhaps sustain this notion of fear on the part of the cadets. I have on every occasion when I had command over my fellow-cadets in any degree, noticed that they were generally more orderly and more obedient than when this authority was exercised by another.

Thus whenever I commanded the guard there were very few reports for offences committed by members of the guard. They have ever been obedient and military. In camp, when I was first in command of the guard, I had a most orderly guard and a very pleasant tour, and that too, observe, while some of the members of it were plebes and on for the first time. On all such occasions it is an immemorial custom for the yearlings to interfere with and haze the plebe sentinels. Not a sentinel was disturbed, not a thing went amiss, and why? Manifestly because it was thought—and rightly too—that I would not connive at such interference, and because they feared to attempt it lest they be watched and reported. Later, however, even this semblance of fear disappeared, and they acted under me precisely as they do under others, because they are convinced that I will not stoop to spy or retaliate.

“The boys were rather afraid that when he should come to hold the position as officer of the guard that he would swagger over them; but he showed good sense and taste, merely assuming the rank formally and leaving his junior to carry out the duty.” —*New York Herald*.

And just here it is worthy of notice that the press, in commenting upon my chances of graduating, has never, so far as I know, entertained any doubts of my ability to do so. It has, on the contrary, expressed the belief that the probability of my graduating depended upon the officers of the Academy, and upon any others who, by influence or otherwise, were connected with the Academy. Some have even hinted at politics as a possible ground upon which they might drop me.

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October 21, 1886,” RG 404, USMA Library Special Collections and Archives. For Whittaker’s own tortured experience of West Point, see John F. Marszalek, *Assault at West Point: The Court-Martial of Johnson Whittaker* (Collier Books, 1972).

All such opinions have been created and nurtured by the hostile portion of the press, and, I regret to say, by that part also which ought to have been more friendly, if not more discreet. No branch of the government is freer from the influences and whims of politicians than the National Military Academy. Scarcely any paper has considered how the chances of any cadet depended upon himself alone. The authorities of the Academy are, or have been, officers of the army. They are, with one or two exceptions, graduates, and therefore, presumably, "officers and gentlemen." To transform young men into a like ilk as themselves is their duty. The country intrusts them with this great responsibility. To prove faithless to such a charge would be to risk position, and even those dearer attributes of the soldier, honor and reputation. They would not dare ill-treat a colored cadet or a white one. Of course the prejudice of race is not yet overcome entirely, and possibly they may be led into some indiscretion on account of it; but I do not think it would be different at any other college in the country. It is natural.<sup>12</sup>

There are prejudices of caste as well as prejudices of race, and I am most unwilling to believe it possible that any officer would treat with injustice a colored cadet who in true gentlemanly qualities, intelligence, and assiduousness equals or excels certain white ones who are treated with perfect equanimity. With me it has not been so. I have been treated as I would wish to be in the majority of cases. There have been of course occasions where I've fancied wrong had been done me. I expected to be ill-treated. I went to

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12. Here Flipper simultaneously suggests that the faculty and Corps of Cadets were too honorable to mistreat a Black cadet and that they would be acting on a natural, justifiable inclination if they were biased toward Black people. This sentiment mirrors contradictory arguments offered later by some faculty who sought to defend West Point against charges of impropriety after the Academy accused Whittaker with having faked or coordinated a heinous assault that he suffered in spring 1880, allegedly to avoid examinations. In rhetoric that echoes some of Flipper's own passages, Professor George Andrews (West Point's long-serving professor of French—see chapter VIII, note 6) claimed that cadets were simultaneously too influenced by the prejudice of their upbringing and the general national attitude toward Black people, and, because of their natural honor and integrity as cadets, lacking any enmity toward Black cadets. Here as elsewhere, it is unclear whether Flipper is attempting to present the only interpretation he could without alienating an Army officer corps comprised largely of West Point graduates, or if he had genuinely internalized an unshakable faith in the honor and good character of the Corps of Cadets. See George L. Andrews, "West Point and the Colored Cadets." *The International Review*, IX (November 1880), 477–98.

West Point fully convinced that I'd have "a rough time of it." Who that has read the many newspaper versions of the treatment of colored cadets, and of Smith in particular would not have been so convinced? When, therefore, any affront or any thing seemingly of that nature was offered me, I have been disposed, naturally I think, to unduly magnify it, because I expected it. This was hasty and unjust, and so I admit, now that I am better informed. What was apparently done to incommode or discourage me has been shown to have been done either for my own benefit or for some other purpose, not to my harm. In every single instance I have, after knowing better the reason for such acts, felt obliged to acknowledge the injustice of my fears. At other times I have been agreeably surprised at the kindnesses shown me both by officers and cadets, and have found myself at great loss to reconcile them with acts I had already adjudged as malicious wrongs.

I have, too, been particularly careful not to fall into an error, which, I think, has been the cause of misfortune to at least one of the cadets of color. If a cadet affront another, if a white cadet insult a colored one for instance, the latter can complain to the proper authorities, and, if there be good reason for it, can always get proper redress. This undoubtedly gives the consolation of knowing that the offence will not be repeated, but beyond that I think it a great mistake to have so sought it. A person who constantly complains, even with some show of reason, loses more or less the respect of the authorities. And the offenders, while they refrain from open acts, do nevertheless conduct their petty persecutions in such a manner that one can shape no charge against them, and consequently finds himself helpless. One must endure these little tortures—the sneer, the shrug of the shoulder, the epithet, the effort to avoid, to disdain, to ignore—and thus suffer; for any of them are—to me at least—far more hard to bear than a blow. A blow I may resist or ignore. In either case I soon forget it. But a sneer, a shrug of the shoulder, mean more. Either is a blow at my sensitiveness, my inner feelings, and which through no ordinary effort of mind can be altogether forgotten. It is a sting that burns long and fiercely. How much better to have ignored the greater offences which could be reached, and to have thus avoided the lesser ones, which nothing can destroy! How much wiser to stand like a vast front of fortification, on some rocky moral height absolutely unassailable, passively resisting alike the attack by open assault and the surer one by regular approaches! The assault can be repulsed, but who can, who has ever successfully

stopped the mines and the galleries through which an entrance is at length forced into the interior?

“We cannot expect the sons to forget the lessons of the sires; but we have a right to demand from the general government the rooting out of all snobbery at West Point, whether it is of that kind which sends poor white boys to Coventry, because they haven’t a family name or wealth, or whether it be that smallest, meanest, and shallowest of all aristocracies—the one founded upon color.

“If the government is not able to root out these unrepugnant seeds in these hotbeds of disloyalty and snobbery, let Congress shut up the useless and expensive appendages and educate its officers at the colleges of the country, where they may learn lessons in true Republican equality and nationality. The remedy lies with Congress. A remonstrance, at least, should be heard from the colored members of Congress, who are insulted whenever a colored boy is ill-treated by the students or the officers of these institutions. So far from being discouraged by defeats, the unjust treatment meted out to the young men should redouble the efforts of others of their class to conquer this new Bastille by storm. It should lead every colored Congressman to make sure that he either sends a colored applicant or a white one who has not the seeds of snobbery or caste in his soul.”<sup>13</sup>

I shall consider this last clause at the end of this chapter, where I shall quote at length the article from which this passage is taken.

If I may be pardoned an opinion on this article, I do not think the true remedy lies with Congress at all. I do not question the right to demand of Congress any thing, but I do doubt the propriety or need of such a proceeding, of course, in the case under consideration. As to “that kind which sends poor white boys to Coventry,” because of their poverty, etc., I can say with absolute truthfulness it no longer exists. When it did exist the power to discontinue it did not lie with Congress. Congress has no control over personal whims or prejudices. But I make a slight mistake. There was a time

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13. After the Civil War, West Point faced criticism for its graduates who had violated their oaths and fought for the Confederacy. Some in Congress even debated closing West Point in favor of other means of educating and training Army officers. The treatment of Black cadets during the Reconstruction era was inseparable from negative connections many American citizens drew between West Point and the South. Newspaper accounts criticizing the Academy for the abuse Black cadets endured often attempted to connect the Corps of Cadets and West Point itself to those who fought to maintain slavery under the Confederacy during the Civil War. See Adam Domby, “A Nursery of Treason Remade? Reconstruction Politics and the Rise and Fall of West Point’s First Black Cadets,” in *Race, Politics, and Reconstruction at Old West Point*, eds. Rory McGovern and Ronald G. Machoian (University of Virginia Press, 2024), 15–43.

when influence, wealth, or position was able to secure a cadetship. At that time poor boys very rarely succeeded in getting an appointment, and when they did they were most unmercifully "cut" by the snobs of aristocracy who were at the Academy. Then the remedy did lie with Congress. The appointments could have been so made as to exclude those snobs whose only recommendation was their position in society, and so also as to admit boys who were deserving, although they were perhaps poor. This remedy has been made, and all classes (white), whether poor or rich, influential or not, are on terms of absolute equality.

But for that other kind, "the one founded upon color," Congress has no remedy, no more than for fanaticism or something of that kind.

This article also tells us that "the government has been remiss in not throwing around them the protection of its authority." I disdainfully scout the idea of such protection. If my manhood cannot stand without a governmental prop, then let it fall. If I am to stand on any other ground than the one white cadets stand upon, then I don't want the cadetship. If I cannot endure prejudice and persecutions, even if they are offered, then I don't deserve the cadetship, and much less the commission of an army officer. But there is a remedy, a way to root out snobbery and prejudice which but needs adoption to have the desired effect. Of course its adoption by a single person, myself for instance, will not be sufficient to break away all the barriers which prejudice has brought into existence. I am quite confident, however, if adopted by all colored cadets, it will eventually work out the difficult though by no means insoluble problem, and give us further cause for joy and congratulations.

The remedy lies solely in our case with us. We can make our life at West Point what we will. We shall be treated by the cadets as we treat them. Of course some of the cadets are low—they belong to the younger classes—and good treatment cannot be expected of them at West Point nor away from there. The others, presumably gentlemen, will treat everybody else as becomes gentlemen, or at any rate as they themselves are treated. For, as Josh Billings quaintly tells us, "a gentleman kant hide hiz true karakter enny more than a loafer kan."

Prejudice does not necessarily prevent a man's being courteous and gentlemanly in his relations with others. If, then, they be prejudiced and treat one with ordinary civility, or even if they let one "severely alone," is there any harm done? Is such a course of

conduct to be denounced? Religiously, yes; but in the manner of every-day life and its conventionalities, I say not by any means. I have the right—no one will deny it—of choosing or rejecting as companions whomsoever I will. If my choice be based upon color, am I more wrong in adopting it than I should be in adopting any other reason? It may be an unchristian opinion or fancy that causes me to do it, but such opinion or fancy is my own, and I have a right to it. No one objects to prejudice as such, but to the treatment it is supposed to cause. If one is disposed to ill-treat another, he'll do it, prejudiced or not prejudiced. Only low persons are so disposed, and happily so for West Point, and indeed for the whole country.

“The system of competitive examination for admission, so largely adopted within the past few years in many of our large cities, has resulted in recruiting the corps with lads of bright intellect and more than ordinary attainments, while the strict physical examination has rigorously excluded all but those of good form and perfect health. The competitive system has also given to the Academy students who want to learn, instead of lads who are content to scramble through the prescribed course as best they can, escaping being ‘found’ (a cadet term equivalent to the old college word ‘plucked’) by merely a hair’s-breadth.”

The old way of getting rid of the rough, uncouth characters was to “find” them. Few, very few of them, ever got into the army. Now they are excluded by the system of competitive examination even from entering the Military Academy, and if they should succeed in getting to West Point, they eventually fail, since men with no fixed purpose cannot graduate at West Point.

Now if the “colored cadets” be not of this class also, then their life at West Point will not be much harder than that of the others. The cadets may not associate, but what of that? Am I to blame a man who prefers not to associate with me? If that be the only charge against him, then my verdict is for acquittal. Though his conduct arises from, to us, false premises, it is to his sincere convictions right, and we would not in the slightest degree be justified in forcing him into our way of looking at it. In other words, the remedy does not lie with Congress.

The kind of treatment we are to receive at the hands of others depends entirely upon ourselves. I think my life at West Point sufficiently proves the truth of this assertion. I entered the Academy at a time when, as one paper had it, West Point was a “hotbed of disloyalty and snobbery, a useless and expensive appendage.” I

expected all sorts of ill-treatment, and yet from the day I entered till the day I graduated I had not cause to utter so much as an angry word. I refused to obtrude myself upon the white cadets, and treated them all with uniform courtesy. I have been treated likewise. It simply depended on me what sort of treatment I should receive. I was careful to give no cause for bad treatment, and it was never put upon me. In making this assertion I purposely disregard the instances of malice, etc., mentioned elsewhere, for the reason that I do not believe they were due to any deep personal convictions of my inferiority or personal desire to impose upon me, but rather were due to the fear of being “cut” if they had acted otherwise.<sup>14</sup>

Our relations have been such, as any one will readily observe, that even officially they would have been obliged to recognize me to a greater or less extent, or at the expense of their consciences ignore me. They have done both, as circumstances and not inclination have led them to do.

A rather unexpected incident occurred in the summer of '73, which will show perhaps how intense is that gravitating force—if I may so term it—which so completely changes the feelings of the plebes, and even cadets, who, when they reported, were not at all prejudiced on account of color.

It was rather late at night and extremely dark. I was on guard and on post at the time. Approaching the lower end of my post, No. 5, I heard my name called in a low tone by some one whom I did not recognize. I stopped and listened. The calling was repeated, and I drew near the place whence it came. It proved to be a cadet,

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14. In June 1870, shortly after their arrival, James W. Smith and Michael Howard were attacked by a fellow prospective cadet, Robert McChord from Kentucky. McChord took offense when Smith and Howard, both Black men, did not move from a doorway when he pushed by. McChord physically assaulted Howard, with others in the crowd shouting racial epithets and death threats throughout the fracas. Afterward, McChord received no formal reprimand or punishment for his actions, and suggestions abounded that Smith and Howard had instigated the whole affair. The implication that Black cadets were instigators and culpable in their own mistreatment was widespread in the early 1870s, especially for Smith. Flipper was conscious of that fact and deliberately tried to distance himself from Smith's reputation and memory both at West Point and in his account of West Point. By noting that he “refused to obtrude himself upon the white cadets,” Flipper attempted to distinguish himself in the eyes of his audience from the three Black cadets who preceded him and failed to graduate. See Rory McGovern, Makonen Campbell, and Louisa Koebrich, “‘I Hope to Have Justice Done Me or I Can’t Get Along Here’: James Webster Smith and West Point,” *Journal of Military History* 87 (October 2023): 975–79.

a classmate of mine, and then a sentinel on the adjacent post, No. 4. We stood and talked quite awhile, as there was no danger either of being seen by other cadets—an event which those who in any manner have recognized me have strenuously avoided—or “hived standing on post.” It was too dark. He expressed great regret at my treatment, hoped it would be bettered, assured me that he would ever be a friend and treat me as a gentleman should.

Another classmate told me, at another time, in effect the same thing. I very naturally expected a fulfilment of these promises, but alas! for such hopes! They not only never fulfilled them, but treated me even as badly as all the others. One of them was assigned a seat next to me at table. He would eat scarcely anything, and when done with that he would draw his chair away and pretend to be imposed upon in the most degrading manner possible. The other practised similar manoeuvres whenever we fell in at any formation of company or section. They both called me “nigger,” or “d—d nigger,” as suited their inclination. Yet this ought, I verily believe, to be attributed not to them, but to the circumstances that led them to adopt such a course.

On one occasion, however, one of them brought to my room the integration of some differential equation in mechanics which had been sent me by our instructor. He was very friendly then, apparently. He told me upon leaving, if I desired any further information to come to his “house,” and he would give it. I observed that he called me “*Mr. Flipper.*”

One winter’s night, while on guard in barracks during supper, a cadet of the next class above my own stopped on my post and conversed with me as long as it was safe to do so. He expressed—as all have who have spoken to me—great regret that I should be so isolated, asked how I got along in my studies, and many other like questions. He spoke at great length of my general treatment. He assured me that he was wholly unprejudiced, and would ever be a friend. He even went far enough to say, to my great astonishment, that he cursed me and my race among the cadets to keep up appearances with them, and that I must think none the less well of him for so doing. It was a sort of necessity, he said, for he would not only be “cut,” but would be treated a great deal worse than I was if he should fraternize with me. Upon leaving me he said, “I’m d—d sorry to see you come here to be treated so, but I am glad to see you stay.”

Unfortunately the gentleman failed at the examination, then not far distant, and of course did not have much opportunity to give proof of his friendship. And thus,

“The walk, the words, the gesture could supply,  
The habit mimic and the mien belie.”<sup>15</sup>

When the plebes reported in '76, and were given seats in the chapel, three of them were placed in the pew with myself. We took seats in the following order, viz., first the commandant of the pew, a sergeant and a classmate of mine, then a third-classman, myself, and the plebes. Now this arrangement was wholly unsatisfactory to the third-classman, who turned to the sergeant and asked of him to place a plebe between him and myself. The sergeant turned toward me, and with an angry gesture ordered me to “Get over there.” I refused, on the ground that the seat I occupied had been assigned me, and I therefore had no authority to change it. Near the end of the service the third-classman asked the sergeant to tell me to sit at the further end of the seat. He did so. I refused on the same ground as before. He replied, “Well, it don’t make any difference. I’ll see that your seat is changed.” I feared he would go to the cadet quartermaster, who had charge of the arrangement of seats, and have my seat changed without authority. I reported to the officer in charge of the new cadets, and explained the whole affair to him.

“You take the seat,” said he, “assigned you in the guard house”—the plan of the church, with names written on the pews, was kept here, so that cadets could consult it and know where their seats were—“and if anybody wants you to change it tell them I ordered you to keep it.”

The next Sabbath I took it. I was ordered to change it. I refused on the authority just given above. The sergeant then went to the

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15. Flipper draws this quotation from John Dryden’s translation of the story of Ceyx and Alcyone, from the tenth book of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. In the larger Ovidian context, Morpheus, the god of dreams, takes “The shape of man” and appears before Alcyone in the fashion Flipper cites. Morpheus is the bearer of sad news in Ovid’s tale, but leaving that aside here, Flipper’s point seems to be that this caring “gentleman” disappeared before the friendship could prove real; Flipper was left with only mimicry, a false and untested semblance of a man, friend, and ally. See John Dryden, “Ceyx and Alcyone,” in *The Works of John Dryden* (William Miller, 1808), 148.

commandant of cadets, who by some means got the impression that I desired to change my seat. He sent for me and emphatically ordered me to keep the seat which had by his order been assigned me. Thus the effort to change my seat, made by the third-classman through the sergeant, but claimed to have been made by me, failed. It was out of the question for it to be otherwise. If the sergeant had wanted the seat himself he would in all probability have got it, because he was my senior in class and lineal rank. But the third-classman was my junior in both, and therefore could not, by any military regulation, get possession of what I was entitled to by my superior rank. And the effort to do so must be regarded a marvellous display of stupidity, or a belief on the part of the cadet that I could be imposed upon with impunity, simply because I was alone and had shown no disposition to quarrel or demand either real or imaginary rights.<sup>16</sup>

While in New York during my furlough—summer of '75—I was introduced to one of her wealthy bankers. We conversed quite a while on various topics, and finally resumed the subject on which we began, viz., West Point. He named a cadet, whom I shall call for convenience John, and asked if I knew him. I replied in the affirmative. After asking various other questions of him, his welfare, etc., he volunteered the following bit of information:

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16. In a clear assertion of his rightful membership in the Corps of Cadets and the Army, Flipper uses the regulations to defend himself from attempts to “put him in his place,” or deny him the privileges of his class and rank. West Point’s unique setting and the specificity of the rules provided him with avenues of recourse—a new product of the Reconstruction-era social climate. At West Point, Flipper was entitled, without exception, to the benefits of his class. While other cadets could be malicious toward him in informal settings and otherwise actively strive to cause him trouble, Flipper could not be prevented from performing his class duties. He saw it as his responsibility to assert himself when others violated the rights and privileges due to a cadet of his rank and class, as another episode described on pages 208–209 later in this chapter demonstrates. In this small way, Flipper emphasized his newfound equality within the strict structures of the Academy while still being denied social equality with his peers. This reflects the state of white public opinion in the United States after the Civil War, which featured increased, though far from universal, tolerance of civic equality for African Americans, balanced by widespread opposition to social equality among the races. For a succinct explanation of Reconstruction-era distinctions between social and civic equality, see Michael W. Fitzgerald, *Splendid Failure: Postwar Reconstruction in the American South* (Ivan R. Dee, 2007), 120.

“Oh! yes,” said he, “I’ve known John for several years. He used to peddle newspapers around the bank here. I was agreeably surprised when I heard he had been appointed to a cadetship at West Point. The boys who come in almost every morning with their papers told me John was to sell me no more papers. His mother has scrubbed out the office here, and cleaned up daily for a number of years. John’s a good fellow though, and I’m glad to know of his success.”

This information was to me most startling. There certainly was nothing dishonorable in that sort of labor—nay, even there was much in it that deserved our highest praise. It was honest, humble work. But who would imagine from the pompous bearing assumed by the gentleman that he ever peddled newspapers, or that his mother earned her daily bread by scrubbing on her knees office floors? And how does this compare with the average negro?

It is not to me very pleasant to thus have another’s private history revealed, but when it is done I can’t help feeling myself better in one sense at least than my self-styled superiors. I certainly am not really one thing and apparently another. The distant haughtiness assumed by some of them, and the constant endeavor to avoid me, as if I were “a stick or a stone, the veriest poke of creation,” had no other effect than to make me feel as if I were really so, and to discourage and dishearten me. I hardly know how I endured it all so long. If I were asked to go over it all again, even with the experience I now have, I fear I should fail. I mean of course the strain on my mind and sensitiveness would be so great I’d be unable to endure it.

There is that in every man, it has been said, either good or bad, which will manifest itself in his speech or acts. Keeping this in mind while I constantly study those around me, I find myself at times driven to most extraordinary conclusions. If some are as good as their speech, then, if I may be permitted to judge, they have most devoutly observed that blessed commandment, “Honor thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee,” in that they have profited by their teaching both mentally and morally.

On the other hand, we hear from many the very worst possible language. Some make pardonable errors, while others make blunders for which there can be no excuse save ignorance. Judging their character by their speech, what a sad condition must be theirs; and more, what a need for missionary work!

This state of affairs gives way in the second, and often in the first year, to instruction and discipline. West Point's greatest glory arises from her unparalleled success in polishing these rough specimens and sending them forth "officers and gentlemen." No college in the country has such a "heterogeneous conglomeration"—to quote Dr. Johnson—of classes. The highest and lowest are represented. The glory of free America, her recognition of equality of all men, is not so apparent anywhere else as at West Point. And were prejudice entirely obliterated, then would America in truth be that Utopia of which so many have but dreamed. It is rapidly giving way to better reason, and the day is not far distant when West Point will stand forth as the proud exponent of absolute social equality. Prejudice weakens, and ere long will fail completely. The advent of general education sounds its death knell. And may the day be not afar off when America shall proclaim her emancipation from the basest of all servitudes, the subservience to prejudice!

After feeling reasonably sure of success, I have often thought that my good treatment was due in a measure to a sort of apprehension on the part of the cadets that, when I should come to exercise command over them, I would use my authority to retaliate for any ill-treatment I had suffered. I have thought this the case with those especially who have been reared in the principles of prejudice, and often in none other, for "prejudices, it is well known, are the most difficult to eradicate from the heart whose soil has never been loosened or fertilized by education. They grow there as firm as weeds among rocks."

When the time did come, and I proved by purely gentlemanly conduct that it was no harder, no more dishonorable, to be under me than under others, this reserve vanished to a very great extent. I might mention instances in which this is evident.

At practical engineering, one day, three of us were making a gabion. One was putting in the watling, another keeping it firmly down, while I was preparing it. I had had some instruction on a previous day as to how it should be made, but the two others had not. When they had put in the watling to within the proper distance of the top they began trimming off the twigs and butt ends of the withes. I happened to turn toward the gabion and observed what they were doing. In a tone of voice, and with a familiarity that surprised my own self, I exclaimed, "Oh, don't do that. Don't you see if you cut those off before sewing, the whole thing will come to pieces? Secure the ends first and then cut off the twigs."

They stopped working, listened attentively, and one of them replied, "Yes, that would be the most sensible way." I proceeded to show them how to sew the watling and to secure the ends. They were classmates. They listened to my voluntary instruction and followed it without a thought of who gave it, or any feeling of prejudice.<sup>17</sup>

At foot battery drill one day I was chief of piece. After a time the instructor rested the battery. The cannoneers at my piece, instead of going off and sitting down, gathered around me and asked questions about the nomenclature of the piece and its carriage. "What is this?" "What is it for?" and many others. They were third-classmen. Certainly there was no prejudice in this. Certainly, too, it could only be due to good conduct on my part.<sup>18</sup> And here is another.

Just after taps on the night of July 12th, 1876, while lying in my tent studying the stars, I happened to overhear a rather angry conversation concerning my unfortunate self.

It seems the cadet speaking had learned beforehand that he and myself would be on duty a few days hence, myself as senior and he as junior officer of the guard. His chums were teasing him on his misfortune of being under me as junior, which act caused him to enter into a violent panegyric upon me. He began by criticising my military aptitude and the manner in which I was treated by the authorities, that is, by the cadet officers, as is apparent from what follows:

"That nigger," said he, "don't keep dressed. Sometimes he's 'way head of the line. He swings his arms, and does other things not half as well as other 'devils,' and yet he's not 'skinned' for it."

What a severe comment upon the way in which the file-closers discharge their duties! Severe, indeed, it would be were it true. It is hardly reasonable, I think, to suppose the file-closers, in the face of prejudice and the probability of being "cut," would permit me to do

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17. The setting is practical military engineering training during Flipper's first-class encampment. His pleasant surprise that his classmates freely listened to his good advice underscores the point that Flipper did not experience the comfortable revelry and pleasures that characterized most cadets' first-class encampment. Refer to Flipper's description of practical training at the end of chapter VIII and to that chapter's note 7.

18. "Foot battery drill" refers to light artillery training that Flipper previously described in chap. VII and VIII. The "chief of piece" was the individual who commanded a cannon crew—roughly 4–6 cadets—during the exercise. With Flipper leading yearlings, this anecdote also comes from his first-class encampment.

the things mentioned with impunity, while they reported even their own classmates for them.

And here again we see the fox and sour grapes. The gentleman who so honored me with his criticism was junior to me in every branch of study we had taken up to that time except in French. I was his senior in tactics by—well, to give the number of files would be to specify him too closely and make my narrative too personal. Suffice it to say I ranked him, and I rather fancy, as I did not gain that position by favoritism, but by study and proficiency, he should not venture to criticize. But so it is all through life, at West Point as well as elsewhere. Malcontents are ever finding faults in others which they never think of discovering in themselves.<sup>19</sup>

When the time came the detail was published at parade, and next day we duly marched on guard. When I appeared on the general parade in full dress, I noticed mischievous smiles on more than one face, for the majority of the corps had turned out to see me. I walked along, proudly unconscious of their presence.

Although I went through the ceremony of guard mounting without a single blunder, I was not at all at ease. I inspected the front rank, while my junior inspected the rear. I was sorely displeased to observe some of the cadets change color as they tossed up their pieces for my inspection, and that they watched me as I went through that operation. Some of them were from the South, and educated to consider themselves far superior to those of whom they once claimed the right of possession. I know it was to them most galling, and although I fully felt the responsibility and honor of commanding the guard, I frankly and candidly confess that I found no pleasure in their apparent humiliation.

I am as a matter of course opposed to prejudice, but I nevertheless hold that those who are not have just as much right to their opinions on the matter as they would have to any one of the various religious creeds. We in free America at least would not be justified in forcing them to renounce their views or beliefs on race and color any more than those on religion.

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19. Flipper goes to great lengths to safeguard the offending cadet's anonymity, giving the benefit of the doubt so often denied him. This further demonstrates how Flipper had to remain conscious of his audience and his career prospects in a small Army officered by a similarly small and tightly knit community of West Point graduates, and how that consciousness affected his narrative and limited his criticism of West Point and his fellow cadets.

We can sometimes, by so living that those who differ from us in opinion respecting any thing can find no fault with us or our creed, influence them to a just consideration of our views, and perhaps persuade them unconsciously to adopt our way of thinking. And just so it is, I think, with prejudice. There is a certain dignity in enduring it which always evokes praise from those who indulge it, and also often discovers to them their error and its injustice.

Knowing that it would be unpleasant to my junior to have to ask my permission to do this or that, and not wishing to subject him to more mortification than was possible, I gave him all the latitude I could, telling him to use his own discretion, and that he need not ask my permission for any thing unless he chose.

This simple act, forgotten almost as soon as done, was in an exceedingly short time known to every cadet throughout the camp, and I had the indescribable pleasure, some days after, of knowing that by it I had been raised many degrees in the estimation of the corps. Nor did this knowledge remain in camp. It was spread all over the Point. The act was talked of and praised by the cadets wherever they went, and their conversations were repeated to me many times by different persons.

When on guard again I was the junior, and of course subject to the orders of the senior. He came to me voluntarily, and in almost my own words gave me exactly the same privileges I had given my junior, who was a chum of my present senior. In view of the ostracism and isolation to which I had been subjected, it was expected that I would be severe, and use my authority to retaliate. When, however, I did a more Christian act, did to others as I would have them do to me, and not as they had sometimes done, I gave cause for a similar act of good-will, which was in a degree beyond all expectation accorded me.

Indeed, while we are all prone to err, we are also very apt to do to others as they really do to us. If they treat us well, we treat them well; if badly, we treat them so also. I believe such to be in accordance with our nature, and if we do not always do so our failure is due to some influence apart from our better reason, if we do not treat them well, or our first impulse if we do. If now, on the contrary, I had been severe and unnecessarily imperious because of my power, I should in all probability have been treated likewise, and would have fallen and not have risen in the estimation of the cadets.

It has often occurred to me that the terms "prejudice of race, of color," etc., were misnomers, and for this reason. As soon as I show

that I have some good qualities, do some act of kindness in spite of insult, my color is forgotten and I am well treated.<sup>20</sup> Again, I have observed that colored men of character and intellectual ability have been treated as men should be by all, whether friends or enemies; that is to say, no prejudice of color or race has ever been manifested.

I have been so treated by men I knew to be—to use a political term—“vile democrats.”<sup>21</sup> Unfortunately a bad temper, precipitation, stubbornness, and like qualities, all due to non-education, are too often attributes of colored men and women. These characteristics lower the race in the estimation of the whites, and produce, I think, what we call prejudice. In fact I believe prejudice is due solely to non-education and its effects in one or perhaps both races.

Prejudice of—well, any word that will express these several characteristics would be better, as it would be nearer the truth.

There is, of course, a very large class of ignorant and partially cultured whites whose conceptions can find no other reason for prejudice than that of color. I doubt very much whether they are prejudiced on that account as it is. I rather think they are so because they know others are for some reason, and so cringing are they in their weakness that they follow like so many trained curs.<sup>22</sup> This is the class we in the South are accustomed to call the “poor white trash,” and speaking of them generally I can neglect them in this discussion of my treatment, and without material error.

In camp at night the duties of the officers of the guard are discharged part of the night by the senior and the other part by the junior officer. As soon as it was night—to revert to the subject of this article—my junior came to me and asked how I wished to divide the night tour.

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20. That Flipper could characterize a professional courtesy being given to him as being “well treated” while still acknowledging earlier in this passage “the ostracism and isolation to which I had been subjected” reveals much about just how poorly treated he was. As noted in earlier chapters, despite enduring so much, Flipper was preternaturally both an optimist and a champion of West Point as an institution. Those characteristics fundamentally shape his narrative.

21. Although a partisan term, this has little relation to modern American political parties. The “vile democrat” is a reference to individuals who, in Flipper’s time, comprised a bastion of Southerners who were the primary engine that drove sectional division over slavery before the Civil War, as well as their political allies from other regions, most prominently the Midwest. During Reconstruction, they generally opposed integration and the political advancement of Black Americans.

22. A “cur” refers to an aggressive looking, mangy dog.

“Just suit yourself. If you have any reason for wanting a particular part of the night, I shall be pleased to have you take it.”

He chose the latter half of the night, and asked me to wake him at a specified time. After this he discovered a reason for taking the first half, and coming to me said:

“If it makes no difference to you I will take the first half of the night.”

“As you like,” was my reply.

“You ‘pile in’ then, and I’ll wake you in time,” was his reply.

Observe the familiarity in this rejoinder.

The guard was turned out and inspected by the officer of the day at about 12.20 P.M. After the inspection I retired, and was awakened between 1 and 2 P.M. by my junior, who then retired for the night.

The officer in charge turned out and inspected the guard between 2 and 3 P.M.

Several of the cadets were reported to me by the corporals for violating regulations. The reports were duly recorded in the guard report for the day. I myself reported but one cadet, and his offence was “Absence from tattoo roll-call of guard.”<sup>23</sup>

These reports were put in under my signature, though not at all made by me, as also was another of a very grave nature.

It seems—for I didn’t know the initial circumstances of the case—that a citizen visiting at West Point asked a cadet if he could see a friend of his who was a member of the corps. The cadet at once sought out the corporal then on duty, and asked him to go to camp and turn out this friend. The corporal did not go. The cadet who requested him to do so reported the fact to the officer of the day. The latter came at once to me and directed me, as officer of the guard, to order him to go and turn out the cadet, and to see that he did it. I did as ordered. The corporal replied, “I have turned him out.” As the cadet did not make his appearance the officer of the day himself went into camp, brought him out to his citizen friend, and then ordered me in positive terms to report the corporal for gross disobedience of orders. I communicated to him the corporal’s reply, and received a repetition of his order. I obeyed it, entering on my guard report the following:

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23. “Tattoo roll-call” was a nightly event that served as the final accountability assembly of all soldiers.

“——, disobedience of orders, not turning out a cadet for citizen when ordered to do so by the officer of the guard.”

The commandant sent for me, and learned from me all the circumstances of the case as far as I knew them. He made similar requirements of the corporal himself.

Connected with this case is another, which, I think, should be recorded, to show how some have been disposed to act and think concerning myself. At the dinner table, and on the very day this affair above mentioned occurred, a cadet asked another if he had heard about ——, mentioning the name of the cadet corporal.

“No, I haven’t,” he replied; “what’s the matter with him?”

“Why, the officer of the day ordered him reported for disobedience of orders, and served him right too.”

“What was it? Whose orders did he disobey?”

“Some cit wanted to see a cadet and asked C—— if he could do so. C—— asked ——, who was then on duty, to go to camp and turn him out. He didn’t do it, but went off and began talking with some ladies. The officer of the day directed the senior officer of the guard to order him to go. He did order him to go and —— replied, “I have turned him out,” and didn’t go. The officer of the day then turned him out, and ordered him to be reported for disobedience of orders, and I say served him right.”<sup>24</sup>

“I don’t see it,” was the reply.

“Don’t see it? Why ——’s relief was on post, and it was his duty to attend to all such calls during his tour; and besides, I think ordinary politeness would have been sufficient to make him go.”

“Well, I can sympathize with him anyhow.”

“Sympathize with him! How so?”

“*Because he’s on guard to-day.*” What an excellent reason! “Because he’s on guard to-day,” or, in other words, because *I* was in command of the guard.

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24. “Cit” is shorthand for citizen and in this case means a civilian. More importantly, Flipper’s rigid avoidance of naming names throughout this section underscores how his precarious position shaped his autobiography (refer to the discussion on this point on page 2 in this volume’s Editors’ Introduction, as well as note 19 above). He could only air so many grievances about prejudice and mistreatment at West Point—and go only so far in airing them—without jeopardizing his standing in the officer corps. In this case as in others throughout the volume, Flipper felt a need to preserve the anonymity of those who mistreated him in order to safeguard his career.

He then went on to speak of the injustice of the report, the malice and spirit of retaliation shown in giving it, and hoped that the report would not be the cause of any punishment. And all this because the report was under my signature.

When the corporal replied to me that he had turned out the cadet, I considered it a satisfactory answer, supposing the cadet's non-appearance was due to delay in arranging his toilet. I had no intention of reporting him, and did so only in obedience to positive orders. There surely was nothing malicious or retaliatory in that; and to condemn me for discharging the first of all military duties—viz., obedience of orders—is but to prove the narrowness of the intellect and the baseness of the character which are vaunted as so far superior to those of the “negro cadet,” and which condemn him and his actions for no other reason than that they are his. How could it be otherwise than that he be isolated and persecuted when such minds are concerned?

In his written explanation to the commandant the corporal admitted the charge of disobedience of orders on his part, but excused himself by saying he had delegated another cadet to discharge the duty for him. This was contrary to regulations, and still further aggravated his offence.

For an incident connected with this tour of guard duty, see chapter on “Incidents, Humor,” etc.

The only case of downright malice that has come to my knowledge—and I'm sure the only one that ever occurred—is the following:

It is a custom, as old as the institution I dare say, for cadets of the first and second classes to march in the front rank, while all others take their places in the rear rank, with the exception that third-classmen may be in the front rank whenever it is necessary for the proper formation of the company to put them there. The need of such a custom is apparent. Fourth-classmen, or plebes not accustomed to marching and keeping dressed, are therefore unfit to be put in the front rank. Third-classmen have to give way to the upper classmen on account of their superior rank, and are able to march in the front rank only when put there or allowed to remain there by the file-closers. When I was a plebe, and also during my third-class year, I marched habitually in the rear rank, as stated with reason elsewhere. But when I became a second-classman, and had by class rank a right to the front rank, I took my place there.

Just about this time I distinctly heard the cadet captain of my company say to the first sergeant, or rather ask him why he did not put me in the rear rank. The first sergeant replied curtly, "Because he's a second-classman now, and I have no right to do it." This settled the question for the time, indeed for quite a while, till the incident above referred to occurred.

At a formation of the company for retreat parade in the early spring of '76, it was necessary to transfer some one from the front to the rear rank. Now instead of transferring a third-classman, the sergeant on the left of the company ordered me, a second classman, into the rear rank. I readily obeyed, because I felt sure I'd be put back after the company was formed and inspected, as had been done by him several times before. But this was not done. I turned to the sergeant and reminded him that he had not put me back where I belonged. He at once did so without apparent hesitation or unwillingness. He, however, reported me for speaking to him about the discharge of his duties. For this offence, I submitted the following explanation:

WEST POINT, N. Y., April 11, 1876.

*Offense:* Speaking to sergeant about formation of company at parade.

*Explanation:* I would respectfully state that the above report is a mistake. I said nothing whatever about the formation of the company. I was put in the rear rank, and, contrary to custom, left there. As soon as the command "In place, rest," was given, I turned to the nearest sergeant and said, "Mr.—, can I take my place in the front rank?" He leaned to the front and looked along the line. I then said, "There are men in the front rank who are junior to me." I added, a moment after, "There is one just up there," motioning with my head the direction meant. He made the change.

Respectfully submitted,

HENRY O. FLIPPER,  
*CADET Priv., Comp. "D," First Class.*

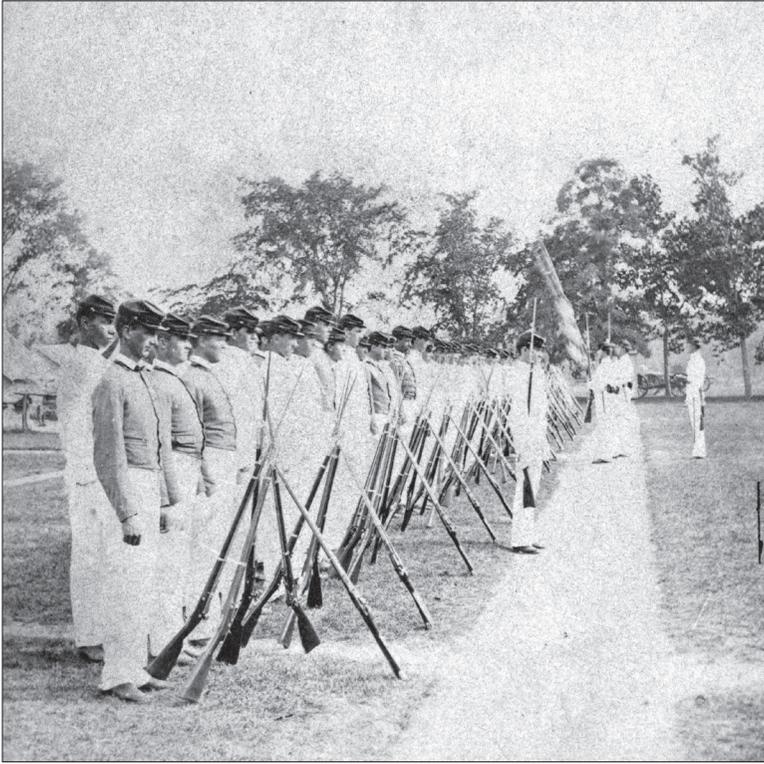
To Lieut. Colonel ———,  
*Commanding Corps of Cadets.*

This explanation was sent by the commandant to the reporting sergeant. He indorsed it in about the following words:

Respectfully returned with the following statement:

It was necessary in forming the company to put Cadet Flipper in the rear rank, and as I saw no third-classman in the front rank, I left him there as stated. I reported him because I did not think he had any right to speak to me about the discharge of my duty.

“—————”,  
*CADET Sergeant Company "D."*



Henry O. Flipper in the ranks during a summer encampment in either 1874 or 1876.

Flipper stands in the rear rank, nearest the camera.

*Courtesy of the United States Military Academy Library Special Collections and Archives.*

A polite question a reflection on the manner of discharging one's duty! A queer construction indeed! Observe, he says, he saw no third-classman in the front rank. It was his duty to be sure about it, and if there was one there to transfer him to the rear, and myself to the front rank. In not doing so he neglected his duty and imposed upon me and the dignity of my class. I was therefore entirely justified in calling his attention to his neglect.

This is a little thing, but it should be borne in mind that it is nevertheless of the greatest importance. We know what effect comity or international politeness has on the relations or intercourse between nations. The most trifling acts, such as congratulations on a birth or marriage in the reigning family, are wonderfully efficacious in keeping up that feeling of amity which is so necessary to peace and continued friendship between states. To disregard

these little things is considered unfriendly, and may be the cause of serious consequences.

There is a like necessity, I think, in our own case. Any affront to me which is also an affront to my class and its dignity deserves punishment or satisfaction. To demand it, then, gives my class a better opinion of me, and serves to keep that opinion in as good condition as possible.

I knew well that there were men in the corps who would readily seize any possible opportunity to report me, and I feared at the time that I might be reported for speaking to the sergeant. I was especially careful to guard against anger or roughness in my speech, and to put my demand in the politest form possible. The offence was removed. I received no demerits, and the sergeant had the pleasure or displeasure of grieving at the failure of his report.

I am sorry to know that I have been charged, by some not so well acquainted with West Point and life there as they should be to criticise, with manifesting a lack of dignity in that I allowed myself to be insulted, imposed upon, and otherwise ill-treated. There appears to them too great a difference between the treatment of former colored cadets and that of myself, and the only way they are pleased to account for this difference is to say that my good treatment was due to want of "spunk," and even to fear, as some have said. It evidently never occurred to them that my own conduct determined more than all things else the kind of treatment I would receive.

Every one not stubbornly prejudiced against West Point, and therefore not disposed to censure or criticise every thing said or done there, knows how false the charge is. And those who make it scarcely deserve my notice. I would say to them, however, that true dignity, *selon nous*, consists in being above the rabble and their insults, and particularly in remaining there. To stoop to retaliation is not compatible with true dignity, nor is vindictiveness manly. Again, the experiment suggested by my accusers has been abundantly tried, and proved a most ridiculous failure, while my own led to a glorious success.

I do not mean to boast or do any thing of the kind, but I would suggest to all future colored cadets to base their conduct on the "ἄριστονμέτρον," the golden mean. It is by far the safer, and surely the most Christian course.<sup>25</sup>

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25. Flipper uses the golden mean to guide his own behavior and recommends it to other Black cadets. He does not, however, reference the conduct of his white peers

Before closing this chapter I would add with just pride that I have ever been treated by all other persons connected with the Academy not officially, as becomes one gentleman to treat another. I refer to servants, soldiers, other enlisted men, and employés. They have done for me whatever I wished, whenever I wished, and as I wished, and always kindly and willingly. They have even done things for me to the exclusion of others. This is important when it is remembered that the employés, with one exception, are white.

“NATIONAL SCHOOLS AND SNOBOCRACY.<sup>26</sup>

“Cadet Smith has arrived in Columbia. He did not “pass.”—*Phoenix*.

“Alexander Bouchet, a young man of color, graduates from Yale College, holding the fifth place in the largest class graduated from that ancient institution.”—*Exchange*.

“These simple announcements from different papers tersely sum up the distinction between the military and civil education of this country. One is exclusive, snobbish, and narrow, the other is liberal and democratic.

“No one who has watched the course of Cadet Smith and the undemocratic, selfish, and snobbish treatment he has experienced from the martinets of West Point, men educated at the expense of the government, supported by negro taxes, as well as white, who attempt to dictate who shall receive the benefits of an education in our national charity schools—no one who has read of his court-martialings, the degradations and the petty insults inflicted upon him can help

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or how their actions contradict it. White cadets isolated and mistreated Flipper and other Black cadets. Responding to white cadets with the same manner of treatment was not a viable recourse for Flipper and other Black men at the time—something Flipper pointed out earlier in this chapter. As James W. Smith’s welcome letter to Flipper makes clear, in situations when a Black cadet was the aggrieved party, any negative response on his part would lead to worse consequences. Flipper, however, chose to meet their intolerance with polite equanimity. Without stating it outright, he here demonstrates that he held himself to a higher standard than that to which he held his white peers. For Smith’s letter, refer to chapter III, note 13.

26. The following article is an excerpt from the South Carolinian newspaper *The Union and Herald* as reprinted in *New National Era*, a newspaper owned by Frederick Douglass, a well-known activist for emancipation and abolition before and during the Civil War, and social and political equality after it. The paper mainly served as a collection of stories related to Black Americans and leaned toward the Republican Party. It began as a committed pro-Lincoln paper and continued to highlight national news related to the Black American community. The focus on Flipper and other Black service academy students in this paper demonstrated the level of significance that the plight of Black cadets and midshipmen had for the broader Black community. This was a prominent issue at the time, and the struggles these men endured rippled throughout Black political and social discourse. See Louis H. Douglass, “Cadet Smith,” *New National Era*, August 6, 1874.

feeling that he returns home to-day, in spite of the *Phoenix's* sneers, a young hero who has 'passed' in grit, pluck, perseverance, and all the better qualities which go to make up true manhood, and only has been 'found' because rebel sympathizers at West Point, the fledglings of caste, and the Secretary of War, do not intend to allow, if they can prevent it, a negro to graduate at West Point or Annapolis, *if he is known to be a negro*.

"Any one conversant with educational matters who has examined the examinations for entrance, or the curriculum of the naval and military academies, will not for a moment believe that their requirements, not as high as those demanded for an ordinary New England high school, and by no means equal in thoroughness, quantity, or quality to that demanded for entrance at Yale, Amherst, Dartmouth, or Brown, are too high or abstruse to be compassed by negroes, some of whom have successfully stood all these, and are now pursuing their studies in the best institutions of the North.

"No fair-minded man believes that Smith, Napier and Williams, Conyers and McClellan, have had impartial treatment.<sup>27</sup> The government itself has been remiss in not throwing about them the protection of its authority. Had these colored boys been students at St. Cyr, in Paris, or Woolwich, in England, under despotic France and aristocratic England, they would have been treated with that courtesy and justice of which the average white American has no idea. The South once ruled West Point, much to its detriment in loyalty, however much, by reason of sending boys more than prepared. It dominated in scholarship. It seeks to recover the lost ground, and rightly fears to meet on terms of equality in the camp the sons of fathers to whom it refused quarter in the war and butchered in cold blood at Fort Pillow. We cannot expect the sons to forget the lessons of the sires; but we have a right to demand from the general government the rooting out of all snobbery at West Point, whether it is of that kind which sends poor white boys to Coventry, because they haven't a family name or wealth, or whether it be that smallest, meanest, and shallowest of all aristocracies—the one founded upon color.

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27. James Henry Conyers and Alonzo Clifton McClennan (whose name is misspelled here and elsewhere in the text) were the first and second midshipmen nominated to the Naval Academy in 1872 and 1873, respectively. Both midshipmen experienced harassment and mistreatment from their fellow "shipmates" during their time at the Naval Academy and neither graduated. Conyers resigned after severe academic struggles and very little is known about his time after resignation. McClennan left the Academy after enduring harassment from his peers and similar struggles with academics. He would go on to practice medicine in Georgia after graduating from Howard Medical School. Their reported experiences of physical assault, isolation, and degradation are similar to the struggles Black cadets at West Point recounted after their own dismissals. These parallels demonstrate that the difficulties of integration were not unique to the Army or West Point, but rather reflective of a broader issue across service academies. Civilian university integration was similarly fraught with unique challenges. See Robert J. Schneller, "The First Black Midshipman at the United States Naval Academy," *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, no. 48 (2005): 107; and Willard B. Gatewood, "Alonzo Clifton McClennan: Black Midshipman from South Carolina, 1873–1874." *The South Carolina Historical Magazine* 89, no. 1 (1988): 24–26.

“If the government is not able to root out these unrepublican seeds in these hot-beds of disloyalty and snobbery, then let Congress shut up the useless and expensive appendages and educate its officers at the colleges of the country, where they may learn lessons in true republican equality and nationality. The remedy lies with Congress. A remonstrance at least should be heard from the colored members of Congress, who are insulted whenever a colored boy is ill-treated by the students or the officers of these institutions. So far from being discouraged by defeats, the unjust treatment meted out to these young men should redouble the efforts of others of their class to carry this new Bastille by storm. It should lead every colored Congressman to make sure that he either sends a colored applicant or a white one who has not the seeds of snobbery and caste in his soul. Smith, after four years of torture, comes home, is driven home, because, forsooth, he might attend the ball next year! He is hounded out of the Academy because he would have to be assigned to a white regiment! There are some negroes who feel that their rights in the land of their birth are superior to the prejudices of the enemies of the Union, and who dare to speak and write in behalf of these rights, as their fathers dared to fight for them a very few years ago.

“Bouchet, under civil rule, enters Yale College the best prepared student of one hundred and thirty freshmen, and all through his course is treated like a gentleman, both by the faculty and the students, men who know what justice means, and have some adequate idea of the true theory of education and gentlemanly conduct. Two freed boys, from North Carolina and South Carolina, slaves during the war, prepare at the best Northern academics, and enter, without remonstrance, Amherst and Dartmouth. What divinity, then, hedges West Point and Annapolis? What but the old rebel spirit, which seeks again to control them for use in future rebellions as it did in the past. The war developed some unwelcome truths with regard to this snobbish and disloyal spirit of our national institutions, and the exploits of some volunteer officers showed that all manhood, bravery, skill, and energy were not contained in West Point or Annapolis, or, if there, did not pertain solely to the petty cliques that aim to give tone to those academies. It is not for any officer, the creature of the government—it is not for any student, the willing ward of that government—to say who shall enter the national schools and be the recipients of my bounty. It is the duty of every member of Congress to see that the government sanctions no such spirit; and it becomes every loyal citizen who wishes to avoid the mistakes of the former war to see to it that no class be excluded, and that every boy, once admitted, shall have the strictest justice dealt out to him, a thing which, thus far, has not been done in the case of the colored cadets.

“The true remedy lies in the feelings and sympathies of the officers of these academies, in the ability and fair investigations of the board of examiners; not from such gentlemen as at present seem to rule these institutions.

“NIGER NIGRORUM.”

This article was taken from some South Carolina paper during the summer of '74. Its tone is in accordance with the multitude of articles upon the same subject which occurred about the same time, and, like them all, or most of them, is rather farfetched. It is

too broad. Its denunciations cover too much ground. They verge upon untruth.

As to Conyers and McClellan at the Naval Academy I know nothing. Of Napier I know nothing. Of Smith I prefer to say nothing. Of Williams I do express the belief that his treatment was impartial and just. He was regularly and rightly found deficient and duly dismissed. The article seems to imply that he should not have been "found" and dismissed simply because he was a negro. A very shallow reason indeed, and one "no fair-minded man" will for an instant entertain.

Of four years' life at the Academy, I spent the first with Smith, rooming with him. During the first half year Williams was also in the corps with us. The two following years I was alone. The next and last year of my course I spent with Whittaker, of South Carolina. I have thus had an opportunity to become acquainted with Smith's conduct and that of the cadets toward him. Smith had trouble under my own eyes on more than one occasion, and Whittaker\* has already received blows in the face, but I have not had so much as an angry word to utter. There is a reason for all this, and had "Niger Nigrorum" been better acquainted with it he had never made the blunder he has.

I cannot venture more on the treatment of colored cadets generally without disregarding the fact that this is purely a narrative of my own treatment and life at West Point. To go further into that subject would involve much difference of opinion, hard feelings in certain quarters, and would cause a painful and needless controversy.

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\* *Johnson Chestnut Whittaker, of Camden, South Carolina, appointed to fill vacancy created by Smith's dismissal, after several white candidates so appointed had failed, entered the Academy in September, 1876. Shortly after entering he was struck in the face by a young man from Alabama for sneering at him, as he said, while passing by him. Whittaker immediately reported the affair to the cadet officer of the day, by whose efforts this belligerent Alabama gentleman was brought before a court-martial, tried, found guilty, and suspended for something over six months, thus being compelled to join the next class that entered the Academy.*



## CHAPTER XI.

### RESUME.<sup>1</sup>

JULY 1, 1876! Only one year more; and yet how wearily the days come and go! How anxiously we watch them, how eagerly we count them, as they glimmer in the distance, and forget them as they fade! What joyous anticipation, what confident expectation, what hope animates each soul, each heart, each being of us! What encouragement to study this longing, this impatience gives us, as if it hastened the coming finale! And who felt it more than I? Who could feel it more than I? To me it was to be not only an end of study, of discipline, of obedience to the regulations of the Academy, but even an end to isolation, to tacit persecution, to melancholy, to suspense. It was to be the grand realization of my hopes, the utter, the inevitable defeat of the minions of pride, prejudice, caste.<sup>2</sup> Nor would such consummation of hopes affect me only, or those around me. Nay, even I was but the point of “primitive disturbance,” whence emanates as if from a focus, from a new origin, prayer, friendly and inimical, to be focused again into realization on one side and discomfiture on the other. My friends, my enemies, centre their hopes on me. I treat them, one with earnest endeavor for realization, the other with supremest indifference. They are deviated with varying anxiety on either side, and hence my joy, my gratitude, when I find, July 1, 1876, that I am a first-classman.

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1. When published in 1878, this chapter was titled “Resumé” in the Table of Contents and “Resume” in the opening header of the chapter. It is unclear which form is correct and which form is in error.

2. Flipper’s use of the term “caste” aligns with part of the public view of West Point at the time. In an article published in *The North American Review* in 1880, Peter Michie characterized public sentiment as holding that West Point was “no longer an institution of thorough education, manly qualities, or devoted duty, but a hot-bed of aristocracy, of caste, of outrage, and insurrection.” Flipper and other Black cadets at the time experienced caste at West Point in a unique way, with race introducing a new dimension of caste that previously had not affected other cadets. Flipper hoped that his persistence and his success would convince recalcitrant and resistant white cadets of the error in their prejudices. For Michie’s description of public perceptions of caste at West Point, and his attempted rebuttal of them, see Peter S. Michie, “Caste at West Point,” *The North American Review* 130, no. 283 (June 1880): 604–13.

A first-classman! The beginning of realization, for had I not distanced all the colored cadets before me? Indeed I had, and that with the greater prospect of ultimate success gave me double cause for rejoicing.

A first-classman! “There’s something prophetic in it,” for behold

“The country begins to be agitated by the approaching graduation of young Flipper, the colored West Point cadet from Atlanta. If he succeeds in getting into the aristocratic circles of the official army there will be a commotion for a certainty. *Flipper is destined to be famous.*”

Such was the nature of the many editorials which appeared about this time, summer of ’76. The circumstance was unusual, unexpected, for it had been predicted that only slaughter awaited me at that very stage, because Smith had failed just there, just where I had not.

“Henry Flipper, of Atlanta, enjoys the distinction of being the only negro cadet that the government is cramming with food and knowledge at West Point. He stands forty-sixth in the third class, which includes eighty-five cadets. A correspondent of the *New York Times* says that, while all concede Flipper’s progress, yet it is not believed that he will be allowed to graduate. No negro has passed out of the institution a graduate, and it is believed that Flipper will be eventually slaughtered in one way or another. The rule among the regulars is: No darkeys need apply.”<sup>3</sup>

Or this:

“Smith’s dismissal leaves Henry Flipper the sole cadet of color at West Point. Flipper’s pathway will not be strewn with roses, and we shall be surprised if the Radicals do not compel him, within a year, to seek refuge from a sea of troubles in his father’s quiet shoe shop on Decatur Street.”

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3. Both Flipper and the unnamed editorial writer he quotes imply that there was such overt resistance to the policy of integration at West Point that some member or part of the institution could contrive a way to force him out of the Academy. That risk was real. Resistance to and resentment of integration ran high both at West Point and in the Army at large. Furthermore, James W. Smith alleged that his academic failure and dismissal at the end of his second-class year was exactly the type of “slaughter” others feared would befall Flipper. On resistance at West Point and broader Army opinions about integration at West Point, see eds. Rory McGovern and Ronald G. Machoian, *Race Politics, and Reconstruction: The First Black Cadets at Old West Point* (University of Virginia Press, 2024), chap. 5–6. For Smith’s allegation, refer to chapter XVII, page 332.

Isn't it strange how some people strive to drag everything into politics! A political reason is assigned to every thing, and "every thing is politics."

The many editors who have written on the subject of the colored cadets have, with few exceptions, followed the more prejudiced and narrow-minded critics who have attributed every thing, ill-treatment, etc., to a natural aversion for the negro, and to political reasons. They seem to think it impossible for one to discharge a duty or to act with justice in any thing where a negro is concerned. Now this is unchristian as well as hasty and undeserved. As I have said elsewhere in my narrative, aside from the authorities being *de facto* "officers and gentlemen," and therefore morally bound to discharge faithfully every duty, they are under too great a responsibility to permit them to act as some have asserted for them, to compel me "to seek refuge from a sea of troubles," or to cause me to "be eventually slaughtered in one way or another." Who judges thus is not disposed to judge fairly, but rather as suits some pet idea of his own, to keep up prejudice and all its curses.

It would be more Christian, and therefore more just, I apprehend, to consider both sides of the question, the authorities and those under them. Other and better reasons would be found for some things which have occurred, and reasons which would not be based on falsehood, and which would not tend to perpetuate the conflict of right and prejudice. My own success will prove, I hope, not only that I had sufficient ability to graduate—which by the way none have questioned—but also that the authorities were not as some have depicted them.<sup>4</sup> This latter proof is important,

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4. Unfortunately, too many of the authorities were exactly "as some have depicted them." Officials and faculty at West Point prided themselves on their polite and proper interactions with Flipper and other Black cadets. Many commentators—and, as we see here and elsewhere in this volume, Flipper himself—took such polite and proper interactions as evidence of a lack of racial prejudice. They were not privy to what Academy officials and faculty said to each other behind closed doors, nor could they observe how privately held thoughts and biases affected official actions.

Only two years after Flipper's volume appeared in print, those private views came into the open in the aftermath of a brutal assault against Johnson Chestnut Whittaker, a Black cadet who was a plebe when Flipper was a first-classman. Peter Michie, a West Point professor and member of the academic board, described all Black cadets admitted to West Point in the 1870s as possessing "a marked deficiency in deductive reasoning." Another member of the academic board, George Andrews, described the very policy of admitting Black cadets to West Point as a "tyrannical course" because it forced white cadets into close contact with Black

first, because it will remove that fear which has deterred many from seeking, and even from accepting appointments when offered, to which deterrent my isolation is largely due; and second, because it will add another to the already long list of evidences of the integrity of our national army.

To return to the last quotation. Immediately after the dismissal of Smith, indeed upon the very day of that event, it was rumored that I intended to resign. I learned of the rumor from various sources, only one of which I need mention.

I was on guard that day, and while off duty an officer high in rank came to me and invited me to visit him at his quarters next day. I did so, of course. His first words, after greeting, etc., were to question the truth of the rumor, and before hearing my reply, to beg me to relinquish any such intention. He was kind enough to give me much excellent advice, which I have followed most religiously. He assured me that prejudice, if it did exist among my instructors,

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cadets. Even more significantly and in terms that may make a modern reader's jaw drop, Major General John M. Schofield—who served as superintendent of West Point from 1876 to 1881—aired his own grievances about integrating West Point in his section of the War Department's annual report:

The difficulty surrounding this subject [the high dismissal rate of Black cadets] is aggravated by the somewhat common error of ascribing it to an unreasonable prejudice against race or color. The prevailing "prejudice" is rather a just aversion to qualities which the people of the United States have long been accustomed to associate with a state of slavery and intercourse without legal marriage, and of which color and its various shades are only the external signs. That feeling could not be removed by the simple act of enfranchising the slave. It can only be done by the education and moral elevation of the race. That great work has only been commenced, and it must of necessity require much time. To send to West Point for a four years' competition a young man who was born in slavery is to assume that half a generation has been sufficient to raise a colored man to the social, moral, and intellectual level which the average white man has reached in several hundred years. As well might the common farm-horse be entered in a four-mile race against the best blood inherited from a long line of English racers.

These quotations come from Michie, "Caste at West Point," 611; George Andrews, "The Colored Cadets at West Point," *International Review* (November 1880): 484; and U.S. War Department, *Annual Report of the Secretary of War for the Year 1880*, vol. I (Government Printing Office, 1880), 229. For more on Schofield's superintendency, as well as his views and actions related to integrating West Point, see Donald B. Connelly, *John M. Schofield and the Politics of Generalship* (University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 249–68.

would not prevent them from treating me justly and impartially. I am proud to testify now to the truth of his assurance. He further assured me that the officers of the Academy and of the army, and especially the older ones, desired to have me graduate, and that they would do all within the legitimate exercise of their authority to promote that end. This assurance has been made me by officers of nearly every grade in the army, from the general down, and has ever been carried out by them whenever a fit occasion presented itself.

Surely this is not discouraging. Surely, too, it is not causing me "to seek refuge from a sea of troubles." We need only go back to the article quoted from the *Era*, and given in Chapter III., to find an explanation for this conduct.

"We know that any young man, whether he be poor or black, or both, may enter any first-class college in America and find warm sympathetic friends, both among students and faculty, *if he but prove himself to be possessed of some good qualities.*"

This is the keynote to the whole thing. One must not expect to do as one pleases, whether that be right or wrong, or right according to some fanatical theory, and notwithstanding to be dealt with in a manner warranted only by the strictest notion of right. We must force others to treat us as we wish, by giving them such an example of meekness and of good conduct as will at least shame them into a like treatment of us. This is the safer and surer method of revenge.

"Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink; for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head."

To proceed: I am undoubtedly a first-classman. None other has enjoyed that eminence. There are many honors and responsibilities incident to that position or rank. First-classmen have authority at times over their fellow-cadets. How will it be when I come to have that authority? Will that same coldness and distance be manifested as hitherto? These are important questions. I shall be brought necessarily into closer relations with the cadets than before. How will they accept such relationship? The greatest proof of their personal convictions will be manifested in their conduct here. If they evade my authority, or are stubborn or disobedient, then are their convictions unfriendly indeed. But if kind, generous, willing to assist, to advise, to obey, to respect myself as well as my office, then are they, as I ever believed them to be, gentlemen in all that recognizes no prejudice, no caste, nothing inconsistent with manhood.

There are certain privileges accorded to first-classmen which the other classes do not enjoy. The privates of the first class do duty

as officers of the guard, as company officers at company and battalion drills, at light battery drills, and at other drills and ceremonies. In all these cases they have command of other cadets. These cadets are subject to their orders and are liable to be reported—indeed such is required—for disobedience, stubbornness, or for any thing prejudicial to good order and good discipline.

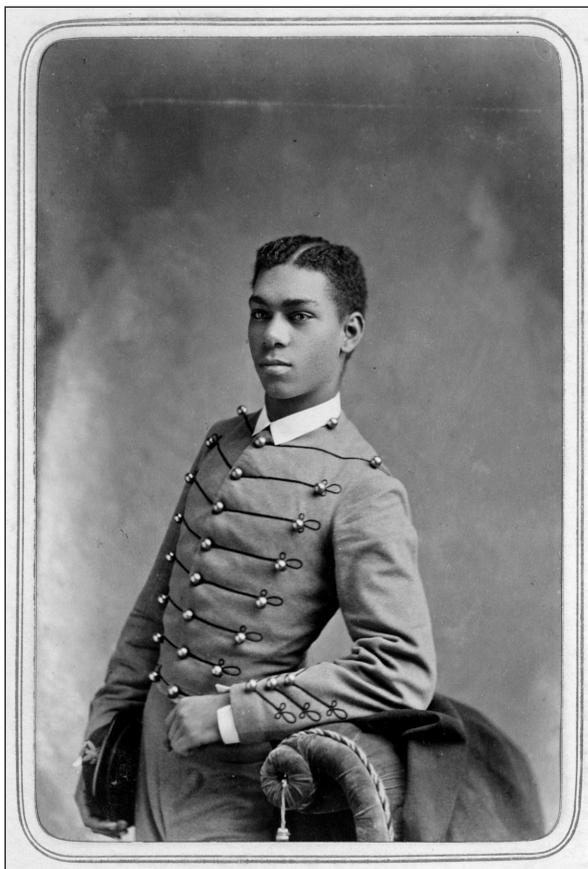
In this fact is a reason—the only one, I think, which will in any manner account for the unpardonable reserve of many of the cadets. To be subject to me, to my orders, was to them an unbearable torture. As they looked forward to the time when I should exercise command over them, they could not help feeling the mortification which would be upon them.

I must modify my statement. They may be prejudiced, and yet gentlemen, and if gentlemen they will not evade authority even though vested in me.<sup>5</sup>

We go into camp at West Point on the 17th of June, '76 for ten days. During all that time I enjoy all the privileges of first-classmen. Nothing is done to make it unpleasant or in any way to discourage or dishearten me. We go to Philadelphia. We visit the Centennial, and there not only is the same kindness shown me, but I find a number of cadets accost me whenever we meet, on the avenues and streets, on the grounds and in the city. They ask questions, converse, answer questions. This occurred several times at the Southern Restaurant, as well as elsewhere. After the parade on the 4th of July, every kindness was shown me. Those cadets near me bought lemons, lemonade, etc, and shared with me, and when, on another occasion, I was the purchaser, they freely partook of my "good cheer." What conclusion shall I draw from this? That they are unfriendly or prejudiced? I fain would drop my pen and burn my manuscript if for even an instant I thought it possible. And yet how shall I explain away this bit of braggadocio in the words italicized in this article from the Philadelphia *Times*?

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5. Flipper's statements simultaneously reflect both anger at and an abiding faith in the Corps of Cadets. He characterizes as "unpardonable" the "reserve of many of the cadets," referring to his state of isolation through silencing. At the same time, he held enough faith in what he considered to be their gentlemanly qualities that he insisted all would and did respect his authority as a first-classman—and by implication, his position as a fellow officer after graduation.



Henry O. Flipper as a first-classman.

*Courtesy of the United States Military Academy Library Special Collections and Archives.*

*“The Color Line.—One of the first-classmen is Mr. Flipper, of Georgia, a young colored man. ‘We don’t have any thing to do with him off duty,’ said one of the cadets yesterday. ‘We don’t even speak to him. Of course we have to eat with him, and drill with him, and go on guard with him, but that ends it. Outside of duty, we don’t know him.’ ‘Is he intelligent?’ ‘Yes; he stands high in his class, and I see no reason to doubt that he will graduate next June. He has the negro features strongly developed, but in color he is rather light.’”*<sup>6</sup>

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6. This is the portion of *The Philadelphia Times* article that Flipper omitted when quoting the rest of the article in chapter IX. The internal italics are Flipper’s own point of emphasis, not the newspaper’s. Flipper introduces this material here in order to challenge its authenticity in ways meant to underscore his previous point about earning more respect within the Corps of Cadets. It is interesting to note, however, that Flipper considered all other parts of the article to be authentic enough

Easily enough, I think. In the first place the statement is too broad, if made by a cadet, which I very much doubt. There are some of that “we” who do know me outside of duty. And if a cadet made the statement he must have been a plebe, one unacquainted with my status in the corps, or one who, strenuously avoiding me himself, supposed all others likewise did so.<sup>7</sup> The cadet was not a first-classman. There is a want of information in his last answer which could not have been shown by a first-classman.

Again, he says we “go on guard with him.” Now that is untrue, as I understand it. The word “with” would imply that we were on guard in the same capacity, viz., as privates. But first-classmen do no guard duty in that capacity, and hence not being himself a first-classman he could not have been on guard “with” me. If he had said “under him,” his statement would have been nearer the truth.

After a stay of ten days in Philadelphia, we return to West Point, and still the same respect is shown me. There is but little more of open recognition, if any, than before, and yet that I am respected is shown in many ways. See, for example, the latter part of chapter on “Treatment.”

Again, during my first year I many times overheard myself spoken of as “the nigger,” “the moke,” or “the thing.” Now openly, and when my presence was not known, I always hear myself mentioned as Mr. Flipper. There are a few who use both forms of address as best suits their convenience or inclination at the time. But why is it? Why not “nigger,” “moke,” or “thing” as formerly? Is there, can there be any other reason than that they respect me more now than then? I am most unwilling to believe there could be.<sup>8</sup>

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to let it stand as nearly all of chapter IX, unchallenged except for in one small detail about camp furniture. Refer to chapter IX, note 2. See also “Our Future Heroes,” *The Philadelphia Times*, July 6, 1876, 1.

7. It is difficult to reconcile Flipper’s statement here—implying that more cadets had begun to associate with him openly—with his statement two paragraphs later that, upon returning to West Point from Philadelphia, “There is but little more of open recognition, if any, than before.”

8. Flipper wrestles with a difficult question. Modern readers may ask themselves if any increased respect for Flipper among the Corps of Cadets was evidence of respect for Flipper individually, or respect for Flipper’s position as a first-classman more generally and impersonally. There is evidence that Flipper earned some personal respect through his four years of patient perseverance, none more poignant than the applause he received on graduation day. But there is also evidence that many cadets showed respect and deference to Flipper’s rank and

We begin our regular routine of duties, etc. We have practical military engineering, ordnance, artillery, practical astronomy in field and permanent observatories, telegraphy, and guard. We are detailed for these duties. Not the least distinction is made. Not the slightest partiality is shown. Always the same regard for my feelings, the same respect for me! See the case of gabion in the chapter on "Treatment."

At length, in my proper order, I am detailed for officer of the guard. True, the cadets expressed some wonderment, but why? Simply, and reasonably enough too, because I was the first person of color that had ever commanded a guard at the Military Academy of the United States. It is but a natural curiosity. And how am I treated? Is my authority recognized? Indeed it is. My sergeant not only volunteered to make out the guard report for me, but also offered any assistance I might want, aside from the discharge of his own duty as sergeant of the guard. Again, a number of plebes were confined in the guard tents for grossness and carelessness. I took their names, the times of their imprisonment, and obtained permission to release them. I was thanked for my trouble. Again, a cadet's father wishes to see him. He is in arrest. I get permission for him to visit his father at the guard tents. I go to his tent and tell him, and start back to my post of duty. He calls me back and thanks me. Must I call that natural aversion for the negro, or even prejudice? Perhaps it is, but I cannot so comprehend it. It may have that construction, but as long as the other is possible it is generous to accept it. And again, I am ordered to report a cadet. I do it. I am stigmatized, of course, by some of the low ones (see that case under "Treatment"); but my conduct, both in obeying the order and subsequently, is approved by the better portion of the corps. The commandant said to me: "Your duty was a plain one, and you discharged it properly. You were entirely right in reporting Mr. ——." What is the conduct of this cadet himself afterwards? If different at all from what it was before, it is, in my presence at least, more cordial, more friendly, more kind. Still there is no ill-treatment, assuming of course that my own conduct is proper, and not obtrusive or overbearing. And

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authority rather than to Flipper as a person. Flipper described that portion of the Corps neatly earlier in this chapter when he wrote, "They may be prejudiced, and yet gentlemen, and if gentlemen they will not evade authority even though vested in me." For the former case, refer to chapter XV, note 8. For the latter, see note 4 in this chapter.

so in a multitude of ways this fact is proved. I have noticed many things, little things perhaps they were, but still proofs, in the conduct of all the cadets which remove all doubt from my mind. And yet with all my observation and careful study of those around me, I have many times been unable to decide what was the feeling of the cadets toward me. Some have been one thing everywhere and at all times, not unkind or ungenerous, nor even unwilling to hear me and be with me, or near me, or on duty with me, or alone with me. Some again, while not avoiding me in the presence of others have nevertheless manifested their uneasy dislike of my proximity. When alone with me they are kind, and all I could wish them to be. Others have not only strenuously avoided me when with their companions, but have even at times shown a low disposition, a desire to wound my feelings or to chill me with their coldness. But alone, behold they know how to mimic gentlemen. The kind of treatment which I was to receive, and have received at the hands of the cadets, has been a matter of little moment to me. True, it has at times been galling, but its severest effects have been but temporary and have caused me no considerable trouble or inconvenience. I have rigidly overlooked it all.

The officers, on the contrary, as officers and gentlemen, have in a manner been bound to accord me precisely the same privileges and advantages, etc., which they granted the other cadets, and they have ever done so.

I must confess my expectations in this last have been most positively unfulfilled, and I am glad of it. The various reports, rumors, and gossips have thus been proved not only false but malicious, and that proof is of considerable consequence. That they have not been unkind and disposed to ill-treat me may be readily inferred from the number of demerits I have received, and the nature of the offences for which those demerits were given. They have never taken it upon themselves to watch me and report me for trifling offences with a view of giving me a bad record in conduct, and thereby securing my dismissal, for one hundred demerits in six months means dismissal. They have ever acted impartially, and, ignoring my color, have accorded me all immunities and privileges enjoyed by other cadets, whether they were allowed by regulations or were mere acts of personal favor. Of the majority of the cadets I can speak likewise, for they too have power to spy out and report.

As to treatment in the section-room, where there were many opportunities to do me injustice by giving me low marks for all

recitations, good or bad, for instance, they have scrupulously maintained their honor, and have treated me there with exact justice and impartiality. This is not a matter of opinion. I can give direct and positive proof of its truthfulness. In the chapter on “Studies,” in the record of marks that proof can be found, my marks per recitation, and the average are good. By rank in section is meant the order of my mark—that is, whether best, next, the next, or lowest. Are these marks not good? In law, for example, once I received the eighth out of nine marks, then the fifth, the first, second, third, first, first, and so on. Surely there was nothing in them to show I was marked low either purposely or otherwise.<sup>9</sup>

My marks in the section for each week, month, and the number of men in each section, afford the means of comparison between the other members of the section and myself. And my marks are not only evidence of the possession on my part of some “good faculties,” but also of the honor of my instructors and fellow-members of section.

What manner of treatment the cadets chose to manifest toward me was then of course of no account. But what is of importance, and great importance too, is how they will treat me in the army, when we

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9. In Flipper’s time, West Point cadets were graded daily in each class, with grades posted publicly at regular time intervals throughout the year and sections (classes) in any given subject shuffled according to cadets’ relative standing in that particular course. This fostered a competitive environment in which, as Flipper notes, it would have been relatively easy for instructors and classmates alike to sabotage Flipper’s standing at West Point. They did not. Still, Flipper does not mention a more passive form of sabotage that was directed against Black cadets. West Point’s curriculum was broad enough that few cadets were naturally talented in all subjects within it. Cadets routinely leaned on friends to “bone up,” or to study with the assistance of a friend acting as an informal tutor, with many saying they could never have passed through West Point successfully without such help. Silenced and ostracized as they were, Flipper and other Reconstruction-era Black cadets had no white friends who were willing to help them “bone up” in subjects they found particularly challenging. This contributed to the exceptionally high rate at which Black cadets failed out of the Academy in the 1870s and 1880s.

For more on recitations, sectioning, and grading, and a competitive environment, see Stephen E. Ambrose, *Duty, Honor, Country: A History of West Point* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1966), 131–32. On the relationship between the ostracism of Black cadets and their academic problems, see Rory McGovern, “‘You Need Not Think You Are on an Equality with Your Classmates’: Resistance to Integration at West Point, in *Race Politics, and Reconstruction: The First Black Cadets at Old West Point*, eds. Rory McGovern and Ronald G. Machoian (University of Virginia Press, 2024), 122.

have all assumed the responsibilities of manhood, coupled with those of a public servant, an army officer. Of course the question cannot now be answered. I feel nevertheless assured that the older officers at least will not stoop to prejudice or caste, but will accord me proper treatment and respect. Men of responsibility are concerned, and it is not presumable that they will disregard the requirements of their professions so far as to ill-treat even myself.<sup>10</sup> There is none of the recklessness of the student in their actions, and they cannot but recognize me as having a just claim upon their good-will and honor.

The year wears away—the last year it is too—and I find myself near graduation, with every prospect of success. And from the beginning to the close my life has been one not of trouble, persecution, or punishment, but one of isolation only. True, to an unaccustomed nature such a life must have had many anxieties and trials and displeasures, and, although it was so with me, I have nothing more than that of which to complain. And if such a life has had its unpleasant features, it has also had its pleasant ones, of which not the least, I think, was the constantly growing prospect of ultimate triumph. Again, those who have watched my course and have seen in its success the falsity of certain reports, can not have been otherwise than overjoyed at it, at the, though tardy, vindication of truth. I refer especially to certain erroneous ideas which are or were extant concerning the treatment of colored cadets, in which it is claimed that color decides their fate. (See chapter on “Treatment.”)

I hope my success has proved that not color of face, but color of character alone can decide such a question. It is character and nothing else that will merit a harsh treatment from gentlemen, and of course it must be a bad character. If a man is a man, *un homme comme il faut*, he need fear no ill-treatment from others of like calibre. Gentlemen avoid persons not gentlemen. Resentment is not a characteristic of gentlemen. A gentlemanly nature must shrink from it. There may be in it a certain amount of what is vulgarly termed pluck, and perhaps courage. But what of that? Everybody

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10. In this paragraph, Flipper presents evidence of continued mistreatment despite claims earlier in this chapter that mistreatment was, in some cases, giving way to respect. He also shows the persistent optimism that is a defining feature of his autobiography. Whether convinced by the spirit of the policy of integration or by his faith in the Army and its officer corps, Flipper believed that the obstacles he overcame as a cadet would not manifest in the rest of his Army career. Refer to this volume's Afterword for more on Flipper's experiences after West Point.

more or less admires pluck. Everybody worships courage, if it be of a high order, but who allows that pluck or even courage is an excuse for passion or its consequences? The whites may admire pluck in the negro, as in other races, but they will never admit unwarrantable obtrusiveness, or rudeness, or grossness, or any other ungentlemanly trait, and no more in the negro than in others. This is quite just. A negro would not allow it even in another.

I did not intend to discuss social equality here, but as it is not entirely foreign to my subject I may be pardoned a word or so upon it.<sup>11</sup>

Social equality, as I comprehend it, must be the natural, and perhaps gradual, outgrowth of a similarity of instincts and qualities in those between whom it exists. That is to say, there can be no social equality between persons who have nothing in common. A civilized being would not accept a savage as his equal, his *socius*, his friend. It would be repugnant to nature. A savage is a man, the image of his Maker as much so as any being. He has all the same rights of equality which any other has, but they are political rights only. He who buried his one talent to preserve it was not deemed worthy to associate with him who increased his five to ten. So also in our particular case. There are different orders or classes of men in every civilized community. The classes are politically equal, equal in that they are free men and citizens and have all the rights belonging to such station. Among the several classes there can be no social

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11. The tension between political (or civil) equality and social equality is a recurring theme throughout the text, and Flipper gives it his most direct and lengthy attention from here through the end of the chapter. Boldly for his time and audience, Flipper asserts his own social equality, but he does so in ways that characterize social equality as something to be worked for and earned, not as a universal right. He argues social equality should be granted or denied on the basis of ability, ambition, class, and station, not on the basis of color. Flipper's argument here is a study in nuance. It is as boldly revolutionary as Flipper ever allows his autobiography to be. It is simultaneously couched in somewhat classist terms—with enough nuance to appeal to a white American audience that generally rejected the notion of social equality for Black Americans. In its nuance, this passage demonstrates the deep complexity of Flipper's world and his unique position within it.

For more on political and social equality, refer to the Editors' Introduction of this volume. See also Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863–1877*, Perennial Classics Edition (Perennial Classics, 2002), 230–45; and Michael W. Fitzgerald, *Splendid Failure: Postwar Reconstruction in the American South* (Ivan R. Dee, 2007), 119–20.

equality, for they have nothing socially in common, although the members of each class in itself may have.

Now in these recent years there has been a great clamor for rights. The clamor has reached West Point, and, if no bad results have come from it materially, West Point has nevertheless received a bad reputation, and I think an undeserved one, as respects her treatment of colored cadets.

A right must depend on the capacity and end or aim of the man. This capacity and end may, and ought to be, moral, and not political only. Equal capacities and a like end must give equal rights, and unequal capacities and unlike ends unequal rights, morally, of course, for the political end of all men is the same. And therefore, since a proper society is a moral institution where a certain uniformity of views, aims, purposes, properties, etc., is the object, there must be also a uniformity or equality of rights, for otherwise there would be no society, no social equality.

This, I apprehend, is precisely the state of affairs in our own country. Among those who, claiming social equality, claim it as a right, there exists the greatest possible diversity of creeds, instincts, and of moral and mental conditions, in which they are widely different from those with whom they claim this equality. They can therefore have no rights socially in common; or, in other words, the social equality they claim is not a right, and ought not to and cannot exist under present circumstances, and any law that overreaches the moral reason to the contrary must be admitted as unjust if not impolitic.

But it is color, they say, color only, which determines how the negro must be treated. Color is his misfortune, and his treatment must be his misfortune also. Mistaken idea! and one of which we should speedily rid ourselves. It may be color in some cases, but in the great majority of instances it is mental and moral condition. Little or no education, little moral refinement, and all their repulsive consequences will never be accepted as equals of education, intellectual or moral. Color is absolutely nothing in the consideration of the question, unless we mean by it not color of skin, but color of character, and I fancy we can find considerable color there.<sup>12</sup>

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12. Flipper's first chapter includes the following quote from the *Chicago Tribune*: "The prejudice of the regular army instructors against the colored race is insurmountable, and that they will drive away from the Academy by persecution of some petty sort any colored boy who may obtain admittance there." Here in

It has been said that my success at West Point would be a grand victory in the way of equal rights, meaning, I apprehend, social rights, social equality, inasmuch as all have, under existing laws, equal political rights. Doubtless there is much truth in the idea. If, however, we consider the two races generally, we shall see there is no such right, no such social right, for the very basis of such a right, viz., a similarity of tastes, instincts, and of mental and moral conditions, is wanting. The mental similarity especially is wanting, and as that shapes and refines the moral one, that too is wanting.

To illustrate by myself, without any pretensions to selfishness. I have this right to social equality, for I and those to whom I claim to be equal are similarly educated. We have much in common, and this fact alone creates my right to social and equal recognition.<sup>13</sup>

“But the young gentlemen who boast of holding only official intercourse with their comrade, should remember that no one of them stands before the country in any different light from him. . . . Amalgamated by the uniform course of studies and the similarity of discipline, the separating fragments at the end of the student life carry similar qualities into the life before them, and step with almost remarkable social equality into the world where they must find their level.” – *Philadelphia North American*, July 7th, 1876.

If we apply this to the people as a unit, the similarity no longer exists. The right, therefore, also ceases to exist.

The step claimed to have been made by my success is one due to education, and not to my position or education *at West Point*, rather than at some other place; so that it follows if there be education, if the mental and moral condition of the claimants to that right be a proper one, there will necessarily be social equality, and under other circumstances there can be no such equality.

“Remember, dear friend,” says a correspondent, “that you carry an unusual responsibility. The nation is interested in what you do.

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chapter XI, Flipper attempts to use his West Point experience to restructure the narrative on prejudice in ways that reject racial prejudice but accept it in other forms. For more on Flipper’s interpretation of and experiences with prejudice at West Point, see chapter X, which includes no fewer than 46 references to it.

13. For its time, this was an extremely bold statement. Much of the public, the Army, and its officer corps plainly disagreed. Including this paragraph, however short, in his autobiography was a courageous act. That Flipper spent so many pages explaining his position is evidence that he was fully conscious of both its boldness and its justice.

If you win your diploma, your enemies lose and your friends gain one very important point in the great argument for equal rights. When you shall have demonstrated that you have equal powers, then equal rights will come in due time. The work which you have chosen, and from which you cannot now flinch without dishonor, proves far more important than either you or me (Faculty at A. U.) at first conceived. Like all great things its achievement will involve much of trial and hardship.”

Alas! how true! What a trial it is to be socially ostracized, to live in the very midst of life and yet be lonely, to pass day after day without saying perhaps a single word other than those used in the section-room during a recitation. How hard it is to live month after month without even speaking to woman, without feeling or knowing the refining influence of her presence! What a miserable existence!<sup>14</sup>

Oh! 'tis hard, this lonely living, to be  
 In the midst of life so solitary,  
 To sit all the long, long day through and gaze  
 In the dimness of gloom, all but amazed  
 At the emptiness of life, and wonder  
 What keeps sorrow and death asunder.  
 'Tis the forced seclusion most galls the mind,  
 And sours all other joy which it may find.  
 'Tis the sneer, tho' half hid, is bitter still,  
 And wakes dormant anger to passion's will.  
 But oh! 'tis harder yet to bear them all  
 Unangered and unheedful of the thrall,  
 To list the jeer, the snarl, and epithet  
 All too base for knaves, and e'en still forget  
 Such words were spoken, too manly to let  
 Such baseness move a nobler intellect.  
 But not the words nor e'en the dreder disdain  
 Move me to anger or resenting pain.  
 'Tis the thought, the thought most disturbs my mind,  
 That I'm ostracized for no fault of mine,  
 'Tis that ever-recurring thought awakes  
 Mine anger—<sup>15</sup>

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14. Flipper's statement here underscores the vast depth and extent to which ostracism affected him. He makes this point throughout the autobiography.

15. Flipper's inexpert rhyming couplets are interesting for how they recursively arrive at the fact of the speaker's anger. The poem may have aided Flipper to work through his resentment concerning his isolated condition, but it also enacts the containment of his resentment.

Such a life was mine, not indeed for four years, but for the earlier part of my stay at the Academy.<sup>16</sup>

But to return to our subject. There are two questions involved in my case. One of them is, Can a negro graduate at West Point, or will one ever graduate there? And the second, If one never graduate there, will it be because of his color or prejudice?

My own success answers most conclusively the first question, and changes the nature of the other. Was it, then, color or actual deficiency that caused the dismissal of all former colored cadets? I shall not venture to reply more than to say my opinion is deducible from what I have said elsewhere in my narrative.<sup>17</sup>

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16. Here, as elsewhere in this chapter, Flipper continues to suggest his isolation abated to some extent during his first-class year. He does not provide evidence that supports the claim, but instead seems to use it to support his broader assertion of social equality.

17. Clearly, if indirectly, Flipper argues that “actual deficiency” had more to do with the failure and dismissal of other Black cadets than racism. That is a dubious claim, but one that aligns quite well with Flipper’s characterization of social equality as something to be granted or denied based on ability and merit. Flipper has already presented his own success as evidence supporting that vision of social equality, and he will continue to do so in subsequent chapters. By characterizing his predecessors as having been dismissed because of “actual deficiency,” Flipper presents them as further evidence supporting his view of social equality.

Flipper does his predecessors a considerable disservice. His successful career at West Point would not have been possible without James Webster Smith, who endured incredible abuse as West Point’s first admitted Black cadet, and whose persistence conditioned cadets to resist integration more passively than actively—a key change to the West Point environment that made it possible, if still not probable, for a Black cadet to graduate. Furthermore, each of the three Black cadets admitted to West Point prior to Flipper—Smith, Henry A. Napier, and Thomas van Rensselaer Gibbs—had studied at either an elite northern secondary school or Howard University. While there is no evidence showing irregularities in their exams, something in the environment at West Point—most likely the practice of silencing and ostracizing Black cadets, denying them the benefit of assistance from friends when they encountered difficulties—led them to fail.

For a collective biography of Black cadets nominated to West Point during Reconstruction, see Makonen Campbell and Louisa Koebrich, “The First African American Cadets at West Point,” in *Race, Politics, and Reconstruction: The First Black Cadets at Old West Point*, eds. Rory McGovern and Ronald G. Machoian (University of Virginia Press, 2024), 64–82. For Smith’s experience at West Point, see Rory McGovern, Makonen Campbell, and Louisa Koebrich, “‘I Hope to Have Justice Done Me or I Can’t Get Along Here’: James Webster Smith and West Point,” *Journal of Military History* 87, no. 4 (October 2023): 964–1003.

However, my correspondent agrees with me that color is of no consequence in considering the question of equality socially. My friends, he says, gain an important point in the argument for equal rights. It will be in this wise, viz., that want of education, want of the proof of equality of intellect, is the obstacle, and not color. And the only way to get this proof is to get education, and not by “war of races.” Equal rights must be a consequence of this proof, and not something existing before it. Equal rights will come in due time, civil rights bill, war of races, or any thing of that kind to the contrary notwithstanding.

And moreover, I don’t want equal rights, but identical rights. The whites and blacks may have equal rights, and yet be entirely independent, or estranged from each other. The two races cannot live in the same country, under the same laws as they now do, and yet be absolutely independent of each other. There must, there should, and there will be a mutual dependence, and any thing that tends to create independence, while it is thus so manifestly impossible, can engender strife alone between them. On the other hand, whatever brings them into closer relationship, whatever increases their knowledge and appreciation of fellowship and its positive importance, must necessarily tend to remove all prejudices, and all ill-feelings, and bring the two races, and indeed the world, nearer that degree of perfection to which all things show us it is approaching. Therefore I want identical rights, for equal rights may not be sufficient.<sup>18</sup>

“It is for you, Henry, more than any one I know of, to demonstrate to the world around us, in this part of it at least (the North),

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18. This statement is no less bold and revolutionary for its time than the statement analyzed in note 13 above. When he published his autobiography in 1878, few white Americans were receptive to arguments in favor of identical rights and a complete integration of society. This statement also reveals the arc of Flipper’s evolving ambitions. He initially approached his appointment to the Academy for fulfilling “an ordinary ambition.” In due time, he realized that his work “proved far more important than either [his] friends or [himself] at first thought it would be.” His hopes of receiving an appointment to and graduating from West Point transformed into one that aspired to shift many of the fundamental, subconscious beliefs of cadets, officers, and much of society. His desire for identical rights takes a similar approach to that of his desire for social equality. Although Black men were admitted to the Academy, their experiences were inherently different from those of their white counterparts. For more on social and civic equality, see Michael W. Fitzgerald, *Splendid Failure: Postwar Reconstruction in the American South* (Ivan R. Dee, 2007), 120.

the equality of intellect in the races. You win by your uprightness and intelligence, and it cannot be otherwise than that you will gain respect and confidence."

Thus a lady correspondent (Miss M. E. H., Durham Centre, Ct.) encourages, thus she keeps up the desire to graduate, to demonstrate to the world "the equality of intellect in the races," that not color but the want of this proof in this semi-barbarous people is the obstacle to their being recognized as social equals. A tremendous task! Not so much to prove such an equality—for that had already been abundantly demonstrated—but rather to show the absurdity and impracticability of prejudice on account of color; or, in other words, that there is no such prejudice. It is prejudice on account of non-refinement and non-education.

As to how far and how well I have discharged that duty, my readers, and all others who may be in any manner interested in me, must judge from my narrative and my career at West Point. Assuring all that my endeavor has been to act as most becomes a gentleman, and with Christian forbearance to disregard all unfriendliness or prejudice, I leave this subject, this general résumé of my treatment at the hands of the cadets, and my own conduct, with the desire that it be criticised impartially if deemed worthy of criticism at all.

"*Reporter*.—Have you any more colored cadets?

"*Captain H*——.—Only one—Henry O. Flipper, of Georgia. He is a well-built lad, a mulatto, and is bright, intelligent, and studious.

"*Reporter*.—Do the cadets dislike him as much as they did Smith?

"*Captain H*——.—No, sir; I am told that he is more popular. I have heard of no doubt but that he will get through all right."—*New York Herald*, July, 1874.



## CHAPTER XII.

### PLEASURES AND PRIVILEGES.

THE privileges allowed cadets during an encampment are different generally for the different classes. These privileges are commonly designated by the rank of the class, such, for instance, as “first-class privileges,” “third-class privileges,” etc. Privileges which are common receive their designation from some characteristic in their nature or purpose. Thus we have “Saturday afternoon privileges,” and “Old Guard privileges.”

The cadets are encamped and are not supposed to leave their camp save by permission. This permission is granted by existing orders, or if for any reason it be temporarily denied it can be obtained by “permit” for some specified time. Such permission or privilege obtained by “permit” for a particular class is known as “class privileges,” and can be enjoyed only by the class that submits and gets the permit.

“First-class privileges” permit all members of the first class to leave camp at any time between troop and retreat, except when on duty, and to take advantage of the usual “Saturday afternoon privileges,” which are allowed all classes and all cadets. These privileges, however, cannot be enjoyed on the Sabbath by any except the first-class officers, without special permission.

The usual form of a permit is as follows:<sup>1</sup>

WEST POINT, N. Y., November 6, 1876.

Cadet A— B— C— has permission to walk on public lands between the hours of 8 A. M. and 4 P. M.

\_\_\_\_\_,  
*LIEUT.-COLONEL First Art’y Comd’g Corps of Cadets.*

\_\_\_\_\_,  
*Commanding Company “A.”*

By “Saturday afternoon privileges” is meant the right or privilege to walk on all public lands within cadet limits on Saturday

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1. A permit, as described by Flipper, has the same purpose as a modern-day “Exception to Policy” (ETP). This document outlines the privileges granted to the referenced group.

afternoon. This includes also the privilege of visiting the ruins of old Fort Putnam, which is not on limits. These privileges are allowed throughout the year.

The second class being absent on furlough during the encampment, of course have no privileges. Should any member of the class be present during the encampment, he enjoys "first-class privileges," unless they are expressly denied him.

"Third-class privileges" do not differ from "first-class privileges," except in that they cannot be taken advantage of on the Sabbath by any member of the class.

The fourth class as a class have no privileges.

"Old Guard privileges" are certain privileges by which all members of the "Old Guard" are exempted from all duty on the day they march off guard until one o'clock, and are permitted to enjoy privileges similar to those of Saturday afternoon during the same time. They also have the privilege of bathing at that time.

The baths are designated as "first," "second," and "third." The officers and noncommissioned officers have the first baths, and the privates the others.

Cadets who march off guard on Sunday are restricted in the enjoyment of their privileges to exemption from duty on the Sabbath only. They may take advantage of the other privileges on the following Monday during the usual time, but are not excused from any duty. All members of the "Old Guard," to whatever class they may belong, are entitled to "Old Guard privileges."

Besides these there are other privileges which are enjoyed by comparatively few. Such are "Hop managers' privileges." "Hop managers" are persons elected by their classmates from the first and third classes for the management of the hops of the summer. To enable them to discharge the duties of their office, they are permitted to leave camp, whenever necessary, by reporting their departure and return.

Under pleasures, or rather sources of pleasure, may be enumerated hops, Germans, band practice, and those incident to other privileges, such as "spooneying," or "spooning."<sup>2</sup> The hops

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2. On November 26, 1885, CDT Charles Rhodes (USMA 1889) wrote home to his parents:

We have had an inspection a few minutes ago—so I am at liberty to write you—  
We have all day today as a holiday and I can truly say I never enjoyed a holiday more. Last night there was a big German at the Mess-Hall and we pebles



The “hop card” for the graduation hop honoring West Point’s class of 1878.

The bottom of the card advertises the start time for “the German.” The very bottom of the hop card identifies Homer Lee—who published Flipper’s memoir—as having been the printer who mass-produced the hop cards in 1877.

who were doomed to stay away, kind o’ took possession of the barracks— As there was a supper served at the German, the Corps had no regular supper but were allowed to take away sandwiches at dinner. Piper, Cornell, and a fellow named Stevens & myself determined to have what is known in cadet circles as a feast—I dragged off about a loaf of bread, and the others imitated me.

The “feast” that these friends enjoyed also included “butter, ham, preserved pears, and hot chocolate.” CDT Rhodes concludes this section of his letter as follows:

are the chief source of enjoyment, and take place on Mondays and Fridays, sometimes also on Wednesdays, at the discretion of the Superintendent.

Germans are usually given on Saturday afternoons, and a special permit is necessary for every one. These permits are usually granted, unless there be some duty or other cause to prevent.

Two evenings of every week are devoted to band practice, Tuesday evening for practice in camp, and Thursday evening for practice in front of the Superintendent's quarters. Of course these entertainments, if I may so term them, have the effect of bringing together the young ladies and cadets usually denied the privilege of

"Had a jolly time— In fact a fellow must have a gay time once in a while or he'll dry up here."

While West Point hops, or dances, are likely familiar to most readers, its "Germans" are little known today. A German, or German Cotillion, differed from a hop in being more like a "dance party with games." There were dozens of variations on these dance games, many of which featured stylized flirtation and performative humor. According to one source, "[t]his dance was introduced in New York about the year 1844. At that time the quadrille was the fashionable dance, but was known as the cotillion. To make a distinction between that and this dance, which was known in Europe by the same name, this was called the 'German Cotillion'; gradually the word cotillion was dropped, the dance becoming simply 'The German.'"

In chapter IV, "Cant Terms," a glossary of West Point language, Flipper refines his reference to "Spooneyism" or "Spooning." There, "'to be spooney.'—[is] To be gallant," "'To spoon.'—[is] To be attentive to ladies," and "'A spoon.'—[is] A sweet-heart" (see page 109 in this volume). It bears remembering that Flipper's careful attention in this chapter to his readers' fascination with "pleasures" in West Point culture required he describe experiences refused him by racism. The issue is most often treated subtly. For example, two paragraphs on, where Flipper describes the pleasure of band practice as the comingling of "ladies and cadets" "in front of the Superintendent's quarters," he writes, "It is quite reasonable to assume that they enjoy themselves" (refer to page 241). Because he cannot participate in "feasts," hops, Germans, or band practices, Flipper must assume the agonized rhetorical position of an insider while actually excluded. He narrates as a voyeur brought tantalizingly close to forbidden pleasures and privileges. To read Flipper without an evenly hovering awareness of this fundamental violence in the text is to overlook one of the author's subtly central messages.

See "Charles Rhodes, to Father and Mother," November 26, 1885, Charles Rhodes Papers, United States Military Academy Library Special Collections and Archives, West Point, NY; Barbara Menard Pugliese, *Recreating the Nineteenth Century Ballroom: How the German Got Its Name*, accessed June 2, 2024, <https://recreating19cballroom.blogspot.com/2011/10/how-german-got-its-name.html>; Elias Howe, *Howe's Complete Ball-Room Hand Book* (Boston, 1858); and Allen Dodworth, *Dancing and Its Relations to Education and Social Life* (Harper & Brothers, 1900), 145.

leaving camp during the evening. It is quite reasonable to assume that they enjoy themselves. On these evenings “class privileges” permit the first- and third-classmen to be absent from camp till the practice is over. Sometimes a special permit is necessary. It might be well to say here, ere I forget it, that Wednesday evening is devoted to prayer, prayer-meeting being held in the Dialectic Hall. All cadets are allowed to attend by reporting their departure and return. The meeting is under the sole management of the cadets, although they are by no means the sole participants. Other privileges, more or less limited, such as the holding of class meetings for whatever purpose, must be obtained by special permit in each case.<sup>3</sup>

We have not much longer here to stay,  
 Only a month or two,  
 Then we'll bid farewell to cadet gray,  
 And don the army blue.  
 Army blue, army blue, we'll don the army blue,  
 We'll bid farewell to cadet gray and don the army blue.  
 To the ladies who come up in June,  
 We'll bid a fond adieu,  
 And hoping they will be married soon,  
 We'll don the army blue.  
 Army blue, army blue, we'll don the army blue,  
 We'll bid farewell to cadet gray and don the army blue.

*Addresses to the Graduating Class of the U. S. Military Academy, West Point, N. Y., June 14th, 1877.* By PROFESSOR C. O. THOMPSON, MAJOR-GENERAL WINFIELD

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3. The chapter here takes a jarring turn. After a few verses of “Army Blue,” readers will find graduation addresses by four dignitaries, and the chapter closes with a simple, alphabetized list of the 1877 graduates. Graduation is a pleasure and privilege, but the material seems out of place. We think that, without a segue of any kind, Flipper reprints material from a contemporary newspaper’s reporting—a suspicion strongly suggested by the journalistic voice that emerges to report events in the four paragraphs printed just before the chapter-closing alphabetical list of graduates. After the two following chapters—chapter XIII, “Furlough,” and chapter XIV, “Incident, Humor, etc.”—Flipper returns his readers to the graduation narrative, starting with a discussion of the spring recitation (or exam) process. In short, the second part of chapter XII, “Pleasures and Privileges,” would seem to make more sense as part of chapter XV, “Graduation—In the Army.” Whether this was a poor decision by Flipper, or by Homer Lee (his editor/printer), or simply evidence of the way the text expanded in order to be long enough for publication, cannot be definitively known at this time. See “Army Blue,” 1802 Bicentennial, 2002; Army Blue, <https://www.west-point.org/family/bicent/song>; and see David Neale, “Love Me Tender: The Story Behind an Elvis Presley Song,” accessed June 5, 2024, <https://davidneale.eu/elvis/lmt/index.html>.

S. HANCOCK, HONORABLE GEORGE W. MCCRARY, *Secretary of War*, MAJOR-GENERAL JOHN M. SCHOFIELD, *Superintendent U. S. Military Academy*.<sup>4</sup>

ADDRESS BY PROFESSOR C. O. THOMPSON,  
*President of the Board of Visitors.*

YOUNG GENTLEMEN OF THE GRADUATING CLASS: The courtesy of your admirable Superintendent forbids a possible breach in an ancient custom, and lays upon me, as the representative, for the moment, of the Board of Visitors, the pleasant duty of tendering to you their congratulations on the close of your academic career, and your auspicious future.

The people of this country have a heavy stake in the prosperity of this institution. They recognize it as the very fountain of their security in war, and the origin of some of their best methods of education. And upon education in colleges and common schools the pillars of the State assuredly rest.

To participants and to bystanders, this ceremony of graduation is as interesting and as exciting as if this were the first, instead of the seventy-fifth occurrence. Every such occasion is clothed with the splendor of perpetual youth. The secret of your future success lies in the impossibility of your entering into the experience of your predecessors. Every man's life begins with the rising sun. The world would soon become a frozen waste but for the inextinguishable ardor of youth, which believes success still to be possible where every attempt has failed.

That courage which avoids rashness by the restraints of knowledge, and dishonor by the fear of God, is the best hope of the world.

History is not life, but its reflection.

The great armies of modern times which have won immortal victories have been composed of young men who have turned into historic acts the strategy of experienced commanders.

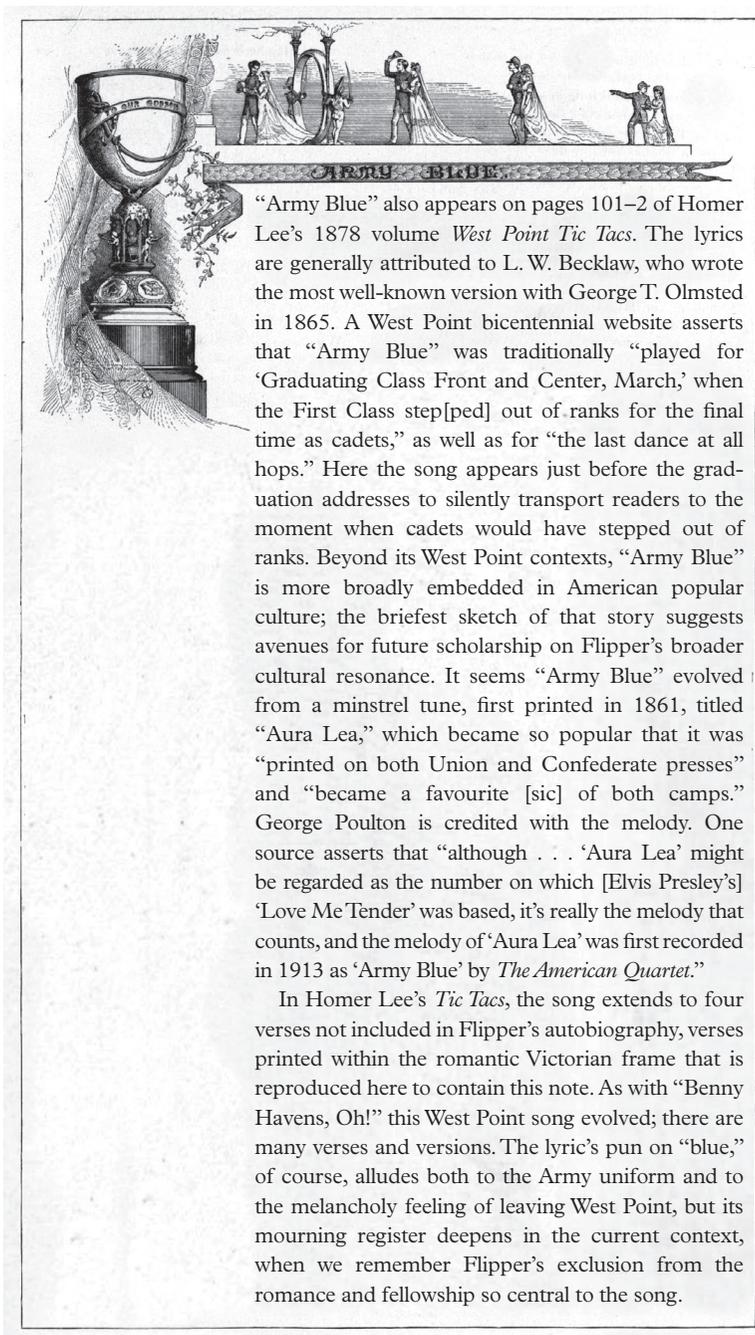
To bystanders, for the same and other reasons, the occasion is profoundly interesting.

For educated men who are true to honor and to righteousness, the world anxiously waits; but an educated man who is false, the world has good reason to dread. The best thing that can be said of this Academy, with its long roll of heroes in war and in peace, is, that every year the conviction increases among the people of the United States, that its graduates are men who will maintain, at all hazards, the simple virtues of a robust manhood—like Chaucer's young Knight, courteous, lowly, and serviceable.<sup>5</sup>

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4. It is not until chapter XV that Flipper sets the scene for these distinguished graduation speakers. In keeping with his preference for not describing West Point space, a brief description enters the text only via an interpellated article from "the *New York Times*"; the addresses are described as occurring "in the open air, under the shadow of the maple trees, which form almost a grove in front of the Academy building" (244). The anonymous journalist describes the first speaker, Professor C. O. Thompson, as "of the school of technology, Worcester, Mass., and chairman of the Board of Visitors" (245). The biographies of the other speakers are well-known.

5. The allusion is apt. Thompson remembers Geoffrey Chaucer's Middle English description of the Knight's son, his young Squire (a Knight in training) from



“Army Blue” also appears on pages 101–2 of Homer Lee’s 1878 volume *West Point Tic Tacs*. The lyrics are generally attributed to L. W. Becklaw, who wrote the most well-known version with George T. Olmsted in 1865. A West Point bicentennial website asserts that “Army Blue” was traditionally “played for ‘Graduating Class Front and Center, March,’ when the First Class step[ped] out of ranks for the final time as cadets,” as well as for “the last dance at all hops.” Here the song appears just before the graduation addresses to silently transport readers to the moment when cadets would have stepped out of ranks. Beyond its West Point contexts, “Army Blue” is more broadly embedded in American popular culture; the briefest sketch of that story suggests avenues for future scholarship on Flipper’s broader cultural resonance. It seems “Army Blue” evolved from a minstrel tune, first printed in 1861, titled “Aura Lea,” which became so popular that it was “printed on both Union and Confederate presses” and “became a favourite [sic] of both camps.” George Poulton is credited with the melody. One source asserts that “although . . . ‘Aura Lea’ might be regarded as the number on which [Elvis Presley’s] ‘Love Me Tender’ was based, it’s really the melody that counts, and the melody of ‘Aura Lea’ was first recorded in 1913 as ‘Army Blue’ by *The American Quartet*.”

In Homer Lee’s *Tic Tacs*, the song extends to four verses not included in Flipper’s autobiography, verses printed within the romantic Victorian frame that is reproduced here to contain this note. As with “Benny Havens, Oh!” this West Point song evolved; there are many verses and versions. The lyric’s pun on “blue,” of course, alludes both to the Army uniform and to the melancholy feeling of leaving West Point, but its mourning register deepens in the current context, when we remember Flipper’s exclusion from the romance and fellowship so central to the song.

I welcome you, therefore, to the hardships and perils of a soldier's life in a time of peace. The noise and the necessities of war drive men in upon themselves and keep their faculties awake and alert; but the seductive influence of peace, when a soldier must spend his time in preparation for the duties of his profession rather than in their practice, this is indeed a peril to which the horrors of warfare are subordinate. It is so much easier for men to fight other men than themselves. So much easier to help govern other men than to wholly govern themselves.

But, young gentlemen, as we have listened to your examination, shared in your festivities, and enjoyed personal acquaintance with you, we strongly hope for you every thing lovely, honorable, and of good report.

You who have chosen the sword, may be helped in some trying hour of your coming lives by recalling the lesson which is concealed in a legend of English history. It is the old lesson of the advantage of knowledge over its more showy counterfeits, and guards against one of the perils of our American society.

A man losing his way on a hillside, strayed into a chamber full of enchanted knights, each lying motionless, in complete armor, with his horse standing motionless beside him. On a rock near the entrance lay a sword and a horn, and the intruder was told that he must choose between these, if he would lead the army. He chose the horn, and blew a loud blast; whereupon the knights and their horses vanished in a whirlwind, and their visitor was blown back into common air, these words sounding after him upon the wind:

“Cursed be the coward, that ever he was born,  
Who did not draw the sword before he blew the horn.”<sup>6</sup>

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the “General Prologue” to *The Canterbury Tales* (written c.1388–1400 CE): “So hoote he lovede that by nyghtertale / He sleep namoore than dooth a nyghtyn-gale. / Curteis he was, lowly, and servysable, / And carf biforn his fader at the table.” Project Gutenberg provides D. Laing Purves’s 1879 edition “edited for popular perusal” as follows: “So hot he loved, that by nightertale\* \*night-time / He slept no more than doth the nightingale. / Courteous he was, lowly, and serviceable, / And carv’d before his father at the table.” The last line plays on the word “carv’d” to suggest that the Squire both serves his master “at the table” and that he is carved in his father’s image. Thompson echoes Chaucer’s careful figuration of the Squire, suggesting that while the graduates’ heroic futures are their own, built upon “the inextinguishable ardor of youth,” they also represent a lengthening democratic lineage of men dedicated to “simple virtues” in service to “the people of the United States.” Moreover, by recalling the romantic tradition of courtly love still ensconced at the Academy at the time, and by recuperating words like “lowly” and “serviceable” for democratic contexts, Thompson deftly evinces an appreciation of his audience. See Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Riverside Chaucer* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), 25; and Chaucer, Geoffrey, *The Canterbury Tales, and Other Poems of Geoffrey Chaucer*, ed. D. Laing Purves (1881), Project Gutenberg, accessed June 13, 2024, <https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/2383/pg2383-images.html>.

6. Here Professor Thompson paraphrases from the “The Legend of Canonbie Dick,” one of the most well-known traditional Scottish folk tales, told in many variations. The version sketched here tracks loosely to the version Sir Walter Scott collected in his *Letters on Demonology and Witchcraft*. The correlate quotation in Scott

Young gentlemen, the Board of Visitors can have no better wish for our common country than that your future will fulfil the promise of the present.

*ADDRESS BY MAJOR-GENERAL W. S. HANCOCK.<sup>7</sup>*

To me has been assigned the pleasant duty of welcoming into the service as commissioned officers, the Graduates of the Military Academy of to-day.

Although much time has elapsed since my graduation here, and by contact with the rugged cares of life some of the sharp edges of recollection may have become dulled, yet I have not lived long enough to have forgotten the joy of that bright period. You only experience it to-day as I have felt it before you.

I have had some experience of life since, and it might be worth something to you were I to relate it. But youth is self-confident and impatient, and you may at present doubt the wisdom of listening to sermons which you can learn at a later day.

You each feel that you have the world in a sling, and that it would be wearisome to listen to the croakings of the past, and especially from those into whose shoes you soon expect to step. That is the rule of life. The child growing into manhood, believes that its judgment is better than the knowledge of its parents; and yet if that experience was duly considered, and its unselfish purposes believed in, many shoals would be avoided, otherwise certain to be met with in the journey of life, by the inexperienced but confident navigator.

You should not forget that there were as bright intellects, and men who possessed equal elements of greatness in past generations as in this, and that deeds have been performed in earlier times which, at best, the men of the present day can only hope to rival. Why then should we not profit by the experiences of the past; and as our lives are shot at best, instead of following the ruts of our predecessors, start on the road of life where they left off, and not continue to repeat their failures? I cannot say why, unless it proceeds from the natural

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begins instead "Woe to the coward," and there are other differences. In *Demonology*, Scott asserts that "A moral might be perhaps extracted from the legend—namely, that it is best to be armed against danger before bidding it defiance." See Sir Walter Scott, *Letters on Demonology and Witchcraft* (John Murray, 1830), 137.

7. Hancock's biography is long and storied, with superb service in the Civil War in command of the Second Corps of the Army of the Potomac. But in the context of this volume, he is perhaps most noteworthy for authoring in 1867 his "General Order Number 40" while commanding the Fifth Military District, an area that included Louisiana and Texas. Hancock's General Order delivered a damaging blow to the cause of Radical Reconstruction. Philip Sheridan had commanded the Fifth district before Hancock, but President Johnson had ordered Grant to replace Sheridan, who had angered local powerbrokers by aiding "in the formation of Union Leagues and the Republican party," and by "us[ing] his powers to remove numerous [anti-Reconstruction] officeholders." The General Order by a "far more conservative Gen. Winfield S. Hancock . . . announced that henceforth the military would remain subordinate to civilian authorities." Quotations are from Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877*, Perennial Classics Edition (Perennial Classics, 2002), 307-8. For more on Hancock, see David M. Jordan, *Winfield Scott Hancock: A Soldier's Life* (Indiana University Press, 1995).

buoyancy of youth, self-confidence in its ability to overcome all obstacles, and to carve out futures more dazzling than any successes of the past. In this there is a problem for you to solve. Yet I may do well by acknowledging to you, to-day, that after an active military life of no mean duration, soldiers of my length of service feel convinced that they might have learned wisdom by listening to the experience of those who preceded them. Had they been prepared to assume that experience as a fact at starting, and made departures from it, instead of disregarding it, in the idea that there was nothing worthy of note to be learned from a study of the past, it would be safe to assume that they would have made greater advances in their day.

Were I to give you my views *in extenso*, applicable to the occasion, I could only repeat what has been well and vigorously said here by distinguished persons in the past, in your hearing, on occasions of the graduation of older classes than your own.<sup>8</sup>

You are impatient, doubtless, as I was in your time, and if you have done as my class did before you, you have already thrown your books away, and only await the moment of the conclusion of these ceremonies to don the garb of the officer or the civilian. The shell of the cadet is too contracted to contain your impatient spirits. Nevertheless, if you will listen but for a few minutes to the relation of an old soldier, I will repeat of the lessons of experience a few of those most worthy of your consideration.

There is but one comrade of my class remaining in active service to-day, and I think I might as truly have said the same ten years ago.<sup>9</sup>

In the next thirty years, those of you who live will see that your numbers have become sensibly reduced, if not in similar proportion.

Some will have studied, have kept up with the times, been ready for service at the hour of their country's call, been prepared to accomplish the purposes for which their education was given to them.

Some will have sought the active life of the frontiers, and been also ready to perform their part in the hour of danger.

A few will have seized the passing honors.

It may have depended much upon opportunity among those who were well equipped for the occasion, who gained the greatest distinction; but it cannot for a moment be doubted that the roll of honor in the future of this class will never again stand as it stands to-day.

It will be a struggle of life to determine who among you will keep their standing in the contest for future honors and distinctions.

You who have been the better students here, and possessed the greater natural qualities, have a start in the race; but industry, study, perseverance, and other

8. *In extenso* is a Latin phrase meaning "at full length."

9. Hancock graduated West Point in 1844 and was 18th in a class of 25 students. Asher R. Eddy, the only one of Hancock's 1844 classmates still in the Army in June 1873, had by then risen to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel in the Quartermaster General Bureau. He had graduated 5th in his class. For more on Hancock, Eddy, and others see *George W. Cullum's Biographical Register of the Officers and Graduates of the United States Military Academy at West Point, New York, since its establishment in 1802* (Houghton Mifflin, 1891).

qualities will continue to be important factors in the future, as they have been in the past.

Through continuous mental, moral, and physical development, with progress in the direction of your profession and devotion to duty, lies the road to military glory; and it may readily come to pass that "the race will not be to the swift, nor the battle to the strong," as you regard your classmates to-day.

It must be admitted, however, that great leaders are born.

A rare combination of natural qualities causes men to develop greatness. Education and training make them greater; nevertheless, men with fewer natural qualities often succeed, with education and training, when those more richly endowed fail to reach the higher places, and you have doubtless witnessed that in your experience here.

A man in a great place in modern times is not respectable without education. That man must be a God to command modern armies successfully without it; yet war is a great school; men learn quickly by experience, and in long wars there will be found men of natural abilities who will appear at the front. It will be found, however, in the long run, that the man who has prepared himself to make the best use of his natural talents will win in the race, if he has the opportunity, while others of equal or greater natural parts may fail from lack of that mental and moral training necessary to win the respect of those they command.

Towards the close of our civil war, men came to the front rank who entered the service as privates. They were men of strong natural qualities. How far the best of them would have proceeded had the war continued, cannot be told; but it may be safely assumed that if they possessed the moral qualities and the education necessary to command the respect of the armies with which they were associated, they would have won the highest honors; and yet our war lasted but four years.

Some of them had the moral qualities, some the education; and I have known of those men who thus came forward, some who would certainly have reached the highest places in a long race, had they had the training given to you.

War gives numerous opportunities for distinction, and especially to those who in peace have demonstrated that they would be available in war; and soldiers can win distinction in both peace and war if they will but seize their opportunities.

"There is a tide in the affairs of men which, taken at the flood, leads on to victory."<sup>10</sup>

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10. Hancock quotes from Shakespeare's extended metaphor in the tragedy *Julius Caesar*, but the last word should be "fortune," not "victory." At this point in the play, Brutus is attempting to convince Cassius that the time is ripe for marching against their enemies at Philippi. Here is the passage, slightly widened: "The enemy increaseth every day; / We, at the height, are ready to decline. / There is a tide in the affairs of men / Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune; / Omitted, all the voyage of their life / Is bound in shallows and in miseries. / On such a full sea are we now afloat, / And we must take the current when it serves / Or lose our ventures." Four paragraphs on, Hancock notably extends Shakespeare's water imagery of "shallows and miseries" when, a bit like the long-winded Polonius in another play, he advises graduating cadets to "[a]void the rocks of dissipation, of gambling, of debt."

Great responsibilities in time of danger are not given to the ignorant, the slothful, or to those who have impaired their powers of mind or body by the indulgences of life. In times of danger favorites are discarded. When work is to be done, deeds to be performed, men of action have their opportunities and fail not to seize them. It is the interest of commanders that such men should be selected for service, when success or failure may follow, according to the wisdom of the selection, as the instrument may be—sharp or dull, good or bad.

I would say to you, lead active, temperate, studious lives, develop your physical qualities as well as mental. Regard the education acquired here as but rudimentary; pursue your studies in the line of your profession and as well in such other branches of science or language as may best accord with your inclinations. It will make you greater in your profession and cause you to be independent of it. The latter is but prudent in these practical days.

Study to lead honorable, useful, and respected lives. Even if no opportunity presents for martial glory you will not fail to find your reward.

Avoid the rocks of dissipation, of gambling, of debt; lead those manly lives which will always find you in health in mind and body, free from entanglements of whatever kind, and you may be assured you will find your opportunities for great services, when otherwise you would have been overlooked or passed by. Such men are known and appreciated in every army and out of it.

Knowledge derived from books may bring great distinction outside of the field of war, as an expert in the lessons of the military profession and in others, but the lessons of hard service are salutary and necessary to give the soldier a practical understanding of the world and its ways as he will encounter them in war. I would advise you to go when young to the plains—to the wilderness—seek active service there, put off the days of indulgence and of ease. Those should follow years.

Take with you to the frontier your dog, your rod and gun; the pursuit of a life in the open air with such adjuncts will go far to give you health and the vigor to meet the demands to be made upon you in trying campaigns, and to enable you to establish the physical condition necessary to maintain a life of vigor such as a soldier requires.<sup>11</sup> You will by these means, too, avoid many of the temptations

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Like Shakespeare, Hancock intends to evoke military readiness, a specific aspect of the more general *carpe diem* theme, but he empathizes individual—or leader—readiness, rather than mass preparedness for battle. His discussion in subsequent sentences of individual “reward” in times without war tracks with Brutus’s concern for “fortune” and “ventures,” which a footnote in the Norton Shakespeare tells us means “investments (in trading voyages).” Through Shakespeare, Hancock speaks to the martial as well as the material aspects of America’s expansionist project and the belief in Manifest Destiny. See William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, in *The Norton Shakespeare*, 3rd ed., general ed. Steven Greenblatt (W.W. Norton, 2016), 4.3.217–24.

11. These pleasantries about keeping fit “in the open air” contrast with General William Tecumseh Sherman’s ascetic “centennial class” address made at the previous year’s graduation. Flipper was there for Sherman’s words, as he notes in his memoranda for Wednesday, June 14, 1876 (see page 82). Hancock borrows from Sherman at times, for example where, the year before, Sherman had said that “Man

incident to an idle life—all calculated to win you from your usefulness in the future, and by no means leave your books behind you.

When I graduated, General Scott, thinking possibly to do me a service, asked me to what regiment I desired to be assigned; I replied, to the regiment stationed at the most western post in the United States. I was sent to the Indian Territory of to-day. We had not then acquired California or New Mexico, and our western boundary north of Texas was the one hundredth degree of longitude.

I know that that early frontier service and the opportunities for healthy and vigorous out-door exercise were of great advantage to me in many ways, and would have been more so had I followed the advice in reference to study that I have given to you.

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is naturally a social being, and yearns for his kindred and friends, but where the soldier is there should his affections be. He must practice self-denial, and learn to find companionship in his horse, his dog and his gun." Sherman's message differs in its more abrupt turn toward the starkness of martial life on the inland frontier. In advance of his own graduation, readers might imagine Flipper first at the 1876 graduation, listening to Sherman, and then a short three months later, on September 2, 1876, sitting down in the library to read Keim's *Sheridan's Troopers*, which reiterates Sherman's stark, anti-indigenous sentiments. See pages 45–46 in our introduction for a passage from Keim's book. Here is a sampling of Sherman's address:

The proclaimed mission among the nations of the earth was peace, yet we were born in war, baptized in war, and have had wars of aggression and defence. We have warred with our neighbors, with ourselves, and have had eternal war with the savage aboriginal inhabitants, yet at each step of our progress good men have denounced war as necessarily inhuman, barbarous, to be abhorred by God and man. This cannot be. Wars are only the means to an end, to be judged by the motives and the events, like other human actions. . . . You have doubtless heard much of the wrongs and the oppressions of the poor Indian. His inevitable fate appeals to your generous natures, and you will find among your comrades a strong feeling of sympathy for him; but high above all the difficulties that surround this question is the inherited prejudice of the red man against labor. He has never heard or heeded the divine command that all men must earn their bread by the sweat of their brows. He prefers to trust for his food to the scanty supply of game that requires a vast scope of country to range over. Take for instance the state of Nebraska. Twenty thousand Indians would regard it as a small range for their subsistence, whereas the white man by the plough and the common arts of agriculture will provide for 1,000,000 or 2,000,000 of people. Reason as we may, here is a conflict of interest that can have but one result. The Indian must be absorbed into the common whole or he must content himself on a reasonable share of the common domain. This will probably form your first task in the great problem of war, and all I can say to you is that the inevitable result should be reached with a due regard to humanity and mercy. I have thrown out a few of these thoughts because I know you will soon have to grapple with them, and I believe they are not written down in any of your text books.

See "Young Officers," *New York Herald*, June 15, 1876, p. 5.

There are many “extreme western” posts to-day. It is difficult to say which is the most western in the sense of that day, when the Indian frontiers did not as now, lie in the circumference of an inner circle; but the Yellowstone will serve your purpose well. And if any of you wish to seek that service your taste will not be difficult to gratify, for the hardest lessons will be certain to be avoided by many. There will be those who in the days of youth will seek the softer places. They may have their appropriate duties there and do their parts well, but it may be considered a safe maxim that the indulgence of the present will have to be paid for in the future. A man may not acquire greatness by pursuing religiously the course I have indicated as the best, but it will be safe to assume that when the roll of honor of your class is called after a length of service equal to mine, but few, if any of your number, will have done their part well in public estimation save of those who shall have prettily closely followed these safe rules of life.

Gentlemen, I bid you welcome.

*ADDRESS BY HON. G. W. McCRARY,  
Secretary of War.<sup>12</sup>*

GENTLEMEN OF THE GRADUATING CLASS: Although not a part of the programme arranged for these exercises, I cannot refuse to say a word by way of greeting, and I would make it as hearty and earnest as possible to you, gentlemen, one and all, upon this occasion, so interesting to you as well is to the entire army, and to the people of the whole country.

There are others here who will speak to you as soldiers, to whom you will listen, and from whom you will receive all counsel and admonition as coming from men who have distinguished themselves in the command of the greatest armies the world has ever seen, and by the achievement of some of the grandest victories recorded upon the pages of history.

I would speak to you as a citizen; and as such, I desire to assure you that you are to-day the centre of a general interest pervading every part of our entire country. It is not the army alone that is interested in the graduating class of 1877. West Point Military Academy, more than any other institution in the land—far more—is a national institution—one in which we have a national pride.

It is contrary to the policy of this country to keep in time of peace a large standing army. We have adopted what I think is a wiser and better policy—that of educating a large number of young men in the science of arms, so that they may be ready when the time of danger comes. You will go forth from this occasion with your commissions as Second Lieutenants in the army; but I see, and I know that the country sees, that if war should come, and large armies should be organized and marshalled, we have here seventy-six young gentlemen, any one of whom can

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12. George W. McCrary was a native Indianan whose family moved to Iowa while he was a young child. He became a Republican politician in that state, serving in the state assembly and as a state senator prior to and during the Civil War before being elected in 1868 to serve in the U.S. House of Representatives, where he served four terms. He served as Secretary of War under President Rutherford B. Hayes from 1877 to 1879. See “McCrary, George Washington,” *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress*, accessed September 14, 2024, <https://bioguide.congress.gov/search/bio/M000379>.

command not only a company, but a brigade; and I think I may say a division, or an army corps.

The experience of the past teaches that I do not exaggerate when I say this. At all events, such is the theory upon which our government proceeds, and it is expected that every man who is educated in this institution, whether he remains in the ranks of the army or not, wherever he may be found and called upon, shall come and draw his sword in defence of his country and her flag.

It is a happy coincidence that one hundred years ago to-day, on the 14th of June, 1777, the Continental Congress passed the act which fixed our national emblem as the stars and stripes. It is a happy coincidence that you graduate upon the anniversary of the passage of that act—the centennial birthday of the stars and stripes. I do not know that it will add any thing to your love of the flag and of your country. I doubt whether any thing would add to that; but I refer to this coincidence with great pleasure.<sup>13</sup>

Gentlemen of the Graduating Class: I am not qualified to instruct you in your duties as soldiers, but these is one thing I may say to you, because it ought to be said to every graduating class, and to all young men about to enter upon the active duties of life, and that is, that the profession does not ennoble the man, but the man ennoble the profession Behind the soldier is the man.<sup>14</sup>

Character, young men, is every thing; without it, your education is nothing; without it, your country will be disappointed in you. Go forth into life, then, firmly resolved to be true, not only to the flag of your country, not only to the institutions of the land, not only to the Union which our fathers established, and which the blood of our countrymen has cemented, but to be true to yourselves and the principles of honor, of rectitude, of temperance, of virtue, which have always characterized the great and successful soldier, and must always characterize such a soldier in the future.

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13. At the previous graduation, William T. Sherman made the day more memorable by tying the class to the Centennial. Here McCrary ties Flipper's graduation to the Centennial of the act establishing the "stars and stripes" as "our national emblem." Flipper's graduation in 1877 also marked the semi-sesquicentennial, or 75th anniversary, of the United States Military Academy. Such connections worked to help the graduates appreciate the moment.

14. The rhetorical figure McCrary deploys here is *chiasmus*, or the crossing figure. Modern readers will certainly know it better from President Kennedy's famous 1961 construction, "Ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country." McCrary could have drawn this moral commonplace from any number of contemporary usages. For example, it appears in a Victorian essay titled "Choosing a Profession" in the following variation: "Whatever the business of life, act well your part, and prove to the world that the man ennoble the profession, not the profession the Man!" See *The Mother's Magazine and Family Circle*, ed. E. T. Farr, Volume 40, page 220 (Kelly & Rorty, 1872).

*ADDRESS BY MAJOR-GENERAL JOHN M. SCHOFIELD,  
Superintendent U. S. Military Academy.*<sup>15</sup>

GENTLEMEN OF THE GRADUATING CLASS: The agreeable duty now devolves upon me of delivering to you the diplomas which the Academic Board have awarded you as Graduates of the Military Academy.

These diplomas you have fairly won by your ability, your industry, and your obedience to discipline. You receive them, not as favors from any body, but as the just and lawful reward of honest and persistent effort.

You have merited, and are about to receive, the highest honors attainable by young men in our country. You have won these honors by hard work and patient endurance, and you are thus prepared to prize them highly. Unless thus fairly won, honors, like riches, are of little value.

As you learn, with advancing years, to more fully appreciate the value in life of the habits you have acquired of self-reliance, long-sustained effort, obedience to discipline, and respect for lawful authority, a value greater even than that of the scientific knowledge you have gained, you will more and more highly prize the just reward which you are to-day found worthy to receive.

You are now prepared to enter upon an honorable career in the great arena of the world. The West Point Diploma has ever been a passport to public respect, and to the confidence of government. But such respect and confidence imply corresponding responsibilities. The honor of West Point and that of the army are now in your keeping; and your country is entitled to the best services, intellectual, moral, and physical, which it may be in your power to render.

That you may render such services, do not fail to pursue your scientific studies, that you may know the laws of nature, and make her forces subservient to the public welfare. Study carefully the history, institutions, and laws of your country, that you may be able to see and to defend what is lawful and right in every emergency. Study not only the details of your profession, but the highest principles of the art of war. You may one day be called to the highest responsibility. And, above all, be governed in all things by those great moral principles

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15. Schofield proved an able commander in the Civil War's western theater. He went on to face a series of difficult civil-military relations challenges during Reconstruction, especially when President Andrew Johnson installed Schofield as Secretary of War after he removed Edwin Stanton from that post in 1868, which opened the political firestorm that led the House of Representatives to impeach Johnson. The Senate acquitted the president by one vote and Schofield stayed in office until the Grant administration took office in 1869. Schofield subsequently moved to St. Louis and assumed command of the Department of Missouri. In 1876, Commanding General of the U.S. Army William T. Sherman brought Schofield east and installed him as superintendent at West Point with a mandate to reform the institution. While a strong advocate for military reform, Schofield was a reactionary on questions of race and was ill-suited to lead the institution through an effort to integrate the Corps of Cadets. He even believed the Fourteenth Amendment, which granted citizenship to formerly enslaved people, to be "unjust and unwise." See Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877*, Perennial Classics Edition (Perennial Classics, 2002), 308. For more on Schofield, see Donald B. Connelly, *John M. Schofield and the Politics of Generalship* (University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

which have been the guide of great and good men in all ages and in all countries. Without such guide the greatest genius can do only evil to mankind.

One of your number, under temptation which has sometimes proved too great for even much older soldiers, committed a breach of discipline for which he was suspended. The Honorable Secretary of War has been kindly pleased to remit the penalty, so that your classmate may take his place among you according to his academic rank.

You have to regret the absence of one of your number, who has been prevented by extreme illness from pursuing the studies of the last year. But I am glad to say that Mr. Barnett has so far recovered that he will be able to return to the Academy, and take his place in the next class.<sup>16</sup>

Another member of the class has been called away by the death of his father, but he had passed his examination, and will graduate with you. His diploma will be sent to him.

With the single exception, then, above mentioned, I have the satisfaction of informing you that you graduate with the ranks of your class unbroken.

We take leave of you, gentlemen, not only with hope, but with full confidence that you will acquit yourselves well in the honorable career now before you. We give you our parental blessing, with fervent wishes for your prosperity, happiness, and honor.

Loud applause greeted the close of the general's speech, and the graduates were then called up one by one and their diplomas delivered to them. The first to step forward was Mr. William M. Black, of Lancaster, Penn., whose career at the Academy has been remarkable. He has stood at the head of his class for the whole four years, actually distancing all competitors. He is a young man of signal ability, won his appointment in a competitive examination, and has borne himself with singular modesty and good sense. During the past year he has occupied the position of Adjutant of the Corps of Cadets—the highest post which can be held. General Sherman shook hands with the father of the young cadet—a grand-looking old gentleman, and very proud of his son, as he has a right to be—and warmly congratulated him on the brilliant career which was before the young man. The next on the list was Mr. Walter F. Fisk. When Mr. Flipper, the colored cadet, stepped forward, and received the reward of four years of as hard work and unflinching courage and perseverance as any young man could be called upon to go through, the crowd of spectators gave him a round of hearty applause. He deserves it. Any one who knows how quietly and bravely this young man—the first of his despised race to graduate at West Point—has borne the difficulties of his position; how for four years he has had to stand apart from his classmates as one with them but not of them; and to all the severe work of academic official life has had added the yet more severe mental strain which bearing up against a cruel social ostracism puts on any man; and knowing that he has done this without getting soured, or losing courage for a day—any one, I say, who knows all this would be inclined to say that the young man deserved to be well taken care of by the government he is bound to serve.

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16. Schofield refers to John T. Barnett (USMA 1878) from Indiana; Cullum #2730. See George Cullum's *Registry of Graduates* (Houghton Mifflin, 1891).

Everybody here who has watched his course speaks in terms of admiration of the unflinching courage he has shown. No cadet will go away with heartier wishes for his future welfare.

When the last of the diplomas had been given, the line reformed, the band struck up a lively tune, the cadets marched to the front of the barracks, and there Cadet Black, the Adjutant, read the orders of the day, they being the standing of the students in their various classes, the list of new officers, etc. This occupied some time, and at its conclusion Colonel Neil, Commandant of Cadets, spoke a few kind words to the First Class, wished them all success in life, and then formally dismissed them.

At the close of the addresses the Superintendent of the Academy delivered the diplomas to the following cadets, members of the Graduating Class. The names are alphabetically arranged:

Ammon A. Augur,  
 William H. Baldwin,  
 Thomas H. Barry,  
 George W. Baxter,  
 John Baxter, Jr.,  
 John Bigelow, Jr.,  
 William M. Black,  
 Francis P. Blair,  
 Augustus P. Blocksom,  
 Charles A. Bradley,  
 John J. Brereton,  
 Oscar J. Brown,  
 William C. Brown,  
 Ben. I. Butler,  
 George N. Chase,  
 Edward Chynoweth,  
 Wallis O. Clark,  
 Charles J. Crane,  
 Heber M. Creel,  
 Matthias W. Day,  
 Millard F. Eggleston,  
 Robert T. Emmet,  
 Calvin Esterly,  
 Walter L. Fisk,  
 Henry O. Flipper,  
 Fred. W. Foster,  
 Daniel A. Frederick,  
 F. Halverson French,  
 Jacob G. Galbraith,  
 William W. Galbraith,  
 Charles B. Gatewood,  
 Edwin F. Glenn,  
 Henry J. Goldman,  
 William B. Gordon,  
 John F. Guilfoyle,

John J. Haden,  
 Harry T. Hammond,  
 John F. C. Hegewald,  
 Curtis B. Hoppin,  
 George K. Hunter,  
 James B. Jackson,  
 Henry Kirby,  
 Samuel H. Loder,  
 James A. Maney,  
 James D. Mann,  
 Frederick Marsh,  
 Medad C. Martin,  
 Solon F. Massey,  
 Ariosto McCrimmon,  
 David N. McDonald,  
 John McMartin,  
 Stephen C. Mills,  
 Cunliffe H. Murray,  
 James V. S. Paddock,  
 Theophilus Parker,  
 Alexander M. Patch,  
 Francis J. Patten,  
 Thomas C. Patterson,  
 John H. Philbrick,  
 Edward H. Plummer,  
 David Price, Jr.,  
 Robert D. Read, Jr.,  
 Solomon W. Roessler,  
 Robert E. Safford,  
 James C. Shofner,  
 Adam Slaker,  
 Howard A. Springett,  
 Robert R. Stevens,  
 Monroe P. Thorington,  
 Albert Todd,

Samuel P. Wayman,  
John V. White,  
Wilber E. Wilder,

Richard H. Wilson,  
William T. Wood,  
Charles G. Woodward.



## CHAPTER XIII.

### FURLOUGH.

OF all privileges or sources of pleasure which tend to remove the monotony of military life, there are none to which the stripling soldier looks forward with more delight than furlough. Indeed it is hard to say which is the stronger emotion that we experience when we first receive information of our appointment to a cadetship, or that which comes upon us when we are apprised that a furlough has been granted us. Possibly the latter is the stronger feeling. It is so with some, with those, at least, who received the former announcement with indifference, as many do, accepting it solely to please a mother, or father, or other friend or relative. With whatever feeling, or for whatever reason the appointment may have been accepted, it is certain that all are equally anxious to take advantage of their furlough when the time comes. This is made evident in a multitude of ways.<sup>1</sup>

A furlough is granted to those only who have been present at two annual examinations at least, and by and with the consent of a parent or guardian if a minor.

Immediately after January next preceding their second annual examination, the furloughmen, as they are called, have class meetings, or rather furlough meetings, to celebrate the "good time coming." They hold them almost weekly, and they are devoted to music, jesting, story-telling, and to general jollification. It can be well imagined with what joy a cadet looks forward to his furlough. It is the only interruption in the monotony of his Academy life, and it is to him for that very reason extremely important. During all this time, and even long before January, the furloughmen are accustomed to record the state of affairs respecting their furlough by covering every available substance that will bear a pencil or chalk mark with numerous inscriptions, giving the observer some such information as this: "100 days to furlough," "75 days to furlough,"

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1. Furlough is a period granted to soldiers so they can take leave away from their duty assignment, typically to return home or travel for leisure. As Flipper recounts, the summer between a cadet's third-class and second-class year was the only time when a cadet was granted furlough from West Point.

“only two months before furlough,” and thus even to the day before they actually leave.

The crowning moment of all is the moment when the order granting furloughs is published.

I am sure my happiest moment at West Point, save when I grasped my “sheepskin” for the first time, was when I heard my name read in the list.<sup>2</sup> It was a most joyous announcement. To get away from West Point, to get out among friends who were not ashamed nor afraid to be friends, could not be other than gratifying.<sup>3</sup> It was almost like beginning a new life, a new career, and as I looked back from the deck of the little ferryboat my feelings were far different from what they were two years before.

My furlough was something more than an interruption of my ordinary mode of life for the two years previous. It was a complete change from a life of isolation to one precisely opposite. And of course I enjoyed it the more on that account.<sup>4</sup>

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2. Graduation diplomas were initially made of “sheepskin.” Here Flipper rates his graduation as his happiest moment at West Point, with hearing his name on the approved furlough list as a close second.

3. Flipper insinuates here that some cadets would interact with him more if they were not constrained by the expectations of the Academy. Flipper claims elsewhere in his autobiography that cadets socially isolated him because they were afraid of their peers ostracizing them for appearing tolerant or friendly toward him. Refer to chapter III, note 12, and chapter X, notes 5 and 7.

4. Flipper’s furlough for the summer of 1875 began June 20 and lasted until the last week of August. On June 27, 1875, *The Atlanta Constitution* reported that “Henry Flipper, the colored cadet, [had] not yet arrived home from West Point.” This implies that Flipper was expected at some point to return to Atlanta, most likely to visit his family. However, after this article there are no available entries from the *Constitution* that reference his arrival in the city. This could mean that Flipper did not use his furloughed time to go to Atlanta or visit his family, potentially remaining in New York or venturing to another part of the country. He references at least some time spent in New York City during his furlough, but there are no other specific references to what he did with the time. Flipper had a large family to visit in Atlanta and surrounding areas, comprised of both his parents and five brothers. His limited commentary on the events of his furlough suggest that it might not have met his expectations for the experience, or that there was some considerable part of furlough that he wanted to keep private. The absence of reference to interactions with other cadets during furlough or while in transit to and from West Point suggests that their lack of association with him was not caused solely by the Academy and its environment. See “Town Topic,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, June 27, 1875.



A page from the class album belonging to Edward Chynoweth, class of 1877. Chynoweth arranged photos of his classmates in alphabetical order except for Flipper, whom he placed next to Bugler Louis D. Bentz on the last portrait page. *Courtesy of the United States Military Academy Special Collections and Archives.*

The granting of furloughs is entirely discretionary with the Superintendent. It may be denied altogether, but usually is not, except as punishment for some grave offence.

It is customary to detain for one, two, three, or even more days those who have demerits exceeding a given number for a given time. The length of their leave is therefore shortened by just so many days.<sup>5</sup>

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5. While Flipper deeply desired social connection with other cadets, he also feared that any attempt to forge them would invite the kind of trouble that Smith had warned him against (refer to chapter III, note 13). One method white cadets used to make Academy life difficult for their Black counterparts was to falsely accuse them of minor disciplinary infractions in order to add to their demerits. If applied in volume, this could become a real threat, as any cadet who accumulated more than 100 demerits within a six-month period could be dismissed for deficiency in discipline. While there is some evidence of cadets targeting him with demerits and other reports of misconduct, Flipper maintained a respectable disciplinary record. This means that his furlough was most likely the full two months allocated to rising second-class cadets.

For further analysis on Flipper's isolation from his peers, see Tom Phillips, "The Black Regulars: Negro Soldiers in the US Army, 1866-1891" (PhD Dissertation,

There are a number of customs observed by the cadets which I shall describe here.

To disregard these customs is to show—at least it is so construed—a want of pride. To say that this or that “is customary,” is quite sufficient to warrant its conception and execution. Among these customs the following may be mentioned:

To begin with the fourth class. Immediately after their first semi-annual examination the class adopts a class crest or motto, which appears on all their stationery, and often on many other things. To have class stationary is a custom that is never overlooked. Each class chooses its own design, which usually bears the year in which the class will graduate.

Class stationary is used throughout the period of one’s cadetship.

In the early spring, the first, second, and third classes elect hop managers, each class choosing a given number. This is preparatory to the hop given by the second to the graduating class as a farewell token. This custom is rigorously kept up.<sup>6</sup>

Next to these are customs peculiar to the first class. They are never infringed upon by other classes, nor disregarded even by the first class.

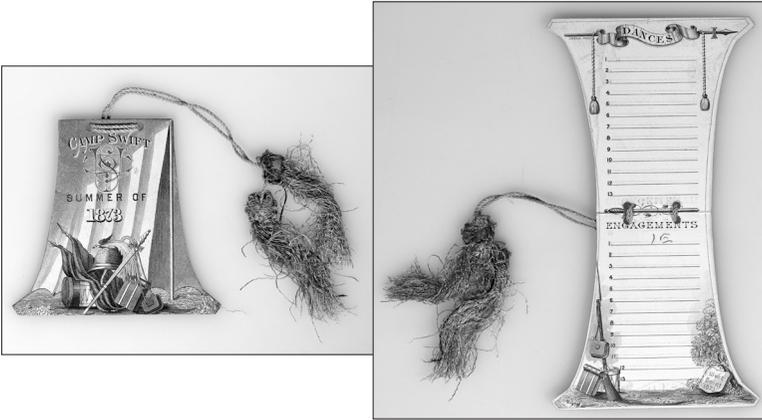
First, prior to graduation it is an invariable custom of the graduating class to adopt and procure, each of them, a class ring. This usually bears the year of graduation, the letters U. S. M. A., or some other military character.

This ring is the signet that binds the class to their Alma Mater, and to each other. It is to be in after years the souvenir that is to recall one’s cadet life, and indeed every thing connected with a happy and yet dreary part of one’s career.

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University of Wisconsin, 1970), p. 1288. For discussion of white cadets harassing Black cadets with disciplinary demerits, see Rory McGovern, Makonen Campbell, and Louisa Koebrich, “‘I Hope to Have Justice Done Me or I Can’t Get Along Here’: James Webster Smith and West Point,” *Journal of Military History* 87, no. 4 (October 2023): 990.

6. Hops were a significant social event for cadets and consisted of an organized night of dancing and music. Prior to the event, “hop cards,” would be distributed to cadets as an invitation and would include an attached dance card. The designs of the cards were intricate and unique to each hop. That Flipper never actually provides a detailed and personal description of a hop suggests he never attended one, underscoring how completely isolated he was.



A hop card from summer 1873. The hop took place during Flipper's first summer encampment.  
*Courtesy of the United States Military Academy Library Special Collections and Archives.*

The class album also is intended for the same purpose. It contains the “smiling shadows” of classmates, comrades, and scenes perhaps never more to be visited or seen after parting at graduation. Oh! what a feeling of sadness, of weariness of life even, must come upon him who in after years opens his album upon those handsome young faces, and there silently compares their then lives with what succeeding years have revealed! Who does not, would not grieve to recall the sad tidings that have come anon and filled one’s heart and being with portentous gloom? This, perhaps a chum, an especial favorite, or at any rate a classmate, has fallen under a rude savage warfare while battling for humanity, without the advantages or the glory of civilized war, but simply with the consciousness of duty properly done. That one, perchance, has fallen bravely, dutifully, without a murmur of regret, and this one, alas! where is he? Has he, too, perished, or does he yet remember our gladsome frolics at our beloved Alma Mater. My mind shudders, shrinks from the sweet and yet sad anticipations of the years I have not seen and may perhaps never see. But there is a sweetness, a fondness that makes me linger longingly upon the thought of those unborn days.<sup>7</sup>

7. During the late-nineteenth century, cadets could purchase and organize a class photo album to their personal preference. Because cadets curated their own albums, no two are the same. In the holdings of the United States Military Academy Library Special Collections and Archives are seven Class of 1877 albums. Each

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of them includes Flipper's cadet photo, or an empty photo square with Flipper's name written underneath—in the latter case, several other cadet names appeared under empty photo squares, indicating that photos were included originally but have since been lost. In all but one of these albums, the photo of Flipper is included among other cadet photos, indicating that at least by graduation, the owner of the album had come to tolerate or accept Flipper as a legitimate classmate. In one album, however, photos of each member of the class of 1877 appear in alphabetical order—except for Flipper's photo, which appears next to an image of the bugler Louis Bentz. The arrangement of this seventh album is a visual representation of the ostracism Flipper endured, revealing that some segment of the class of 1877 was still unwilling to accept Flipper as a full and legitimate member of the class. See *Class of 1877 Albums*, USMA Special Collections and Archives, West Point, NY. The album that separates Flipper from other cadets is the Chynoweth Album.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### INCIDENT, HUMOR, ETC.<sup>1</sup>

IT may not be inappropriate to give in this place a few—as many I as I can recall—of the incidents, more or less humorous, in which I myself have taken part or have noticed at the various times of their occurrence. First, then, an adventure on “Flirtation.”<sup>2</sup>

During the encampment of 1873—I think it was in July—Smith and myself had the—for us—rare enjoyment of a visit made us by some friends. We had taken them around the place and shown and explained to them every thing of interest. We at length took seats on “Flirtation,” and gave ourselves up to pure enjoyment such as is found in woman’s presence only. The day was exceedingly beautiful; all nature seemed loveliest just at that time, and our lone, peculiar life, with all its trials and cares, was quite forgotten. We chatted merrily, and as ever in such company were really happy. It was so seldom we had visitors—and even then they were mostly males—that we were delighted to have some one with whom we could converse on other topics than official ones and studies. While we sat there not a few strangers, visitors also, passed us, and almost invariably manifested surprise at seeing us.

I do think uncultivated white people are unapproachable in downright rudeness, and yet, alas! they are our superiors. Will prejudice ever be obliterated from the minds of the people? Will man ever cease to prejudge his fellow-being for color’s sake alone? Grant, O merciful God, that he may!

But *au fait!* Anon a cadet, whose perfectly fitting uniform of matchless gray and immaculate white revealed the symmetry of

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1. The chapter title masks its content. While this chapter does present some humorous incidents and glimpses of nineteenth-century cadet life that do not appear elsewhere in *The Colored Cadet at West Point*, Flipper also uses parts of this chapter to address his mistreatment.

2. “Flirtation” refers to Flirtation Walk. Once a path connecting West Point’s broad plain with Revolutionary War artillery emplacements closer to the level of the river, it became a well-worn and scenic walking path for cadets and their visitors. It is still in use today.

his form in all its manly beauty, saunters leisurely by, his head erect, shoulders back, step quick and elastic, and those glorious buttons glittering at their brilliant points like so many orbs of a distant stellar world. Next a plebe strolls wearily along, his drooping shoulders, hanging head, and careless gait bespeaking the need of more squad drill. Then a dozen or more “picnicers,” all females, laden with baskets, boxes, and other *et ceteras*, laughing and playing, unconscious of our proximity, draw near. The younger ones tripping playfully in front catch sight of us. Instantly they are hushed, and with hands over their mouths retrace their steps to disclose to those in rear their astounding discovery. In a few moments all appear, and silently and slowly pass by, eyeing us as if we were the greatest natural wonder in existence. They pass on till out of sight, face about and “continue the motion,” passing back and forth as many as five times. Wearied at length of this performance, Smith rose and said, “Come, let’s end this farce,” or something to that effect. We arose, left the place, and were surprised to find a moment after that they were actually following us.<sup>3</sup>

The “Picnicers,” as they are called in the corps, begin their excursions early in May, and continue them till near the end of September. They manage to arrive at West Point at all possible hours of the day, and stay as late as they conveniently can. In May and September, when we have battalion drills, they are a great nuisance, a great annoyance to me especially. The vicinity of that flank of the battalion in which I was, was where they “most did congregate.” It was always amusing, though most embarrassing, to see them pointing me out to each other, and to hear their verbal accompaniments, “There he is, the first”—or such—“man from the right”—“or left.” “Who?” “The colored cadet.” “Haven’t you seen him? Here, I’ll show him to you,” and so on *ad libitum*.

All through this encampment being “——— young; a novice in the trade,” I seldom took advantage of Old Guard privileges, or any

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3. Smith’s purported use of the word “farce” drives home the key point of this passage—that even at one of the few places on West Point kept and cultivated to allow cadets a respite and an escape from their normal routines, Smith and Flipper—and presumably other Black cadets who followed them—could not escape others reminding them of their status as outsiders.

other, for the reason that I was not accustomed to such barbarous rudeness, and did not care to be the object of it.<sup>4</sup>

It has always been a wonder to me why people visiting at West Point should gaze at me so persistently for no other reason than curiosity. What there was curious or uncommon about me I never knew. I was not better formed, nor more military in my bearing than all the other cadets. My uniform did not fit better, was not of better material, nor did it cost more than that of the others. Yet for four years, by each and every visitor at West Point who saw me, it was done. I know not why, unless it was because I was in it.

There is an old man at Highland Falls, N. Y., who is permitted to peddle newspapers at West Point. He comes up every Sabbath, and all are made aware of his presence by his familiar cry, "Sunday news! Sunday news!" Indeed, he is generally known and called by the soubriquet, "Sunday News."

He was approaching my tent one Sunday afternoon but was stopped by a cadet who called out to him from across the company street, "Don't sell your papers to them niggers!" This kind advice was not heeded.

This and subsequent acts of a totally different character lead me to believe that there is not so much prejudice in the corps as is at first apparent. A general dislike for the negro had doubtless grown up in this cadet's mind from causes which are known to everybody at all acquainted with affairs at West Point about that time, summer of 1873. On several occasions during my second and third years I was the grateful recipient of several kindnesses at the hands of this same cadet, thus proving most conclusively that it was rather a cringing disposition, a dread of what others might say, or this dislike of the negro which I have mentioned, that caused him to utter those words, and not a prejudiced dislike of "them niggers," for verily I had won his esteem.<sup>5</sup>

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4. "Old Guard privileges" allowed cadets to roam outside of the summer encampment within prescribed hours. Flipper reveals here that he avoided them because of the discomfort of being made to feel like an object on display.

5. This is a loaded anecdote. It is a lightly disguised criticism of James W. Smith. Flipper's remark, "A general dislike for the negro had doubtless grown up in this cadet's mind from causes which are known to everybody at all acquainted with affairs at West Point about that time" can only refer to the many controversies surrounding Smith's tenure at West Point (1870-74), particularly those stemming from his tortuous first year in 1870-71. Once again trying to cast himself as different from and perhaps superior to Smith, Flipper goes so far as to suggest in this passage

Just after returning from this encampment to our winter quarters, I had another adventure with Smith, my chum, and Williams, which cost me dearly.<sup>6</sup>

It was just after “evening call to quarters.” I knew Smith and Williams were in our room.<sup>7</sup> I had been out for some purpose, and was returning when it occurred to me to have some fun at their expense. I accordingly walked up to the door—our “house” was at the head of the stairs and on the third floor—and knocked, endeavoring to imitate as much as possible an officer inspecting. They sprang to their feet instantly, assumed the position of the soldier, and quietly awaited my entrance. I entered laughing. They resumed their seats with a promise to repay me, and they did, for alas! I was “hived.” Some cadet reported me for “imitating a tactical officer inspecting.” For this I was required to walk three tours of extra guard duty on three consecutive Saturdays, and to serve, besides, a week’s confinement in my quarters. The “laugh” was thus, of course, turned on me.<sup>8</sup>

During the summer of ’74, in my “yearling camp,” I made another effort at amusement, which was as complete a failure as the

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that Smith made white cadets prejudiced, a far cry from Flipper’s assertions earlier in chapter III that West Point itself and exposure to the broader Corps of Cadets made bigots of cadets otherwise inclined to be fair-minded (refer to chapter III, note 12). On James W. Smith, see Rory McGovern, Makonen Campbell, and Louisa Koebrich, “I Hope to Have Justice Done Me or I Can’t Get Along Here”: James Webster Smith and West Point,” *Journal of Military History* 87 (October 2023): 964–1003.

6. Flipper’s characterization of Smith as “my chum” so closely on the heels of a significant criticism of him speaks to the bifurcated way in which Smith haunts the text, as noted in the Editors’ Introduction. “Williams” refers to John Washington Williams of Virginia, a Black cadet who reported to West Point four days after Flipper in May 1873. See “Statement Showing the Number of Colored Persons Appointed Candidates for Admission to the U.S. Military Academy, October 21, 1886,” RG 404, USMA Library Special Collections and Archives.

7. This passage reveals that Smith, Flipper, and Williams—the only three Black cadets at that time—were assigned to the same room. Most white cadets were assigned quarters with only two to a room, generally of the same class. The living arrangements for Black cadets show that Academy leaders approached integration with more concern for distinguishing by race than by rank within the Corps of Cadets.

8. “Hived” meant to be punished. While it is unclear who reported Flipper, it is clear he believed it had to be either Smith or Williams rather than a passerby near enough in the barracks to see or overhear.

attempt with Smith and Williams. I had been reported by an officer for some trifling offence. It was most unexpected to me, and least of all from this particular officer. I considered the report altogether uncalled for, but was careful to say nothing to that effect. I received for the offence one or two demerits. A short while afterwards, being on guard, I happened to be posted near his tent. Determined on a bit of revenge, and fun too, at half-past eleven o'clock at night I placed myself near his tent, and called off in the loudest tone I could command, "No. ———, half-past eleven o'clock, and all-l-l-l's well-l-l-l!" It woke him. He arose, came to the front of his tent, and called me back to him. I went, and he ordered me to call the corporal. I did so. When the corporal came he told him to "report the sentinel on No. ——— for calling off improperly." If I mistake not, I was also reported for not calling off at 12 P.M. loud enough to be heard by the next sentinel. Thus my bit of revenge recoiled twofold upon myself, and I soon discovered that I had been paying too dear for my whistle.

On another occasion during the same camp I heard a cadet say he would submit to no order or command of, nor permit himself to be marched anywhere by "the nigger," meaning myself. We were in the same company, and it so happened at one time that we were on guard the same day, and that I was the senior member of our company detail. When we marched off the next day the officer of the guard formed the company details to the front, and directed the senior member of each fifteen to march it to its company street and dismiss it. I instantly stepped to front and assumed command. I marched it as far as the color line at "support arms;" brought them to a "carry" there and saluted the colors. When we were in the company street, I commanded in loud and distinct tone, "Trail arms! Break ranks! March!" A cadet in a tent near by recognized my voice, and hurried out into the company street. Meeting the cadet first mentioned above, he thus asked of him:

"Did that nigger march you in?"

"Yes-es, the nigger marched us in," speaking slowly and drawling it out as if he had quite lost the power of speech.

At the following semi-annual examination (January, '75), the gentleman was put on the "retired list," or rather on the list of "blasted hopes." I took occasion to record the event in the following manner, changing of course the names:

## FAILED.

SCENE.—*Hall of Cadet Barracks at West Point. Characters: RANSOM and MARS, both Cadets. RANSOM, who has been "found" at recent semiannual examination, meets his more successful chum, MARS, on the stoop. After a moment's conversation, they enter the hall.*

MARS (*as they enter*).

Ah! how! what say? Found! Art going away?  
 Unfortunate rather! 'm sorry! but stay!  
 Who hadst thou? How didst thou? Badly, I'm sure.  
 Hadst done well they had not treated thee so.

RANSOM (*sadly*).

Thou sayest aright. I did do my best,  
 Which was but poorly I can but confess.  
 The subject was hard. I could no better  
 Unless I'd memorized to the letter.

MARS.

Art unfortunate! but tho' 'twere amiss  
 Me half thinks e'en that were better than this.  
 Thou couldst have stood the trial, if no more  
 Than to come out low. That were better, 'm sure.

RANSOM.

But 'tis too late. 'Twas but an afterthought,  
 Which now methinks at most is worth me naught;  
 "Le sort en est jetté," they say, you know;  
 "'Twere idle to dream and still think of woe."<sup>9</sup>

MARS.

Thou sayest well! Yield not to one rebuff.  
 Thou'rt a man, show thyself of manly stuff.  
 The bugle calls! I must away! Adieu!  
 May Fortune grant, comrade, good luck to you!

(*They shake hands, MARS hurries out to answer the bugle call. RANSOM prepares for immediate departure for home.*)

"O dear! it is hawid to have this cullud cadet—perfectly dre'fful. I should die to see my Geawge standing next to him." Thus did one of your models of womankind, one of the negro's superiors, who

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9. *Le sort en est jetté* is a French phrase meaning "the die is cast."

annually visit West Point to flirt, give vent to her opinion of the “cullud cadet,” an opinion thought out doubtless with her eyes, and for which she could assign no reason other than that some of her acquaintances, manifestly cadets, concurred in it, having perhaps so stated to her. And the cadets, with their accustomed gallantry, have ever striven to evade “standing next to him.” No little amusement—for such it was to me—has been afforded me by the many ruses they have adopted to prevent it. Some of them have been extremely ridiculous, and in many cases highly unbecoming a cadet and a gentleman.<sup>10</sup>

While I was a plebe, I invariably fell in in the rear rank along with the other plebes. This is a necessary and established custom. As soon as I became a third-classman, and had a right to fall in in the front rank whenever necessary or convenient, they became uneasy, and began their plans for keeping me from that rank. The first sergeant of my company did me the honor of visiting me at my quarters and politely requested me—not order me, for he had no possible authority for such an act—to fall in invariably on the right of the rear rank. To keep down trouble and to avoid any show of presumption or forwardness on my part, as I had been advised by an officer, I did as he requested, taking my place on the right of the rear rank at every formation of the company for another whole year. But with all this condescension on my part I was still the object of solicitous care. My falling in there did not preclude the possibility of my own classmates, now also risen to the dignity of third-classmen, falling in next to me. To perfect his plan, then, the first sergeant had the senior plebe in the company call at his “house,” and take from the roster an alphabetical list of all the plebes in the company. With this he (the senior plebe) was to keep a special roster, detailing one of his own classmates to fall in next to me. Each one detailed for such duty was to serve one week—from Sunday morning breakfast to Sunday morning breakfast. The keeper of the roster was not of course to be detailed.

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10. Attempting to avoid drilling or standing in formation with Black cadets was one way white cadets resisted integration throughout the Reconstruction era. As for the anecdote, Flipper pulled the quote from an 1874 article relating one reporter's observations of James Webster Smith over the course of his four years at the Academy (the material appears again in chapter XVII, on pages 349–350). In presenting it here, Flipper does not make it clear that the woman was referring to Smith, but he clearly indicates that he had similar experiences often enough to be both amused by and tired of them.

It is astonishing how little care was taken to conceal this fact from me. The plan, etc., was formed in my hearing, and there seems to have been no effort or even desire to hide it from me. Returning from supper one evening, I distinctly heard this plebe tell the sergeant that "Mr.—refused to serve." "You tell him," said the sergeant, "I want to see him at my 'house' after supper. If he doesn't serve I'll make it so hot for him he'll wish he'd never heard of West Point."

Is it not strange how these models of mankind, these our superiors, strive to thrust upon each other what they do not want themselves? It is a meanness, a baseness, an unworthiness from which I should shrink. It would be equally astonishing that men ever submit to it, were it not that they are plebes, and therefore thus easily imposed upon. The plebe in this case at length submitted.

When I became a second-classman, no difference was made by the cadets in their manner of falling in, whether because their scruples were overcome or because no fitting means presented themselves for avoiding it, I know not. If they happened to be near me when it was time to fall in, they fell in next to me.

In the spring of '76, our then first sergeant ordered us to fall in at all formations as nearly according to size as possible. As soon as this order was given, for some unknown reason, the old régime was readopted. If I happened to fall in next to a first-classman, and he discovered it, or if a first-classman fell in next to me, and afterward found it out, he would fall out and go to the rear. The second and third-classmen, for no other reason than that first-classmen did it, "got upon their dignity, and refused to stand next to me. We see here a good illustration of that cringing, "bone-popularity" spirit which I have mentioned elsewhere.

The means of prevention adopted now were somewhat different from those of a year before. A file-closer would watch and follow me closely, and when I fell in would put a plebe on each side of me. It was really amusing sometimes to see his eagerness, and quite as amusing, I may add, to see his dismay when I would deliberately leave the place thus hemmed in by plebes and fall in elsewhere.

We see here again that cringing disposition to which I believe the whole of the ill-treatment of colored cadets has been due. The file-closers are usually second-class sergeants and third-class corporals. By way of "boning popularity" with the upper classmen, they stoop to almost any thing. In this case they hedged me in

between the two plebes to prevent upper classmen from falling in next to me.<sup>11</sup>

But it may be asked why I objected to having plebes next to me. I would answer, for several reasons. Under existing circumstances of prejudice, it was of the utmost importance to me to keep them away from me. First—and by no means the least important reason—to put them in the front rank was violating a necessary and established custom. The plebes are put in the rear rank because of their inexperience and general ignorance of the principles of marching, dressing, etc. If they are in the front rank, it would simply be absurd to expect good marching of them. A second reason, and by far the most important, results directly from this one. Being between two plebes, who would not, could not keep dressed, it would be impossible for me to do so. The general alignment of the company would be destroyed. There would be crowding and opening out of the ranks, and it would all originate in my immediate vicinity. The file-closers, never over-scrupulous when I was concerned, and especially when they could forward their own “popularity-boning” interests, would report me for these disorders in the company. I would get demerits and punishment for what the plebes next to me were really responsible for. The plebes would not be reported, because if they were their inexperience would plead strongly in their favor, and any reasonable explanation of an offence would suffice to insure its removal. I was never overfond of demerits or punishments, and therefore strenuously opposed any thing that might give me either; for instance, having plebes put next to me in ranks.

Toward the end of the year the plebes, having learned more about me and the way the corps looked upon me, became as eager to avoid me as the others. Not, however, all the plebes, for there were some who, when they saw others trying to avoid falling in next to me, would deliberately come and take their places there. These plebes, or rather yearlings now, were better disciplined, and, of course, my own scruples vanished.

During the last few months of the year no distinction was made, save by one or two high-toned ones.

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11. In this line of reasoning, Flipper returns to the assertion that the environment at West Point pushed cadets to exclusionary extremes. In this case, he puts blame squarely on the upperclassmen and those trying to curry favor with them. Refer to note 5 in this chapter and note 12 in chapter III.

When the next class of plebes were put in the battalion, the old cadets began to thrust them into the front rank next to me. At first I was indignant, but upon second thought I determined to tolerate it until I should be reported for some offence which was really an offence of the plebes. I intended to then explain the case, *à priori*, in my written explanation to the commandant. I knew such a course would cause a discontinuance of the practice, which was plainly malicious and contrary to regulations. Fortunately, however, for all concerned, the affair was noticed by an officer, and by him summarily discontinued. I was glad of this, for the other course would have made the cadets more unfriendly, and would have made my condition even worse than it was.<sup>12</sup> Thereafter I had no further trouble with the plebes.

One day, during my yearling camp, when I happened to be on guard, a photographer, wishing a view of the guard, obtained permission to make the necessary negative. As the officer of the day desired to be “took” with the guard, he came down to the guard tents, and the guard was “turned out” for him by the sentinel. He did not wish it then, and accordingly so indicated by saluting. I was sitting on a camp-stool in the shade reading. A few minutes after the officer of the day came. I heard the corporal call out, “Fall in the guard.” I hurried for my gun, and passing near and behind the officer of the day, I heard him say to the corporal:

“Say, can’t you get rid of that nigger? We don’t want him in the picture.”

The corporal immediately ordered me to fetch a pail of water. As he had a perfect right to thus order me, being for the time my senior officer, I proceeded to obey. While taking the pail the officer of the day approached me and most politely asked: “Going for water, Mr. Flipper?”

I told him I was.

“That’s right,” continued he; “do hurry. I’m nearly dead of thirst.”

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12. This admission shows how deeply Flipper clung to the advice he received in a letter from Smith on his first day at West Point, “telling me not to fear either blows or insults, and advising me to avoid any forward conduct if I wished also to avoid certain consequences, ‘which,’ said the writer, ‘I have learned from sad experience,’ would be otherwise inevitable.” As Flipper shows here, that advice framed his approach to surviving the Academy throughout his cadet career. See chapter III, note 13 for an extended discussion of Smith’s letter.

It is simply astonishing to see how these young men can stoop when they want any thing. A cadet of the second class—when I was in the third class—was once arrested for a certain offence, and, from the nature of the charge, was likely to be court-martialed. His friends made preparation for his defence. As I was not ten feet from him at the time specified in the charge, my evidence would be required in the event of a trial. I was therefore visited by one of his friends. He brought paper and pencil and made a memorandum of what I had to say. The cadet himself had the limits of his arrest extended and then visited me in person. We conversed quite a while on the subject, and, as my evidence would be in his favor, I promised to give it in case he was tried. He thanked me very cordially, asked how I was getting along in my studies, expressed much regret at my being ostracized, wished me all sorts of success, and again thanking me took his leave.

There is an article in the academic regulations which provides or declares that no citizen who has been a cadet at the Military Academy can receive a commission in the regular army before the class of which he was a member graduates, unless he can get the written consent of his former classmates.

A classmate of mine resigned in the summer of '75, and about a year after endeavored to get a commission. A friend and former classmate drew up the approval, and invited the class to his "house" to sign it. When half a dozen or more had signed it, it was sent to the guard-house, and the corporal of the guard came and notified me it was there for my consideration. I went to the guard-house at once. A number of cadets were sitting or standing around in the room. As soon as I entered they became silent and remained so, expecting, no doubt, I'd refuse to sign it, because of the treatment I had received at their hands. They certainly had little cause to expect that I would add my signature. Nevertheless I read the paper over and signed it without hesitation. Their anxiety was raised to the highest possible pitch, and scarcely had I left the room ere they seized the paper as if they would devour it. I heard some one who came in as I went out ask, "Did he sign it?"

Another case of condescension on the part of an upper classman occurred in the early part of my third year at the Academy, and this time in the mess hall. We were then seated at the tables by classes. Each table had a commandant, who was a cadet captain,

lieutenant or sergeant, and in a few instances a corporal. At each table there was also a carver, who was generally a corporal, occasionally a sergeant or private. The other seats were occupied by privates, and usually in this order: first-classmen had first and second seats, second-classmen second and third seats, third-classmen third and fourth seats, and fourth-classmen fourth and fifth seats, which were at the foot of the table. I had a first seat, although a second-classman. For some reason a first-classman, who had a first seat at another table, desired to change seats with me. He accordingly sent a cadet for me. I went over to his room. I agreed to make the change, provided he himself obtained permission of the proper authorities. It was distinctly understood that he was to take my seat, a first seat, and I was to take his seat, also a first seat. He obtained permission of the superintendent of the mess hall, and also a written permit from the commandant. The change was made, but lo and behold! instead of a first seat I got a third. The agreement was thus violated by him, my superior (?), and I was dissatisfied. The whole affair was explained to the commandant, not, however, by myself, but by my consent, the permit revoked, and I gained my former first seat. A tactical officer asked me, "Why did you exchange with him? Has he ever done any thing for you?"

I told him he had not, and that I did it merely to oblige him. It was immaterial to me at what table I sat, provided I had a seat consistent with the dignity of my class.

The baseness of character displayed by the gentleman, the reflection on myself and class would have evoked a complaint from me had not a classmate anticipated me by doing so himself.

This gentleman (?) was practically "cut" by the whole corps. He was spoken to, and that was about all that made his status in the corps better than mine.<sup>13</sup>

Just after the semiannual examination following this adventure, another, more ridiculous still, occurred, of which I was the

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13. This is another loaded anecdote with significant revelations hidden in plain sight. First, the fact that one of Flipper's classmates registered a complaint against the offending first-classman shows that some of Flipper's classmates had begun to see him as a classmate and not as an interloper in their midst, despite their mistreatment of him. Second, it reveals that even though some had come to view Flipper as a legitimate classmate, he continued to suffer through nearly total isolation even as an upperclassman. It is telling that another cadet who "was practically 'cut' by the whole corps" was still spoken to often enough for it to be the distinguishing characteristic between his status and Flipper's.

innocent cause. The dismissal of a number of deficient plebes and others made necessary a rearrangement of seats. The commandant saw fit to have it made according to class rank. It changed completely the former arrangement, and gave me a third seat. A classmate, who was senior to me, had the second seat. He did not choose to take it, and for two or more weeks refused to do so. I had the second seat during all this time, while he was fed in his quarters by his chum. He had a set of miniature cooking utensils in his own room, and frequently cooked there, using the gas as a source of heat. These were at last "hived," and he was ordered to "turn them in." He went to dinner one day when I was absent on guard. At supper he appeared again. Some one asked him how it was he was there, glancing at the same time at me. He laughed—it was plainly forced—and replied, "I forgot to fall out."<sup>14</sup>

He came to his meals the next day, the next, and every succeeding day regularly. Thus were his scruples overcome. His refusing to go to his meals because he had to sit next to me was strongly disapproved by the corps for two reasons, viz., that he ought to be man enough not to thrust on others what he himself disliked; and that as others for two years had had seats by me, he ought not to complain because it now fell to his lot to have one there too.

Just after my return, in September, 1875, from a furlough of two months, an incident occurred which, explained, will give some idea of the low, unprincipled manner in which some of the cadets have acted toward me. It was at cavalry drill. I was riding a horse that was by no means a favorite with us. He happened to fall to my lot that day, and I rather liked him. His greatest faults were a propensity for kicking and slight inequality in the length of his legs. We were marching in a column of fours, and at a slow walk. I turned my head for some purpose, and almost simultaneously my horse plunged headlong into the fours in front of me. It was with difficulty that I retained my seat. I supposed that when I turned my head I had accidentally spurred him, thus causing him to plunge forward. I regained my proper place in ranks.

None of this was seen by the instructor, who was riding at the head of the column. Shortly after this I noticed that those near me

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14. Flipper places this event after the January examinations in his second-class year, meaning early 1876. It is difficult to reconcile such public snubbing with his description of slightly improving social conditions in 1876-77 in chapter XI.

were laughing. I turned my head to observe the cause and caught the trooper on my left in the act of spurring my horse. I looked at him long and fiercely, while he desisted and hung his head. Not long afterwards the same thing was repeated, and this time was seen by the instructor, who happened to wheel about as my horse rushed forward. He immediately halted the column, and, approaching, asked me, "What is the matter with that horse, Mr. F.?" To which I replied, "The trooper on my left persists in kicking and spurring him, so that I can do nothing with him."

He then caused another trooper in another set of fours to change places with me, and thereafter all went well.

Notwithstanding the secrecy of hazing, and the great care which those who practised it took to prevent being "hived," they sometimes overreached themselves and were severely punished. Cases have occurred where cadets have been dismissed for hazing, while others have been less severely punished.

Sometimes, also, the joke, if I may so call it, has been turned upon the perpetrators to their utter discomfort. I will cite an instance.

Quite often in camp two robust plebes are selected and ordered to report at a specified tent just after the battalion returns from supper. When they report each is provided with a pillow. They take their places in the middle of the company street, and at a given signal commence pounding each other. A crowd assembles from all parts of camp to witness the "pillow fight," as it is called. Sometimes, also, after fighting awhile, the combatants are permitted to rest, and another set continues the fight.

On one of these occasions, after fighting quite a while, a pillow bursted, and one of the antagonists was literally buried in feathers. At this a shout of laughter arose and the fun was complete. But alas for such pleasures! An officer in his tent, disturbed by the noise, came out to find its cause. He saw it at a glance, aided no doubt by vivid recollections of his own experience in his plebe camp. He called an orderly and sent for the cadet captain of the company. When he came he was ordered to send the plebes—he said new cadets—to their tents, and order them to remain there till permission was given to leave them. He then had every man, not a plebe, who had been present at the pillow fight turned out. When this was done he ordered them to pick up every feather within half an hour, and the captain to inspect at the end of that time and to

see that the order was obeyed. Thus, therefore, the plebes got the better part of the joke.

It was rumored in camp one day that the superintendent and commandant were both absent from the post, and that the senior tactical officer was therefore acting superintendent. A plebe sentinel on Post No. 1, seeing him approaching camp, and not knowing under the circumstances how to act, or rather, perhaps, I should say, not knowing whether the report was true or not, called a corporal, and asked if he should salute this officer with "present arms." To this question that dignitary replied with righteous horror, "Salute him with present arms! No, sir! You stand at attention, and when he gets on your post shout, 'Hosannah to the supe!'" This rather startled the plebe, who found himself more confused than ever. When it was about time for the sentinel to do something the corporal told him what to do, and returned to the guard tents. The officer was at the time the commanding officer of the camp.

While walking down Sixth Avenue, New York, with a young lady, on a beautiful Sabbath afternoon in the summer of 1875, I was paid a high compliment by an old colored soldier. He had lost one leg and had been otherwise maimed for life in the great struggle of 1861–65 for the preservation of the Union. As soon as he saw me approaching he moved to the outside of the pavement and assumed as well as possible the position of the soldier. When I was about six paces from him he brought his crutch to the position of "present arms," in a soldierly manner, in salute to me. I raised my cap as I passed, endeavoring to be as polite as possible, both in return for his salute and because of his age. He took the position of "carry arms," saying as he did so, "That's right! that's right! Makes me glad to see it."

We passed on, while he, too, resumed his course, ejaculating something about "good-breeding," etc., all of which we did not hear.

Upon inquiry I learned, as stated, that he had served in the Federal army. He had given his time and energy, even at the risk of his life, to his country. He had lost one limb, and been maimed otherwise for life. I considered the salute for that reason a greater honor.<sup>15</sup>

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15. This is a poignant scene. Flipper places it in summer 1875, which means it happened during his furlough. Flipper's description underscores the point that

During the summer of 1873 a number of cadets, who were on furlough, visited Mammoth Cave. While there they noticed on the wall, written in pencil, the name of an officer who was an instructor in Spanish at West Point. One of them took occasion to add to the inscription the following bit of information:

“Known at the U. S. Military Academy as the ‘Spanish Inquisition.’”

A number of cadets accosted a plebe, who had just reported in May, 1874, and the following conversation ensued:

“Well, mister, what’s your name?”

“John Walden.”

“Sir!” yelled rather than spoken.

“John Walden.”

“Well, sir, I want to see you put a ‘sir’ on it,” with another yell.

“Sir John Walden,” was the unconcerned rejoinder.

Now it was not expected that the “sir” would be put before the name after the manner of a title, but this impenetrable plebe put it there, and in so solemn and “don’t-care” a manner that the cadets turned away in a roar of laughter.

Ever afterward he was known in the corps as “Sir John.”

Another incident, even more laughable perhaps than the preceding, occurred between a cadet and plebe, which doubtless saved the plebe from further hazing. Approaching him with a look of utter contempt on his face, the cadet asked him:

“Well, thing, what’s your name?”

“Wilreni, sir,” meekly responded he.

“Wilreni, sir!” repeated the cadet slowly, and bowing his head he seemed for a moment buried in profoundest thought. Suddenly brightening up, he rejoined in the most unconcerned manner possible: “Oh! yes, yes, I remember now. You are Will Reni, the son of old man Bill Reni,” put particular stress on “Will” and “Bill.”

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integrating West Point during Reconstruction was an extension of Black service during the Civil War. Refer to pages 4–6 in this volume’s Editors’ Introduction, and also to Cameron D. McCoy, “Making West Point ‘All American’: Integration as the Legacy of Civil War Service,” in *Race, Politics, and Reconstruction: The First Black Cadets at Old West Point*, eds. Rory McGovern and Ronald G. Machoian (University of Virginia Press, 2024), 44–63.

I think, though, the most laughable incident that has come under my notice was that of a certain plebe who made himself famous for gourmandizing.

Each night throughout the summer encampment, the guard is supplied from the mess hall with an abundance of sandwiches. The old cadets rarely eat them, but to the plebes, as yet unaccustomed to guard duty, they are quite a treat.

On one occasion when the sandwiches were unusually well prepared, and therefore unusually inviting, it was desirable to preserve them till late in the night, till after the guard had been turned out and inspected by the officer of the day. They were accordingly—to conceal them from the plebes—transferred, with the vessel containing them, to one of the chests of a caisson of the light battery, just in front of camp in park. Here they were supposed to be safe. But alas for such safety! At an hour not far advanced into the night, two plebes, led by an unerring instinctiveness, discovered the hiding-place of the sandwiches and devoured them all.

Now when the hour of feasting was come, a corporal was dispatched for the dainty dish, when, lo, and behold! it had vanished. The plebes—for who else could thus have secretly devoured them—were brought to account and the guilty ones discovered. They were severely censured in that contemptuous manner in which only a cadet, an upper classman, can censure a plebe, and threatened with hazing and all sorts of unpleasantness.

Next morning they were called forth and marched ingloriously to the presence of the commandant. Upon learning the object of the visit he turned to the chief criminal—the finder of the sandwiches—and asked him, “Why did you eat all the sandwiches, Mr. S——?”

“I didn’t eat them all up, sir. I ate only fifteen,” was his ready reply.

The gravity of the occasion, coupled with the enormity of the feast, was too much, and the commandant turned away his head to conceal the laughter he could not withhold. The plebe himself was rather short and fleshy, and the picture of mirth. Indeed to see him walking even along the company street was enough to call forth laughter either at him as he waddled along or at the humorous remarks the act called forth from onlooking cadets.

He was confined to one of the guard tents by order of the commandant, and directed by him to submit a written explanation for eating all the sandwiches of the guard. The explanation

was unsatisfactory, and the gentleman received some other light punishment, the nature of which has at this late day escaped my memory.

The other plebe, being only a *particeps criminis*, was not so severely punished. A reprimand, I think, was the extent of his punishment.<sup>16</sup>

The two gentlemen have long since gone where the “woodbine twineth”—that is, been found deficient in studies and dismissed.

There was a cadet in the corps who had a wonderful propensity for using the word “mighty.”

With him everything was “mighty.” I honestly do not believe I ever heard him conversing when he did not use “mighty.”

Speaking of me one day, and unconscious of my presence, he said, “I tell you he does ‘mighty’ well.”

During drill at the siege battery on the 25th of April, 1876, an accident occurred which came near proving fatal to one of us. I had myself just fired an 8-inch howitzer, and gone to the rear to observe the effect of the other shots. One piece had been fired, and the command for the next to fire had been given. I was watching intently the target when I was startled by the cry of some one near me, “Look out! look out!” I turned my eyes instinctively toward the piece just fired, but saw only smoke. I then looked up and saw a huge black body of some kind moving rapidly over our heads. It was not until the smoke had nearly disappeared that I knew what was the cause of the disturbance. A number of cannoneers and our instructor were vociferously asking, “Anybody hurt? Anybody hurt?” We all moved up to the piece, and, finding no one was injured, examined it. The piece, a 4½-inch rifle, mounted on a siege carriage, had broken obliquely from the trunnions downward and to the rear. The re-enforce thus severed from the chase broke into three parts, the nob of the cascabel, and the other portion split in the direction of the bore. The right half of the re-enforce, together with the nob of the cascabel, were projected into the air, describing a curve over our heads, and falling at about twenty feet from the right of the battery, having passed over a horizontal distance of about sixty or seventy feet. The left half was thrown obliquely to the ground,

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16. *Particeps criminis* is a Latin expression meaning “partner in crime.”

tearing away in its passage the left cheek of the carriage, and breaking the left trunnion plate. A cannoneer was standing on the platform of the next piece on the left with the lanyard in his hand. His feet were on two adjacent deck planks, his heels being on line with the edge of the platform. These two planks were struck upon their ends, and moved bodily, with the cadet upon them, three or four inches from their proper place. The bolts that held them and the adjacent planks together were broken, while not the slightest injury was done the cadet.

It was hardly to be believed, and was not until two or three of the other cannoneers had examined him and found him really uninjured. It was simply miraculous. The instructor sent the cannoneers to the rear, and fired the next gun himself.

After securing the pieces and replacing equipments, we were permitted to again examine the bursted gun, after which the battery was dismissed.

There had been some difficulty in loading the piece, especially in getting the projectile home. It was supposed that this not being done properly caused the bursting.

I was one summer day enjoying a walk on "Flirtation." I was alone, and, if I remember aright, "on Old Guard privileges." Walking leisurely along I soon observed in front of me a number of young ladies, a servant girl, and several small children.

They were all busily occupied in gathering wild flowers, a kind of moss and ferns which grow here in abundance. I was first seen by one of the children, a little girl. She instantly fixed her eyes upon me, and began vociferating in a most joyous manner, "The colored cadet! the colored cadet! I'm going to tell mamma I've seen the colored cadet."

The servant girl endeavored to quiet her, but she continued as gayly as ever:

"It's the colored cadet! I'm going to tell mamma. I'm going to tell mamma I've seen the colored cadet."

All the others stopped gathering flowers, and watched me till I was out of sight.

A similar display of astonishment has occurred at every annual examination since I became a cadet, and on these occasions the ladies more than anybody else have been the ones to show it.

Whenever I took my place on the floor to receive my enunciation or to be questioned, I have observed whisperings, often

audible, and gestures of surprise among the lady visitors. I have frequently heard such exclamations as this: "Oh! there's the colored cadet! there's the colored cadet!"

All of this naturally tended to confuse me, and it was only by determined effort that I maintained any degree of coolness. Of course they did not intend to confuse me. Nothing was, I dare say, further from their thoughts. But they were women; and it never occurs to a woman to think before she speaks.

It was rather laughable to hear a cadet, who was expounding the theory of twilight, say, pointing to his figure on the blackboard: "If a spectator should cross this limit of the crepuscular zone he would enter into *final darkness*."

Now "final darkness," as we usually understand it, refers to something having no resemblance whatever to the characteristics of the crepuscular zone.

The solemn manner in which he spoke it, together with their true significations, made the circumstance quite laughable.

The most ludicrous case of hazing I know of is, I think, the following:

For an unusual display of grossness a number of plebes were ordered by the cadet lieutenant on duty over them to report at his "house" at a specified hour. They duly reported their presence, and were directed to assume the position of the soldier, facing the wall until released. After silently watching them for a considerable time, the lieutenant, who had a remarkable *penchant* for joking, called two of them into the middle of the room. He caused them to stand *dos à dos*, at a distance of about one foot from each other, and then bursting into a laugh, which he vainly endeavored to suppress, he commanded, "Second, exercise!"

Now to execute this movement the hands are extended vertically over the head and the hands joined. At the command "Two!" given when this is done, the arms are brought briskly forward and downward until the hands touch if possible the ground or floor. The plebes having gone through the first motion, the lieutenant thus cautioned them:

"When I say 'Two!' I want to see you men come down with life, and touch the floor. Two!"

At the command they both quickly, and "with life" brought their bodies forward and their arms downward; nay, they but

attempted, for scarcely had they left the vertical ere their bodies collided, and they were each hurled impetuously, by the inevitable reaction in opposite directions, over a distance of several feet.

Their bodies being in an inclined position when struck, and the blow being of great force, they were necessarily forced still further from the erect attitude, and were with much difficulty able to keep themselves from falling outright on the floor. Of course all present, save those concerned, enjoyed it immensely. Indeed it was enjoyable. Even the plebes themselves had a hearty laugh over it when they were dismissed.

Again a cadet lieutenant, who was on duty at the time over the "Seps," ordered a number of them to report at his "house" at a given hour. They had been unusually gross, and he intended to punish them by keeping them standing in his quarters. They reported, and were put in position to serve their punishment. For some reason the lieutenant left the room, when one of the "Seps" faced to the others and thus spoke to them:

"Say, boys, let's kick up the devil. P—— has gone out."

Now it so happened that P——'s chum was present, but in his alcove, and this was not known to the Seps. When the Sep had finished speaking, this chum came forth and "went for" him. He made the Sep assume the soldier's position, and then commanded, "Second, exercise!" which command the Sep proceeded to obey.

Another cadet coming in found him vigorously at it, and queried, "Well, mister, what's all that for?"

"Eccentricity of Mr. M——, sir," he promptly replied.

The word eccentricity was not interpreted by the cadet, of course, as the Sep meant it should be, but in the sense we use it when we speak of the eccentricity of an orbit for instance.

Hence it was that Mr. M—— asked, "Well, sir, what's the expression for my eccentricity?"

There is another incident remotely connected with my first tour of guard duty which may be mentioned here.

At about eleven o'clock A.M., in obedience to a then recent order, my junior reported at the observatory to make the necessary observations for finding the error of the Tower clock. After an elaborate explanation by an officer then present upon the graduation of the vernier and the manner of reading it, the cadet set the finders so as to read the north polar distance of the sun for

that day at West Point apparent noon. When it was about time for the sun's limb to begin its transit of the wires, the cadet took position to observe it. The instructor was standing ready to record the times of transit over each wire. Time was rapidly passing, and not yet had the cadet called out "Ready." The anxious instructor cautiously queried:

"Do you see any light, Mr. P———?"

"No, sir."

"Can you see the wires?"

"No, sir, not yet."

"Any light yet, Mr. P———?"

"Yes, sir, it is *getting brighter*."

"Can you see the wires at all?"

"No, sir; it *keeps getting brighter, but I can't see the wires yet*."

Fearing he might be unable to make his observations that day unless the difficulty was speedily removed, the instructor himself took position at the transit, and made the ridiculous discovery that the *cap had not been removed from the farther end of the telescope*, and yet it kept getting brighter.

One day in the early summer of 1875, a cadet was showing a young lady the various sights and wonders at West Point, when they came across an old French cannon bearing this inscription, viz., "Charles de Bourbon, Comte d'Eu, ultima ratio regum."

She was the first to notice it, and astonished the cadet with the following rendition of it:

"I suppose that means Charles Bourbon made the gun, and the Spanish (?) that the artilleryman must have his rations."

What innocence! Or shall I say, what ignorance?

"The authorities of West Point have entered an interdict against the cadets loaning their sashes and other military adornments to young ladies, and great is the force of feminine indignation." Summer of 1873.

#### COME KISS ME, LOVE.

A young lieutenant at the Academy and his *fiancée* were seen by an old maid at the hotel to kiss each other. At the first opportunity she reproved the fair damsel for, to her, such unmaidenly conduct. With righteous indignation she repelled the reproof as follows:

“Not let S—— kiss me! Why, I should die!” Then lovingly,

“Come kiss me, love, list not what they say,  
Their passions are cold, wasted away.  
They know not how two hearts like ours are  
Long to mingle i’ the sweetness o’ the kiss,  
That like the soft light of a heavenly star,  
As it wanders from its world to this,  
Diffuses itself through ev’ry vein  
And meets on the lips to melt again.”



## CHAPTER XV.

### GRADUATION—IN THE ARMY.

“Patience is bitter, but its fruit is sweet.”<sup>1</sup>

MY four years were drawing to a close. They had been years of patient endurance and hard and persistent work, interspersed with bright oases of happiness and gladness and joy, as well as weary barren wastes of loneliness, isolation, unhappiness, and melancholy. I believe I have discharged—I know I have tried to do so—every duty faithfully and conscientiously. It had been a sort of bittersweet experience, this experimental life of mine at West Point. It was almost over, and whatever of pure sweetness, whatever of happiness, or whatever reward fortune had in store for me, was soon to become known.<sup>2</sup>

“Speaking of the Military Academy, we understand that the only colored cadet now at West Point will not only graduate at the coming June commencement, but that his character, acquirements, and standing on the merit roll are such as will insure his graduation among the highest of his class.”—*Harper’s Weekly*, April 28th, 1877.

All recitations of the graduating class were discontinued on the last scholar day of May. On June 1st examination began. The class was first examined in mineralogy and geology. In this particular subject I “maxed it,” made a thorough recitation. I was

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1. While this common proverb has often been attributed to Aristotle, and while it aligns with his teachings on the importance of perseverance, it does not appear in this form anywhere in the great philosopher’s works.

2. Flipper summarizes here in powerful terms his ordeal at West Point. Referring to periods of happiness as “bright oases” interspersed among “barren wastes of loneliness, isolation, unhappiness, and melancholy” underscores how heavily isolation and ostracism weighed on him. His use of the adjective “experimental” to describe his existence at West Point also stands out. That carried a burden of its own—a burden that would not be relieved by graduating and moving from one “experimental” existence as only the second Black cadet to endure four years at the Academy to another as West Point’s first Black graduate and the regular army’s first Black officer. Refer to the afterword in this volume for an extended discussion of Flipper’s career after West Point.



Second Lieutenant Henry O. Flipper, as engraved by Homer Lee and included in *The Colored Cadet* at West Point on the second page of chapter XV. Courtesy of the United States Military Academy Library Special Collections and Archives.

required to discuss the subject of “Mesozoic Time.” After I had been examined in this subject Bishop Quintard, of Tennessee, a member of the Board of Visitors, sent for me, and personally congratulated me on my recitation of that day, as well as for my conduct during the whole four years.<sup>3</sup> My hopes never were higher; I knew I would graduate. I felt it, and I made one last effort for rank. I wanted to graduate as high up as possible. I was not without success, as will subsequently appear. The New York *Herald* was pleased to speak as follows of my recitation in mineralogy and geology:

“To-day the examination of the first class in mineralogy and geology was completed, and the first section was partially examined in engineering. In the former studies the class acquitted themselves in a highly creditable manner, and several members have shown themselves possessed of abilities far above the average. The class has in its ranks a son of General B. F. Butler, Hon. John Bigelow’s son, and sons of two ex-Confederate officers. Flipper, the colored cadet, was examined to-day, and produced a highly favorable impression upon the board not less by his ready and intelligent recitation than by his modest, unassuming, and gentlemanly manner. There is no doubt that he will pass, and he is said to have already ordered a cavalry uniform, showing that he has a predilection for that branch of the service.”

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3. Despite his Unionist leanings at the beginning of the war, Charles T. Quintard was an Episcopal bishop and a former chaplain in the Confederate army during the Civil War. While it appears he was well-disposed toward Flipper, it is worth considering the tensions inherent in the fact that Reconstruction-era integration at West Point played out at the same time that the social and political elite who led Southern states into a slaveholders’ rebellion were returning to positions of social and political power. A telling sign of their return to power is their presence on West Point’s Board of Visitors. The board is now and was then required by law, serving as a body of civilians who inspected and reported upon the Academy on an annual basis. In the late nineteenth century, members included congressmen designated by congressional leaders and several others, usually civilians, designated by the president. Most U.S. Military Academy boards of visitors in the 1870s included at least one Confederate veteran. This compounded the already complex dynamic of integrating West Point as the Southern proportion of the Corps of Cadets returned to its pre-war levels. See the discussion about this dynamic on pages 19–21 in the Editors’ Introduction. As the next paragraph notes, Flipper’s class included “sons of two ex-Confederate officers.” See Charles Quintard, *Doctor Quintard, Chaplain C.S.A. and Second Bishop of Tennessee, Being His Story of the War (1861–1865)*, ed. Rev. Arthur Howard Noll (Tennessee: The University Press of Sewanee, 1905). See also the annual reports of the Board of Visitors for the years 1870–1877, USMA Library Special Collections and Archives, West Point, NY.

The class was next examined in law. In this, also, I exceeded my most sanguine expectations, again "maxing it" on a thorough recitation. My subject was "Domicile." Senator Maxey, of the Board of Visitors, questioned me closely. The Bishop of Tennessee left his seat in the board, came outside when the section was dismissed, and shook my hand in hearty congratulation. These were the proudest moments of my life. Even some of my own classmates congratulated me on this recitation. All that loneliness, dreariness, and melancholy of the four years gone was forgotten. I lived only in the time being and was happy. I was succeeding, and was meeting with that success which humble effort never fails to attain.

The New York *Tribune* joins in with its good words as follows:

LIEUTENANT FLIPPER, THE COLORED GRADUATE OF  
WEST POINT.

"The examination of the first class in law will be completed tomorrow. The sections thus far called up have done very well. The colored cadet, Flipper, passed uncommonly well this morning, showing a practical knowledge of the subject very satisfactory to Senator Maxey, who questioned him closely, and to the rest of the board. He has a good command of plain and precise English, and his voice is full and pleasant. Mr. Flipper will be graduated next week with the respect of his instructors, and not the less of his fellows, who have carefully avoided intercourse with him. The quiet dignity which he has shown during this long isolation of four years has been really remarkable. Until another of his race, now in one of the lower classes, arrived, Flipper scarcely heard the sound of his own voice except in recitation, and it is to be feared that unless he is detailed at Howard University, which has been mentioned as possible, his trials have only begun."

The class was next examined in civil and military engineering. In this also I did as well as in either of the other studies. I made a thorough recitation. I was required to explain what is meant by an "order of battle," and to illustrate by the battles of Zama, Pharsalia, and Leuctra.

THE COLORED CADET.

"Flipper, the colored cadet from South Carolina, was up this afternoon and acquitted himself remarkably well. Some time since he was recommended for a higher grade than the one he holds, and his performance to-day gained him a still higher standing in the class."

In ordnance and gunnery the class was next examined. In this I was less successful. I was to assume one of Captain Didion's equations of the trajectory in air, and determine the angle of projection represented by  $\phi$ , and the range represented by  $x$  in the following equation:

$$y = x \tan. \phi - \frac{(g x^2)}{(2 V^2)} B,$$

and to explain the construction and use of certain tables used in connection with it. I made a fair recitation, but one by no means satisfactory to myself. I lost four files on it at least. A good recitation in ordnance and gunnery would have brought me out forty-five or six instead of fifty. I did not make it, and it was too late to better it. This was the last of our examination. It ended on the 11th day of June. On the 14th we were graduated and received our diplomas.

During the examination I received letters of congratulation in every mail. Some of them may not be uninteresting. I give a few of them:

POST-OFFICE DEPARTMENT, ROOM 48,        }  
WASHINGTON, D. C., June 3, 1877. }

MY DEAR MR. FLIPPER: It has been four years since I last addressed you. Then you had just entered the Academy with other young colored men, who have since dropped by the way. I was at that time the editor of the *Era* in this city, and wrote an article on West Point and snobocracy which you may remember reading.

I felt a thrill of pleasure here the other day when I read your name as the first graduate from the Academy. I take this opportunity of writing you again to extend my hearty congratulations, and trust your future career may be as successful as your academic one. "My boy," Whittaker, has, I am told, been rooming with you, and I trust has been getting much benefit from the association.

I am, your friend and well-wisher,

RICHARD T. GREENER.<sup>4</sup>

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4. Richard Theodore Greener became the first Black graduate of Harvard University in 1870. He had a successful career as a lawyer, scholar, educator, and diplomat. He was a mentor to Johnson C. Whittaker, a Black cadet admitted to West Point in the summer of 1875. Greener helped to defend Whittaker during the trials subsequent to his assault in 1880. For more on Greener and Whittaker, see John F. Marszalek, *Assault at West Point: The Court-Martial of Johnson Whittaker* (Collier Books, 1972).



Richard T. Greener, circa 1885. *Courtesy of Harvard University Archives.*

42 BROAD STREET, NEW YORK, June 4, 1877.<sup>5</sup>

CADET HENRY O. FLIPPER,  
*West Point, N.Y.:*

DEAR SIR: I have been much pleased reading the complimentary references to your approaching graduation which have appeared in the New York papers the past week. I beg to congratulate you most heartily, and I sincerely trust that the same intelligence and pluck which has enabled you to successfully complete your academic course may be shown in a still higher degree in the new sphere of duty soon to be entered upon.

I inclose an editorial from to-day's *Tribune*.

Respectfully,

\_\_\_\_\_.

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5. It is interesting that Flipper included Greener's signature in the preceding letter but withholds names in subsequent letters, even while including potentially identifiable information within them. Flipper may have withheld names where he saw a risk of causing reputational harm to his correspondents, in the same way that elsewhere in this volume he routinely avoids naming those who tormented him.

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR,  
 UNITED STATES PATENT OFFICE,  
 WASHINGTON, D. C., June 5, 1877.<sup>6</sup> }

HENRY O. FLIPPER, ESQ.,

*U. S. Military Academy, West Point, N. Y.:*

DEAR SIR: Having noticed in the daily papers of this city an account of the successful termination of your course at the Military Academy, we hasten to tender you our sincere congratulations.

We are prompted to this act by an experimental knowledge of the social ostracism and treacherous duplicity to which you must have been made the unhappy victim during the long years of faithful study through which you have just passed.

We congratulate you upon the moral courage and untiring energy which must have been yours, to enable you to successfully battle against the immeasurable influence of the prejudice shown to all of us at both of our *national* schools. We hail your success as a national acknowledgment, in a new way, of the mental and moral worth of our race; and we feel amply repaid for the many privations we have undergone in the naval branch of our service, in noting the fact that one of us has been permitted to successfully stand the trying ordeal.

Trusting that the same firmness of purpose and untiring energy, which have characterized your stay there, may ever be true of your future career on the field and at the hearth side,

We remain, very truly yours,

\_\_\_\_\_,  
 \_\_\_\_\_.

POST-OFFICE, NEW YORK CITY, N. Y.  
 OFFICE OF THE POSTMASTER,  
 WEDNESDAY, JUNE 7, 1877. }

MY DEAR FRIEND: Let me extend to you my full gratitude upon your success at West Point. I was overjoyed when I saw it. My friends are delighted with you, and they desire to see you when you come down. Let me know when you think you will leave West Point, and I will look out for you.

Very truly yours,

\_\_\_\_\_.

HENRY O. FLIPPER, ESQ.,

*West Point Military Academy.*

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6. In noting “an experimental knowledge of the social ostracism and treacherous duplicity to which you must have been made the unhappy victim,” the anonymous correspondents of this letter are likely Black men who at some point were in positions similar to Flipper’s, integrating a resistant space. Although Flipper’s narrative is one of individualism and self-sufficiency, it is important to note that he was part of a much broader struggle playing out at nearly the same time in many locations and walks of life.

WASHINGTON, D. C., JUNE 13, 1877.<sup>7</sup>

HENRY O. FLIPPER, ESQ.,  
*West Point, N.Y.:*

MY DEAR FRIEND: I wish to congratulate you upon passing successfully your final examination, and salute you as the first young colored man who has had the manhood and courage to struggle through and overcome every obstacle. So many of our young men had failed that I wondered if you would be able to withstand all the opposition you met with, whether you could endure the kind of life they mete out to our young men at our national Military Academy. I rejoice to know that you have won this important victory over prejudice and caste. This will serve you in good stead through many a conflict in life. Your path will not be all strewn with roses; something of that caste and prejudice will still pursue you as you enter the broader arena of military life, but you must make up your mind to live it down, and your first victory will greatly aid you in this direction. One thing, allow me to impress upon you: you are not fighting your own battle, but you are fighting the battle of a struggling people; and for this reason, my dear Flipper, resolve now in your deepest soul that come what may you will *never* surrender; that you will *never* succumb. Others may leave the service for more lucrative pursuits; your duty to your people and to yourself demand that you remain.

Be assured that whatever you do, wherever you may go, you always have my deepest sympathy and best wishes.

I return to Europe in a few weeks.

Cordially yours,

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Even the cadets and other persons connected with the Academy congratulated me. Oh how happy I was! I prized these good words of the cadets above all others. They knew me thoroughly. They meant what they said, and I felt I was in some sense deserving of all I received from them by way of congratulation. Several visited my quarters. They did not hesitate to speak to me or shake hands with me before each other or any one else. All signs of ostracism were gone. All felt as if I was worthy of some regard, and did not fail to extend it to me.

At length, on June 14th, I received the reward of my labors, my "sheepskin," the United States Military Academy Diploma, that glorious passport to honor and distinction, if the bearer do never disgrace it.

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7. The letter dated June 13, 1877, from Washington, DC, however, is likely from someone both Black and active in Reconstruction-era civil rights advocacy. That letter seems more personal, possibly by someone directly acquainted with Flipper. It is entirely possible that this correspondent is John F. Quarles, serving in 1877 as the U.S. Consul at Malaga, Spain. Quarles would have risked no reputational harm by corresponding with Flipper, so it appears Flipper sometimes had other motives for withholding names. For more on Quarles, refer to chapter I, note 7, and pages 367–368 in the afterword of this volume.



The fate of Flipper's diploma is unknown. Save for the name and state, it would have looked exactly like this diploma, awarded on the same day to his classmate Alexander M. Patch. Courtesy of the United States Military Academy Library Special Collections and Archives.

Here is the manner of ceremony we had on that day, as reported in the *New York Times*:

“The concluding ceremony in the graduation exercises at the West Point Academy took place this morning, when the diplomas were awarded to the graduates. The ceremony took place in the open air under the shadow of the maple trees, which form almost a grove in front of the Academy building. Seats had been arranged here for the spectators, so as to leave a hollow square, on one side of which, behind a long table, sat the various dignitaries who were to take part in the proceedings. In front of them, seats were arranged for the graduating class. The

cadets formed line in front of the barracks at 10.30, and, preceded by the band playing a stirring air, marched to the front of the Academy building. The first class came without their arms; the other classes formed a sort of escort of honor to them. The graduating class having taken their seats, the other classes stacked arms and remained standing in line around the square. The proceedings were opened by an address from Professor Thompson, of the School of Technology, Worcester Mass., who is the Chairman of the Board of Visitors.”

And thus after four years of constant work amid many difficulties did I obtain my reward.

“Lieutenant H. O. Flipper was the only cadet who received the cheers of the assembled multitude at West Point upon receiving his parchment. How the fellows felt who couldn’t associate with him we do not know; but as the old Christian woman said, they ‘couldn’t a been on the mountain top.’”—*Christian Recorder*.<sup>8</sup>

Victor Hugo says somewhere in his works that he who drains a marsh must necessarily expect to hear the frogs croak. I had graduated, and of course the newspapers had to have a say about it. Some of the articles are really amusing. I couldn’t help laughing at them when I read them. Here is something from the New York *Herald* which is literally true:

“MR. BLAINE AND THE COLORED CADET.

“Senator James G. Blaine, with his wife and daughter and Miss Dodge (‘Gail Hamilton’) left at noon yesterday in anticipation of the rush. Before going the Senator did a very gracious and kindly deed in an unostentatious way. Sending for Flipper, the colored cadet, he said:

“I don’t know that you have any political friends in your own State, Mr. Flipper, and you may find it necessary to have an intermediary in Congress to help you out of your difficulties. I want you to consider me your friend, and call upon me for aid when you need it.”<sup>9</sup>

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8. It is hard to imagine how Flipper felt on graduation day. He gives us a small glimpse in the paragraph that opens this section, noting his joy in what apparently was a flood of congratulations and handshakes by cadets about to graduate and therefore unafraid of consequences for breaking the code of ostracism. The applause referred to by the *Christian Recorder* was not only unique to Flipper, but also initiated by none other than the commanding general of the U.S. Army, William T. Sherman. For a more detailed account of the graduation ceremony, see “The West Point Cadets,” *New York Times*, June 15, 1877.

9. It is a revealing commentary on the state of Southern politics in 1877 that a senator from Maine (and future secretary of state) offered to serve as Flipper’s “intermediary in Congress” in case of future “difficulties,” out of concern for a lack of

“With that he shook the lad’s hand and bade him good-by.

“Bishop Quintard, of Tennessee, and Senator Maxey, of Texas, also complimented the pioneer graduate of the colored race upon his conduct throughout the four years of his training, and proffered their sympathy and assistance. With these encouragements from prominent men of both political parties the young man seemed deeply touched, and thanking them suitably he returned with a light heart to his quarters.”

It was so very kind of the distinguished senators and bishop. I valued these congratulations almost as much as my diploma. They were worth working and enduring for.

The New York *Herald* again speaks, and that about not hearing my voice, etc., made me “larf.” Here is the article:

“THE COLORED CADET’S EXPERIENCE AND PROSPECTS.

“Flipper, the colored cadet, who graduates pretty well up in his class, said to me to-day that he is determined to get into either the Ninth or Tenth colored cavalry regiment if possible. He seems to be very happy in view of the honorable close of his academic career, and entertains little doubt that he can procure the appointment he wishes. When asked whether he was not aware that there was a law providing that even colored troops must be officered by white men, he replied that he had heard something of that years ago, but did not think it was true. ‘If there is such a law,’ he said emphatically, but with good humor, ‘it is unconstitutional and cannot be enforced.’ He added that several weeks ago he wrote to a prominent gentleman in Alabama to inquire what the existing law on the subject was, and had not yet received an answer. I questioned him about his experience in the Academy, and he said that he had suffered but little on account of his race. The first year was very hard, as the class all made their dislike manifest in a variety of ways. ‘That,’ he said, ‘was in a great measure caused by the bad conduct of Smith, the colored cadet who preceded me. When the class found out that I was not like him, they treated me well.’<sup>10</sup> The professors act toward me in every

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willing sponsorship from Flipper’s native state of Georgia. Subsequent praise from Bishop Quintard and Senator Maxey, noted below, reveals that resistance was not uniformly consistent across the South. But Blaine’s concern is indicative of a growing reactionary tide. For analyses of the reactionary backlash and Reconstruction’s decline, see Heather Cox Richardson, *The Death of Reconstruction: Race, Labor, and Politics in the Post-Civil War North, 1865–1901* (Harvard University Press, 2004), especially chap. 3–4, and Michael Perman, *The Road to Redemption: Southern Politics, 1869–1879* (University of North Carolina Press, 1984).

10. Flipper casts himself here and elsewhere as the antithesis of James W. Smith, going so far as to blame Smith for the racist response he received from fellow cadets. This indictment does a disservice to Smith and overlooks the extent to which Smith’s early advice to Flipper shaped his approach to Academy life. Flipper’s interpretation here is also disproven by the subsequent mistreatment of

respect as toward the others, and the cadets, I think, do not dislike me. But they don't associate with me. I don't care for that. If they don't want to speak to me I don't want them to, I'm sure.' Save in the recitation-room Flipper never heard the sound of his own voice for months and months at a time; but he was kept so hard at work all the time that he did not mind it. If he should join a regiment, however, he would be more alone even than he has been here, for the association with other officers in the line of duty would not be so close as it has been with the cadets. He would be isolated—ostracized—and he would feel it more keenly, because he would have more leisure for social intercourse, and his mind would not be so occupied as it has been here with studies.<sup>11</sup>

“Senator Blaine, in the course of a conversation last night, thought the career of Flipper would be to go South and become a leader of his race. He could in that way become famous, and could accomplish much good for the country.” . . .

When I entered the Academy I saw in a paper something about colored officers being put in white regiments, etc. It purported to be a conversation with the then Secretary of War, who said there was such a law, and that it would be enforced. The then Secretary of War has since told me he was sure there was such a law, until to satisfy himself he searched the Revised Statutes, when he found he was mistaken.

I have mentioned elsewhere the untruthfulness of the statement that I never heard my own voice except in the recitation-room. Every one must know that could not be true. The statement is hardly worth a passing remark.<sup>12</sup>

“If he should join a regiment, however,” etc. Ah! well, I have joined my regiment long ago. Let me say, before I go further, I am putting this manuscript in shape for the press, and doing it in my quarters at Fort Sill, I. T. These remarks are inserted *apropos* of this article. From the moment I reached Sill I haven't experienced any thing but happiness. I am not isolated. I am not ostracized by

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Black cadets who followed Flipper at the hands of white cadets who had no living memory of Smith. For another example of this framing, refer to chapter XIV, note 5. An analysis of Smith's advice appears in chapter III, note 13. Continued mistreatment of Black cadets by white cadets who had no interactions with Smith are readily apparent in Marszalek, *Assault at West Point* (Collier Books, 1994), and Brian G. Shellum, *Black Cadet in a White Bastion: Charles Young at West Point* (Bison Books, 2006).

11. This prediction proved partially true and partially false. Flipper's enjoyed fair treatment at Fort Sill, but not in subsequent years in Texas. Refer to the afterword for more on Flipper's life after West Point.

12. Refer to chapter VII, note 9, in which Flipper identifies a short list of people at West Point who broke an otherwise enduring cycle of isolation and ostracism.

a single officer. I do not “feel it more keenly,” because what the *Herald* said is not true. The *Herald*, like other papers, forgets that the army is officered by men who are presumably officers and gentlemen. Those who are will treat me as become gentlemen, as they do, and those who are not I will thank if they will “ostracize” me, for if they don’t I will certainly “ostracize” them.<sup>13</sup>

“But to get into a cavalry regiment is the highest ambition of most cadets, and failing in that it is almost a toss-up between the infantry and the artillery. Flipper, the South Carolina colored cadet, wants to get into the cavalry, and as there is a black regiment of that character he will, it is thought, be assigned to that. There is in existence a law specifying that even black regiments shall be officered by white men, and it is thought there will be some trouble in assigning Flipper. As any such law is in opposition to the constitutional amendments, of course it will be easily rescinded. From the disposition shown by most of the enlisted men with whom I have conversed at odd times upon this subject, I fancy that if Flipper were appointed to the command of white soldiers they would be restive, and would, if out upon a scout, take the first opportunity to shoot him; and this feeling exists even among men here who have learned to respect him for what he is.”

Now that is laughable, isn’t it? What he says about the soldiers at West Point is all “bosh.” Nobody will believe it. I don’t. I wish the *Herald* reporter who wrote the above would visit Fort Sill and ask some of the white soldiers there what they think of me. I am afraid the *Herald* didn’t get its “gift of prophecy” I from the right place. Such blunders are wholly inexcusable. The *Herald* reporter deserves an “extra” (*vide* Cant Terms, etc.) for that. I wish he could get one at any rate. Perhaps, however, the following will excuse him. It is true.

“He is spoken of by all the officers as a hard student and a gentleman. To a very great extent he has conquered the prejudices of his fellows, and although they still decline to associate with him it is evident that they respect him. Said one of his class this morning: ‘Flipper has certainly shown pluck and gentlemanly qualities, and I shall certainly shake his “flipper” when we say “Good-by.” We have no feeling against him at all, but we could not associate with him. You see we are so crowded together here that we are just like one family, possessing every thing in common and borrowing every thing, even to a pair of white trousers, and we could not hold such intimate fellowship with him. It may be prejudice, but we

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13. Flipper’s faith that class consciousness would overcome racial prejudice is a consistent theme throughout his narrative. While generally acknowledging the nature of his ordeal at West Point, Flipper assumed that beyond West Point’s gates, fellow officers would see him as an officer and a gentleman above all, rather than as a Black man. In fairness, some did. Too many did not.

could not do it; so we simply let him alone, and he has lived to himself, except when we drill with him. Feel bad about it? Well, I suppose he did at first, but he has got used to it now. The boys were rather afraid that when he should come to hold the position as officer of the guard that he would swagger over them, but he showed good sense and taste, merely assuming the rank formally and leaving his junior to carry out the duty.”

That glorious day of graduation marked a new epoch in my military life. Then my fellow-cadets and myself forgot the past. Then they atoned for past conduct and welcomed me as one of them as well as one among them.<sup>14</sup>

I must revert to that *Herald's* article just to show how absurd it is to say I never heard the sound of my own voice except in the section-room. I heard it at reveille, at breakfast, dinner, and supper roll-calls, at the table, at taps, and at every parade I attended during the day—in all no less than ten or twelve times every single day during the four years. Of course I heard it in other places, as I have explained elsewhere. I always had somebody to talk to every single day I was at the Academy.<sup>15</sup> Why, I was the happiest man in the institution, except when I'd get brooding over my loneliness, etc. Such moments would come, when it would seem nothing would interest me. When they were gone I was again as cheerful and as happy as ever. I learned to hate holidays. At those times the other cadets would go off skating, rowing, or visiting. I had no where to go except to walk around the grounds, which I sometimes did. I more often remained in my quarters. At these times barracks would be deserted and I would get so lonely and melancholy I wouldn't know what to do. It was on an occasion like this—Thanksgiving Day—I wrote the words given in another place, beginning,

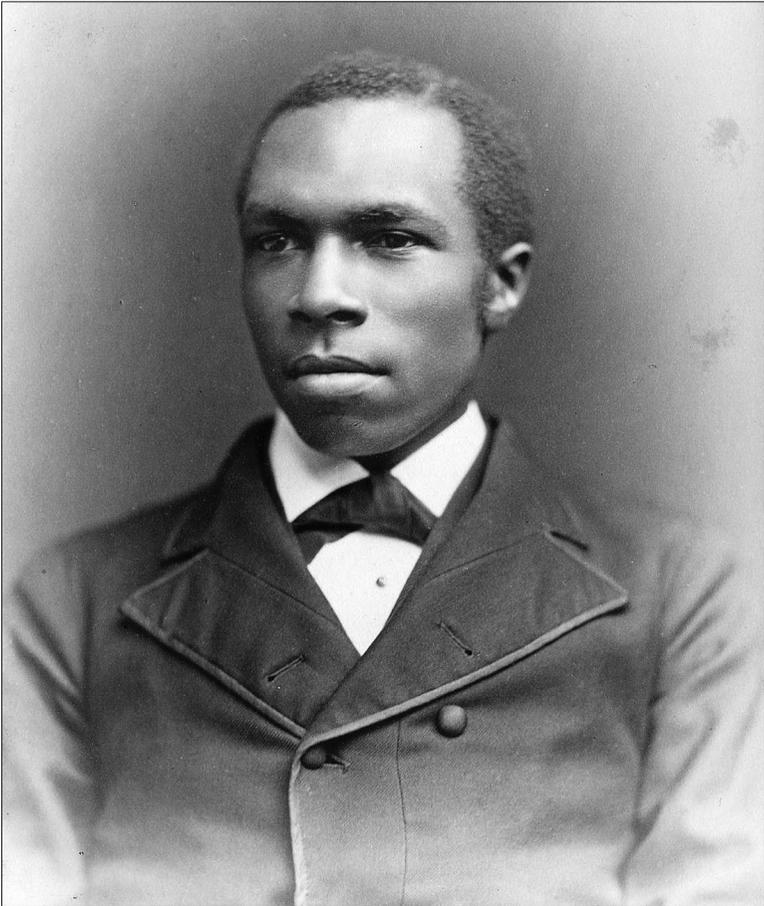
“Oh! 'tis hard this lonely living, to be  
In the midst of life so solitary,” etc.

Here is something from *Harper's Weekly*. The northern press generally speak in the same tenor of my graduation.

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14. Flipper gives clear expression here to why he placed so much faith in the future. He viewed graduation as a day of atonement and renewal.

15. Refer to Flipper's footnote on page 162 in chapter VII, as well as the analysis in note 9 immediately after Flipper's footnote.



Inman E. Page, circa 1877. Page and his classmate George Washington Milford were the first Black graduates of Brown University. *Courtesy of the John Carter Brown Library.*

“Inman Edward Page, a colored student at Brown University, has succeeded in every respect better than his brother Flipper at West Point. While a rigid non-intercourse law was for four years maintained between Flipper and the nascent warriors at the Military Academy, Page has lived in the largest-leaved clover at Brown, and in the Senior year just closed was chosen Class-day Orator—a position so much coveted among students ambitious for class honors that it is ranked by many even higher than the Salutatory or the Valedictory. Page has throughout been treated by his classmates as one of themselves. He is a good writer and speaker, though not noticeably better than some of his classmates. His conduct has been uniformly modest but self-respectful, and he had won the esteem of professors as well as students. The deportment of his class toward him is in high and honorable contrast with that pursued by the less manly students supported by the government at West Point, who may have already learned that the ‘plain people’ of the country are with Flipper.”

Here is something of a slightly different kind from a Georgia paper—Augusta *Chronicle and Constitutionalist*. Its tone betrays the locality of its birth.

“Benjamin F. Butler, Jr., who graduated at West Point last summer in the same class with the colored cadet from Georgia, Flipper, has been assigned for duty to the Ninth Cavalry, the same regiment to which Flipper is attached. The enlisted men in this regiment are all negroes. Ben, senior, doubtless engineered the assignment in order to make himself solid with the colored voters of the South. Ben, like old Joe Bagstock, is devilish sly.”

It is in error as to my assignment. Lieutenant Butler (whose name, by the way, is not Benjamin F., Jr.) was assigned to the Ninth Cavalry. Here is the truth about my assignment, given in the Sing Sing (N. Y.) *Republican*:

“Cadet Flipper has been appointed to the Tenth U. S. Cavalry (colored), now in Texas. Secretary of State Bigelow’s son has also been assigned to the same regiment. We wonder if the non-intercourse between the two at West Point will be continued in the army. Both have the same rank and are entitled to the same privileges. Possibly a campaign among the Indians, or a brush with the ‘Greasers’ on the Rio Grande, will equalize the complexion of the two.

The *National Monitor*, of Brooklyn (N. Y.), has this much to say. It may be worth some study by the cadets now at the Academy.

“Lieutenant Flipper, colored, a recent graduate from West Point, is a modest gentleman, and no grumbler. He says that privately he was treated by fellow-cadets with proper consideration, but reluctantly admits that he was publicly slighted. He can afford to be untroubled and magnanimous. How is it with his fellows? Will not shame ere long mantle their cheeks at the recollection of this lack of moral courage on their part? A quality far more to be desired than any amount of physical heroism they may ever exhibit.”

Here is something extra good from the *Hudson River Chronicle*, of Sing Sing. To all who want to know the truth about me physically, I refer them to this article. I refer particularly to the editor of a certain New Orleans paper, who described me as a “little bow-legged *grif* of the most darkly coppery hue.”<sup>16</sup>

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16. Toward the end of this chapter, Flipper includes a lengthy extract of the article that reiterates this particular line. It appears on page 321.

“For a few days past Lieutenant Henry O. Flipper, the colored cadet who graduated from West Point Academy last week, has been the guest of Professor John W. Hoffman, of this place. Lieutenant Flipper is a native of Atlanta, Georgia, whence General Sherman commenced that glorious march to the sea which proved what a hollow shell the Southern Confederacy really was. The lieutenant evidently has a large strain of white blood in his veins, and could probably, if so disposed, trace descent from the F. F.’s. He stands six feet, is well proportioned, has a keen, quick eye, a gentlemanly address, and a soldierly bearing. He goes from here to his home in Georgia, on a leave of absence which extends to the first of November, when he will join the Tenth Cavalry, to which he has been assigned as Second Lieutenant. This assignment shows that Lieutenant Flipper stood above the average of the graduating class, as the cavalry is the next to the highest grade in the service—only the Engineer Corps taking precedence of the cavalry arm.

“For four long years Cadet Flipper has led an isolated life at the Point—without one social companion, being absolutely ostracized by his white classmates. As much as any mortal, he can say:

“In the crowd  
They would not deem me one of such; I stood  
Among them, but not of them; in a shroud  
Of thoughts which were not their thoughts.’

“There must have been much of inherent manhood in a boy that could stand that long ordeal, and so bear himself at the close that, when his name was pronounced among the graduates, the fair women and brave men who had gathered to witness the going out into the world of the nation’s wards, with one accord greeted the lone student with a round of applause that welcomed none others of the class, and that could call from Speaker Blaine the strong assurance that if he ever needed a friend he might trustingly call on him.

“‘The path of glory leads but to the grave,’ but we venture the prediction that Lieutenant Flipper will tread that path as fearlessly and as promptly as any of his comrades of the ‘Class of ’77.’”

Here is an editorial article from the *New York Tribune*. It needs no comment, nor do the two following, which were clipped from the *Christian Union*.

#### LIEUTENANT FLIPPER.

“Among the West Point graduates this year is young Flipper, a lad of color and of African descent. It is stated that he acquitted himself very respectably in his examination by the Board of Visitors, that he will pass creditably, and that he will go into the cavalry, which is rather an aristocratic branch, we believe, of the service. Mr. Flipper must have had rather a hard time of it during his undergraduate career, if, as we find it stated, most if not all his white fellow-students have declined to associate with him. He has behaved so well under these anomalous circumstances, that he has won the respect of those who, so far as the discipline

of the school would permit, ignored his existence. 'We have no feeling against him,' said one of the students, 'but still we could not associate with him. It may be prejudice, but still we couldn't do it.' Impossibilities should be required of no one, and if the white West Pointers could not treat Mr. Flipper as if he were one of themselves, why of course that is an end of the matter. So long as they kept within the rules of the service, and were guilty of no conduct 'unbecoming an officer and a gentleman,' it was not for their commanders to interfere. But when they tell us that they couldn't possibly associate with Mr. Flipper, who is allowed to have 'shown pluck and gentlemanly qualities,' we may at least inquire whether they have tried to do so. Conquering prejudices implies a fight with prejudices—have these young gentlemen had any such fight? Have they too 'shown pluck and gentlemanly qualities?'

"We are not disposed to speak harshly of these fastidious young fellows, who will not be long out of the school before they will be rather sorry that they didn't treat Mr. Flipper a little more cordially. But a much more important matter is that he has, in spite of his color, made a good record every way, has kept up with his class, has not been dropped or dismissed, but emerges a full-blown Second Lieutenant of Cavalry. He has thus achieved a victory not only for himself but for his race. He has made matters easier for future colored cadets; and twenty years hence, if not sooner, the young white gentlemen of West Point will read of the fastidiousness of their predecessors with incredulous wonder. Time and patience will settle every thing."

#### CADET FLIPPER.

"The most striking illustration of class prejudice this year has been afforded, not by Mississippi or Louisiana, but by West Point. In 1873 Cadet Flipper entered the Military Academy. God had given him a black skin, a warm heart, an active brain, and a patriotic ambition. He was guilty of no other crime than that of being a negro, and bent on obtaining a good education. He represented a race which had done as good fighting for the flag as any done by the fair-skinned Anglo-Saxon or Celt. Congress had recognized his right and the right of his race to education.

"But his classmates decided that it should be denied him. If they had possessed the brutal courage of the murderers of Chisholm they would have shot him, or whipped him, or hung him; but they were not brave enough for that, and they invented instead a punishment worse than the State has inflicted upon its most brutal criminals. They condemned him to four years of solitude and silence. For four years not a classmate spoke to Cadet Flipper; for three years he did not hear his own voice, except in the recitation-room, on leave of absence, or in chance conversation with a stray visitor. Then another negro entered West Point, and he had one companion. The prison walls of a Sing Sing cell are more sympathetic than human prejudice. And in all that class of '77 there were not to be found a dozen men brave enough to break through this wall of silence and give the imprisoned victim his liberty. At least two thirds of the class are Republican appointees; and not one champion of equal rights. In all that class but one hero—and he a negro. Seventy-five braves against one! And the one was victorious. He fought out the four years' campaign, conquered and graduated. Honor to the African; shame to the Anglo-Saxon."

## CADET FLIPPER AGAIN.

“We have received several letters on the subject of Cadet Flipper, to whose treatment at West Point we recently called the attention of our readers. One of them is from a former instructor, who bears a high testimony to Lieutenant Flipper’s character. He writes:

“I want to thank you for your editorial in the *Christian Union* about Cadet Flipper. He was one of our boys; was with us in school from the beginning of his education till Freshman year in college, when he received his appointment to West Point. He was always obedient, faithful, modest, and in every way manly. We were sorry to have him leave us; but now rejoice in his victory, and take pride in him.

“During all these years, in his correspondence with his friends, he has not, so far as I can learn, uttered a single complaint about his treatment.”

“A second is from a Canadian reader, who objects to our condemnation of the Anglo-Saxon race, and insists that we should have reserved it for the Yankees. In Canada, he assures us, the color line is unknown, and that negroes and Anglo-Saxons mingle in the same school and in the same sports without prejudice. Strange to say the white men are not colored by the intercourse.

“The third letter comes indirectly from Lieutenant Flipper himself. In it the writer gives us the benefit of information derived from the lieutenant. We quote (the italics are ours):

“Mr. Flipper is highly respected here, and has been received by his former teachers and friends with pleasure and pride. His deportment and character have won respect and confidence for himself and his race. As to his treatment at West Point, he assures me that the “papers” are far astray. There was no ostracism on the part of his fellow-cadets, *except in the matter of personal public association*. He was invariably spoken to and treated courteously and respectfully both as a cadet and officer.”<sup>17</sup>

“We are glad to be assured that it was not as bad as we had been informed by what we considered as good authority; and we are still more glad to know that Lieutenant Flipper, instead of making much of his social martyrdom, has the good sense to make as light of it as he conscientiously can. But if it is true that there were cadets who did not sympathize with the action of the class, and were brave enough to speak to their colored comrade in private, it was a pity that they were not able to screw their courage up to a little higher point, and put the mark of a public condemnation on so petty and cruel a persecution.”

The people at large seem to be laboring under a delusion about West Point, at least the West Point that I knew. I know nothing of what West Point was, or of what was done there before I entered the

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17. This and similar remarks throughout this chapter show that Flipper’s optimistic narrative about treatment and mistreatment at West Point was not unique to his autobiography, but consistent in his public and private remarks and correspondence.

Academy. I have heard a great deal and read a great deal, and I am compelled to admit I have doubts about much of it. At the hands of the officers of the institution my treatment didn't differ from that of the other cadets at all, and at the hands of the cadets themselves it differed solely "in the matter of personal public association." I was never persecuted, or abused, or called by approbrious epithets in my hearing after my first year. I am told it has been done, but in my presence there has never been any thing but proper respect shown me. I have mentioned a number of things done to me by cadets, and I have known the same things to be done to white cadets. For instance, I was reported for speaking to a sergeant about the discharge of his duty. (See Chapter X., latter part, on that subject.) The same thing occurred to several members of the class of '74. They were ordered into the rear rank by a sergeant of the second class, when they were first-classmen. They were white. The result was they were all, three in number, I think, put in arrest.

Some New England paper contributes the following articles to this discussion, parts of which I quote:

#### THE BIGOT AND THE SNOB.

"The Hilton-Seligman controversy is one of those incidents which illustrate some of the features of our social life. The facts can briefly be stated. A Jewish gentleman, of wealth and position, applies for rooms at the Grand Union Hotel, Saratoga, and is flatly refused admission because he is a Jew. The public indignation is so great that the manager of the hotel is obliged to defend the act, and puts in the plea that a man has the right to manage his property as he pleases.

"But before our anger cools, let us remember the case of the colored cadet at West Point. During his course he met with constant rebuffs. He was systematically cut by his fellow-schoolmates. Instead of extending to him a generous sympathy in his noble ambition, they met him with sneers. All the feelings which should guide a chivalric soldier and lead him to honor real heroism, were quenched by the intense prejudice against color. Mean and despicable as is the spirit which prompted the manager of the Grand Union Hotel to refuse to entertain the rich Jewish banker, that which influenced the young men at West Point is still more deserving scorn and contempt. It was meaner and more contemptible than cowardice."

#### PREJUDICE AGAINST COLOR.

Within the last thirty years there has been a great change in public sentiment relating to colored persons. That it has become wholly just and kind cannot be shown; but it is far less unjust and cruel than it used to be. In most of the old free States, at least, tidy, intelligent, and courteous American citizens of African descent are treated with increasing respect for their rights and feelings. In public conveyances we find them enjoying all the consideration and comforts

of other passengers. At our public schools they have cordial welcome and fair play. We often see them walking along the street with white schoolmates who have evidently lost sight of the difference in complexions. Colored boys march in the ranks of our school battalions without receiving the slightest insult. Colored men have been United States senators and representatives. Frederick Douglass is Marshal of the District of Columbia.

“There is one conspicuous place, however, where caste-feeling seems to have survived the institution of slavery, and that is West Point. There the old prejudice is as strong, active, and mean as ever. Of this there has been a recent and striking instance in the case of young Flipper who has just graduated. It appears that during his whole course this worthy young man was subjected to the most relentless ‘snubbing.’ All his fellow-students avoided him habitually. In the recitation-room and upon the parade ground, by day and by night, he was made to feel that he belonged to an inferior and despised race, and that no excellence of deportment, diligence in study, or rank in his class could entitle him to the recognition accorded to every white dunce and rowdy. Yet with rare strength of character he persevered, and when, having maintained the standing of No. fifty in a class of seventy-six, he received his well-earned diploma, there was a round of tardy applause.

“If West Point is to continue to be a school characterized by aristocracy based upon creed, race, or color, so undemocratic and unrepugnant as to be out of harmony with our laws and institutions, it will do more harm than good, and, like other nuisances, it should be abated. If our rulers are sincere in their professions, and faithful to their duties, a better state of things may be brought about. Military arts must be acquired somewhere; but if the present Academy cannot be freed from plantation manners, it may be well to establish a new one without pro-slavery traditions, or, as has been suggested by the *Providence Journal*, to endow military departments in the good colleges where character and not color is the test of worth and manhood.”

(From the *New York Sun*.)

#### COLORED CADET FLIPPER.

TWO HUNDRED OF HIS NEW YORK ADMIRERS HONORING HIM WITH  
A RECEPTION.

“A reception was given last evening by Mr. James W. Moore, in the rooms of the Lincoln Literary Musical Association, 132 West Twenty-seventh Street, to Lieutenant H. O. Flipper, of Georgia, the colored cadet who has just graduated at West Point. Mr. Moore has had charge of the sick room of Commodore Garrison since his illness. The chandeliers were decorated with small flags. On a table on the platform rested a large basket of flowers, bearing the card of Barrett H. Van Auken, a grandson of Commodore Garrison. Among the pictures on the wall were many relating to Lincoln and the emancipation proclamation. Cheerful music was furnished from a harp and violin.

“The guests began to arrive about nine o’clock, the ladies in large numbers, and the room was soon abreeze with a buzz of conversation and the rustle of gayly-colored dresses and bright ribbons.

“The grand entree was at a quarter before ten. Lieutenant Flipper entered the room in full uniform. A heavy yellow horse-hair plume fell down over his cavalry helmet. His coat was new and bright, and glittered with its gold buttons and tasselled aigulets. By his side hung a long cavalry sabre in a gilt scabbard. His appearance was the signal for a buzz of admiration. He is very tall and well made. Beside him was Mr. James W. Moore. Behind him, as he walked through the thronged rooms, were the Rev. Dr. Henry Highland Garnett, and Mrs. Garnett; the Rev. E. W. S. Peck of the Thirty-fifth Street Methodist Church; Mr. Charles Remond Douglass, son of Fred Douglass, and United States Consul in San Domingo; the Rev. J. S. Atwell, of St. Philip’s Episcopal Church; the Rev. John Peterson; Professor Charles L. Reason, of the Forty-first Street Grammar School; John J. Zuillille; Richard Robinson, and others.

“The Lieutenant was led upon the stage by Mr. Garnett and seated at the extreme left, while Dr. Garnett took a seat at the extreme right. Next to the Lieutenant sat Miss Martha J. Moore and Miss Fanny McDonough, Mr. P. S. Porter, Dr. Ray, Mr. Atwell, and Professor Reason completed the semicircle, of which Lieutenant Flipper and Dr. Garnett formed the extremities. The Rev. Mr. Atwell sat in the middle.

“After all were seated, Dr. Garnett called Mr. Douglass forward to a vacant seat on the platform. In introducing Lieutenant Flipper, Dr. Garnett said he had honored himself and his race by his good scholarship and pluck. Nowhere else was there, he thought, such iron-bound and copper-covered aristocracy as in West Point. Who could have thought that any one wearing the ‘shadowed livery of the burnished sun’ would ever dare to be an applicant? Young Smith’s high personal courage had led him to resent a blow with a blow, and his career in the Academy was cut short. Lieutenant Flipper had encountered the same cold glances, but he had triumphed, and appeared before his friends in the beautiful uniform of the national army. (Applause.) The Doctor believed he would never disgrace it. (Applause, and waving of handkerchiefs by the ladies.)

“At the close of his address, Dr. Garnett said: ‘Ladies and gentlemen, I take great pleasure in introducing to you Lieutenant H. O. Flipper.’ The Lieutenant rose and bowed low, his hands resting on the hilt of his sabre. He said nothing. Mr. Douglass was introduced, but excused himself from speaking.

“Then Mr. James Crosby was called on. He said when the regiment in which he was orderly sergeant had marched to Port Hudson, General —— met it, and said to Colonel Nelson: ‘Colonel, what do you call these?’ ‘I call them soldiers,’ answered Colonel Nelson. ‘Well, if these are soldiers, and if I’ve got to command niggers, the government is welcome to my commission. Take them down to the right to General Payne. He likes niggers.’ ‘Soon afterward,’ added Mr. Crosby, ‘occurred that terrible slaughter of the colored troops which you all remember so well. This year Lieutenant Flipper and a nephew of General —— graduated in the same class, and the colored man rated the highest.’

“After the addresses Lieutenant Flipper descended to the floor, and without formal introductions shook hands with all. He had taken off his cavalry helmet while sitting on the stage. Lemonade and ice-cream were served to the guests. About two hundred persons, all colored, were present. The Lieutenant will start for his home in Georgia on Monday. He will join his regiment, the Tenth Cavalry, on the Rio Grande in November.”

(From the *Atlanta (Ga.) Constitution.*)

FLIPPER AGAIN.

“Flipper has flopped up again, and seems to be decidedly in luck. He has been transferred to the Tenth Cavalry, which is alluded to by a New Orleans paper as the ‘Tenth Nubian Light Foot.’<sup>18</sup> This, it seems to us, is a dark hint as to the color of this gallant corps, but as the State of Texas lies somewhere between New Orleans and the Rio Grande, we suppose the matter will be allowed to pass. But as to Flipper, Flipper has got his regiment and he has had a reception at the hands of his colored friends and acquaintances in New York. Common people are generally embarrassed at receptions given to themselves, but not so with Flipper. The reception was exceedingly high-toned, as well as highly colored, and took place in the rooms of the ‘Lincoln Literary Musical Association.’ Flipper, rigged out in full uniform, with a yellow horse-hair plume flowing felicitously over his cavalry helmet, sailed in, according to accounts, just as chipper and as pert as you please. There was no lager beer handed around, but the familiar sound of the band, which was composed of a harp and a violin, made its absence painfully apparent. There were few speeches, but the affair was decidedly formal. When every thing was ready for business, a party of the name of Garnett rose and introduced Flipper, and in the course of his remarks took occasion to attack the newly-made lieutenant by accusing him of wearing ‘the shadowed livery of the burnished sun.’ Whereupon Flipper got up, placed his hands on the hilt of his bloody sabre, and bowed. The crowd then shook hands all around, the music played, and lemonade and ice-cream were brought out from their hiding-places, and all went merry as the milkman’s bell. As we said before, Flipper is in luck. He is a distinguished, young man. He will reach home during the present week, and it is to be hoped that his friends here are ready to give him an ice-cream lunch, or something of that kind.”

(From the *Christian Recorder.*)

LIEUTENANT FLIPPER IN NEW YORK—HIS RECEPTION—  
CALLS ON BELKNAP.

“Lieutenant Flipper has, by his manly conduct and noble bearing, his superior intellectual powers shown his fellow-cadets and tutors that all the colored student wants is a ‘chance.’ His term of four years, his graduation, his appointment,

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18. The 9th and 10th Cavalry Regiments, as well as the 24th and 25th Infantry Regiments, were the famed Buffalo Soldier regiments organized within the regular army after the Civil War. Comprised of Black troops under the command of white officers (with the exception of Flipper and, later, John Hanks Alexander and Charles Young), they were also a frequent target for reactionaries. See pages 5–6 in the Editors’ Introduction to this volume. For more on the Buffalo Soldiers, see—among others—Brian Shellum, *Black Officer in a Buffalo Soldier Regiment: The Military Career of Charles Young* (University of Nebraska Press, 2010), and Le’Trice D. Donaldson, *Duty Beyond the Battlefield: African American Soldiers Fight for Racial Uplift, Citizenship, and Manhood, 1870–1920* (Southern Illinois University Press, 2020), chapter 1.

will all mark a new era in American history. That the 'feat' he has accomplished is appreciated has been shown in too many ways to mention. His advent into New York City was marked by many courtesies. His friends, not unmindful of his new field and position, tendered him a grand reception at Lincoln Literary Hall on the 30th of June. It was the writer's good fortune to arrive at New York just in time to be present and pay him similar honors with others. The hall was tastefully and beautifully decorated with flowers and flags, representing the different States in the Union. At the appointed hour the distinguished guests were seen gathering, filling the hall to its utmost capacity. Among the number we noticed especially Dr. H. H. Garnett and Professor Reason. A few and appropriate remarks were made by Dr. Garnett as an introduction, after him others followed. After these formal exercises were over, Mr. Flipper came down from the rostrum and welcomed his friends by a hearty shake of the hand, then all supplied the wants of the inner man by partaking of cream, cake, and lemonade, which were so bountifully supplied. The evening was certainly a pleasant one, as delightful as one could wish, and I presume there was no one present who did not enjoy himself. In addition to what has already been mentioned the occasion was still more enlivened by the strains of sweet music. The exercises of the evening being concluded, the distinguished guests departed each one for his home. Lieutenant Flipper spent some days in New York, and during this visit, as he tells me, ex-Secretary Belknap sent him a written invitation to call on him. This he did, and was received very cordially and congratulated on the victory achieved. He spoke of the pros and cons, and seemed anxious that success might attend his footsteps in all the avenues of army life. That Belknap is interested in the young soldier and desires his success I do not deny; but whether the ex-Secretary would have given him any assistance when in his power is a question I shall not presume to answer."

*(From the Atlanta (Ga.) Constitution.)*

#### FLYING AROUND FLIPPER.<sup>19</sup>

HIS RECEPTION UPON HIS RETURN HOME—EAGERNESS TO SHAKE THE HAND OF THE "BAD MAN WID DE GUB'MENT STROPS ON!"—A SOCIAL RECEPTION ON MONDAY NIGHT.

"'Flip's done come home!' was the familiar, and yet admiring manner in which the young negroes about town yesterday spread the information that Second Lieutenant Henry O. Flipper, of the Tenth Cavalry, and the first colored graduate of the United States Military Academy at West Point, had arrived. His coming has created quite a sensation in colored circles, and when he appeared upon the streets, last evening, taking a drive with his delighted father, he was the cynosure of all the colored people and the object of curious glances from the whites. The young man had 'been there before,' however, and took all the ogling with patience and seeming indifference. Once in awhile he would recognize an old acquaintance and greet him with a smile and a bow.

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19. Not uniquely but quite directly, this article reveals how some press outlets attempted to continue to portray African Americans as unfit for service as officers. The language—both charged and in caricature—is meant to portray inferiority.

“The last number of *Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper* contains an excellent likeness of Flipper, dressed in his cadet uniform. His features betray his intelligence, and indicate the culture which he has acquired by hard study. His arrival here was the occasion of a buzz about the Union depot. His parents and a number of intimate friends were present to receive him, and the scene was an interesting one to all concerned.

“‘Dat’s him!’ said a dozen of the curious darkeys who stood off and hadn’t the honor of the youth’s acquaintance. They seemed to feel lonesome.

“‘He’s one ob de United States Gazettes!’ shouted a young darkey, in reply to a query from a strange negro who has moved here since Flipper went away.

“But the young officer was speedily spirited out of the crowd and taken home to his little bed for a rest.

“On the streets he was greeted by many of our citizens who knew him, and who have watched his career with interest. His success was complimented, and he was urged to pursue his course in the same spirit hereafter. Among his colored friends he was a lion, and they could not speak their praises in language strong enough.

“A darkey would approach the young man, cautiously, feel of his buttons and clothes, and enthusiastically remark: “‘Bad man wid de gub’ment strops on!’

“These were the expressions of admiration that best suited the ideas of his delighted acquaintances. They will give him a reception on Monday night next, at which all his friends will be present, and some of our leading white citizens will be invited to be present.

“We will try and give the young man’s views and experiences in tomorrow’s issue.”

This paper is noted for its constant prevarication. Whatever it says about negroes is scarcely worth noticing, for be it in their favor or not it is almost certainly untrue. My “delighted father” was not within three hundred miles of Atlanta when I reached that place. I did not appear on the streets in uniform for several days after my arrival, and then only at the request of many friends and an officer of the Second Infantry then at McPherson Barracks.

(*From the Atlanta (Ga.) Republican*)

“Lieutenant Flipper arrived in our city last week on a visit to his friends. His father lives in Thomasville, but he was educated in this city. His intelligence and manly course has won for him the praise of even the Bourbons.”

(*From the Atlanta (Ga.) Republican*)

“We acknowledge the courtesy of an invitation to a reception given to Lieutenant H. O. Flipper of the Tenth Cavalry, by his colored friends in Atlanta. Circumstances beyond our control prevented our attending.

“We are informed it was a pleasant affair, and that Lieutenant Flipper embraced the opportunity to give something of his four years’ experience at West Point, and to correct some of the misstatements of the *Atlanta Constitution*

concerning the treatment he received while a cadet at the Military Academy. An article alluding to this subject has been crowded out this week, but will appear in our next issue.

(From the *Augusta (Ga.) Chronicle and Constitutionalist*.)

#### A FALSEHOOD.

“The Cincinnati *Gazette* says: ‘Lieutenant Flipper, the young colored man who is guilty of having been graduated with credit from West Point, continues to be the butt of Georgia Democratic journals.’ We would like to know where the *Gazette* gets its information. Flipper has been treated with nothing but kindness in Georgia. Wherever he has reviewed the colored military, accounts of the reviews have been published, but we have yet to see a single word in a Georgia paper in disparagement or ridicule of the colored graduate.”

Witness the following from the *Atlanta Constitution*:<sup>20</sup>

#### FLIPPER AS A FRAUD.

FREEMAN’S PROTEGE ON SOUTHERN CIVILIZATION—HE TALKS AT THE RECEPTION AND MAKES OF HIMSELF AN ASS—THE ANOMALOUS CREATURE ON EXHIBITION—HE SHOWS THE CLOVEN FOOT.

“Last night the colored people of the city gave a ‘reception’ to Flipper, of the United States Army. They did this from a feeling of pride over the fact that one of their color, a townsman, had succeeded in attaining his rank. They doubtless, little suspected that he would make such use of the occasion as he did. More than one of them so expressed their feeling before the evening ended. The relations between the races in this city have for years been such as to make remarks like those in which Flipper indulged not only uncalled for, but really distasteful. They are not to be blamed for his conduct.

“The crowd that gathered in the hall on the corner of Mitchell and Broad Streets was large. It was composed almost entirely of well-dressed and orderly colored people. There were present several of the white male and female teachers of the negro schools; also, some of our white citizens occupying back seats, who were drawn thither by mere curiosity.

“Flipper was dressed lavishly in regimentals and gold cord, and sat upon the stage with his immense and ponderous cavalry sabre tightly buckled around him. He had the attitude of Wellington or Grant at a council of war. He was introduced to the audience by J. O. Wimbish, a high-toned negro politician (as was) of this city, who bespattered the young warrior with an eulogy such as no school-master

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20. With the following lengthy article, Flipper pushes back subtly and artfully to the *Chronicle and Constitution*’s claim of a fair and positive reception by the Democratic press in Georgia. The article is quite flagrant, and a cursory reading of it could leave a reader perplexed as to why Flipper included it. But its inclusion is an effective representation of the silent form of resistance that characterized Flipper’s response to mistreatment at West Point.

would have written for less than \$5 C. O. D. It was real slushy in its copiousness and diffusiveness.

## FRIP FIRES OFF.

“He arose with martial mien, and his left hand resting on his sabre hilt. He said:

“Some weeks ago he had been called upon at a reception in New York to make a speech, but he had reminded the gentleman who called upon him that he had been taught to be a soldier and not an orator. While upon this occasion he still maintained that lie was not an orator, yet he would tell them something of his career at West Point. He referred to his colored predecessors in the Academy and their fates, particularly of Smith, whose last year there was his (F’s) first. During that year, on Smith’s account, he had received his worst treatment at the Academy. Prejudice against us was strong there at that time. During his first encampment he had a better time than almost any man in his class. In 1874 Smith left, and a rumor prevailed that he (F) was afraid to stay and was going to resign. Colonel Upton, the commandant, sent for him to his house, told him not to do so, but to stick it out. Of course he had no intention of resigning, and he followed this superfluous advice. So far as the cadets were concerned they always treated me fairly, would speak to me, and some came to my room and talked with me, but the only thing they did that was wrong, perhaps, was that they would not associate with me openly. The officers always treated me as well as they did any other cadet. All these reports about my bad treatment there, especially in Southern newspapers, are absolutely false.

“I will read and comment upon some of these articles. In *The Constitution* of last Saturday it said I had the hardest four years of any cadet who ever passed through the Academy. That is in some respects true, but not wholly so. Speaking of Ben Butler’s son, I am proud to say that among the three hundred cadets I hadn’t a better friend than the son of the Massachusetts statesman. (Applause.) As to Mr Bigelow’s son, mentioned here, I know him well, and his whole family—his father, the distinguished ex-Secretary of State, his mother and his two sisters, and have met them at their home. Mrs. Bigelow, recognizing my position, and thinking to assure my feelings, sent me a nice box of fruit with her compliments.”

“He then commented on articles from Beecher’s *Christian Union*, the *New York Tribune*, *Harper’s Weekly*, and the *New York Telegram*, characterizing many of their statements about himself as false.

## SOCIAL EQUALITY IN THE ARMY.

“The article last named was about social equality in the army. Flipper said that he was cordially met by the army officers in Chattanooga. In return he paid his respects to the commandant and was introduced and shown through the barracks. He was treated with every courtesy.

“How it is here you have all seen as I walked about the city. I have walked with the officers of the garrison here several times to-day, even up and down Whitehall Street, and one of them invited me into Schumann’s drug store, and had a glass of soda together. I know it is not a usual thing to sell to colored people, but we got it. (Laughter and applause.) And to-night as Mr. J. O. Wimbish

and myself were coming to the hall, we met with one of the officers at the corner, and went into Schumann's again. We called for soda-water, and got it again! (Applause.) And I called at the barracks, through military courtesy, and paid my respects to the commandant. I understand that the officers there have had my case under consideration, and have unanimously agreed that I am a graduate of the national Academy, and hold a commission similar to their own, and am entitled to the same courtesy as any other officer. I have been invited to visit them at their quarters to-morrow. These things show you something of social equality in the army, and when this happens with officers who have lived in the South, and had opportunity to be tainted with Southern feeling, I expect still less trouble from this source when I reach my regiment and among officers who have not lived in the South and had occasion to be tainted in this way. The gentlemen of the army are generally better educated than the people of the South.'

"He spoke of his graduation and of the applause with which he was greeted. He closed by thanking his audience.

#### FLOURISHING HIS FLIPPER.

"Then Flipper was escorted upon the floor, and the announcement was made that all who desired could now be introduced to the youth.

"The first man to receive this distinguished honor was George Thomas, the Assistant United States Attorney. He was followed closely by several Northern school-marms and teachers, and a host of the colored people.

"After shaking, the crowd took ice-cream and cake and adjourned. *Sic transit!*"

I pass over the preceding article with the silent contempt it deserves. Some of the papers commented upon it. I give two such articles:

(*From the Atlanta (Ga.) Republican.*)

"The *Atlanta Constitution*, true to principle, comes out in a slanderous attack upon Lieutenant Flipper. In its issue of Tuesday, July 10th, it calls him a fraud. Would to heaven we had ten thousand such frauds in Georgia for the good of the State and progress in general!

"It takes exception, too, to the manner in which the colored lieutenant appeared at the reception given by the colored people in his honor. He was 'lavishly dressed in full regimentals,' it says, 'with gold cord. He sat upon the stage with his massive and ponderous sword, looking like Wellington or Grant in war council. He made remarks uncalled for and distasteful.' Oh dear! Oh!

"Now we (that is I, this individual, Mr. Editor, for I would not assume your grand editorial pronoun) should like to know how the *Constitution* would have the young officer dress. Surely it was entirely proper and becoming that he should appear in full regimental cap, coat, boots, spurs, and all, full fledged, just as he issued forth from West Point.

"In the first place it was a novel sight for the colored people. Surely the *Constitution* would not rob us of the privilege and pleasure of seeing in full military

costume the first and only one of our race who has been permitted to pass through West Point with honor.

“In regard to the ostentatious manner in which the lieutenant conducted himself on that evening, nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, the general comment of the evening by both black and white was on the modesty of his bearing.

“It is not strange, however, that the *Constitution*, whose judgment and sense of right and justice have been perverted through years of persistent sinning, should see things in a different light.

“The ‘uncalled for and distasteful’ remarks were doubtless those made in regard to the fact that Northern people coming into contact with Southern prejudice are tainted by it, and that West Pointers are generally better educated than the Southern people. Of course this would stir up the wrath of the *Constitution*; for what could be more hateful in its sight than truth?

“JUSTITIA.”

(*From the New York World.*)

“Lieutenant Flipper would have shown better sense if he had not made any speech at Atlanta. But if he was to make any speech at all upon the subject of his treatment at West Point, it could scarcely be expected that he should make one more modest, manly and sensible than that which is reported in our news columns.”

Here are two other articles of the abusive order from the Southern press:

(*From the Griffin (Ga.) News.*)

“J. C. Freeman, the only white man in Georgia that ever disgraced the military of the United States, was in the city yesterday. It will be remembered that this individual at one time misrepresented this district in Congress, and during that time he appointed one negro by color, and Flipper by name, to West Point. But then, nevertheless, the negro is as good as he is, and better too, and we have no doubt but what Freeman thinks he did a big thing, but the good people of the State think different. This notice is not paid for.”

(*From the Warrenton (Ga.) Clipper.*)

“The following is the way the Southerners solidify their section—that is, it is one way—the other, being the masked Kuklux. What it says, however, about the North, is just about so:

“Lieutenant Flipper, the colored cadet, is in Macon, and the darkies there think him a bigger man than General Grant. They’ll want him to be President after awhile, and the Northern people will then be the first to say no.”

The article of social equality referred to was clipped from the New York *Evening Telegram*. It is as follows:

#### NEGRO EQUALITY IN THE ARMY.

“There is no danger of negro equality, oh no! But it will be so delightful for the white soldier to be commanded to pace the greensward before the tent of Lieutenant Flipper, the negro graduate of West Point, and the white soldier will probably indulge in a strange train of thought while doing it. And when promotion comes, and the negro becomes Majah Flippah, or Colonel Flippah, the prospects of the white captains and lieutenants will be so cheerful, particularly if they have families and are stationed at some post in the far West, where any neglect in the social courtesies toward their superior officer would probably go hard with them and their families.”

To go back to the article “Flying Around Flipper,” I want to say the white people of Georgia can claim no credit for any part of my education. The Storrs school was not a public school at the time I went to school there. It did not become such until I went to West Point. The Atlanta University receives \$8000 per annum from the State of Georgia in lieu of the share of the agricultural land scrip due to the colored people for educational purposes. Efforts have been made to take even this from the university, but all have been failures.

*(From the Macon (Ga.) Telegram and Messenger.)*

#### BATTALION PARADE.

“On Monday evening the colored companies of the city had a battalion parade and review.

“The three companies, viz., the Lincoln Guards, the Bibb County Blues, and the Central City Light Infantry, formed on Fourth Street, and to martial music marched up Mulberry to First, down First to Walnut, up Walnut to Spring Street, and there formed for dress parade and inspection.

“On the right of the line were the Light Infantry under Captain W. H. DeLyons. The Blues bore the colors, and were commanded by Spencer Moses, Captain, and the Guards supported the extreme left. T. N. M. Sellers, Captain of the Lincoln Guards, acted as major. After some preliminary movements the troops were inspected by Lieutenant Flipper, the colored graduate of West Point. The troops then marched around the inspecting officer.

“The line was again formed, and the major addressed Lieutenant Flipper in a short speech, in which was expressed gratitude to the government and thanks to the inspecting officer.

“Lieutenant Flipper replied in a few very sensible and appropriate remarks: That he wished all success, honor, and thanks to the companies for their kindness and courtesy. Hoped they would all make soldiers and tight for their country.

That he was a soldier rather than a speaker. That he had tried to do his duty at West Point, and that he expected to continue to try to do his duty, and 'again thanking you for your hospitality, kindness, and attention to myself, I renew my wish for your future success.'

"After the speaking there was a general hand-shaking. The entire parade was very creditable indeed, showing considerable proficiency in the tactics, and was witnessed by a large crowd of about twelve hundred of whites and blacks.

"This is the first review ever held by the colored troops in the city of Macon. About eighty men rank and file were out. The colors used was the United States flag. The uniforms were tasty and well gotten up."

There was a very scurrilous article in one of the Charleston (S. C.) papers. I have not been able to get it. I am informed that after commenting on my graduation, assignment, etc., it indulged in much speculation as to my future. It told how I would live, be treated, etc., how I would marry, beget "little Flippers," and rear them up to "don the army blue," and even went far enough to predict their career. It was a dirty piece of literature, and I am not very sorry I couldn't obtain it.

*(From the Atlanta (Ga.) Republican.)*

SUCCESSFUL COLORED YOUNG MEN.

"At length a colored youth has overcome the difficulties that surrounded him as a student at the West Point Military Academy, and has graduated, with the respect of his white associates who were at first very much opposed to him. Mr. Flipper, the successful young man is a Georgia boy, and was appointed a cadet to West Point from the Fifth Congressional District—the Atlanta District—by Congressman Freeman, we believe. He was raised by Rev. Frank Quarles, of this city, and is regarded by him almost as a son.

"John F. Quarles, Esq., the son of Rev. Frank Quarles, is spending a few days with his father. Mr. J. F. Quarles was educated in Pennsylvania since the war, and returned to Georgia in 1870. He read law and was admitted to the Augusta bar after a careful examination before three of the ablest lawyers at that bar, which is noted for its talent. He passed a very creditable examination, and is, we believe, the only colored man who has been admitted to the Georgia bar. He was soon after appointed consul to Port Mahon, in the Mediterranean Sea, and served with credit until he was legislated of office by the Democratic Congress. President Hayes recently appointed him consul to Malaga, Spain.

"Rev. Mr. Quarles is justly proud of two such boys."

Here, too, is a venerable colored man claiming the honor of having raised me. Why, I never was away from my mother and father ten consecutive hours in my life until I went to West Point. It is possible, nay, very probable, that he jumped me on his knee, or

boxed me soundly for some of my childish pranks, but as to raising me, that honor is my mother's, not his.<sup>21</sup>

Before leaving West Point the following communications were sent me from the head-quarters of the Liberia Exodus Association, 10 Mary Street, Charleston S. C. I replied in very courteous terms that I was opposed to the whole scheme, and declined to have any thing to do with it. I was in Charleston later in the year, and while there I was besieged by some of the officers of the association, who had not yet despaired of making me "Generalissimo of Liberia's Army," as one of them expressed himself. Wearied of their importunities, and having no sympathy with the movement, I published the following in the Charleston *News and Courier*:

FLIPPER ON LIBERIA.<sup>22</sup>

"Lieutenant Flipper, of the Tenth United States Cavalry, the newly-fledged colored West Pointer, has something to say on the question of the Liberian Exodus, which will be interesting to the people of his race. The lieutenant, by his creditable career as a cadet at the Military Academy, has certainly earned the right to be heard by the colored population with at least as much respect and attention as has been given to the very best of the self-constituted apostles of the Exodus. Here is his letter:

*To the Editor of The News and Courier:*

"SIR: A rumor has come to me from various sources, to the effect that I have promised to resign my commission in the army after serving the two years required by law, and to then accept another as General Commander-in-Chief of the Liberian Army.

"It has also come to my notice that many, particularly in the counties adjoining Georgia, are being persuaded, and intend going to Liberia because I have made this promise.

"I shall consider it no small favor if you will state that there is no law requiring me to serve two years, that I never authorized any such statement as here made, that I have no

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21. This perhaps intemperate remark about Reverend Frank T. Quarles may be part of the reason why John Quarles, the elder Quarles's son and a well-respected Black lawyer, did not defend Flipper at his court martial. Refer to chapter I, note 7 and pages 367–368 in the Afterword.

22. The Liberian exodus movement had become somewhat more popular at this time but had not yet reached its height of popularity. Reconstruction's shortcomings and the onset of the Jim Crow era convinced some African Americans that they had a more secure future in Liberia than in the United States. As the following correspondence shows, Flipper had to decline offers to join the movement in a military capacity vigorously and publicly to better secure his own position in the army. At the same time, rejecting the invitation as strongly and publicly as he did may have generated resentment among parts of the broader African American community, discouraging them from rallying to Flipper's defense during his court martial in 1882. See Donaldson, *Duty Beyond the Battlefield*, 115–16.

sympathy whatever for the "Liberian Exodus" movement, that I give it neither countenance nor support, but will oppose it whenever I feel that the occasion requires it. I am not at all disposed to flee from one shadow to grasp at another—from the supposed error of Hayes's Southern policy to the prospective glory of commanding Liberia's army.

"Very respectfully, your obedient servant,

"HENRY O. FLIPPER,

"Second Lieutenant Tenth U. S. Cavalry.

"CHARLESTON, S. C., October 19, 1877."

#### THE LETTERS FROM CHARLESTON.

ROOMS OF THE LIBERIAN AFRICAN ASSOCIATION, }  
 10 MARY STREET, CHARLESTON, S. C., }  
 June 22, 1877. }

TO HENRY O. FLIPPER, ESQ.,

*U. S. Military Academy, West Point, N. Y.:*

DEAR FRIEND AND BROTHER: Your future, as foreshadowed by the press of this country, looks dismal enough. We have conned its remarks with mingled feelings of sympathy and exultation. Exultation! because we believe fate has something higher and better in store for you than they or you ever dreamed. Inclosed please find copy of a letter to the Honorable the Secretary of State. We have not yet received a reply. Also, inclosed, a number of the *Missionary Record* containing the call referred to. We have mentioned you in our note to His Excellency Anthony Gardner, President of Liberia. Please communicate with us and say if this letter and inclosures do not open up a bright vista in the future to your imagination and reasonable aspirations? *Wē* picture to ourselves our efforts to obtain a line of steamers crowned with success; and behold you as commander-in-chief organizing and marshalling Liberia's military forces in the interests of humanity at large, and the especial development of a *grand* African nationality that shall command the respect of the nations:

So Afric shall resume her seat in the  
 Hall of Nations vast;  
 And strike upon her restrung lyre  
 The requiem of the past:  
 And sing a song of thanks to God,  
 For his great mercy shown,  
 In leading, with an outstretched arm,  
 The benighted wanderer home. Selah!

Provide yourself at once with maps, etc., master the chorography of Africa in general, and the topography of Liberia in particular, that is to say, the whole range of the Kong mountains, including its eastern slope on to the Niger, our natural boundary! for the next thirty years! after that, onward! Cultivate especially the artillery branch of the service; this is the arm with which we can most surely overawe all thought of opposition among the native tribes; whilst military engineering will dot out settlements with forts, against which, they will see, 'twould be madness to hurl themselves. We desire to absorb and cultivate

them. The great obstacle to this is their refusal to have their girls educated. This results from their institution of polygamy. Slavery is the same the world over—it demands the utter ignorance of its victims. We must compel their enlightenment. Have we not said enough? Does not your intelligence grasp, and your ambition spring to the great work? Let us hear from you. You can be a great power in assisting to carry out our Exodus. If you desire we will elect you a member of our council and keep you advised of our proceedings. We forward you by this mail some of our numbers and the Charleston News of the 20th. See the article on yourself, and let it nerve you to thoughts and deeds of greatness. Let us know something about Baker and McClennan. Are they at Annapolis? Cadets? (We will require a navy as well as an army.) Also something about yourself. What part of the State are you from? Hon. R. H. Cain is not here, or probably he could inform us.

Affectionately yours. By our President,

B. F. PORTER,

*PASTOR of Morris Brown Chapel.*

GEO. CURTIS, *Corresponding Secretary.*

P. S.—We have received a reply from the Secretary of State—very courteous in its tone—but “regrets” to say that he has “no special means of forming an opinion upon the subject. The measure referred to would require an Act of Congress, in respect to whose future proceedings it would not be prudent to venture a prediction.”

The answer is all we expected. We have made ourselves known to, and are recognized by, the Executive; our next step is to address Senators Morton and Blaine—Hon. R. H. Cain will see to it, that the question is pushed in the House. G. C.

COPY.

ROOMS OF THE LIBERIA EXODUS ASSOCIATION,  
10 MARY STREET, CHARLESTON, S. C.,  
JUNE 14, 1877.

}

HON. WM. J. EVARTS,

*Secretary of State, Washington, D. C.:*

SIR: Inclosed please find a call on our people to prepare to organize for an exodus to Liberia.

We think it explains itself, but any further explanation called for we will gladly supply.

In the event of a sufficient response to our call, please inform us if there is any probability of our government placing one or more steamers on the route between here, or Port Royal, and Liberia for our transportation; and if so, then the charge for passage; and if, to those unable to pay ready money, time will be given, and the payment received in produce?

Tens of thousands are now eager to go from this State alone, but we want a complete exodus, if possible, from the whole United States; thus leaving you a homogeneous people, opening up an immense market for your products, giving a much required impetus to your trade, commerce, and manufactures; and for *ourselves* attaining a position where, removed from under the shade of a “superior

race," we will have full opportunity for developing whatever capacity of soul growth our Creator has endowed us with.

That Africa *will be* developed, and chiefly through the instrumentality of its five millions of descendants in America, is certain. Now the question is, who shall have the chief handling and consequent benefit of this grand instrument, next to itself, of course, for we are treating of a sentient instrumentality. We beseech you that you do not send us, Columbus-like, from court to court offering the development of a new world to incredulous ears. We are asking the President of Liberia, the American Colonization Society, and all friends of the measure, for their aid, advice, and co-operation.

We desire to carry our first shipment of emigrants not later than September or October proximo.

We have the honor to be, Sir, in all respect and loyalty, yours to command.

The Council of the L. E. A. By our President,

B. F. PORTER,

*PASTOR Morris Brown A. M. E. Church.*

GEO. CURTIS, *Corresponding Secretary.*

Here is an article from some paper in New Orleans. Contempt is all it deserves. I am sure all my readers will treat it as I do. Frogs will croak, won't they?

#### LIEUTENANT FLIPPER.

"With the successful examination of the colored cadet Flipper, at West Point, and his appearance in the gazette as a full-fledged lieutenant of cavalry, the long vexed question has been settled just as it ceased to be a question of any practical import. Out of three or four experiments Flipper is the one success. As the whole South has now passed into Democratic control, and the prospect for Southern Republican congressmen is small, the experiments will hardly be repeated, and he must stand for those that might have been.

"It would be interesting to know how Flipper is to occupy his time. The usual employments of young lieutenants are of a social nature, such as leading the German at Narraganset Pier and officiating in select private theatricals in the great haunts of Fashion. Flipper is described as a little bow-legged *grif* of the most darkly coppery hue, and of a general pattern that even the most enthusiastic would find it hard to adopt. Flipper is not destined to uphold the virtues and graces of his color in the salons of Boston and New York, then, nor can he hope to escape the disagreeably conspicuous solitude he now inhabits among his fellow-officers through any of those agencies of usage and familiarity which would result if other Flippers were to follow him into the army and help to dull the edge of the innovation. Just what Flipper is to do with himself does not seem altogether clear. Even the excitement of leading his men among the redskins will be denied him, now that Spotted Tail has pacified the malcontents and Sitting Bull has retired to the Canadas. It is to be presumed that those persons who patronized Flipper and had him sent to West Point are gratified at the conclusion, and there is a sort of reason for believing that Flipper himself is contented with the lot he has accepted; but whether the experiment is worth all the annoyance it occasions is a problem not so easily disposed of.

“His prospects don’t appear to be very brilliant as regards social delights or domestic enjoyments, but of course that is Flipper’s business—not ours. It merely struck us that things had happened a little unfortunately for him, to become the lonesome representative of his race in the midst of associations that object to him and at a time when the supply of colored officers is permanently cut off. Personally we are not interested in Flipper.”

I am indebted to a Houston Texas, paper for the following:

#### THE COLORED WEST POINTER.

“We had a call yesterday from Lieutenant H. O. Flipper, of the United States Army. Mr. Flipper, it will be remembered, is the colored cadet who graduated at the Military Academy at West Point last session, occupying in his class a position that secured his appointment to the cavalry service, a mark of distinction. He was gazetted as second lieutenant in the Tenth Cavalry, and he enjoys the honor of being the first colored man who has passed by all the regular channels into an official station in the army.

“This young officer is a bright mulatto, tall and soldierly, with a quiet unobtrusive manner, and the bearing of a gentleman. As the forerunner of his race in the position he occupies, he is placed in a delicate and trying situation, a fact which he realizes. He remarked that he knew it was one of the requirements of an officer of the army to be a gentleman, a man of honor and integrity under all circumstances, and he hoped to be equal to his duties in this regard. He goes on to Fort Concho to join his regiment, which is likely to have work to do soon, if there is anything in the signs of the times.

“We bespeak for this young officer the just consideration to which the difficulties of his position entitle him.”

I was originally ordered to Fort Concho, but at Houston, Texas I met my lieutenant-colonel, who informed me that my company was *en route* to Fort Sill. My orders were then changed, and I proceeded to Sill.

Here is another article from a paper in the same place:

#### THE DIFFERENCE.

“The *Age* yesterday had a call from Henry O. Flipper second lieutenant Tenth United States Cavalry, who is on his way under orders to join his regiment at Fort Concho. So far there is nothing very unusual in this item, but interest will be given to it when we add that Lieutenant Flipper is the first colored graduate of West Point. He went to the institution from Georgia, and graduated last June, fifty-fifth in a class of seventy-six. There is a preponderance of white blood in his veins, and in general appearance, except for color, he is a perfect image of Senator Plumb of Kansas. He reports that since he has struck the South he has been treated like a gentleman, *which is something different from his experience in the North*. He made the acquaintance of Senator Maxey at West Point—the Senator

himself being a graduate of the Academy—and regards him as a very pleasant gentleman. During the ten minutes he spent in the Age editorial rooms several prominent democrats of the city called to see and shake hands with him, partly out of curiosity to see the colored cadet who was *so bitterly persecuted by Northern students at West Point*, and partly to bid him a welcome to the South such as none of his political party friends would have thought of giving him in the North. *Before many years he will be, as all intelligent colored men will be, a democrat.*”

Wherever I have travelled in the South it has been thrown into my face that the Southern people had, would, and did treat me better than the Northern people.<sup>23</sup> This is wholly untrue. It is true that the men generally speak kindly and treat me with due courtesy, but never in a single instance has a Southern man introduced me to his wife or even invited me to his house. It was done North in every place I stopped. In many cases, when invited to visit gentlemen’s residences, they have told me they wanted their wives to meet me. A distinguished New York lady, whose name has occurred in print several times with mine, gave me with her own hands a handsome floral tribute, just after receiving my diploma. During five months’ stay in the South, after my graduation, not a single Southern white woman spoke to me. I mistake. I did buy some articles from one who kept a book-store in a country town in Georgia. This is the only exception. This is the way Southern people treated me better than Northern people. The white people (men) of Houston, Texas, showed me every possible courtesy while I was there. My treatment there was in high and honorable contrast to that I received in Atlanta.

Here are two articles that have a few words to say about me. I adopt and quote them at length:

(From the *New York Tribune*.)

#### WEST POINT.

“The examinations of the boys in the national school have become an object of national interest this year more than any other, simply because there is a stagnation of other news. While the public is waiting for an outbreak from Kars or the new party, it has leisure to look into the condition of these incipient officers. Hence reporters have crowded to West Point, the Board of Visitors and cadets have both been quickened to unwonted zeal by the consciousness of the blaze of

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23. The notion that racism and intolerance were inventions and common practices of white Northerners generally and Northern Republicans specifically was a key feature of Lost Cause ideology, then in its early form and gaining momentum. See David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Belknap Press, 2001), chapter 8.

notoriety upon them, and the country has read with satisfaction each morning of searching examinations and sweeping cavalry charges, giving a shrug however, at the enthusiastic recommendation of certain members of the board that the number of yearly appointments should be doubled or quadrupled. In this cold age of economy with which the nation is attacked just now, and which leaves old army officers unpaid for a disagreeably long time, the chances of any addition to the flock in the nest are exceedingly small. In fact, while the average American in war time recognized the utility of a trained band of tacticians, he is apt to grumble at their drain upon his pocket in piping times of peace. Only last year he relieved himself in Congress and elsewhere by a good deal of portentous talking as to the expediency of doing away with the naval and military free schools altogether. He has, in short, pretty much the opinion of the army officer that Hodge has of his parish priest, 'useful enough for Sundays and funerals, but too consumedly expensive a luxury for week days.'

"This opinion, no doubt, appears simply ludicrous and vulgar to the gallant young fellows who are being trained for their country's service up the Hudson, and who already look upon themselves as its supports and bulwarks, but there is a substratum of common-sense in it which we commend to their consideration, because, if for no other reason, that the average American is the man who pays their bills and to whom they owe their education and future livelihood. If they do not accept his idea of the conduct and motives of action by which they may properly repay him the debt they owe, it certainly is fitting that their own idea should be indisputably a higher one. We begin to doubt whether it is not much lower. The country, in establishing this school, simply proposed to train a band of men skilled to serve it when needed as tacticians, engineers, or disciplinarians; the more these men founded their conduct on the bases of good sense, honor, and republican principles, the better and higher would be their service. The idea of the boys themselves, however, within later years, seems to be that they constitute an aristocratic class (moved by any thing but republican principles) entitled to lay down their own laws of good-breeding and honor. Accounts which reach us of their hazing, etc., and notably their treatment of the colored cadets, show that these notions are quite different from those accepted elsewhere. Now such ideas would be natural in pupils of the great French or Austrian military schools, where admission testifies to high rank by birth or to long, patient achievement on the part of the student. But really our boys at West Point must remember that they belong to a nation made up of working and trades men; that they are the sons of just such people; that the colored laborer helps to pay for their support as well as that of the representative of his race who sits beside them. Furthermore, they have done nothing as yet to entitle them to assume authority in such matters. They have recited certain lessons, learned to drill and ride, and to wear their clothes with precision; but something more is needed. The knight of old was skilled in gentleness and fine courtesy to the weak and unfortunate as well as in horsemanship. It was his manners, not his trousers, which were beyond reproach.

"It is not as trifling a matter as it seems that these young fellows should thus imbibe mistaken ideas of their own position or the requirements of real manliness and good-breeding. The greatest mistakes in the war were in consequence of just such defects in some of our leading officers, and the slaughter of the Indians in the South-West upon two occasions proceeded from their inability to recognize the rights of men of a different color from themselves. Even in trifles, however,

such matters follow the rule of inexorable justice—as, for instance, in this case of Cadet Flipper, who under ordinary circumstances might have passed without notice, but is now known from one end of the country to the other as a credit to his profession in scholarship, pluck, and real dignity; while his classmates are scarcely mentioned, though higher in rank, except in relation to their cruel and foolish conduct toward him.”

*(From the New York World.)*

“WEST POINT, August 29.—In my earnest desire to do justice to the grand ball last night I neglected to mention the arrival of the new colored candidate for admission into the United States, Military Academy, although I saw him get off at the steamboat lauding and was a witness to the supreme indifference with which he was treated, save by a few personal friends. Minnie passed the physical examination easily, for he is a healthy mulatto. Whether this stern Alma Mater will matriculate him is still a question. It is really astonishing, and perhaps alarming, in view of the enthusiastic endeavors of the Republican party to confer upon the colored race all the rights and privileges of citizens of the United States, to see with what lofty contempt every candidate for academic honors who is in the slightest degree ‘off color,’ is received. As you are aware, there is at present a colored, or partly colored, cadet in the Freshman Class—Whittaker by name. This poor young mulatto is completely ostracized not only by West Point society, but most thoroughly by the corps of cadets itself. Flipper got through all right, and, strange to say, the cadets seem to have a certain kind of respect for him, although he was the darkest ‘African’ that has yet been seen among the West Point cadets. Flipper had remarkable pluck and nerve, and was accorded his parchment—well up on the list, too—at last graduation day. He is made of sterner stuff than poor Whittaker.

“A most surprising fact is that not one of the cadets—and I think I might safely include the professors—tries to dissemble his animosity for the black, mulatto, or octoroon candidate. When I asked a cadet to-day some questions concerning the treatment of Cadet Whittaker by the corps, he said: ‘Oh, we get along very well, sir. The cadets simply ignore him, and he understands very well that we do not intend to associate with him.’ This cadet and several others were asked whether Minnie, if admitted, would also be ostracized socially. Their only answer was: ‘Certainly; that is well understood by all. We don’t associate with these men, but they have all the rights that we have nevertheless.’ I asked if he knew whether Whittaker attended the ball last night. The cadet said he didn’t see him at the ball, but that he might have been looking on from the front stoop! ‘How does this young man Whittaker usually amuse himself when the rest of the boys are at play?’ I asked. ‘Well, we don’t get much play, and I think that Whittaker has as much as he can do to attend to his studies. He managed to pull through at last examination, but I doubt if he ever graduates,’ was the reply. Meeting another cadet to whom I had been introduced I asked what he had heard of the prospects of the new colored candidate, Minnie. ‘I haven’t heard any thing, but I hope he won’t get through,’ said the cadet. Another cadet who stood near said that the case of Flipper, who graduated so successfully, was an exceptional one. Flipper didn’t care for any thing except to graduate, but he was confident that these other colored cadets would fail. So far as I have been able to ascertain, the Faculty have

never attempted to prevent the colored cadets from having an equal chance with their white fellows. In fact under the present management it would be next to impossible for them to do so.”

I can't let this article pass without quoting a few words from a letter I have from Whittaker, now at West Point. He says:

“I have been treated bully since I came in from camp (of summer of '77). Got only one 'skin' last month (Deccember, '77). I am still under '——' (tactical officer), and he treats me bully; he wanted to have a man court-martialled, when we were in camp, for refusing to close up on me. One day a corporal put me in the rear rank when there were plebes in the front rank, and —— told him if any such act ever occurred again he would have him and the file confined to the guard-house. He has never 'skinned' me since you left.<sup>24</sup> He is O.K. towards me, and the others are afraid of him. . . . As I am sitting in my room on third floor, sixth 'div,' a kind of sadness creeps over me, for I am all alone. Minnie went home on last Friday. He was weighed in the 'math' scale and found wanting. The poor fellow did not study his 'math' and could not help being 'found.' He was treated *fairly and squarely*, but he did not study. I did all I could to help and encourage him, but it was all in vain. He did not like —— (an instructor) very much, and a carelessness seized him, which resulted in his dismissal.<sup>25</sup> I was sorry to see him go away, and he himself regretted it very much. He saw his great error only when it was too late. On the day he left he told me that he did not really study a 'math' lesson since he entered; and was then willing to give any thing to remain and redeem himself. He had a very simple subject on examination, and when he came back *he told me that he had not seen* the subject for some two or three weeks before, and he, consequently, did not know what to put on the board. All he had on it was wrong, and he could not make his demonstration.”

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24. “Skin” and “skinned” is a term with multiple meanings. In some contexts, it means to punish or haze. In others, it refers to physical violence, though perhaps not rising to the level of an outright assault. When applied to a tactical officer as in this case, it almost certainly refers to punishments. See Rory McGovern, “You Need Not Think You are on an Equality with Your Classmates: Resistance to Integration at West Point,” in *Race, Politics, and Reconstruction: The First Black Cadets at Old West Point*, eds. Rory McGovern and Ronald G. Machoian (University of Virginia Press, 2024), 119.

25. Charles Augustus Minnie of New York was a Black cadet admitted in August 1877 and dismissed in January 1878 after failing the semiannual mathematics exam. With Reconstruction ending, it would not be until June 1883 that another Black appointee would report to West Point. Minnie found the pressures of isolation and ostracism overwhelming, and appears to have deliberately failed the exam in order to leave West Point. See Makonen Campbell and Louisa Koebrich, “The First African American Cadets at West Point,” in *Race, Politics, and Reconstruction*, 76–77.

The *World* reporter seems to be as ignorant as some of the others. I was by no means the “darkest ‘African’ that has yet been seen among the West Point cadets.” Howard, who reported in 1870 with Smith, was unadulterated, as also were Werle and White, who reported in 1874. There were others who were also darker than I am: Gibbs and Napier, as I am informed. I never saw the last two.

The Brooklyn *Eagle* is more generous in its views. It proposes to utilize me. See what it says:

“Probably Lieutenant Flipper could be made much more useful than as a target for Indian bullets, if our government would withdraw him from the army and place him in some colored college, where he could teach the pupils engineering, so that when they reach Africa they could build bridges, railroads, etc.”

This article was signed by “H. W. B.” It is not difficult to guess who that is.

I have had considerable correspondence with an army officer, a stranger to me, on this subject of being detailed at some college. He is of opinion it would be best for me. I could not agree with him. After I joined my company an effort (unknown to me) was made by the Texas Mechanical and Agricultural College to have me detailed there. It was published in the papers that I had been so detailed. I made some inquiries, learned of the above statements, and that the effort had completely failed. Personally I’d rather remain with my company. I have no taste and no tact for teaching. I would decline any such appointment.

*(From the Thomasville (Ga.) Times.)*

“Wm. Flipper, the colored cadet, has graduated at West Point and been commissioned as a second lieutenant of cavalry in the United States Army. He is the first colored individual who ever held a commission in the army, and it remains to be seen how the thing will work. Flipper’s father resides here, and is a first-class boot and shoe maker. A short time back he stated that he had no idea his son would be allowed to graduate, but he will be glad to know that he was mistaken.”

Of course everybody knows my name is not William.

*(From the Thomasville (Ga.) Enterprise.)*

“Lieutenant Henry O. Flipper of the United States Army is spending a few days here with his father’s family, he has been on the streets very little, spending most of his time at home. He wears an undress uniform and deports himself, so far as we have heard, with perfect propriety. This we believe he has done since his

graduation, with the exception of his unnecessary and uncalled-for criticisms on the Southern people in his Atlanta speech. He made a mistake there; one which his sense and education ought to teach him not to repeat. Not that it would affect our people, or that they care about it, but for his own good.”\*

That “undress uniform” was a “cit” suit of blue Cheviot. The people there, like those in Atlanta, don’t seem to know a black button from a brass one, or a civilian suit from a military uniform.

*(From the Charleston (S. C.) News and Courier.)*

#### THE COLORED WESTPONTER.

“Lieutenant H. O. Flipper, the colored graduate of West Point, was entertained in style at Tully’s, King Street, Tuesday night. The hosts were a colored organization called the Amateur Literary and Fraternal Association, which determined that the lieutenant who will leave this city to-day to join his regiment, the Tenth Cavalry, now in Texas, should not do so without some evidence of their appreciation of him personally, and of the fact that he had reflected credit on their race by passing through the National Academy. Over forty persons were at the entertainment, to whom the lieutenant was presented by A. J. Ransier, the colored ex-member of Congress. The lieutenant responded briefly, as he has invariably done, and expressed his warm thanks for the courtesy shown by the association. A number of sentiments were offered and speeches made, and the evening passed off very agreeably to all, especially so to the recipient of the hospitality.

“Lieutenant Flipper expects to start to-day for Texas. While he has been in this city he has made friends with whites and blacks by the sensible course he has pursued.”

*(From the Charleston (S. C.) Commercial.)*

#### LIEUTENANT FLIPPER’S ENTERTAINMENT.

“The Amateur Literary and Fraternal Association, of which A. J. Ransier is the President, learning that Lieutenant Flipper, of the United States Cavalry, was

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\* *In all the places I visited after graduation I was treated with the utmost respect and courtesy except in Atlanta. The white people, with one exception, didn’t notice me at all. All foreigners treated me with all due consideration. One young man, whom I knew many years, who has sold me many an article, and awaited my convenience for his pay, and who met me in New York, and walked and talked with me, hung his head and turned away from me, just as I was about to address him on a street in Atlanta. Again and again have I passed and repassed acquaintances on the streets without any sign of recognition, even when I have addressed them. Whenever I have entered any of their stores for any purpose, they have almost invariably “gotten off” some stuff about attempts on the part of the authorities at West Point to “freeze me out,” or about better treatment from Southern boys than from those of the North. That is how they treated me in Atlanta, although I had lived there over fourteen years, and was known by nearly every one in the city. In Thomasville, Southwest, Ga., where I was born, and which I had not seen for eighteen years, I was received and treated by the whites almost as one of themselves.*

preparing to depart to the position assigned him on duty on the plains in Texas, at once determined to give him a reception, and for this purpose the following committee was appointed to arrange the details and programme for an entertainment: J. N. Gregg, W. H. Birny, A. J. Ransier, C. C. Leslie, and George A. Gibson.

"The arrangements were made, and the members of the association and invited guests to the number of some forty, of the most respectable colored people of Charleston, met last night at Tully's Hall, King Street, where a bounteous feast was prepared for the occasion. The guest, Lieutenant Flipper, soon arrived, and was introduced to the party, and, in the course of time, all sat down at the table, upon which was spread the most palatable dishes which the king caterer of Charleston could prepare. This was vigorously attacked by all.

"Wines were then brought on, and speech-making introduced as a set off. A. J. Ransier, in one of his usual pleasant speeches, introduced Lieutenant Flipper, paying him a deserved tribute for his success in the attainment of the first commission issued to a colored graduate of West Point.

"Lieutenant Flipper, in a brief and courteous speech, acknowledged the compliment, and thanked the association for the kind attention paid him, promising them that in his future career in the army of his country he would ever strive to maintain a position which would do credit to his race.

"W. H. Birney next responded in eloquent terms to the toast, 'The State of South Carolina.' J. N. Gregg was called upon, and responded in a wise and discreet manner to the toast of 'The Future of the Colored Man in this Country.' 'The Press' and 'Woman' were next respectively toasted, and responded to by Ransier and F. A. Carmand. Other speeches were made by C. C. Leslie, J. J. Connor, and others, and at a late hour the party retired, after a most pleasant evening's enjoyment. Lieutenant Flipper leaves for Texas to-morrow."

Before closing my narrative I desire to perform a very pleasant duty. I sincerely believe that all my success at West Point is due not so much to my perseverance and general conduct there as to the early moral and mental training I received at the hands of those philanthropic men and women who left their pleasant homes in the North to educate and elevate the black portion of America's citizens, and that, too, to their own discomfort and disadvantage. How they have borne the sneers of the Southern press, the ostracism from society in the South, the dangers of Kuklux in remote counties, to raise up a downtrodden race, not for personal aggrandizement, but for the building up and glory of His kingdom who is no respecter of persons, is surely worthy our deepest gratitude, our heartfelt thanks, and our prayers and blessing. Under the training of a good Christian old lady, too old for the work, but determined to give her mite of instruction, I learned to read and to cipher—this in 1866. From her I was placed under control of a younger person, a man. From him I passed to the control of another lady at the famous "Storr's School." I remained under her for two years more or less, when I passed to the

control of another lady in what was called a Normal School. From here I went to the Atlanta University, and prepared for the college course, which in due time I took up. This course of training was the foundation of all my after-success. The discipline, which I learned to heed, because it was good, has been of incalculable benefit to me. It has restrained and shaped my temper on many an occasion when to have yielded to it would have been ruin. It has regulated my acts when to have committed them as I contemplated would have been base unmanliness. And it has made my conduct in all cases towards others generous, courteous, and Christian, when it might otherwise have been mean, base, and degrading. It taught me to be meek, considerate, and kind, and I have verily been benefited by it.

The mind-training has been no less useful. Its thoroughness, its completeness, and its variety made me more than prepared to enter on the curriculum of studies prescribed at West Point. A less thorough, complete, or varied training would never have led to the success I achieved. I was not prepared expressly for West Point. This very thoroughness made me competent to enter any college in the land.

How my heart looks back and swells with gratitude to these trainers of my youth! My gratitude is deeply felt, but my ability to express it is poor. May Heaven reward them with long years of happiness and usefulness here, and when this life is over, and its battles won, may they enter the bright portals of heaven, and at His feet and from His own hands receive crowns of immortal glory.<sup>27</sup>

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27. The final section makes clear that Flipper intended this chapter to close *The Colored Cadet at West Point*. Concluding with praise and thanks for those who prepared him to succeed at West Point—to whom he had dedicated his book—is the emotional conclusion of his narrative.

## CHAPTER XVII.<sup>1</sup>

JAMES WEBSTER SMITH, a native of South Carolina, was appointed to a cadetship at the United States Military Academy at West Point, New York, in 1870, by the Hon. S. L. Hoge. He reported, as instructed, at the Military Academy in the early summer of 1870, and succeeded in passing the physical and intellectual examination prescribed, and was received as a “conditional cadet.” At the same time one Howard reported, but unfortunately did not succeed in “getting in.”

In complexion Smith was rather light, possibly an octoroon. Howard, on the contrary, was black. Howard had been a student at Howard University, as also had been Smith. Smith, before entering the Academy, had graduated at the Hartford High School, and was well prepared to enter upon the new course of studies at West Point.

In studies he went through the first year’s course without any difficulty, but unfortunately an *affaire d’honneur*—a “dipper fight”—caused him to be put back one year in his studies. In going over this course again he stood very high in his class, but when it was finished he began going down gradually until he became a member of the last section of his class, an “immortal,” as we say, and in constant danger of being “found.”

He continued his course in this part of his class till the end of his second class year, when he was declared deficient in natural and experimental philosophy, and dismissed. At this time he had been in the Academy four years, but had been over only a three-years’ course, and would not have graduated until the end of the next year, June, 1875.<sup>2</sup>

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1. This chapter is misnumbered and untitled, though it is listed as “Smith at West Point” on the table of contents included in the original volume published in 1878. For extended discussion of the significance and form of the chapter see the section of our introduction titled “James Webster Smith in *The Colored Cadet at West Point*,” pages 46–48.

2. For a thorough analysis of James W. Smith at West Point, see Rory McGovern, Makonen Campbell, and Louisa Koebrich, “‘I Hope to Have Justice Done Me or I Can’t Get Along Here’: James Webster Smith and West Point,” *Journal of Military History* 87 (October 2023): 964–1003. That analysis finds corroboration in the historical record for most of Smith’s allegations in the letters Flipper includes below. An exception is the allegation about irregularities in the conduct of his examination

As to his trials and experiences while a cadet, I shall permit him to speak. The following articles embrace a series of letters written by him, after his dismissal, to the *New National Era and Citizen*, the political organ of the colored people, published at Washington, D. C.:

THE COLORED CADET AGAIN.

PERTINENT OR IMPERTINENT CARD FROM CADET SMITH.

“COLUMBIA, S. C., July 27, 1874.

*To the Editor of the National Republican:*

“SIR: I saw an article yesterday in one of our local papers, copied from the Brooklyn *Argus*, concerning my dismissal from the Military Academy. The article referred to closes as follows: ‘Though he has written letters to his friends, and is quite sanguine about returning and finally graduating, the professors and cadets say there is not the slightest chance. Said a professor to a friend, the other day: ‘It will be a long time before any one belonging to the colored race can graduate at West Point.’”

“Now, Sir, I would like to ask a few questions through the columns of your paper concerning these statements, and would be glad to have them answered by some of the knowing ones.

“In the first place, what do the professors and cadets know of my chances for getting back, and if they know any thing, how did they find it out? At an interview which I had with the Secretary of War, on the 17th instant, he stated that he went to West Point this year for a purpose, and that he was there both before and after my examination, and conversed with some of the professors concerning me. Now, did that visit and those conversations have any thing to do with the finding of the Academic Board? Did they have any thing to do with that wonderful wisdom and foresight displayed by the professors and cadets in commenting upon my chances for getting back? Why should the Secretary of War go to West Point this year ‘for a purpose,’ and converse with the professors about me both *before* and *after* the examination? Besides, he spoke of an interview he had had with Colonel Ruger, Superintendent of the Academy, in New York, on Sunday, the 12th instant, in reference to me; during which Colonel Ruger had said that the Academic Board would not recommend me to return. Is it very wonderful that the Academic Board should refuse such recommendation after those very interesting conversations which were held ‘both *before* and *after* the recommendation?’ Why was the secretary away from West Point *at the time* of the examination.

“In the next place, by what divine power does that learned oracle, a professor, prophesy that it will be a long time before any one belonging to the colored race can graduate at West Point? It seems that he must have a wonderful knowledge of the negro that he can tell the abilities of all the colored boys in America. But it is possible that he is one of the younger professors, perhaps the professor of philosophy, and therefore expects to live and preside over that department for

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in 1874. This is not to say with any certainty that irregularities did not exist, but that they are not evident in the historical record.

a long time, though to the unsophisticated mind it looks very much as though he would examine a colored cadet on the color of his face.

"I think he could express himself better and come much nearer the truth by substituting *shall* for *can* in that sentence. Of course, while affairs remain at West Point as they have always been, and are now, no colored boy will graduate there; but there are some of us who are sanguine about seeing a change, even if we can't get back.

"J. W. SMITH,  
"Late Cadet U. S. M. A."

#### THE DIPPER DIFFICULTY.

"COLUMBIA, S. C., July 30, 1874.

*To the Editor of the New National Era:*

"As I told you in my last communication, I shall now proceed to give you an account of my four years' stay at West Point.

"I reported there on the 31st of May, 1870, and had not been there an hour before I had been reminded by several thoughtful cadets that I was 'nothing but a d—d nigger.' Another colored boy, Howard, of Mississippi, reported on the same day, and we were put in the same room, where we stayed until the preliminary examination was over, and Howard was sent away, as he failed to pass.

"While we were there we could not meet a cadet anywhere without having the most opprobrious epithets applied to us; but after complaining two or three times, we concluded to pay no attention to such things, for, as we did not know these cadets, we could get no satisfaction.

"One night about twelve o'clock some one came into our room, and threw the contents of his slop-pail over us while we were asleep. We got to our door just in time to hear the 'gentleman' go into his room on the floor above us. This affair reported itself the next morning at 'Police Inspection,' and the inspector ordered us to search among the tobacco quids, and other rubbish on the floor, for something by which we might identify the perpetrator of the affair. The search resulted in the finding of an old envelope, addressed to one McCord, of Kentucky. That young 'gentleman' was questioned in reference, but succeeded in convincing the authorities that he had nothing to do with the affair and knew nothing of it.

"A few days after that, Howard was struck in the face by that young 'gentleman,' 'because,' as he says, 'the d—d nigger didn't get out of the way when I was going into the boot-black's shop.' For that offence Mr. McCord was confined to his room, but was never punished, as in a few days thereafter he failed at the preliminary examination, and was sent away with all the other unfortunates, including Howard.

"On the 28th of June, 1870, those of us who had succeeded in passing the preliminary examination were taken in 'plebe camp,' and there I got my taste of 'military discipline,' as the petty persecutions of about two hundred cadets were called. Left alone as I was, by Howard's failure, I had to take every insult that was offered, without saying any thing, for I had complained several times to the Commandant of Cadets, and, after 'investigating the matter,' he invariably came to the conclusion, 'from the evidence deduced,' that I was in the wrong, and I was cautioned that I had better be very particular about any statements that I might make, as the regulations were very strict on the subject of veracity.

"Whenever the 'plebes' (new cadets) were turned out to 'police' camp, as they were each day at 5 A.M. and 4 P.M., certain cadets would come into the company street and spit out quids of tobacco which they would call for me to pick up. I would get a broom and shovel for the purpose, but they would immediately begin swearing at and abusing me for not using my fingers, and then the corporal of police would order me to put down that broom and shovel, 'and not to try to play the gentleman here,' for my fingers were 'made for that purpose.' Finding there was no redress to be had there, I wrote my friend Mr. David Clark, of Hartford, Ct., to do something for me. He had my letter published, and that drew the attention of Congress to the matter, and a board was sent to West Point to inquire into the matter and report thereon. That board found out that several cadets were guilty of conduct unbecoming a cadet and a gentleman and recommended that they be court-martialled, but the Secretary of War thought a reprimand would be sufficient. Among those reprimanded were Q. O'M. Gillmore, son of General Gillmore; Alex. B. Dyer, son of General Dyer; and James H. Reid, nephew of the Secretary of War (it is said). I was also reprimanded for writing letters for publication.

"Instead of doing good, these reprimands seemed only to increase the enmity of the cadets, and they redoubled their energies to get me into difficulty, and they went on from bad to worse, until from words they came to blows, and then occurred that 'little unpleasantness' known as the 'dipper fight.' On the 13th of August, 1870, I, being on guard, was sent to the tank for a pail of water. I had to go a distance of about one hundred and fifty yards, fill the pail by drawing water from the faucet in a dipper (the faucet was too low to permit the pail to stand under it), and return to the guard tent in ten minutes. When I reached the tank, one of my classmates, J. W. Wilson, was standing in front of the faucet drinking water from a dipper. He didn't seem inclined to move, so I asked him to stand aside as I wanted to get water for the guard. He said: 'I'd like to see any d—d nigger get water before I get through.' I said: 'I'm on duty, and I've got no time to fool with you,' and I pushed the pail toward the faucet. He kicked the pail over, and I set it up and stooped down to draw the water, and then he struck at me with his dipper, but hit the brass plate on the front of my hat and broke his dipper. I was stooping down at the time, but I stood up and struck him in the face with my left fist; but in getting up I did not think of a tent fly that was spread over the tank, and that pulled my hat down over my eyes. He then struck me in the face with the handle of his dipper (he broke his dipper at the first blow), and then I struck him two or three times with my dipper, battering it, and cutting him very severely on the left side of his head near the temple. He bled very profusely, and fell on the ground near the tank.

"The alarm soon spread through the camp, and all the cadets came running to the tank and swearing vengeance on the 'd—d nigger.'

"An officer who was in his tent near by came out and ordered me to be put under guard in one of the guard tents, where I was kept until next morning, when I was put 'in arrest.' Wilson was taken to the hospital, where he stayed two or three weeks, and as soon as he returned to duty he was also placed in arrest. This was made the subject for a court-martial, and that court-martial will form the subject of my next communication.

"Yours respectfully,

"J. W. Smith,  
*"Late Cadet U. S. M. A."*

## THE INJUSTICE AT WEST POINT.

“COLUMBIA, S. C., August 7, 1874.

*To the Editor of the New National Era:*

“SIR: In my last communication I related the circumstances of the ‘dipper fight,’ and now we come to the court-martial which resulted therefrom.

“But there was another charge upon which I was tried at the same time, the circumstances of which I will detail.

“On the 15th of August, 1870, just two days after the ‘dipper fight,’ Cadet Corporal Beacom made a report against me for ‘replying in a disrespectful manner to a file-closer when spoken to at drill, P.M.’ For this alleged offence I wrote an explanation denying the charge; but Cadet Beacom found three cadets who swore that they heard me make a disrespectful reply in ranks when Cadet Beacom, as a file-closer on duty, spoke to me, and the Commandant of Cadets, Lieutenant Colonel Upton, preferred charges against me for making false statements.

“The court to try me sat in September, with General O. O. Howard as President. I plead ‘not guilty’ to the charge of assault on Cadet Wilson, and also to the charge of making false statements.

“The court found both Cadet Wilson and myself ‘guilty’ of assault, and sentenced us to be confined for two or three weeks, with some other light punishment in the form of ‘extra duty.’

“The finding of the court was approved by President Grant in the case of Cadet Wilson, but disapproved in my case, on the ground that the punishment was not severe enough. Therefore, Cadet W. served his punishment and I did not serve mine, as there was no authority vested in the President to increase it.

“On the second charge I was acquitted, for I proved, by means of the order book of the Academy that there was no *company* drill on that day—the 15th of August—that there was *skirmish* drill, and by the guard reports of the same date, that Cadet Beacom and two of his three witnesses were on guard that day, and could not have been at drill, even if there had been one. To some it might appear that the slight inconsistencies existing between the sworn testimony of those cadets and the official record of the Academy, savored somewhat of perjury, but they succeeded in explaining the matter by saying that ‘Cadet Beacom only made a mistake in date.’ Of course he did; how could it be otherwise? It was necessary to explain it in some way so that I might be proved a liar to the corps of cadets, even if they failed to accomplish that object to the satisfaction of the court.

“I was released in November, after the proceedings and findings of the court had been returned from Washington, where they had been sent for the approval of the President, having been in arrest for three months. But I was not destined to enjoy my liberty for any length of time, for on the 13th of December, same year, I was in the ranks of the guard, and was stepped on two or three times by Cadet Anderson, one of my classmates, who was marching beside me.

“As I had had some trouble with the same cadet some time before, on account of the same thing I believed that he was doing it intentionally, and as it was very annoying, I spoke to him about it, saying: “I wish you would not tread on my toes.’ He answered: ‘Keep your d—d toes out of the way.’ Cadet Birney, who was standing near by, then made some invidious remarks about me, to which I did not condescend to reply. One of the Cadet Corporals, Bailey, reported me for ‘inattention in ranks,’ and in my written explanation of the offence, I

detailed the circumstances, but both Birney and Anderson denied them, and the Commandant of Cadets took their statement in preference to mine, and preferred charges against me for falsehood.

"I was court martialled in January, 1871, Captain Piper, Third Artillery, being President of the court. By this court I was found 'guilty,' as I had no witnesses, and had nothing to expect from the testimony of the witnesses for the prosecution. Cadet Corporal Bailey, who made the report, Cadets Birney and Anderson were the witnesses who convicted me; in fact they were the only witnesses summoned to testify in the case. The sentence of the court was that I should be dismissed, but it was changed to one year's suspension, or, since the year was almost gone before the finding of the court was returned from Washington, where it was sent for the approval of President Grant, I was put back one year.

"I had no counsel at this trial, as I knew it would be useless, considering the one-sided condition of affairs. I was allowed to make the following written statement of the affair to be placed among the records of the proceedings of the court:

"May it please the court: I stand here to-day charged with a most disgraceful act—one which not only affects my character, but will, if I am found guilty, affect it during my whole life—and I shall attempt, in as few words as possible, to show that I am as innocent as any person in this room. I was reported on the 18th of December, 1870, for a very trivial offence. For this offence I submitted an explanation to the Commandant of Cadets. In explanation I stated the real cause of committing the offence for which I was reported. But this cause, as stated, involved another cadet, who, finding himself charged with an act for which he was liable to punishment, denies all knowledge of it. He tries to establish his denial by giving evidence which I shall attempt to prove absurd. On the morning of the 13th of December, 1870, at guard-mounting, after the new guard had marched past the old guard, and the command of "Twos left, halt!" had been given, the new guard was about two or three yards to the front and right of the old guard. Then the command of "Left backward, dress," was given to the new guard, "Order arms, in place rest." I then turned around to Cadet Anderson, and said to him, "I wish you would not tread on my toes." This was said in a moderate tone, quite loud enough for him to hear. He replied, as I understood, "Keep your d—d toes out of the way." I said nothing more, and he said nothing more. I then heard Cadet Birney say to another cadet—I don't know who it was—standing by his side, "It (or the thing) is speaking to Mr. Anderson. If he were to speak to me I would knock him down." I heard him distinctly, but as I knew that he was interfering in an affair that did not concern him, I took no further notice of him, but turned around to my original position in the ranks. What was said subsequently I do not know, for I paid no further attention to either party. I heard nothing said at any time about taking my eyes away, or of Cadet Anderson compromising his dignity. Having thus reviewed the circumstances which gave rise to the charge, may it please the court, I wish to say a word as to the witnesses. Each of these cadets testifies to the fact that they have discussed the case in every particular, both with each other and with other cadets. That is, they have found out each other's views and feelings in respect to it, compared the evidence which each should give, the probable result of the trial; and one has even testified that he has expressed a desire as to the result. Think you that Cadet Birney, with such a desire in his breast, influencing his every thought and word, with such an end in view, could give evidence unbiassed, unprejudiced, and free from that desire that

“Cadet Smith might be sent away and proved a liar?” Think you that he could give evidence which should be “the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help me God?” It seems impossible for me to have justice done me by the evidence of such witnesses, but I will leave that for the court to decide. There is another question here which must be answered by the finding of the court. It is this: “Shall Cadet Smith be allowed to complain to the Commandant of Cadets when he considers himself unjustly dealt with?” When the court takes notice of the fact that this charge and these specifications are the result of a complaint made by me, it will agree with me as to the importance its findings will have in answering that question. As to what the finding will be, I can say nothing; but if the court is convinced that I have lied, then I shall expect a finding and sentence in accordance with such conviction. A lie is as disgraceful to one man as another, be he white or black, and I say here, as I said to the Commandant of Cadets, “If I were guilty of falsehood, I should merit and expect the same punishment as any other cadet;” but, as I said before, I am as innocent of this charge as any person in this room. The verdict of an infallible judge—conscience—is, “Not guilty,” and that is the finding I ask of this court.

“Respectfully submitted.

(SIGNED) “J. W. SMITH,  
“*Cadet U. S. M. A.*’

“Thus ended my second and last court-martial.

“Yours respectfully,

“J. W. SMITH,  
“*LATE Cadet U. S. M. A.*”

#### THE HONOR OF A CADET AND GENTLEMAN.

“COLUMBIA, S. C., August 13, 1874.

*To the Editor of the New National Era:*

“SIR: In relating the events of my first year at West Point, I omitted one little affair which took place, and I will now relate the circumstances. One Sunday, at dinner, I helped myself to some soup, and one cadet, Clark, of Kentucky, who sat opposite me at table, asked me what I meant by taking soup before he had done so. I told him that I took it because I wished it, and that there was a plenty left. He seemed to be insulted at that, and asked: ‘Do you think I would eat after a d—d nigger?’ I replied: ‘I have not thought at all on the subject, and, moreover, I don’t quite understand you, as I can’t find that last word in the dictionary.’ He then took up a glass and said he would knock my head off. I told him to throw as soon as he pleased, and as soon as he got through I would throw mine. The commandant of the table here interfered and ordered us to stop creating a disturbance at the table, and gave me to understand that thereafter *I should not touch any thing on that table until the white cadets were served.*

“When we came back from dinner, as I was going into my room, Cadet Clark struck at me from behind. He hit me on the back of my neck, causing me to get into my room with a little more haste than I anticipated, but he did not knock me down. He came into my room, following up his advantage, and attempted to take me by the throat, but he only succeeded in scratching me a little with his nails, as I defended myself as well as possible until I succeeded in getting near my bayonet, which I snatched from the scabbard and then tried to put it through him.

But being much larger and stronger than I, he kept me off until he got to the door, but then he couldn't get out, for *some one was holding the door on the outside*, for the purpose, I suppose, of preventing my escape, as no doubt they thought I would try to get out. There were a great many cadets outside on the stoop, looking through the window, and cheering their champion, with cries of 'That's right, Clark; kill the d—d nigger,' 'Choke him,' 'Put a head on him,' etc., but when they saw him giving way before the bayonet, they cried, 'Open the door, boys,' and the door was opened, and Mr. Clark went forth to rejoice in the bosom of his friends as the hero of the day. The cadet officer of the day 'happened around' just *after* Clark had *left*, and wanted to know what did I mean by making all that noise in and around my quarters. I told him what the trouble was about, and soon after I was sent for by the 'officer in charge,' and questioned in reference to the affair. Charges were preferred against Clark for entering my room and assaulting me, but before they were brought to trial he sent two of his friends to me asking if I would withdraw the charges providing he made a written apology. I told these cadets that I would think of the matter and give them a definite answer the next evening.

"I was perfectly well satisfied that he would be convicted by any court that tried him; but the cadets could easily prove (according to their way of giving evidence) that I provoked the assault, and I, besides, was utterly disgusted with so much wrangling, so when the cadets called that evening I told them that if his written apology was satisfactory I would sign it, submit it to the approval of the Commandant of Cadets, and have the charges withdrawn.

"They then showed me the written apology offered by Clark, in which he stated that his offence was caused by passion, because he thought that when I passed him on the steps in going to my room I tried to brush against him. He also expressed his regret for what he had done, and asked forgiveness. I was satisfied with his apology, and signed it, asking that the charges be withdrawn, which was done, of course, and Clark was released from arrest. I will, in justice to Cadet Clark, state that I never had any further trouble with him, for, while he kept aloof from me, as the other cadets did, he always thereafter acted perfectly fair by me whenever I had any official relations with him.

"A few days after the settlement of our dispute I found, on my return from fencing one day, that some one had entered my room and had thrown all my clothes and other property around the floor, and had thrown the water out of my water-pail upon my bed. I immediately went to the guard-house and reported the affair to the officer of the day, who, with the 'officer in charge,' came to my room to see what had been done. The officer of the day said that he had inspected my quarters soon after I went to the Fencing Academy and found everything in order, and that it must have been done within a half hour. The Commandant of the Cadets made an investigation of the matter, but could not find out what young 'gentleman' did it, for every cadet stated that he knew nothing of it, although the corps of cadets has the reputation of being a truthful set of young men.

"'Upon my honor as a cadet and a gentleman,'" is a favorite expression with the West Point cadet; but what kind of honor is that by which a young man can quiet his conscience while telling a base falsehood for the purpose of shielding a fellow-student from punishment for a disgraceful act? They boast of the *esprit de corps* existing among the cadets; but it is merely a cloak for the purpose of covering up their iniquities and silencing those (for there are some) who would, if allowed to act according to the dictates of their own consciences, be above

such disgraceful acts. Some persons might attribute to me the same motives that actuated the fox in crying 'sour grapes,' and to such I will say that I never asked for *social equality* at West Point. I never visited the quarters of any professor, official, or cadet except on duty, for I did not wish any one to think that I was in any way desirous of social recognition by those who felt themselves superior to me on account of color. As I was never recognized as 'a cadet and a gentleman,' I could not enjoy that blessed privilege of swearing 'upon my honor,' boasting of my share in the *esprit de corps*, nor of concealing my sins by taking advantage of them. Still, I hope that what I lost (?) by being deprived of these little benefits will be compensated for the 'still small voice,' which tells me that I have done my best.

"Yours respectfully,

"J. W. SMITH,  
"LATE CADET U. S. M. A."

"COLUMBIA, S. C., August 19, 1874.

*To the Editor of the New National Era:*

"SIR: My communications, thus far, have brought me to the end of my first year at the Academy, and now we come to the events of the second. In June of 1871, the proverbial silver lining, which the darkest cloud is said to have, began to shine very faintly in the West Point firmament, and I thought that at last the darkness of my cadet life was to be dispelled by the appearance above the horizon of another colored cadet. And, indeed, I was not disappointed, for, one day, I was greeted by the familiar face and voice of Mr. H. A. Napier, a former fellow-student at Howard University. Soon after his arrival, and admittance, the corps of cadets, accompanied by the 'plebes,' took up quarters in camp—'plebe camp' to the latter, and 'yearling camp' to us who had entered the previous year.

"During the cadet encampment there are certain dances given three times each week, known as 'Cadet Hops.' These 'hops' are attended by the members of the first and third classes, and their lady friends, and no 'plebe' ever has the assurance of dreaming of attending the 'hops' until he shall have risen to the dignity of a 'yearling'—third-classman. So long as I was a 'plebe,' no one anticipated any such dire calamity as that I would attend the 'hops,' but as soon as I became a 'yearling,' and had a perfect right to go, if I wished, there was a great hue and cry raised that the sanctity of the 'hop' room was to be violated by the colored cadet.

"Meetings were held by the different classes, and resolutions passed to the effect that as soon as the colored cadet entered the 'hop' room, the 'hop' managers were to declare the 'hop' ended, and dismiss the musicians. But the 'hops' went on undisturbed by the presence of the colored cadet for two or three weeks, and all began to get quiet again, when one day my brother and sister, with a couple of lady friends whom they had come to visit, came to camp to see me.

"This started afresh the old report about the 'hops,' and every one was on the *qui vive* to get a glimpse of 'nigger Jim and the nigger wenches who are going to the hops,' as was remarked by a cadet who went up from the guard tent to spread the alarm through camp.

"In a few minutes thereafter the 'gentlemen' had all taken position at the end of the 'company street,' and, with their opera-glasses, were taking observations upon those who, as they thought, had come to desecrate the 'hop' room. I was on guard that day, but not being on post at that time, I was sitting in rear of the guard tents with my friends—that place being provided with camp-stools for the

accommodation of visitors—when a cadet corporal, Tyler, of Kentucky, came and ordered me to go and fasten down the corner of the first guard tent, which stood a few paces from where we were sitting.

“I went to do so, when he came there also, and immediately began to rail at me for being so slow, saying he wished me to know that when he ordered me to do anything, I must ‘step out’ about it, and not try to shirk it. I said nothing, but fastened down the corner of the tent, and went back to where my friends were.

“In a few minutes afterwards he came back, and wanted to know why I hadn’t fastened down that tent wall. I told him that I had.

“He said it was not fastened then, and that he did not wish any prevarication on my part.

“I then told him that he had no authority to charge me with prevarication, and that if he believed that I had not fastened down the tent wall, the only thing he could do was to report me. I went back to the tent—and found that either Cadet Tyler or some other cadet had unfastened the tent wall, so I fastened it down again. Nothing now was said to me by Cadet Tyler, and I went back to where my friends were: but we had been sitting there only about a half hour, when a private soldier came to us and said, ‘It is near time for parade, and you will have to go away from here.’ I never was more surprised in my life, and I asked the soldier what he meant, for I surely thought he was either drunk or crazy, but he said that the superintendent had given him orders to allow no colored persons near the visitors’ seats during parade.

“I asked him if he recognized me as a cadet. He said he did. I then told him that those were my friends; that I had invited them there to see the parade, and that they were going to stay. He said he had nothing to do with me, of course, but that he had to obey the orders of the superintendent. I then went to the officer of the guard, who was standing near by, and stated the circumstances to him, requesting him to protect us from such insults. He spoke to the soldier, saying that he had best not try to enforce that order, as the order was intended to apply to servants, and then the soldier went off and left us.

“Soon after that the drum sounded for parade, and I was compelled to leave my friends for the purpose of falling in ranks, but promising to return as soon as the parade was over, little thinking that I should not be able to redeem that promise; but such was the case, as I shall now proceed to show.

“Just as the companies were marching off the parade ground, and before the guard was dismissed, the ‘officer in charge,’ Lieutenant Charles King, Fifth Cavalry, came to the guard tent and ordered me to step out of ranks three paces to the front, which I did.

“He then ordered me to take off my accoutrements and place them with my musket on the gun rack. That being done, he ordered me to take my place in the centre of the guard as a prisoner, and there I stood until the ranks were broken, when I was put in the guard tent. Of course my friends felt very bad about it, as they thought that they were the cause of it, while I could not speak a word to them, as they went away; and even if I could have spoken to them, I could not have explained the matter, for I did not know myself why I had been put there—at least I did not know what charge had been trumped up against me, though I knew well enough that I had been put there for the purpose of keeping me from the ‘hop,’ as they expected I would go. The next morning I was put ‘in arrest’ for ‘disobedience of orders in not fastening down tent wall

when ordered,' and 'replying in a disrespectful manner to a cadet corporal,' etc.; and thus the simplest thing was magnified into a very serious offence, for the purpose of satisfying the desires of a few narrow-minded cadets. That an officer of the United States Army would allow his prejudices to carry him so far as to act in that way to a subordinate, without giving him a chance to speak a word in his defence—nay, without allowing him to know what charge had been made against him, and that he should be upheld in such action by the 'powers that be,' are sufficient proof to my mind of the feelings which the officers themselves maintained towards us. While I was in ranks, during parade, and my friends were quietly sitting down looking at the parade, another model 'officer and gentleman,' Captain Alexander Piper, Third Artillery—he was president of my second court-martial—came up, in company with a lady, and ordered my brother and sister to get up and let him have their camp-stools, and he actually took away the camp-stools and left them standing, while a different kind of a gentleman—an 'obscure citizen,' with no aristocratic West Point dignity to boast of—kindly tendered his camp-stool to my sister.

"I only wish I knew the name of that gentleman; but I could not see him then, or I should certainly have found it out, though in answer to my brother's question as to his name, he simply replied, 'I am an obscure citizen.' What a commentary on our 'obscure citizens,' who know what it is to be gentlemen in something else besides the name—gentlemen in practice, not only in theory—and who can say with Burns that 'a mans a man for a' that,' whether his face be as black as midnight or as white as the driven snow.

"There is something in such a man which elevates him above many others who, having nothing else to boast of, can only say, 'I am a white man, and am therefore your superior,' or 'I am a West Point graduate, and therefore an officer and a gentleman.'

"After the usual 'investigation' by the Commandant of Cadets, I was sentenced to be confined to the 'company street' until the 15th of August, about five weeks, so that I could not get out to see my brother and sister after that, except when I was at drill, and then I could not speak to them. I tried to get permission to see them in the 'Visitors' Tent' the day before they left the 'Point' on their return home, but my permit was not granted, and they left without having the privilege of saying 'Good-by.'

"I must say a word in reference to the commandant's method of making 'investigations.' After sending for Cadet Corporal Tyler and other white cadets, and hearing their side of the story in reference to the tent wall and the disrespectful reply, he sent for me to hear what I had to say, and after I had given my version of the affair, he told me that I must surely be mistaken, as my statement did not coincide with those of the other cadets, who were unanimous in saying that I used not only disrespectful, but also profane language while addressing the cadet corporal. I told him that new Cadet Napier and my brother were both there and heard the conversation, and they would substantiate my statement if allowed to testify. He said he was convinced that I was in the wrong, and he did not send for either of them. What sort of justice is that which can be meted out to one without allowing him to defend himself, and even denying him the privilege of calling his evidence? What a model Chief Justice the Commandant of Cadets would make, since he can decide upon the merits of the case as soon as he has heard one side. Surely he has missed his calling by entering the army,

or else the American people cannot appreciate true ability, for that 'officer and gentleman' ought now to be wearing the judicial robe so lately laid down by the lamented Chase.

"In reply to my complaint about the actions of the soldier in ordering my friends away from the visitors' seats, he said that the soldier had misunderstood his orders, as the superintendent had told him to keep the colored servants on the 'Point' from coming in front of the battalion at parade, and that it was not meant to apply to my friends, who could come there whenever they wished.

"It seems, though, very strange to me that the soldier could misunderstand his orders, when he saw me sitting there in company with them, for it is one of the regulations of the Academy which forbids any cadet to associate with a servant, and if I had been seen doing such a thing I would have been court-martialled for 'conduct unbecoming a cadet and a gentleman."

"The cadets were, of course, very much rejoiced at my being 'in arrest,' and after my sentence had been published at parade, they had quite a jubilee over it, and boasted of 'the *skill* and *tact* which Cadet Tyler had shown in putting the nigger out of the temptation of taking those black wenches to the hops.' They thought, no doubt, that their getting me into trouble frightened me out of any thoughts I might have had of attending the 'hops;' but if I had any idea of going to the 'hops,' I should have been only more determined to go, and should have done so as soon as my term of confinement was ended. I have never thought of going to the 'hops,' for it would be very little pleasure to go by myself, and I should most assuredly not have asked a lady to subject herself to the insults consequent upon going there. Besides, as I said before, I did not go to West Point for the purpose of advocating social equality, for there are many cadets in the corps with whom I think it no honor for any one to associate, although they are among the high-toned aristocrats, and will, no doubt, soon be numbered among the 'officers and gentlemen' of the United States Army.

"Yours respectfully,

"J. W. SMITH,  
"LATE Cadet U. S. M. A."

#### REPLY TO THE "WASHINGTON CHRONICLE."

"COLUMBIA, S. C., August 25, 1874.

*To the Editor of the New National Era:*

"SIR: The following article appeared in the *Washington Chronicle* of the 14th inst., and as I feel somewhat interested in the statements therein contained, I desire to say a few words in reference to them. The article referred to reads as follows:

"The recent attack of the colored, ex-Cadet Smith upon the Board of Visitors at West Point has attracted the attention of the officers of the War Department. They say that the Secretary of War was extremely liberal in his interpretation of the regulations on behalf of Cadet Smith, and that he did for him what had never been done for a white boy in like circumstances. The officers also say that Smith was manifestly incompetent, that he had a fair examination, and that the Congressional Board of Visitors unanimously testified to his incompetency."

“Now, sir, I am at a loss to know what are ‘the recent attacks of the colored ex-Cadet Smith upon the Board of Visitors,’ for I am not aware that I have said any thing, either directly or indirectly, concerning the Board of Visitors. My remarks thus far have been confined to the *Academic Board* and Secretary of War.

“As the members of the Board of Visitors were simply spectators, and as they were not present when I was examined, I had no reason to make any ‘attack’ upon them, and, therefore, as I said before, confined my remarks (or ‘attacks,’ if that word is more acceptable to the *Chronicle*) to those who acted so unjustly toward me.

“As to the extreme liberality of the Secretary of War, in his interpretation of the regulations on behalf of Cadet Smith, and that he did for him what he had never ‘done for a white boy in like circumstances,’ I hardly know what to say; for such absurd cant seems intended to excite the laughter of all who know the circumstances of the case. What devoted servants those officers of the War Department must be, that they can see in their chief so much liberality!

“But in what respect was the Secretary of War so ‘liberal in his interpretation of the regulations?’

“Was it in dismissing me, and turning back to a lower class two white cadets who had been unable to complete successfully the first year of the course with everything in their favor, while I had completed three years of the same course in spite of all the opposition which the whole corps of cadets, backed by the ‘powers that be,’ could throw in my way? Or was it his decision that ‘I can give Mr. Smith a re-examination, but I *won't*?’ The *Chronicle* is perfectly correct in saying ‘that he did for him what had never been done for a white boy in like circumstances,’ for, in the first place, I don’t think there ever was ‘a white boy in like circumstances,’ certainly not while I was at the Academy, and if there ever were a white boy so placed, we are pretty safe in concluding, from the general treatment of white boys, that the secretary was not so frank in his remarks nor so decided in his action.

“I want another cadet to represent your district at West Point, and I have already sent to Mr. Elliott to appoint one,’ means something more than fair dealing (or, as the *Chronicle* would imply, partiality) toward the colored cadet. It means that the gentleman was pleasing himself in the choice of a cadet from the Third Congressional District of South Carolina, and that he did not recognize the rights of the people of that district to choose for themselves. ‘You are out of the service and will stay out,’ for ‘the Academic Board will not recommend you to come back under any circumstances,’ shows that it is the Academic Board that must choose our representative, and not we ourselves, and that our wishes are only secondary in comparison with those of the service and the Academic Board. We are no longer free citizens of a sovereign State, and of the United States, with the right to choose for ourselves those who shall represent us; but we must be subordinate to the Secretary of War and the Academic Board, and must make our wishes subservient to those of the above-named powers, and unless we do that we are pronounced to be ‘naturally bad’—as remarked the Adjutant of the Academy, Captain R. H. Hall, to a *Sun* reporter—and must have done for us ‘what had never been done for a white boy in like circumstances.’ Now, sir, let us see what has ‘been done for a white boy in like circumstances.’ In July, 1870, the President was in Hartford, Ct., and in a conversation with my friend the Hon. David Clark, in reference to my treatment at West Point, he said: ‘Don’t take him away now; the battle might just as well be fought now as

at any other time,' and gave him to understand that he would see me protected in my rights; while his son Fred, who was then a cadet, said to the same gentleman, and *in the presence of his father*, that 'the time had not come to send colored boys to West Point.' Mr. Clark said if the time had come for them to be in the United States Senate, it had surely come for them to be at West Point, and that he would do all in his power to have me protected. Fred Grant then said: 'Well, no d—d nigger will ever graduate from West Point.' This same young gentleman, with other members of his class, entered the rooms of three cadets, members of the fourth class, on the night of January 3, 1871, took those cadets out, and drove them away from the 'Point,' with nothing on but the light summer suits that they wore when they reported there the previous summer. Here was a most outrageous example of Lynch law, disgraceful alike to the first class, who were the executors of it, the corps of cadets, who were the abettors of it, and the authorities of the Academy, who were afraid to punish the perpetrators because the President's son was implicated, or, at least, one of the prime movers of the affair. Congress took the matter in hand, and instructed the Secretary of War to dismiss all the members of the class who were implicated, but the latter gentleman 'was extremely liberal in his interpretation of the regulations,' and declined to be influenced by the action of Congress, and let the matter drop.

"Again, when a Court of Inquiry, appointed by Congress to investigate complaints that I had made of my treatment, reported in favor of a trial by court-martial of General Gillmore's son, General Dyer's son, the nephew of the Secretary of War, and some other lesser lights of America's aristocracy, the secretary decided that a reprimand was sufficient for the offence; yet 'he did for me what had never been done for a white boy in like circumstances.' Now, sir, by consulting my Register of the Academy, issued in 1871, I find that three cadets of the fourth class were declared 'deficient' in mathematics—Reid, Boyle, and Walker—and that the first named was turned back to join the next class, while the other two were dismissed. Now Reid is the Secretary's nephew, so that is the reason for his doing 'for him what had never been done for a white boy in like circumstances.'

"Mr. Editor, I have no objection whatever to any favoritism that may be shown 'any member of the Royal Family, so long as it does not infringe upon any right of my race or myself; but when any paper tries to show that I have received such impartial treatment at the hands of 'the powers that be,' and even go so far, in their zealous endeavors to shield any one from charges founded upon facts, as to try to make it appear that I was a favorite, a pet lamb, or any other kind of a pet, at West Point, I think it my duty to point out any errors that may accidentally (?) creep into such statements.

"The officers also say that Smith was manifestly incompetent, that he had a fair examination,' etc. What officers said that? Those of the War Department, whose attention was attracted by the 'recent attacks on the Board of Visitors,' or those who decided the case at West Point? In either case, it is not surprising that they should say so, for one party might feel jealous because 'the Secretary of War was extremely liberal in his interpretation of the regulations on behalf of Cadet Smith, and that he did for him what had never been done for a white boy in like circumstances,' while the other party might have been actuated by the desire to prove that 'no colored boy can ever graduate at West Point,' or, as the young gentleman previously referred to said, 'No d—d nigger shall ever graduate at West Point.' As for the unanimous testimony of the Board of Visitors, I can

only say that I know not on what ground such testimony is based, for, as I said before, the members of that board were not in the library when I was examined in philosophy; but perhaps, this is only one of the 'they says' of the officers. There are some things in this case which are not so manifest as my alleged incompetency, and I would like to bring them to the attention of the *Chronicle*, and of any others who may feel interested in the matter. There has always been a system of re-examinations at the Military Academy for the purpose of giving a second chance to those cadets who failed at the regular examination. This year the re-examinations were abolished; but for what reason? It is true that I had never been re-examined, but does it not appear that the officers had concluded 'that Smith was manifestly incompetent,' and that this means was taken to deprive me of the benefit of a re-examination when they decided that I was 'deficient?' Or was it done so that the officers might have grounds for saying that 'he did for him what had never been done for a white boy in like circumstances?' Again, the examinations used to be public; but this year two sentinels were posted at the door of the library, where the examinations were held, and when a visitor came he sent in his card by one of the sentinels, while the other remained at the door, and was admitted or not at the discretion of the superintendent. It is said that this precaution was taken because the visitors disturbed the members of the Academic Board by walking across the floor. *Very good excuse, for the floor was covered with a very thick carpet.* We must surely give the Academic Board credit for so much good judgment and foresight, for it would have been a very sad affair, indeed, for those gentlemen to have been made so nervous (especially the Professor of Philosophy) as to be unable to see how 'manifestly incompetent' Cadet Smith was, and it would have deprived the Secretary of War of the blissful consciousness that 'he did for him what had never been done for a white boy in like circumstances,' besides losing the privilege of handing down to future generations the record of his extreme liberality 'in his interpretation of the regulations on behalf of Cadet Smith.'

"Oh, that this mighty deed might be inscribed on a lasting *leather* medal and adorn the walls of the War Department, that it might act as an incentive to some future occupant of that lofty station! I advise the use of *leather*, because if we used any metal it might convey to our minds the idea of 'a sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal.'

"Respectfully yours,

"J. W. SMITH,

"*LATE Cadet U. S. M. A.*"

### THE NEGRO CADETS.<sup>3</sup>

"We publish this morning an account of Cadet Smith's standing at West Point, which should be taken with a few grains of allowance. The embryo colored soldier and all his friends—black, white and tan—believe that the administrationists have used him shamefully, especially in view of their professions and of the chief source of their political strength. Grant went into the White House by means of colored votes, and his shabby treatment of the first member of the dusky army

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3. Here, Flipper departs from his promise at the outset of the chapter to "permit him [Smith]" to speak. No further material in the chapter is Smith's.

who reached the point of graduation in the country's military school, is a sore disappointment to them.

"Cadet Smith has been a thorn in the side of the Administration from the start. He could not be bullied out or persecuted out of the institution by the insults or menaces of those who, for consistency's sake, should have folded him to their bosoms. He stood his ground bravely, and much against the will of its rulers. West Point was forced to endure his unwelcome presence up to the time of graduation. At that point a crisis was reached. If the odious cadet were allowed to graduate, his commission would entitle him to assignment in our much-officered army, which contains Colonel Fred Grant and a host of other favorites whose only service has been of the Captain Jinks order. The army revolted at the idea. Theoretically they were and are sound on the nigger, but they respectfully and firmly objected to a practical illustration. The Radical General Belknap was easily convinced that the assignment of the unoffending Smith to duty would cause a lack of discipline in any regiment that would be fearful to contemplate.

"Something must be done, and that something was quickly accomplished. They saved the army and the dignity of the horse marines by sacrificing the cadet. To do so, some tangible cause must be alleged, and a deficiency in 'philosophy' was hit upon.

"In vain did Smith appeal to the Secretary of War for an opportunity to be re-examined; in vain did he ask permission to go back and join the class below—all appeals were in vain. 'Gentlemen,' says the secretary, 'I don't wish to be misquoted as saying that I can't give Mr. Smith a re-examination, for I say I *won't* do it.' The victim of the army has since published a three-column card in Fred Douglass's paper, in which he says he was dropped for politico-military reasons, and in the course of which he makes an almost unanswerable case for himself, but the Radicals have dropped him in his hour of necessity, and he must submit."

(From the *New York Sun*.)

#### CADET SMITH'S EXPULSION.<sup>4</sup>

"James W. Smith, the first colored cadet appointed to the Military Academy of West Point, was dismissed after the June examination, having failed to pass an examination in some other studies. Recently the *Sun* received letters from South Carolina charging that the prejudices of the officers of the Academy led to the dismissal; and to ascertain the truth a *Sun* reporter went to West Point to investigate the matter. He accosted a soldier thus:

"Were you here before Smith was dismissed?"

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4. Flipper's motives for including this article are unclear and will always remain unclear, as he offered no explanation. It is an extended interview containing points that Smith had already systematically refuted in the letters reprinted earlier in this chapter. But Hall's response in the middle of the article draws a favorable comparison of Flipper to Smith in ways that are consistent with comparisons Flipper has tried to make elsewhere in his autobiography, offering one plausible rationale for its inclusion.

“‘Yes, sir; I’ve been here many years.’

“‘Can you tell me why he was dismissed?’

“‘Well, I believe he didn’t pass in philosophy and some other studies.’

“‘What kind of a fellow was he?’

“‘The soldiers thought well of him, but the cadets didn’t. They used to laugh and poke fun at him in Riding Hall, and in the artillery drill all of them refused to join hands with him when the cannoneers were ordered to mount. This is dangerous once in a while, for sometimes they mount when the horses are on a fast trot. But he used to run on as plucky as you please, and always got into his seat without help. Some of the officers used to try to make them carry out the drill, but it was no use. I never saw one of the young fellows give him a hand to make a mount. He was a proud negro, and had good pluck. I never heard him complain, but his black eyes used to flash when he was insulted, and you could see easy enough that he was in a killin’ humor. But after the first year he kept his temper pretty well, though he fought hard to do it.’

“‘Captain Robert H. Hall, the post adjutant, said: ‘Young Smith was a bad boy.’

#### NATURALLY BAD.

“‘His temper was hot, and his disposition not honorable. I can assure you that the officers at this post did every thing in their power to help him along in his studies, as well as to improve his standing with his comrades. But his temper interfered with their efforts in the latter direction, while his dulness precluded his passing through the course of studies prescribed.

“‘REPORTER—‘He was always spoken of as a very bright lad.’

“‘CAPTAIN HALL—‘He was not bright or ready. He lacked comprehension. In his first year he was very troublesome. First came his assault upon, or affray with, another young gentleman (Cadet Wilson), but the Court of Inquiry deemed it inadvisable to court-martial either of them. Then he was insolent to his superior on drill, and being called upon for an explanation he wrote a deliberate falsehood. For this he was court-martialled and sentenced to dismissal, but subsequently the findings of the committee were reversed, and Cadet Smith was put back one year. This fact accounts for his good standing on the examination next before the last. You see he went over the same studies twice.’

“‘REPORTER—‘What was Cadet Smith found deficient in?’

“‘CAPTAIN HALL—‘His worst failure was in natural and experimental philosophy, which embraces the higher mathematics, dynamics, optics, mechanics, and other studies. He missed a very simple question in optics, and the examiners, who were extremely lenient with him, chiefly, I believe, because he was colored and not white, tried him with another, which was also missed.’

“‘REPORTER—‘Is optical science deemed an absolutely essential branch of learning for an officer in the army?’

#### DEFICIENT IN HIS STUDIES.

“‘CAPTAIN HALL—‘It is useful to engineers, for instance. But that is not the question. In most educational institutions of the grade of West Point, the standing of a student in his studies is decided by a general average of all studies in which he is examined. Here each branch is considered separately, and if the cadet fails

in any one he cannot pass. I will assure you once more that in my opinion Cadet Smith received as fair an examination as was ever given to any student. If anything, he was a little more favored.'

"REPORTER—"What was his conduct in the last year of his stay at the Academy?"

"CAPTAIN HALL—"Good. He ranked twenty in a class of forty in discipline. Discipline is decided by the number of marks a cadet receives in the term. If he goes beyond a certain number he is expelled.'

"REPORTER—"This record seems hardly consistent with his previous turbulent career.'

"CAPTAIN HALL—"Oh! in the last years of his service he learned to control his temper, but he never seemed happy unless in some trouble.'

"REPORTER—"Have you any more colored cadets?"

"CAPTAIN HALL—"Only one—Henry O. Flipper, of Georgia. He is a well-built lad, a mulatto, and is bright, intelligent, and studious.'

"REPORTER—"Do the cadets dislike him as much as they did Smith?"

"CAPTAIN HALL—"No, sir, I am told that he is more popular. I have heard of no doubt he will get through all right. And here I will say, that had Mr. Smith been white he would not have gone so far as he did.'

"Other officers of the post concur with Captain Hall, but the enlisted men seem to sympathize with Smith. One of them said, 'I don't believe the officers will ever let a negro get through. They don't want them in the army.'

"Cadet Smith's career for the three years of his service was indeed a most unhappy one, but whether that unhappiness arose from

#### THE INFIRMITIES OF TEMPER

or from the persistent persecutions of his comrades cannot be authoritatively said. One officer attributed much of the pugnacity which Smith exhibited early in his course to the injudicious letters sent him by his friends. In some of these he was advised to 'fight for the honor of his race,' and others urged him to brook no insult at the hands of the white cadets. The menial duties which the 'plebes' are called upon to do in their first summer encampment were looked upon by Smith as personal insults thrust upon him, although his comrades made no complaint. Then the social ostracism to a lad of his sensitive nature was almost unbearable, and an occasional outbreak is not to be wondered at.

"Before he had been in the Academy a week he wrote to a friend complaining of the treatment he received from his fellows, and this letter being published intensified the hostility of the other cadets. Soon after this he had a fight with Cadet Wilson and cut his face with a dipper. Then followed the breach of discipline on drill, the court-martial and sentence, and finally the Congressional investigation, which did not effect any good. Smith says that frequently on squad drill he was detached from the squad by the cadet corporal, and told that he was not to stand side by side with white men.

"WEST POINT, June 19."

THE COLORED CADET.<sup>5</sup>

HIS TRIALS AND PERSECUTIONS—THREE YEARS OF ABUSE—SETTLED  
AT LAST—“ELI PERKINS” TELLS THE STORY.

*To the Editor of the Daily Graphic:*

“About the 20th of May, 1870, I saw the colored Cadet, James W. Smith land at the West Point Dock. He was appointed by a personal friend of mine, Judge Hoge, Member of Congress from Columbia, South Carolina. The mulatto boy was about five feet eight inches high, with olive complexion and freckles. Being hungry he tipped his hat to a cadet as he jumped from the ferry-boat and asked him the way to the hotel.

“‘Over there, boy,’ replied the cadet, pointing to the Rose Hotel owned by the government.

“On arriving there the colored boy laid down his carpet-bag, registered his name, and asked for something to eat.

“‘What! A meal of victuals for a nigger?’ asked the clerk.

“‘Yes, sir, I’m hungry and I should like to buy something to eat.’

“‘Well, you’ll have to be hungry a good while if you wait to get something to eat here,’ and the clerk of the government hotel pushed the colored boy’s carpet-bag off upon the floor.

“Jimmy Smith’s father, who fought with General Sherman, and came back to become an alderman in Columbia, had told the boy that when he got to West Point among soldiers he would be treated justly, and you can imagine how the hungry boy felt when he trudged back over the hot *campus* to see Colonel Black and General Schriver, who was then Superintendent of the Academy.

“The black boy came and stood before the commandant and handed him his appointment papers and asked him to read them. Colonel Black, Colonel Boynton, and other officers looked around inquiringly. Then they got up to take a good look

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5. Once again, it is difficult to determine with any certainty Flipper’s motives and intentions in this chapter. In the previous chapter, he used a sympathetic article unembellished with his own commentary as a means of refuting the article that preceded it. He may have intended to use this article to refute at least part of the interview transcribed in the previous article. What follows in this article is a sympathetic account of Smith’s West Point experience, one that accords well, in general, with the historical record despite some errors in which Eli Perkins conflates Smith with Michael Howard (for example, in the story about being denied food at the hotel). We can surmise that Flipper thought the article was at least somewhat accurate, as he lifted Perkins’s recollection of hearing “a wishy-washy girl, who came up year after year with a party to flirt with the cadets say: ‘O dear! it is hawid to have this colod cadet—perfectly dre’fful. I should die to see my George standing next to him’” and included it in chapter XIV (“Incidents, Humor, Etc.”). The inclusion of this particular article supports our theory that Flipper added this chapter at the very end of the publication process as a memorial to Smith, and perhaps to make amends for less generous treatment elsewhere in *The Colored Cadet at West Point*. As written, however, it is a strikingly ambivalent memorial. After this article, Flipper refocuses on himself in ways that reinforce his attempts earlier in the book to differentiate himself from Smith. For more, refer to chapter XIV, note 5 and pages 46–48 in the Editors’ Introduction.

at, the first colored cadet. The colonel, red in the face, waved the boy away with his hand, and, one by one, the officers departed, speechless with amazement.

"In a few moments the news spread through the Academy. The white cadets seemed paralyzed.

"Several cadets threatened to resign, some advocated maiming him for life, and a Democratic 'pleb' from Illinois exclaimed, 'I'd rather die than drill with the black devil.' But wiser counsels prevailed, and the cadets consented to tolerate Jimmy Smith and not drown or kill him for four weeks, when it was thought the examiners would 'bilge' him.

"On the 16th of June, 1870, I saw Jimmy Smith again at West Point and wrote out my experiences. He was the victim of great annoyance.

"At these insults the colored cadet showed a suppressed emotion. He could not break the ranks to chastise his assaulter. Then if he had fought with every cadet who called him a '—— black-hearted nigger,' he would have fought with the whole Academy. Not the professors, for they have been as truly gentlemen as they are good officers. If they had feelings against the colored cadet they suppressed them. I say now that the indignities heaped upon Jimmy Smith would have been unbearable to any white boy of spirit. Hundreds of times a day he was publicly called names so mean that I dare not write them.

"Once I met Jimmy Smith after drill. He bore the insulting remarks like a Christian.

"'I expected it,' he said; 'but it was not so at the Hartford High School. There I had the second honors of my class.' Then he showed me a catalogue of the Hartford High School, and there was the name of James W. Smith as he graduated with the next highest honor.

"On that occasion I asked Jimmy who his father was.

"'His name is Israel Smith. He used to belong to Sandres Guignard, of Columbia.'

"'Then he was a slave?'

"'Yes, but when Sherman's army freed him he became a Union soldier.'

"'And your mother?'

"'She is Catherine Smith, born free.' Here Jimmy showed his mother's photograph. She looked like a mulatto woman, with straight hair and regular features. She had a serious, Miss-Siddons-looking face.

"'How did you come to "the Point?"' I asked.

"'Well, Mr. David Clark, of Hartford, promised to educate me, and he got Congressman Hoge to appoint me.'

"'How came Mr. Clark to become interested in you?'

"'Well, a very kind white lady—Miss Loomis—came to Columbia to teach the freedmen. I went to school to her and studied so hard and learned so fast that she told Mr. Clark about me. My father is able to support me, but Mr. Clark is a great philanthropist and he has taken a liking to me and he is going to stand by me.'

"'What does Mr. Clark say when you write about how the cadets treat you?'

"'The colored boy handed me this letter from his benefactor:

"HARTFORD, June 7, 1870.

"DEAR JEMMY: Yours, 1st inst., is at hand and noted. I herewith inclose stamps.

"Let them call "nigger" as much as they please; they will laugh out of the other corner of their mouth before the term is over.

“Your only way is to maintain your dignity. Go straight ahead. If any personal insult is offered, resist it, and then inform me; I will then see what I can do. But I think you need have no fear on that score. Have been out to Windham a few days. All well, and send kind regards. Mary sails for Europe Saturday. President Grant is to be here the 2d. He will be my guest or Governor Jewell’s.

“Yours, etc.,

“D. CLARK.”

“So Mr. Clark knows the President, does he?”

“Why, yes; he knows everybody—all the great men. He’s a great man himself;’ and this poor colored boy stood up, I thought, the proudest champion David Clark ever had.

“Yes, David Clark is a good man,’ I mused, as I saw the grateful tears standing in the colored cadet’s eyes.

“When I got back to the hotel I heard a wishy-washy girl, who came up year after year with a party to flirt with the cadets say:

“O dear! it is hawid to have this colod cadet—perfectly dre’fful. I should die to see my George standing next to him.’

“But Miss Schenck, the daughter of General Schenck, our Minister to the Court of St. James, told Jimmy Smith that she hoped he would graduate at the head of his class, and when the colored boy told me about it he said:

“Oh, sir, a splendid lady called to see me to-day. I wish I knew her name. I want to tell David Clark.’

“Every white boy at West Point now agreed to cut the colored boy. No one was to say a single word to him, or even answer yes or no. At the same time they would abuse him and swear at him in their own conversation loud enough for him to hear. It is a lamentable fact that every white cadet at the Point swears and chews tobacco like the army in Flanders.

“Again I saw Jimmy Smith on the 9th of July. The officers of the Academy had been changed. Old General Schriver had given place to young General Upton. The young general is a man of feeling and a lover of justice. He sent for the colored boy, and taking his hand he said:

“My boy, you say you want to resign, that you can stand this persecution no longer. You must not do it. You are here an officer of the army. You have stood a severe examination. You have passed honorably and you shall not be persecuted into resigning. I am your friend. Come to me and you shall have justice.’

“Then General Upton addressed the cadets on dress parade. He told them personal insults against their brother cadet, whose only crime was color, must cease.

“One day a cadet came to Jimmy and said he would befriend him if he dared to, ‘but you know I would be ostracized if I should speak to you.’

“What was the cadet’s name?’ I asked.

“Oh, I dare not tell?’ replied the colored boy. ‘He would be ruined, too.’

“Did your father write to you when you thought of resigning?’

“Yes; here is his letter,’ replied the colored boy:

“COLUMBIA, S. C., July 3, 1870.

“MY DEAR SON: I take great pleasure in answering your kind letter received last night. I pray God that my letter may find you in a better state of consolation than when you wrote to me. I told you that you would have trials and difficulties to endure. Do not mind them,

for they will go like chaff before the wind, and your enemies will soon be glad to gain your friendship. They do the same to all newcomers in every college. You are elevated to a high position, and you must stand it like a man. Do not let them run you away, for then they will say, the "nigger" won't do. Show your spunk, and let them see that you will fight. That is what you are sent to West Point for. When they find you are determined to stay, they will let you alone. You must not resign on any account, for it is just what the Democrats want. They are betting largely here that you won't get in. The rebels say if you are admitted, they will devil you so much that you can't stay. Be a man; don't think of leaving, and let me know all about your troubles. The papers say you have not been received. Do write me positively whether you are received or not.

"Times are lively here, for everybody is preparing for the Fourth of July. There are five colored companies here, all in uniform, and they are trying to see who shall excel in drill.

"Stand your ground; don't resign, and write me soon.

"From your affectionate father,

"ISRAEL SMITH."

"On the 11th of January I visited West Point again. I found all the cadets still against the colored boy. A system of terrorism reigned supreme. Every one who did not take sides against the colored boy was ostracized.

"At drill one morning Cadet Anderson trod on the colored boy's toes. When Smith expostulated Anderson replied, 'Keep your —— toes away.' When Smith told about it Anderson got two other white cadets to say he never said so. This brought the colored boy in a fix.

"Last July I saw the colored cadet again. He was still ostracized. No cadet ever spoke to him. He lived a, hermit life, isolated and alone.

"When I asked him how he got on with his studies he said: 'As well as I am able, roaming all alone, with no one to help me and no one to clear up the knotty points. If there is an obscure point in my lesson I must go to the class with it. I cannot go to a brother cadet.'

"If you should ask them to help you what would they say?"

"They would call me a —— nigger, and tell me to go back to the plantation.'

"Yesterday, after watching the colored cadet for three years, I saw him again. He has grown tall and slender. He talks slowly, as if he had lost the use of language. Indeed many days and weeks he has gone without saying twenty lines a day in a loud voice, and that in the recitation-room.

"When they were examining him the other day he spoke slowly, but his answers were correct. His answers in philosophy were correct. But they say he answered slowly, and they will find him deficient for that. Find him deficient for answering slowly when the boy almost lost the use of language! When he knew four hundred eyes were on him and two hundred malignant hearts all praying for his failure!

"The colored cadet is now in his third year. The great question at West Point is, Will he pass his examination? No one will know till the 30th of June. It is my impression that the young officers have marked him so low that he will be found deficient. The young officers hate him almost as bad as the cadets, and whenever they could make a bad mark against him they have done it.

"Does any one ever speak to you now?" I asked.

"No. I dare not address a cadet. I do not want to provoke them. I simply want to graduate. I am satisfied if they do not strike or harm me; though if I had a kind word now and then I should be happier, and I could study better.' Then the colored boy drew a long sigh.

“To-day I met General Howard, who was present at the colored cadet’s court-martial. I asked him to tell me about it.

“Well, Mr. Perkins,” said the General, ‘they tried to make out that the colored boy lied.’

“Yes,” I interrupted, ‘and they all say he did lie at the Point now. How was it?’

“It was this way: They accused him of talking on parade, and, while trying to convict him out of his own mouth, they asked him “If on a certain day he did not speak to a certain cadet while on drill?” “I did not speak to this cadet while on drill the day you mention,” answered Cadet Smith, “for the cadet was not in the parade that day.”

“This answer startled the prosecutors, and, looking over the diary of parade days, they were astonished to find Cadet Smith correct.

“What then?’ I asked.

“Why they accuse him of telling a lie in spirit, though not in form, for he had talked on a previous day. Just as if he was obliged to say any thing to assist the prosecutors except to answer their questions.’

“General Howard believes Cadet Smith to be a good, honest boy. I believe the same.

“ELI PERKINS.”

*(From the Savannah (Ga.) Morning News.)*<sup>6</sup>

“Lieutenant Flipper seems to have gone back on his Atlanta friends. He came home from West Point with a good Academy record, behaved himself with becoming dignity. The officers at the barracks treated him—not socially, but as an officer of the army—with due respect, as did the citizens of Atlanta, who felt that he had won credit by his good conduct and success. But in an evil hour the colored friends (?) of Flipper gave him a reception, and in full uniform he made them a speech. Now speech-making is a dangerous thing, and this colored warrior seems to have been made a victim of it. He distorted the official courtesies of the officers at the barracks into social courtesies, and abused the white people of the South because they did not give him and his race social equality. Not only were sensible colored people displeased with his remarks, but many white citizens who went to the meeting friendly to Flipper left disgusted with his sentiments.”\*

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6. At this point in the chapter, Flipper turns away from Smith and brings the narrative back to himself.

\* *If a man walks on the streets with me, invites me to his quarters, introduces me to his comrades, and other like acts of courtesy, ought I to consider him treating me socially or officially? I went to the garrison in Atlanta to pay my respects to the commanding officer. I expected nothing. I met an officer, who, with four others, had introduced himself to me on the cars. My official call had been made. He took me around, introduced me to the officers, and showed me all possible attention. I met another officer in the city several days after this. He offered cigars. We walked up and down the streets together. Many times did we hear and comment upon the remarks we overheard: “Is he walking with that nigger?” and the like. He invited me into a druggist’s to take some soda-water. I went in and got it, although it was never sold there before to a person of color. We rode out to the garrison together, and every attention was shown me by all. Another officer told me that before I*

(From the Savannah (Ga.) Morning News.)

A COLORED ARMY OFFICER.

"Lieutenant Flipper is his name. He is a living result of the policy of Radicalism which has declared from the first its determination that, under any circumstances, the American citizen of African descent shall enjoy all the privileges of his white brethren. Carrying out this determination, and not dismayed at the fate of colored cadet Smith, who figured so largely in West Point annals a few years ago, cadet Flipper was sent to that institution to try his hand. He has graduated, and now holds the commission of Second Lieutenant of Cavalry in the United States Army, the first of his race who has ever attained such a position.

"It will be curious to watch young Flipper's career as an officer. Time was when army officers were a very aristocratic and exclusive set of gentlemen, whether they still hold to their old ideas, or not, we do not know. There seems to be enough of the old feeling left, however, to justify the belief that until some other descendants of African parents graduate at the institution, Flipper will have a lonely time. During his cadetship, we learn from no less an authority than the New York *Tribune*, 'the paper founded by Horace Greeley,' that he was let severely alone by his fellow-students. According to that paper, one of the cadets said, 'We have no feeling against him, but we *could not* associate with him. It may have been prejudice but still we *couldn't* do it.' This shows very clearly the animus which will exist in the army against the colored officer. If at West Point, where he had to drill, recite, eat, and perhaps sleep with his white brothers, they couldn't associate with him (notwithstanding the fact that the majority of these whites were Northern men and ardent advocates of Radicalism, with its civil rights and social equality record), how can it be expected that they will overcome their prejudices any more readily after they become officers. The *Tribune* thinks they will, and that in time the army will not hesitate to receive young Flipper, and all of his race who may hereafter graduate at West Point, with open arms; but the chances are that the *Tribune* is wrong. Your model Yankee is very willing to use the negro as a hobby-horse upon which to ride into place and power, but when it comes to inviting him to his house and embracing him as a brother he is very apt to be found wanting. The only society Lieutenant of Cavalry Flipper can ever hope to enjoy is that which will exist when there are enough of his race in the army to form a *corps d'Afrique*, and by that time he will be too old to delight in social pleasures. Meanwhile he will be doomed to a life of solitude and self-communings, and be subjected to many such snubs as the venerable Frederick Douglass has but recently received at the hands of that champion mourner for the poor African—Rutherford B. Hayes."

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came the officers of the garrison assembled to consider whether or not they should recognize me. The unanimous vote was "yes." Was all this official? No. It is the white people, the disappointed tyrants of Georgia, who try to distort social courtesies in official ones.

The "many white" people were some half-dozen newspaper reporters, whose articles doubtless were partly written when they came. "Old Si" in his spectacles was prominently conspicuous among them.

The New York *Tribune* is right. The army is officered by men, not by West Point cadets, who are only students and boys.

(From the Savannah (Ga.) Morning News.)

#### CHEERS FOR FLIPPER.

“The miscegenationists and social equality advocates are making a great deal of noise over the facts, first, that a negro has graduated at West Point, and holds to-day a commission in the United States Army; and second, that when he went up to receive his diploma, he was, alone of all the members of his class, the recipient of a round of applause. Great things are augured from these two circumstances, especially the latter.

“It is reasoned that now, that a negro has at last been able to secure a commission in the military service of the country, the first step towards the recognition of his race on the basis of social equality is accomplished, by degrees prejudice will wear away, and, in course of time, black and white citizens of this republic will mingle freely and without reserve; and this, it is claimed, is shown by the applause with which the reception into the army of this African pioneer was greeted. For our part we don’t see that these negro devotees and miscegenationists have any reason to rejoice. It is just as impossible to establish perfect social equality between the Anglo-Saxon and African races as it is to make oil and water unite. It is against nature, and nowhere in the world is the antipathy to such a mingling shown more than in the North, and by no people so strongly as by the very men who whine so incessantly and so pretentiously about ‘men and brethren.’ The negro in the South has always found the white man of the South to be his best and truest friend, and such will always be the case, notwithstanding that the Southern white will never consent to social equality with his fellow-citizen of African descent.

“As to the applause which greeted Flipper, that can easily be accounted for. Nothing is more likely than that at West Point there should have been gathered together a lot of old-time South-haters, who were ready to applaud, not so much to flatter Flipper as to show that they were happy over what they felt to be a still further humiliation of the South. That is all there is in that.

“We have no objections to such demonstrations of delight. As far as we are concerned they may be indulged in to the heart’s content by those who so desire. But one piece of information we can give to the young colored Georgia lieutenant. If he thinks those who applauded him are going to invite him to their houses he will be greatly disappointed. And if he does not die of overeating until those invite him to dine with them, he will live to a good old age. Let him take the fate of the recognized leader of his race, Fred Douglass, as an example, and steer clear of his too demonstrative friends. Experience shows that so long as they can use him, they will be very profuse in their professions of friendship; but when that is done all is done, and he will find himself completely cast aside. If Flipper sees these words, let him mark our prediction.”

“And many false prophets shall arise, and deceive many” (Matt. 24:11). Amen. That is all that article is worth.

*(From the Monmouth Inquirer, Freehold, N. J.)*

LIEUTENANT FLIPPER.

“When Congress founded West Point, to be a training school for those who were to be paid as public servants and to wear the public livery, we do not think that it was intended that the institution should serve as a hotbed for the fostering of aristocratic prejudices and the assumption of aristocratic airs. Nor do we think that when Lincoln declared the negro a freeman, and entitled to a freeman’s rights, either he or the nation designed that the dusky skin of the enfranchised slave should serve as an excuse for ignominy, torture, and disgrace. Yet here, this year, in the graduating class from West Point, steps a young man among his white-skinned fellows, fiftieth in a class of seventy-six members, whose four years of academic life have been one long martyrdom; who has stood utterly alone, ignored and forsaken among his fellows; who has had not one helping hand from professors or students to aid him in fighting his hard battle, and whom only his own talents and sturdy pluck have saved from entire oblivion. Yet in spite of all, he was graduated; he has left twenty-six white students behind him; he is a second lieutenant in the regular army, and the story of his struggles and his hard-won victory is known from Oregon to Florida. All honor to the first of his race who has stemmed the tide and won the prize.

“We do not think the faculty at West Point have done their duty in this matter. One word, one example from them, would have stopped the persecution, and it is to their disgrace that no such word was spoken and no such example set.”

I have not a word to say against any of the professors or instructors who were at West Point during the period of my cadetship. I have every thing to say in their praise, and many things to be thankful for. I have felt perfectly free to go to any officer for assistance, whenever I have wanted it, because their conduct toward me made me feel that I would not be sent away without having received whatever help I may have wanted. All I could say of the professors and officers at the Academy would be unqualifiedly in their favor.

## Afterword

Flipper ended his autobiography on a distinctly positive note, defending West Point's faculty and leadership, in the process showing once again his strong faith in both West Point and the U.S. Army. That faith was not reciprocated in his lifetime. Within four short years after he published *The Colored Cadet at West Point*, Flipper had faced a court martial and an unjust dismissal from the service. But his legacy, still a force at West Point and within the U.S. Army even today, belies a career so brief. He had proven that Black cadets could succeed at West Point, dealing a fatal blow to arguments against integration based on racist claims of African American moral and intellectual inferiority. While support for integration at West Point waned after Flipper departed and as Reconstruction ended, integration was delayed considerably but not stopped. An integrated U.S. Military Academy and U.S. Army officer corps is Flipper's lasting legacy.

### **Autobiography—*The Colored Cadet at West Point***

In 1879, readers of *The United States Army and Navy Journal and Gazette of the Regular and Volunteer Forces*—the leading American professional military journal of its time—became aware of Henry O. Flipper's autobiography *The Colored Cadet at West Point*. An advertisement announcing the new book lay in the bottom left corner of the last page of the February 8 issue, nestled among advertisements for ladies' and children's clothes, band uniforms, glassware, "dinner, tea, and toilet sets," and "Dr. Craig's kidney cure." Promising "the Autobiographical Exposition of the trials, experiences, and incidents in the career of the author—the first and only graduate of color from the U.S. Military Academy," the ad explained that in *The Colored Cadet at West Point*, Flipper "gives, for the first time, expression to his feelings and convictions, and recounts his very peculiar school experience, which, ever since his graduation, have been a matter of great curiosity." Interested readers could write to

Homer Lee & Co. at 65 Liberty Street in New York City to obtain a copy for \$2—roughly equivalent to \$63 in 2024.<sup>1</sup>

The same issue featured a short and generally favorable review of the work. Flipper's consciousness of his position as a new lieutenant in an army full of West Point graduates mollified and gratified editors of the *Army and Navy Journal*, and presumably also many of their readers. They found it to be "an interesting account of his experiences . . . written with warmth, but with an evident desire for fairness," pointing out his praise for officers and faculty at West Point but noting that "naturally he finds something to say against his fellow students, and says it." Despite being bold enough to air some grievances, the editors found it "remarkable that the book-making impulse gets the better of the controversial, in this work, and the larger part of it is such a description of West Point life as anybody might write, without regard to 'the color line' which formed a large part of Cadet Flipper's trouble there," making the volume "interesting, independently of its treatment of Lieut. Flipper's personal grievances." The review was not entirely free of criticism. The editors thought Flipper included "a too liberal amount of newspaper clippings" related to his "personal grievances," and that they collectively served to decrease "the average value of the book, because such newspaper comments are usually erroneous in fact and worthless in opinion." They also found Flipper's descriptions of examinations tediously detailed. And, in an underhanded compliment containing as much or more criticism, they noted that "it should be remembered that no cadet probably ever occupied so prominent a place in public notice, and Lieut. Flipper's dwelling on his personal traits and merits or demerits, as reported in the public press, is accordingly pardonable." The editors concluded that Flipper "had rather a hard time in the earlier part of his stay at the Academy, though he seems to look back on the course, as a whole, with pleasure."<sup>2</sup>

The *Army and Navy Journal* review must have pleased Flipper to no small extent. As has been noted elsewhere in this volume, Flipper seems to have intended *The Colored Cadet at West Point* to provide a narrative of his experiences at West Point in a way that

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1. *The United States Army and Navy Journal and Gazette of the Regular and Volunteer Forces*, vol. 16 (February 8, 1879): 488.

2. *Army and Navy Journal*, vol. 16, 480.

simultaneously laid claim to his rightful place in the U.S. Army officer corps. The latter part of that intent placed some significant limits on how much of his experiences he could share, as well as on the way he could write about them. Accomplishing both parts of that purpose was a difficult needle to thread. But the *Army and Navy Journal* review shows that Flipper was at least somewhat successful in achieving his purpose; the editors seem to have accepted or at least tolerated Flipper as a legitimate part of the broader officer corps.

*The New York Times* was even more fulsome in its praise of the quality of *The Colored Cadet at West Point*. The reviewer praises Flipper's "singularly straightforward style" in a work that "deserves to be universally read." He presents Flipper as someone "fully aware of the prejudices which exist," who "manfully, never cringeingly [*sic*] battles against them," and whose "own exemplary conduct under vulgar aggressions redounds to his credit." That exemplary conduct, according to the *Times*, was rooted firmly in Flipper's self-reliance and capacity for silent persistence, rather than any attempt to leverage Congress or any other lever of power and influence "to control personal whims or prejudices." That is precisely what the reviewer took as the chief lesson to be drawn from Flipper's account: "that pluck, manliness, and perseverance can elevate any one [*sic*] from an humbler sphere to a higher one."<sup>3</sup>

Ironically, however, half of *The New York Times* review argued quite vehemently that Flipper should never have published his book. "Such incidents as might occur in the life of a young colored man, born in Georgia in 1856, who up to the present date is only some 22 years of age, cannot, of course present much that is either startling or remarkable," the reviewer wrote before conceding, "Lieut. Flipper's autobiography is interesting, as it gives in minute detail the history of the first colored graduate at the West Point Academy." Convinced that Flipper "was badly advised when the idea was presented to him of undertaking his autobiography," the reviewer argued that the book would incite resentment and excite prejudices within the army officer corps. "In deviating, then, from the modest, unassuming manner adopted by Cadet Flipper, who worked his way up to be a Lieutenant" the reviewer opined, in an off-handed way of accusing Flipper of self-aggrandizement,

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3. "New Publications. Lieut. Flipper's Experience," *The New York Times*, January 6, 1879.

“we think an error of judgment was made, which, in later life, the writer may regret.” In explaining a possible reception worthy of regret, the reviewer predicted that “though Lieut. Flipper may be very indifferent to it, many of those who are too ready to pick a flaw in the equal rights of the colored man might be inclined, without a perusal of the book, to declare that an autobiography of the first colored Cadet was ostentatious in character, and that public attention had been called in a most unnecessary way to what was by no means a very remarkable circumstance.”

This line of attack in a remarkably bipolar review—asserting simultaneously that *The Colored Cadet at West Point* should never have been written and that, once written, it was excellent and worthy of “universal” reading—is indirectly framed in Reconstruction-era distinctions between political and social equality, a topic previously discussed in the Introduction. The reviewer’s discussion of the quality of Flipper’s work, especially when dwelling upon Flipper’s responses to isolation and ill treatment, reveals a belief that he had every right to be at West Point. The reviewer’s attention to other officers’ responses to *The Colored Cadet at West Point* underscored his concern that publishing the book might undermine Flipper’s rightful place in the officer corps. He noted, “Perhaps the wiser friends of Lieut. Flipper would have wished that he should have quietly gone through his usual round of duty, monotonous though it might have been,” because once the time came that “this young cavalry officer had had opportunity to show his skill or courage in an encounter with an enemy, public praise and honor would have been lavished on him.” The critique strongly implies that Flipper had the right to attend West Point, and by graduating had earned his place in the officer corps; but the act of publishing an account of his experiences at West Point and so publicly laying claim to that rightful place would be perceived as an “ostentatious” claim to social equality that risked serious backlash.

That line of reasoning was not entirely mistaken. Backlash eventually came, though not necessarily as a direct reaction to *The Colored Cadet at West Point*. Instead, a more general resentment of Flipper fueled the backlash that ensued among many—though admittedly not all—officers, who believed he posed a threat to traditional and racially exclusive social norms.

## Frontier Service

When *The Colored Cadet at West Point* appeared in print, Lieutenant Henry O. Flipper was already on duty with the 10th Cavalry Regiment at Fort Sill, then in Indian Territory (modern-day Oklahoma). He had been furloughed for several months after graduation as the army dealt with both budgetary issues and uncertainty over how to employ West Point's first Black graduate. As seen in chapter XV, he was the object of considerable public attention during that furlough, appearing in his new dress uniform at numerous social engagements in Atlanta and elsewhere. He was formally placed on the active list on January 2, 1878, and assigned to his regiment.<sup>4</sup>

Flipper was fortunate to be assigned at that time to the 10th Cavalry, where he served under officers who embraced him in ways that seemed to confirm his best hopes concerning how he would be treated in the army after graduation. The commander of the regiment was Colonel Benjamin Grierson, a legendary Civil War cavalry commander and a supporter of Black service. Grierson organized the 10th Cavalry in 1866–67 and worked hard to ensure not only that it would be put to the same use as other cavalry regiments, but also that his troopers were well trained and supplied for the rigors of frontier service. Grierson assigned Flipper to company A, under the command of Captain Nicholas Nolan, an Irish-born widower and decorated Civil War veteran who took a quick liking to Flipper.<sup>5</sup>

A friendship with his company commander ultimately proved to be both a blessing and a curse for Flipper. Not long after arriving at Fort Sill, Nolan married Annie Dwyer of San Antonio. For additional companionship in a remote post, Annie took her sister Mollie to live with her and her new husband. Apparently, Annie was of a particularly hospitable nature, and she welcomed Flipper into their home as well. Flipper and Mollie Dwyer became friendly, often going on long rides on horseback together on Sundays. It is unclear whether Flipper's relationship with Mollie Dwyer was platonic or romantic—but in either case, their closeness sparked resentment and controversy. In the nineteenth century, apologists for slavery and advocates for segregation often defaulted to racist rhetoric about the perceived dangers of interracial relationships,

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4. Eppinga, *Henry O. Flipper*, 45–49.

5. Eppinga, *Henry O. Flipper*, 49–51.

portraying Black men as uncontrollable threats to white women's virtue. Flipper's relationship with Mollie Dwyer specifically, and more broadly the perceived threat to norms of social equality implied by his close association with the Nolans and access to their social circle, ignited the whisper campaign that *The New York Times* reviewer had feared would spring from Flipper's book. The whispers reached far beyond Fort Sill. The *Army and Navy Journal* published Captain Nolan's vehement defense of Flipper after complaints of his close relationship with the extended Nolan household had been aired publicly in both San Antonio and New York. Despite Nolan's condemnation of complaints made "on account of his color" with "no allowance . . . for his grand attainments," and despite his insistence that "Flipper's standing with the officers is of the most friendly nature, and [that] the more he comes in contact with them the better he proves the worthiness of his position," the spreading controversy revealed the growing precarity of Flipper's situation.<sup>6</sup>

In the meantime, Flipper settled into the usual routine of a cavalry officer on frontier duty in Indian Territory (operating out of Fort Sill) and Texas (operating out of Forts Concho and Elliot). Throughout the nineteenth century, the army's primary missions were to defend the coast and serve as a frontier constabulary—wars were the exception rather than the norm, and the concept of deterrence did not emerge until later in the twentieth century. The frontier constabulary mission was multifaceted. At times it involved fighting or removing Native Americans, or otherwise enforcing reservation policies. At times it involved any number of tasks related to the administration of a frontier army: acquiring and distributing supplies, serving as a post's officer of the day, or serving on court-martial duty. More often it involved a great variety of other work as the United States consolidated control over a frontier in which the U.S. Army was in many areas the only federal government presence beyond a limited number of federal marshals. The

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6. Quotations from *The United States Army and Navy Journal and Gazette of the Regular and Volunteer Forces*, vol. 17 (October 11, 1879): 176. See also Henry Ossian Flipper, *Black Frontiersman: The Memoirs of Henry O. Flipper, First Black Graduate of West Point*, ed. Theodore Harris (Texas Christian University Press, 1997), 18–19; Eppinga, *Henry O. Flipper*, 52–55; and Le'Trice D. Donaldson, *Duty Beyond the Battlefield: African American Soldiers Fight for Racial Uplift, Citizenship, and Manhood, 1870–1920* (Southern Illinois University Press, 2020), 116.

frontier army built roads and bridges, improved waterways, conducted surveys and produced maps, scouted unfamiliar terrain, laid telegraph lines, carried messages, delivered mail, and assisted federal marshals in the conduct of their duties as a last resort and, at times, in contravention of the Posse Comitatus Act (1878), which forbids the army from being employed for domestic law enforcement. With a chain of command perfectly willing to use him as they would any other lieutenant, Flipper experienced these duties as a frontier officer. His most lasting contribution was in constructing a drainage system that successfully emptied the malarial swamps that appeared around and plagued Fort Sill during rainy seasons.<sup>7</sup>

Flipper and the 10th Cavalry Regiment also participated in the 1879–1880 campaign against the Chihenne Apache leader, Victorio. The U.S. government had attempted to concentrate the Apaches on a particularly desolate reservation with little prospects for a healthy and prosperous future. Victorio opted to fight rather than submit, launching a series of far-reaching and fast-moving raids and attacks throughout western Texas, southern New Mexico, and northern Mexico. His fighters were skilled in evading and ambushing forces pursuing them, with the 9th Cavalry Regiment suffering heavy losses of both men and horses. Grierson—who had been promoted to command the Military District of the Pecos—adopted an innovative approach in 1880 that relied upon the 10th Cavalry operating in small detachments encamped near or around all known water sources in the district. Victorio was unable to dislodge them and had to withdraw south, where he was ultimately defeated and killed by Mexican forces, bringing an end to the fighting. Flipper was a part of this campaign in 1880. He was the messenger who rode nearly a hundred miles to bring Grierson the intelligence that Victorio had crossed back into Texas that summer. He was also involved in a five-hour engagement with Victorio's fighters near Eagle Springs in July.<sup>8</sup>

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7. For studies of the frontier army and its myriad missions, see Robert Wooster, *The American Military Frontiers: The United States Army in the West, 1783–1900* (University of New Mexico Press, 2009), and Michael L. Tate, *The Frontier Army in the Settlement of the West* (University of Oklahoma Press, 1999). For Flipper's own description of his frontier experiences in this period, see Flipper, *Black Frontiersman*, 19–31. See also Eppinga, *Henry O. Flipper*, 52–60.

8. Wooster, *The American Military Frontiers*, 249; Flipper, *Black Frontiersman*, 32–35; Eppinga, *Henry O. Flipper*, 61.

Shortly thereafter, Flipper's good fortune with a supporting chain of command began to run out. Because the army managed an expansive frontier mission with a very small force—in 1880, its total strength was only 26,594 officers and men—it relied upon networks of approximately 250 small posts and forts, almost always garrisoned by smaller elements of one or more regiments. As the campaign concluded, Flipper's company moved to Fort Davis, Texas, along with a portion of the 10th Cavalry Regiment. Command of the post soon fell to an infantryman, Colonel William Rufus Shafter, who transferred to Fort Davis in March 1881. Shafter took charge of the post and all units stationed at it. While he had previously commanded Black units—the 17th United States Colored Troops Regiment in the Civil War, and later the all-Black 24th Infantry Regiment—he was immediately wary of Flipper, who once again had become somewhat isolated.<sup>9</sup>

Flipper's life at Fort Davis was not what it had been at Fort Sill. He spent less time in the field and more time in the garrison. While he was not necessarily ostracized as he had been at West Point, neither was he welcomed as an active member of the garrison's social life. He lived in bachelor officer housing in a building he shared with Lieutenant Charles Nordstrom, an officer in Shafter's inner circle who had romantic designs for Mollie Dwyer and had begun courting her. Flipper later recalled, "He [Nordstrom] hated me and gradually won Miss Dwyer from her horse back rides with me and himself took her riding in a buggy he had," and Nordstrom would later marry Mollie. Flipper's fellow officers did not welcome him into their social circles. According to Flipper, only one officer visited him on New Year's Day 1881—typically a convivial and festive day during which officers and their families made a point of calling on each other throughout the day and night. And because the nineteenth-century army kept fairly rigid class divisions between officers and enlisted men, Flipper could not turn to enlisted soldiers for social companionship without willingly sacrificing the claims to a rightful place within the officer corps that he asserted so often in his autobiography. Instead, Flipper's social circle was civilian,

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9. Russell Weigley, *History of the United States Army*, enlarged ed. (Indiana University Press, 1984), 267 and 598. For more on Shafter, though perhaps delivered in an overly sympathetic manner, see Paul H. Carlson, "*Pecos Bill*": *A Military Biography of William R. Shafter* (Texas A&M University Press, 1989).

multinational (Mexican and American), and centered upon the nearby village of Chihuahua.<sup>10</sup>

Shafter noted that Flipper had been designated the post quartermaster and commissary agent in 1880. The post quartermaster managed military supplies and property for the garrison and arranged for hiring and contracting civilians for various administrative and logistical needs of the garrison. The commissary agent was responsible for purchasing, distributing, and selling military rations and household food to soldiers, officers, and civilians within the broader garrison community. The two in combination were a substantial load for a lieutenant experienced in neither function. But the reality of the frontier army was that there were many posts, and no officers specifically trained to be quartermasters and commissary agents. Inexperience was the norm and mistakes were common.<sup>11</sup>

Shafter acted almost immediately to remove Flipper from his position as post quartermaster and informed him that he would also be relieved as commissary agent as soon as a replacement was available. According to Flipper, when he alerted Shafter to the fact that because the only working safes on post were in the quartermaster's office, he lacked any means of reliably securing commissary agent funds, Shafter instructed him to keep the funds in his quarters. Shafter would later deny this, but Flipper insisted it was true and part of "a trap . . . cunningly laid" by other officers at Fort Davis.<sup>12</sup>

What followed is still a confusing affair, even with nearly a century and a half of perspective. Having informed Flipper that he would soon be relieved as commissary agent, Shafter did not actually act to do so. In May 1881, Flipper discovered that his funds on hand were short by approximately \$2,000 (roughly \$62,000 in 2024). He did not report the discrepancy, fearing it could be used to drive him out of the army. His discovery coincided with a suspension of the requirement to file weekly returns with the district

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10. Flipper, *Black Frontiersman*, 37. On officers' lives in the late-nineteenth century, see Edward M. Coffman, *The Old Army: A Portrait of the American Army in Peacetime, 1784–1898* (Oxford University Press, 1986), chap. V and VI. For Flipper's social life, see Eppinga, *Henry Ossian Flipper*, 71. For a different perspective that suggests Flipper could have chosen to seek camaraderie among enlisted soldiers, see Donaldson, *Duty Beyond the Battlefield*, 117.

11. Flipper, *Black Frontiersman*, 35–37; Eppinga, *Henry O. Flipper*, 61–70.

12. Flipper, *Black Frontiersman*, 20 and 37–39.

commissary agent for at least a month while that officer attended to duties away from headquarters. Flipper thought this would buy him time to resolve the matter. But it did not; orders came to transfer funds to the district commissary agent at the end of June 1881. Flipper presented Shafter with paperwork showing that he had transferred nearly \$3,800 to the district headquarters, but by August word arrived alerting Shafter that no funds had arrived. According to Shafter, Flipper then wondered if the funds had gone missing in the mail. On August 10, Shafter ordered his adjutant to take possession of commissary funds in Flipper's possession. Flipper produced \$2,166 dollars in money, checks, and silver from his desk. A subsequent search of his quarters produced additional money, checks, and silver scattered in his desk, in his trunk, and in the personal effects and clothes of Lucy Smith—a white woman quartered in another building who worked as Flipper's cook, laundress, and maid and with whom Flipper may have been romantic, as officers found her possessions in his trunk and bedroom.<sup>13</sup>

Shafter then escalated the matter. He placed Flipper under arrest and charged him with embezzlement. He confined Flipper to a cell in the guardhouse with orders to the sentinels that he should see and speak to no one—treatment highly unusual for an officer, as officers accused of similar or graver offenses were usually confined to post, or their quarters at worst. The Secretary of War and Commanding General William T. Sherman soon intervened, pointedly noting that confinement “is not usual, unless there be reasons to apprehend an escape,” and that “this officer must have the same treatment as though he were white.”<sup>14</sup>

Shafter relented only to the extent that he allowed Flipper to confer with friends from the community. Soldiers and civilians contributed to a fund that raised nearly \$3,800 in cash, loans, and promissory notes to allow Flipper to make good on the shortage. While in other cases, such restitution removed the risk of serious punishment for shortages in an area of army administration then notoriously lax and error-prone, Flipper learned on August 29, 1881, that he would be court martialed on charges of embezzlement and conduct unbecoming an officer.<sup>15</sup>

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13. Donaldson, *Duty Beyond the Battlefield*, 118–19; Eppinga, *Henry O. Flipper*, 70–78.

14. Eppinga, *Henry O. Flipper*, 79–81, quotations on p. 81.

15. Eppinga, *Henry O. Flipper*, 83–85.

## Court Martial

The court martial which played out, due to a few delays and recesses, over three months at Fort Davis from September through December 1881 was marred by what modern Americans would consider to be irregularities, but which were not necessarily unique to Flipper's case. Although a panel of officers were sworn in as court members functioning as a jury, the judge advocate assigned to the trial was also the acting judge advocate for the department headquarters that administered Fort Davis and other posts and units in the area. That meant this officer served simultaneously as the principal legal advisor to the department commander and court-martial convening authority, the officer responsible for selecting and empaneling members of the court, the chief legal advisor for members of the court, the prosecutor, and the legal authority responsible for reviewing the court martial proceedings to determine their propriety. All of this gave him overwhelming—though not total—influence over the course, conduct, and review of the trial, especially over issues where the defense and prosecution disputed whether certain evidence or witnesses were sufficiently relevant and appropriate to be introduced. This clearly placed Flipper at a disadvantage, but, again, not one necessarily unique to his case. Similar circumstances occurred with some regularity due to methods and norms of the nineteenth-century army's military justice system.<sup>16</sup>

Flipper had difficulty securing a defense attorney. He had reached out to Black activists and leaders in Washington, Boston, and Philadelphia to secure funds and legal assistance, but they demurred, sending a response “to the effect that if Lieut. Flipper proves his innocence, he can have all the money he needs,” which Flipper found particularly frustrating because he needed funds and legal assistance to prove his innocence.<sup>17</sup> Flipper approached the famed Black lawyer John F. Quarles for legal assistance, but it never materialized for reasons that are not entirely clear. Quarles attempted to help in the court of public opinion by publishing one of Flipper's letters to him in which Flipper alleged that officers at

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16. For accounts emphasizing the inherent unfairness of this arrangement, see Flipper, *Black Frontiersman*, 59; Eppinga, *Henry O. Flipper*, 95–99. For a study of the trial that argues legal standards of the time were fairly applied, see Charles M. Robinson III, *The Fall of a Black Army Officer: Racism and the Myth of Henry O. Flipper* (University of Oklahoma Press, 2008), chap. 4–11.

17. Flipper, *Black Frontiersman*, 58–59. The quotation is on the latter page.

Fort Davis were conspiring to drive him out of the army.<sup>18</sup> But it is interesting that Quarles did not do more to help. He and Flipper had both been enslaved by the Ponder household in Georgia, and he had helped educate Flipper. It is possible that Quarles had been offended by Flipper's failure to acknowledge in his autobiography the role his father had played in Flipper's younger years and his path to West Point. Such an explanation accords well with historian Le'Trice Donaldson's argument that the broader Black community did not rally around Flipper during his trial because Flipper, in *The Colored Cadet at West Point* and in other public statements, had deliberately presented himself as a generally self-made person making his own path, rather than as an activist for racial uplift. It is also possible that Quarles was otherwise engaged and had no means of traveling to southwest Texas in time for the proceedings. Beyond Quarles, it is likewise possible that Flipper did not benefit from public support because his case was not at the center of national attention. His troubles played out at roughly the same time as the shooting of President James Garfield in July 1881, his death in September, and the trial of Charles Guiteau for Garfield's assassination shortly thereafter. In all likelihood, some combination of all of these factors combined to produce a dearth of public support—with the exception of local support from those living in close proximity to Fort Davis.<sup>19</sup>

Ultimately, Captain Merritt Barber volunteered his services so Flipper would not have to go it alone in his trial. Though stationed nearly two hundred miles away at Fort McKavett, Barber had heard of Flipper's arrest and was convinced of his innocence. A New Englander and a lawyer, Barber had enlisted in the 10th Vermont Infantry during the Civil War and served with distinction, ending the war as a brevet brigadier general. As with other volunteer officers with distinguished records, he was offered a commission at a lower rank in the regular army after the war as it became clear the postwar army would be larger than it had been in the past. Barber mounted a vigorous defense that clearly demonstrated Flipper had

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18. Flipper perceived the publication of his letter as a betrayal. He had carefully avoided publicly airing in his autobiography similar accusations from his West Point years precisely because he thought they would only incite resentment against him within the army. Refer to chapter I, footnote 7 for a more detailed discussion.

19. See Robinson, *The Fall of a Black Army Officer*, 57–59; Eppinga, *Henry O. Flipper*, 86–87; Donaldson, *Duty Beyond the Battlefield*, 119–22.

acted negligently though not criminally in his stewardship of funds as commissary agent. The court agreed with Barber's argument, finding Flipper innocent of embezzlement.<sup>20</sup>

The second charge of conduct unbecoming an officer and a gentleman was far thornier. Having disbelieved earlier warnings from local civilians that some officers at Fort Davis were scheming to have him removed from the army, Flipper had assumed upon discovering missing funds that the plan was in motion. Fearing being driven out, he sought to buy time to resolve the shortage. To do so, he lied to Shafter, submitted false reports, and had also written one fraudulent check. Barber made the case that Flipper's actions were understandable in his circumstances, rooted as they were in competing desires to resolve the matter and preserve his career. He made excellent use of witnesses who uniformly praised Flipper's good character, with several underscoring the point that so many soldiers and civilians contributed money to recoup the missing funds because they were utterly convinced that the funds had been stolen by officers intending to have Flipper charged and dismissed from the army. The court ultimately did not accept this reasoning, finding Flipper guilty of conduct unbecoming an officer and a gentleman and recommending dismissal from the army.<sup>21</sup>

The verdict and sentence were contested when the proceedings were reviewed at department and national levels according to standard military justice procedures of the time. The department commander recommended that the War Department reverse the acquittal on the first charge and declare Flipper guilty of both embezzlement and conduct unbecoming an officer and a gentleman. The army's judge advocate general in Washington rejected that recommendation and offered a blistering opinion of missteps by Shafter and the prosecuting judge advocate. He found Barber's argument that Flipper had acted carelessly but never with an intent to defraud the government compelling. He recommended that President Chester Arthur confirm the verdict with a lesser sentence, stopping short of dismissal.<sup>22</sup>

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20. Flipper, *Black Frontiersman*, 59; Eppinga, *Henry O. Flipper*, 94–108; Robinson, *The Fall of a Black Army Officer*, 59–61 (on Barber), and chap. 4–11 (on the trial).

21. Eppinga, *Henry O. Flipper*, 104–10; Robinson, *The Fall of a Black Army Officer*, 122–140.

22. Eppinga, *Henry O. Flipper*, 110–11; Robinson, *The Fall of a Black Army Officer*, 142–45.

President Arthur, however, confirmed the sentence. Flipper was dismissed from the army effective June 30, 1882, closing a chapter in his life in a manner that starkly contrasted with how it had begun nearly a decade earlier in May 1873, when, as Flipper wrote in the opening of chapter III of *The Colored Cadet at West Point*:

From the deck of the little ferry-boat that steamed its way across from Garrison's on that eventful afternoon I viewed the hills about West Point, her stone structures perched thereon, thus rising still higher, as if providing access to the very pinnacle of fame, and shuddered. With my mind full of the horrors of the treatment of all former cadets of color, and the dread of inevitable ostracism, I approached tremblingly yet confidently.

This passage carries a somewhat different meaning in the light of how Flipper's career ended. One wonders if even when a younger and more optimistic Henry O. Flipper wrote the lines, some part of him knew this day would come, making him shudder and tremble.

## After the Army

A remarkably resilient person, Henry O. Flipper wasted no time in picking up the pieces of his shattered dream of a long and fruitful army career. Upon his dismissal, Flipper set out for the socially and ethnically diverse border town of El Paso, Texas, arriving there in July 1882 to begin what became an exceptionally successful civilian career. He leveraged his education at West Point to become a well-respected engineer whose services were sought by several large mining companies operating in the area.<sup>23</sup>

By 1891, he had relocated to Nogales, Arizona, and established a private practice in land and mine surveying. His knowledge of Spanish and inquisitive nature equipped him well for life on the southwest border, where he became a recognized authority on Spanish and Mexican mining legal issues that affected both sides of the border. He found time to research and publish scholarship on regional history and folklore. Especially through his work to prove the legality of Nogales's city charter, Flipper became a pillar of the

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23. Flipper, *Black Frontiersman*, 7; Eppinga, *Henry O. Flipper*, 116–28.

community, even serving as editor of a local white-owned newspaper for four months in 1895.<sup>24</sup>

His successes in private enterprise brought Flipper back into public-sector work. His ability to prove the case for the Nogales city charter attracted the attention of the U.S. Department of Justice, for whom he served as a special agent from 1891 to 1901, charged with investigating disputed land and mining claims throughout the American southwest. Once again recognized within government circles for his intelligence and ability, Flipper fell into the orbit of Albert Bacon Fall, who employed him first as a legal and mining consultant for the Sierra Mining Company, and later—once Fall became a U.S. Senator—to collect and analyze intelligence related to the Mexican Revolution for Senate committee investigations. Ultimately, when Fall was appointed to serve as Secretary of the Interior during the Warren G. Harding administration, he appointed Flipper to serve as his assistant—placing Flipper at levels of power and influence very unusual for a Black man at the time. Flipper served in that capacity until 1923 and departed without being tainted by the Teapot Dome scandal that erupted in 1922 and led to Fall's political demise.<sup>25</sup>

Throughout these years, Flipper maintained his innocence and strove for reinstatement in the army. Nine bills that would have reversed the court martial and reinstated Flipper failed to pass through Congress between 1884 and 1924. An appeal to Booker T. Washington as the country mobilized for war against Spain in 1898 bore no fruit. Nor did Albert Fall's lobbying of Secretary of War John W. Weeks in 1922. All the while, Flipper refused to pursue commissions in state militia or volunteer units, and, when friends suggested he teach military science and tactics at all-Black institutions like Howard University or Wilberforce University, he responded disdainfully that he "would rather die than be so detailed."<sup>26</sup>

His later years did not bring closure. Still frustrated in his search for exoneration and reinstatement, and departing government service in 1923, an active and somewhat nomadic Flipper next turned to South America as a legal and engineering

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24. Flipper, *Black Frontiersman*, 7–8; Eppinga, *Henry O. Flipper*, 129–54.

25. Flipper, *Black Frontiersman*, 9–12; Eppinga, *Henry O. Flipper*, 155–78.

26. Flipper, *Black Frontiersman*, 14 and 56–58. The quotation is on page 58.

consultant in Venezuela with the Pantepec Petroleum Company. But he lost this job and most of his savings early in the Great Depression. He returned to Atlanta in 1931 and lived out the rest of his days quietly with extended family. At 84 years old, Henry Ossian Flipper passed away in his sister-in-law's home on the morning of May 3, 1940.<sup>27</sup>

## Legacy and Memory

Flipper was never fully aware of his legacy. Although he went to his grave frustrated by his failed efforts to be reinstated, integration of the officer corps gained new momentum after an unpardonably long interruption. Several months after Flipper died, Benjamin O. Davis, Sr., became the U.S. Army's first Black general officer.<sup>28</sup> That access—to the officer corps generally and to West Point specifically—is the legacy of Henry O. Flipper, James W. Smith, and other Reconstruction-era trailblazers in cadet gray. While they did not permanently open the door for Black cadets, they proved that it could be opened, and Flipper proved that once admitted, Black cadets could succeed. No amount of backsliding could take away that simple, publicly demonstrated fact.

In the short term, Reconstruction-era integration at West Point failed. As discussed in the Introduction, the first effort to integrate the Academy emanated from Black service during the Civil War and specific political and social contexts of Reconstruction. Accordingly, integration enjoyed its strongest executive and congressional support during Ulysses S. Grant's first term (1869–73), when so-called Radical Republicans were most united and at the height of their power in Congress. Their unity and control of Congress waned steadily from the election of 1872 onward. So too did Reconstruction, at least in its various manifestations as a federally controlled political and social project. That decline only accelerated with the onset of a severe economic depression in 1873. An increasingly apathetic Northern public watched as “redeemers” brought “home rule” back to the South—coded language for the return to power of the antebellum Southern political elite who were committed to a violently enforced racial hierarchy.

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27. Eppinga, *Henry O. Flipper*, 178–88.

28. Donaldson, *Duty Beyond the Battlefield*, 124.

The contested election of 1876 resulted in a monthslong stalemate that ushered in a new era of divided government as President Rutherford B. Hayes took office in March 1877. The moment had passed.<sup>29</sup>

The decline of Reconstruction altered the nature of integration at West Point and set conditions for its failure, at least in the near term. Prior to Flipper's graduation in June 1877, Black appointments to West Point were both consistent and consistently Southern. Except for one prospective cadet from Massachusetts (William Harvey Jarvis, Jr., appointed in 1874), each of the eleven Black men appointed to West Point came from the South. They hailed from South Carolina, Mississippi, Tennessee, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, and Virginia. And they came at regular intervals: other than in 1875, one to three Black men were appointed to West Point per year from 1870–76. Those dynamics changed after the end of Reconstruction and Flipper's graduation. Black appointees, with the exception of one from New York (Charles Augustus Minnie, appointed in summer 1877), came only from South Carolina or Ohio. Even more significantly, they were appointed at irregular intervals. No Black prospective cadets reported to West Point from 1878 to 1882. Between one and four arrived at West Point per year from 1883 to 1886, and none thereafter for many years. A full decade passed between Flipper becoming West Point's first Black graduate in 1877 and John Hanks Alexander becoming the second in 1887. Charles Young became the third in 1889. But without support in Congress or from successive presidential administrations, there was no viable path for Black cadets to reach West Point, let alone succeed there. There would not be a fourth Black graduate until Benjamin O. Davis, Jr., in 1936.<sup>30</sup>

At the same time, Black access to the officer corps was only briefly interrupted, although that access was too limited for far

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29. Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863–1877*, Perennial Classics Edition (Perennial Classics, 2002), 512–24; Mark Wahlgren Summers, *The Ordeal of the Reunion: A New History of Reconstruction* (University of North Carolina Press, 2014), chap. 13–16; Michael Perman, *The Road to Redemption: Southern Politics, 1869–1879* (University of North Carolina Press, 1984).

30. Reconstruction-era data is derived from “Statement Showing the Number of Colored Persons Appointed Candidates for Admission to the U.S. Military Academy, October 21, 1886,” RG404, USMA Library Special Collections and Archives.

too long. Other than the five-year period between Flipper's dismissal in 1882 and John Hanks Alexander's graduation in 1887, there was always one or more Black officers in the regular army. Alexander died from a heart condition tragically early in 1894, but Young served a full and exemplary career, achieving several notable firsts before his death on duty as the army's attaché in Liberia in 1922. While commanding a company in the segregated 9th Cavalry Regiment in 1901, Young mentored one of his soldiers—Davis, Sr.—and helped him prepare to pass the examination required to gain an officer's commission from the ranks. Davis, Sr., then embarked on a career that would end only with his retirement as a brigadier general in 1948. Their assignment options were incredibly limited, however. Flipper had served only with the 10th Cavalry Regiment. Alexander served with the 9th Cavalry and as a professor of military science and tactics at Wilberforce University. Young and Davis, Sr., spent the bulk of their careers rotating between the 9th Cavalry, 10th Cavalry, Wilberforce University (and the Tuskegee Institute, in Davis, Sr.'s case), and attaché duty in Liberia.<sup>31</sup>

Memory of Flipper faded and only a handful of Black officers served in the regular army as decades passed without Black cadets at West Point. The army attempted to cement its exclusionary policies after World War I. In 1925, the U.S. Army War College published a study titled "Employment of Negro Manpower in War" that analyzed recent wartime experiences through the lens of pseudoscientific theories popularized during the Progressive Era. The study asserted that African Americans were intellectually and morally inferior to whites, underqualified for combat duties, and unqualified to serve in combat units above the rank of lieutenant.<sup>32</sup> With such attitudes prevalent at the highest levels of the army,

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31. For Young's career, see Brian G. Shellum, *Black Officer in a Buffalo Soldier Regiment: The Military Career of Charles Young* (Bison Books, 2010). For Davis, Sr.'s career, see Marvin Fletcher, *America's First Black General: Benjamin O. Davis, Sr., 1880–1970* (University Press of Kansas, 1989); and Donaldson, *Duty Beyond the Battlefield*, chapter 5.

32. H. E. Ely, Memorandum for the Chief of Staff, "The use of negro man power in war," October 30, 1925, President's Official Files 4245-G: Office of Production Management. October 30, 1925, is the date of the report, though an accompanying cover memo submitting it is dated November 10, 1925. Commission on Fair Employment Practices: War Department, 1943, Archives of the Franklin Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, NY. The document, accessed June 30, 2024, is available at <http://docs.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/tcdoc.pdf>.

prospects for reintegrating West Point were poor. Although Benjamin O. Davis, Jr., succeeded in gaining an appointment to West Point in 1932, his right to be there was contested as much as that of his Reconstruction-era predecessors. While Black cadets began to be admitted more regularly during World War II, their appointments came only one or two a time; and only eleven Black cadets had graduated from West Point by the time President Harry S. Truman signed an executive order desegregating the U.S. Army.<sup>33</sup>

That trend changed significantly in the 1960s and 1970s. As with progress during Reconstruction, trends and momentum within the modern civil rights movement affected West Point. In the mid-1960s, two histories of West Point emerged. Both included extended discussions of the Reconstruction-era Academy, heaping praise upon Flipper—though unfairly at the expense of James Webster Smith—and explicitly comparing him to Martin Luther King, Jr. At nearly the same time, the number of Black faculty increased while the number of Black cadets admitted to any given class first climbed into double digits, enabling the growth and consolidation of a larger Black community on West Point. President Richard Nixon visited West Point and demanded that the superintendent, Lieutenant General Thomas Knowlton, build a monument to honor Confederate dead from the Civil War to balance West Point's famed Battle Monument, a massive structure honoring officers and soldiers of the regular army who died while fighting to defeat the Confederacy. Knowlton consulted Black cadets and faculty. They responded with a set of demands collectively calibrated to make West Point more conscious of its troubled past and more welcoming to African Americans.<sup>34</sup> West Point then adopted a celebratory Black History Week in February of each year. The *Pointer View*—a West Point newspaper—featured a spread on February 9, 1973, that ran features on Black history, a brief biographical sketch of Henry O. Flipper, and a profile of then-Cadet (and ultimately Secretary of Defense) Lloyd Austin, III, hailing from Thomasville,

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33. Nicholas Hurley, "Red Sashes, Red Tails: Black West Pointers and the Tuskegee Airmen, 1936–1948," paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Society for Military History, Arlington, VA, April 19, 2024.

34. Ty Seidule, "Black Power Cadets: How African American Students Defeated President Nixon's Confederate Monument and Changed West Point, 1971–1976," *The Hudson River Valley Review: A Journal of Regional Studies*, vol. 36, no. 1 (Autumn 2019): 55–82.

Georgia, who connected his own cadet career to precedents set by Flipper.<sup>35</sup>

Shortly thereafter, activists in the greater Atlanta area and elsewhere in Georgia began to take more interest in preserving Flipper's legacy and memory. A campaign to exonerate Flipper—led in large measure by Flipper's aging niece Irsle Flipper King and educator Ray MacColl—began to gain traction in 1975. MacColl assembled a brief for the Pentagon urging a reconsideration of Flipper's case based largely on his belief that the 1882 judge advocate review of the case correctly identified unjust flaws in the conduct of the trial. After nearly a year, MacColl and King succeeded in persuading the army to review the case. In November 1976, a board of five officers convened and reviewed material from Flipper's court martial.

By a margin of four to one, the board voted to change the characterization of Flipper's discharge to honorable. While modern distinctions of honorable, general, other-than-honorable, and dishonorable discharges did not exist in the nineteenth century, soldiers dismissed from the army due to nineteenth-century courts martial are not considered honorable, which imposes some limitations on how their service can be recognized, rewarded, and honored. By changing the characterization of Flipper's discharge to honorable, the board went as far as it believed it could go in exonerating Flipper. The board reasoned that it did not have the authority to address the verdict in Flipper's case, but it generally agreed with the verdict; by all available evidence, Flipper did not embezzle funds, but had made false statements and rendered false reports. At the same time, the board found that while it could not condone such actions, it did note that Flipper's motives for doing so were rooted in the reality of his unique and isolated position, not in malicious intent to defraud the government. Most importantly, the board's review of similar cases from the late-nineteenth century determined that Flipper's sentence was unaccountably

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35. "Flipper Descendant in Corps," *Pointer View*, February 9, 1973, p. 3. At the time, Austin believed he was Flipper's grandnephew. Secretary Austin still tells public audiences that Flipper is one of his heroes. See Jim Garamone, "Austin Tells DOD Education Activity Students about his Heroes, Inspirations," February 26, 2021, accessed November 7, 2023, <https://www.defense.gov/News/Feature-Stories/Story/Article/2517965/austin-tells-dod-education-activity-students-about-his-heroes-inspirations/>.

severe relative to the others. While it denied MacColl's suggestion that the verdict should be overturned, the board determined that "the continuance of the stigma from a dismissal, which characterizes his entire service as dishonorable, is unduly harsh, and therefore unjust."<sup>36</sup>

Recharacterizing Flipper's discharge had an immediate and tangible effect in 1977–78, as several communities and institutions celebrated the centennial of his graduation from West Point. Flipper had previously rested in an unmarked grave in Southview Cemetery near Atlanta. He was located, exhumed, and reburied with full military honors under a government-provided headstone in his hometown of Thomasville, Georgia. The state of Georgia celebrated Henry O. Flipper Day on March 21, 1977, complete with a ceremony in Atlanta featuring speeches and contributions from national, state, and local politicians, the Department of Defense, the United States Military Academy, presidents of Atlanta University and Morris Brown College, and local community leaders.<sup>37</sup>

West Point and the army embraced the celebrations. In June 1977, a bronze bust of Henry O. Flipper was unveiled at the United States Military Academy and the Corps of Cadets paraded in honor of Flipper in front of his niece and nephew, Irsle Flipper King and Festus Flipper. At another elaborate ceremony, the still-active garrison at Fort Sill, Oklahoma, registered "Flipper's Ditch"—the drainage system that made Fort Sill a more viable post by draining its malarial swamps—as a national historic landmark embellished with a descriptive bronze plaque.<sup>38</sup>

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36. Proceedings of the Department of the Army Board for Correction of Military Records in the Case of Henry O. Flipper, 17 November 1976, Folder 1, Henry O. Flipper Vertical Files, USMA Library Special Collections and Archives.

37. "West Point Graduate Reburied," *Nashville Banner*, February 11, 1978; Program—"A Ceremony of Commemoration and Recognition of Lieutenant Henry Ossian Flipper," Monday, March 21, 1977; and Henry O. Flipper Vertical Files, USMA Library Special Collections and Archives.

38. "Black Victim of Racial Injustice 100 Years. West Point Celebrates Flipper's Graduation," *Jet Magazine*, June 1977; "Unveiling of a Bronze Marker at the Registered National Historic Landmark Structure Known as 'Flipper's Ditch', Commemorating Lieutenant Henry O. Flipper, the First Black Graduate of the United States Military Academy, Class of 1877," October 27, 1977, Ft. Sill, OK; both in Folder 1, Henry O. Flipper Vertical Files, USMA Library Special Collections and Archives.

But while the work of the Board for Correction of Military Records recharacterized Flipper's discharge, it did not completely recover his good name. Because President Chester Arthur approved the verdict and sentence and Congress failed to pass legislation overturning it, only a presidential pardon could completely exonerate Flipper. On February 19, 1999, President Bill Clinton signed that presidential pardon—the first posthumous presidential pardon in American history—remarking, “This good man now has completely recovered his good name.” Sitting proudly in the audience and taking it in alongside descendants of the extended Flipper family and other dignitaries were former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs Colin Powell and Clarence Davenport, a member of the class of January 1943 and West Point's sixth Black graduate.<sup>39</sup>

Flipper's legacy remains alive and well at West Point today. The Academy inaugurated the Henry O. Flipper Memorial Award in 1977 which remains a unique expression of Flipper's continuing influence upon the United States Military Academy. Given on an annual basis, the award is presented to a member of the graduating class who demonstrates exceptional leadership, discipline, and determination in the face of exceptional difficulties. The award's most recent recipient, Teryon Lowery of the class of 2024, gave powerful expression to how he and other cadets view Flipper's legacy at West Point today. According to Lowery, “Henry O. Flipper is a representation of all cadets, whether they're Black, women, gay or trans,” adding that “Flipper helped cement that there's a place for them here [at West Point].”<sup>40</sup>

And there lies the lasting meaning, inspiration, and tragedy of Flipper's experiences. If he truly “helped cement that there's a place” for able and capable future officers of any background at West Point and in the U.S. Army, he did so even as those around him denied his claims to that place, however strongly he staked them in word and deed. The cement proved excruciatingly slow to dry. But dry it did, and where a Black cadet from Thomasville, Georgia, was once ostracized and eventually faced dismissal from

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39. The pardon ceremony can be viewed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SNq5OztW95E> (accessed June 30, 2024).

40. Jorge Garcia, “Honoring Cadet Teryon Lowery and the Legacy of Henry O. Flipper,” February 21, 2024, accessed June 25, 2024, <https://www.westpoint.edu/news/west-point-news/honoring-cadet-teryon-lowery-and-the-legacy-of-henry-o-flipper>.

the army, another rose to become the Secretary of Defense. Flipper has rightfully regained a celebrated place in American public consciousness in the last half century. But celebration by itself, however justified, is not understanding. We hope this volume helps modern readers to further understand Flipper's times and experiences. Perhaps an enhanced understanding will also improve the celebration. At the same time, we recognize the limits of our ability to fully grasp Flipper's circumstances and experiences. Even after so much thought and ink, Flipper remains an enigma.



# Appendix

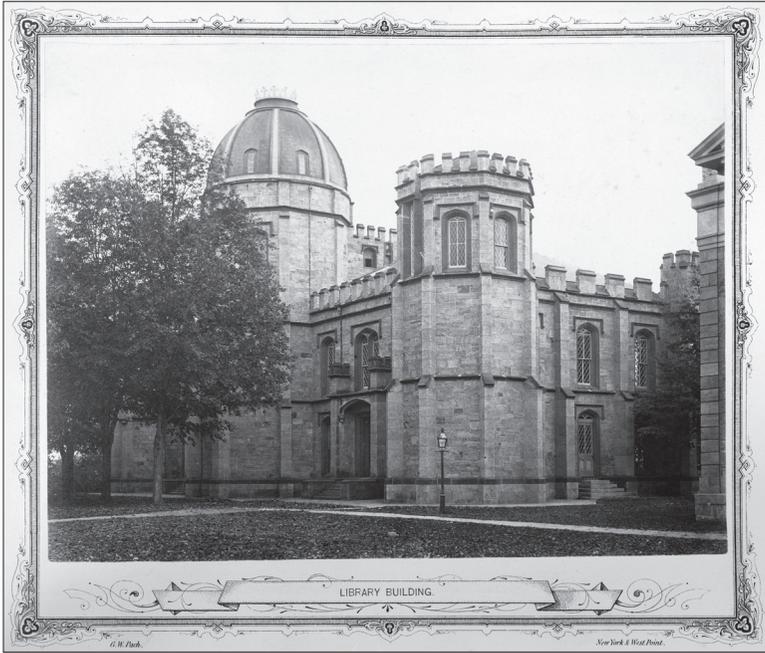
## Black Cadets' Extracurricular Reading, 1870–1877

Cadets could check out books to read in the West Point library on Saturdays. Below is a complete record of Black cadets' visits to the library from James W. Smith's arrival in 1870 until Henry O. Flipper's graduation in 1877, as recorded in circulation records still available in the U.S. Military Academy Library Special Collections and Archives.<sup>1</sup> Librarians' logs appear to list cadet names in the order in which they checked in with the librarian. On days where more than one Black cadet visited the library, their names are usually recorded right next to each other or in near enough proximity to make it likely that those cadets went to the library together (with some exceptions noted in the list below). It is thus probable that in more ways than one, Saturday reading became a way to escape from their ostracized lives.

The library has moved, changed, and even burned since the era represented here, so we cannot attest to the provenance of extant volumes in the holdings. A few volumes at West Point may be the very ones that Black cadets read, but most were likely acquired after Reconstruction. Each entry below begins with the name of the Black cadet who checked out the book. The italicized language in quotation marks, often a shortened title, represents the librarian's handwritten entry in the record book. We have attempted to pin down editions available in the years before the books were borrowed by providing specific edition information for many of the titles, and we have also included the occasional editorial comment. Many volumes, including all numbers of *Harper's Weekly Magazine* are readily available for open access perusal through *Internet Archive* and other stable online platforms.

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1. See U.S. Military Academy Library Circulation Records, 1869–71; U.S. Military Academy Library Circulation Records, 1871–1874; U.S. Military Academy Library Circulation Records, 1874–1875; and U.S. Military Academy Library Circulation Records, November 6, 1875, to January 12, 1878—all bound volumes within Cadet Saturday Circulation Files, 1865–1881, United States Military Academy Library Special Collections and Archives, West Point, NY.



The United States Military Academy Library, circa 1876.  
*Courtesy of the United States Military Academy Library Special Collections and Archives.*



We hope this appendix spurs further research into the promising subject of cadet reading. Here are just two of the most preliminary research questions that await consideration: How did the reading interests of other cadets compare with the interests of Black cadets in this period? How have cadet reading interests changed over time?

**September 2, 1871:**

- James W. Smith—“*Cooper’s Novels vol 1*”
  - James Fenimore Cooper, *Cooper’s Novels* (W.A. Townsend, 1859) “with a discourse on the life, genius, and writing of the author, by William Cullen Bryant.”
- Henry A. Napier—“*Hazlett’s Napoleon vol 1*”
  - William Hazlitt, *The Life of Napoleon Buonaparte* (Lippincott, 1875).

**September 9, 1871:**

- James W. Smith—“*Noyes’s Bivouac & Battlefield*”
  - George F. Noyes, *The Bivouac and the Battlefield, or, Campaign Sketches in Virginia and Maryland* (Harper & Bros., 1863).

**September 16, 1871:**

- James W. Smith—“*Noyes’s Bivouac & Battlefield*”

**September 23, 1871:**

- James W. Smith—“*Dana & Wilson’s Grant*”
  - James Harrison Wilson and Charles A. Dana, *The life of Ulysses S. Grant, General of the Armies of the United States* (Springfield: Gurdon Bill & Co.; Cincinnati: H.C. Johnson, 1868).
- Henry A. Napier—“*Life of Sir William Napier vol. 1*”
  - William Francis Patrick Napier, *Life of General Sir William Napier* (J. Murray, 1864). Smith and Napier are right next to each other on the register, on successive lines.

**September 30, 1871:**

- James W. Smith—“*Andersonville Prison*”
  - We have not identified this text. It may be: Captain James M. Moore, *Quartermasters General’s Office, General Order, No. 70. The Martyrs Who, For Our Country, Gave Up Their Lives In The Prison Pens In Andersonville, Ga.* (Government Printing Office, 1866). This government document begins with a macabre, four-page accounting of the work done in July and August of 1865 to “mark the graves of Union soldiers for future identification” and to “enclose the cemetery” at the notorious Andersonville Prison. Moore’s prefatory report is followed by an alphabetized list of interments that runs to 215 pages and about 13,000 names.

**October 7, 1871:**

- Henry A. Napier—“*Life of Gen. Napier vol. 1*”
- James W. Smith—“*19 Months a Prisoner of War*”
  - *Nineteen Months a Prisoner of War in the Hands of the Rebels: Experience at Belle Isle, Richmond, Danville, and Andersonville* (Starr & Son, 1865). Smith and Napier are right next to each other on the register, on successive lines.

**October 28, 1871:**

- James W. Smith—“*Life of Jefferson Davis*”
- Frank H. Alfriend, *The Life of Jefferson Davis* (Caxton, 1868).
  - This is an extensive great man history that pursues “a rigid investigation [of] the lives, characters, and conduct of those to whom were allotted conspicuous parts in the great drama” of the “the revolution which had its most pronounced phase in the memorable war of 1861” (14, 13). Alfriend launches his Lost Cause recuperation of Davis with the observation that the former CSA President “confronts posterity burdened with the disadvantage of having been the leader of an unsuccessful political movement” (14–15).

**November 11, 1871:**

- James W. Smith—“*Life of Jefferson Davis*”

**November 18, 1871:**

- James W. Smith—“*Life of Jefferson Davis*”

**December 2, 1871:**

- James W. Smith—“*Stonewall Jackson*”
  - John Cooke, *The Life of Stonewall Jackson from Official Papers, Contemporary Narratives, and Personal Acquaintance. By a Virginian.* (Ayres & Wade, 1863). Biographies of Jackson published before Smith’s West Point time are exceedingly rare. He may have had access to this book, published only a few months after Jackson’s death after the Battle of Chancellorsville.

**December 9, 1871:**

- James W. Smith—“*Stonewall Jackson*”

**January 6, 1872:**

- James W. Smith—“*Four Years in the Saddle*”
  - Harry Gilmore, *Four Years in the Saddle* (Harper & Brothers, 1866). This book comprises the reminiscences of battle and imprisonment of the CSA officer Harry W. Gilmore from Maryland, who rose to the rank of Colonel during the Civil War, and, among other notable commands, led the 1st and 2nd Maryland Cavalry at Gettysburg. Smith would have encountered the author’s elaborate defense of his reputation. Gilmore asserts a desire to correct statements in “a number of the Northern journals [that] saw fit to bestow the most unsparing vituperation upon myself and others, my object being to remove from the minds of those willing to judge fairly and without prejudice, impressions created by misstatements in newspapers, whose views it suited to ignore and degrade into mere plundering raids expeditions of a military character” in the Valley of Virginia, where he lead confederate troops (xii).

**January 13, 1872:**

- Henry A. Napier—“*Longfellow’s Poems vol. 1*”
  - Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, *Poems by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow Complete in Two Volumes* (Ticknor and Fields, 1857).

**January 20, 1872:**

- Henry A. Napier—“*Longfellow’s Poems vol. 2*”

**January 27, 1872:**

- Henry A. Napier—“*Pope’s Works*”
  - Alexander Pope, *The Works of Alexander Pope* (J. B. Smith & Co., 1859).

**February 3, 1872:**

- Henry A. Napier—“*Pope’s Works*”

**February 10, 1872:**

- Henry A. Napier—“*Pope’s Works*”
- James W. Smith—“*Milton’s Works vol. 1*”
  - John Milton, *The Poetical Works of John Milton. with a Life of the Poet by John Masson. In Three Volumes* (Little, Brown and Company, 1866). Napier and Smith are right next to each other on the register, on successive lines.

**February 17, 1872:**

- Henry A. Napier—“*Gil Blas*”
  - Alain René Le Sage, *The Adventures of Gil Blas de Santillane. Translated by Tobias Smollett* (George Routledge and Sons, 1866).
- James W. Smith—“*Milton’s Works vol. 1*”
- Smith’s and Napier’s names appear well separated on the register, indicating they came in at different times.

**February 24, 1872:**

- James W. Smith—“*Milton’s Works vol. 1*”
- Henry A. Napier—“*19 Months a Prisoner of War*”
- Lots of separation on the register; Smith and Napier on this day came in at different times.

**April 20, 1872:**

- James W. Smith—“*Chesterfield’s Letters*”
  - Philip Dormer Stanhope Chesterfield, *The Letters of Philip Dormer Stanhope, Earl of Chesterfield* (Richard Bentley, 1847).

**May 18, 1872:**

- James W. Smith—“*Our Great Captains*”
  - Linus Pierpont Bockett, *Our Great Captains: Grant, Sherman, Thomas, Sheridan and Farragut* (C. B. Richardson, 1866).

**November 23, 1872:**

- James W. Smith—“*Bleak House 1*”
  - Charles Dickens, *Bleak House* (Bradbury and Evans, 1853).

**November 30, 1872:**

- James W. Smith—“*Bleak House 1*”

**December 7, 1872:**

- James W. Smith—“*Dombey & Son 1*”
  - Charles Dickens, *Dombey & Son* (Bradbury and Evans, 1848).

**December 14, 1872:**

- James W. Smith—“*Dombey & Son 1*”

**December 21, 1872:**

- James W. Smith—“*Dombey & Son 1*”

**December 28, 1872:**

- James W. Smith—“*Dombey & Son 2*”

**January 4, 1873:**

- James W. Smith—“*Dombey & Son 2*”

**January 11, 1873:**

- Thomas Van Rensselaer Gibbs—“*Innocents Abroad*”
  - Samuel Clemens, *Innocents Abroad* (G. Routledge & Sons, 1872).
  - This was Gibbs’ first and only visit before his dismissal in January 1873.
- James W. Smith—“*Simms’s Scout*”
  - William Gilmore Sims, *The Scout; or, The Black Riders of Congaree* (Redfield, 1854).

**January 18, 1873:**

- James W. Smith—“*Nicholas Nickleby*” [Dickens]

**January 25, 1873:**

- James W. Smith—“*Nicholas Nickleby*”

**February 22, 1873:**

- James W. Smith—“*Martin Chuzzlewit*” [Dickens]

**March 8, 1873:**

- James W. Smith—“*Martin Chuzzlewit*”

**March 15, 1873:**

- James W. Smith—“*Big Foot Wallace*”
  - John Crittenden Duval, *The Adventures of Big-foot Wallace* (J.W. Burke & Co., 1870).

**March 22, 1873:**

- James W. Smith—“*Secret Service of the U.S.*”
  - La Fayette C. Baker, *History of the United States Secret Service* (L.C. Baker, 1867).

**March 29, 1873:**

- James W. Smith—“*Humphrey’s Clock vol. 1*” [Dickens]

**April 5, 1873:**

- James W. Smith—“*Roughing It*” [Clemens / Twain]

**April 19, 1873:**

- James W. Smith—“*Humphrey’s Clock vol. 2*”

**April 26, 1873:**

- James W. Smith—“*Humphrey’s Clock vol. 2*”

**May 3, 1873:**

- James W. Smith—“*Humphrey’s Clock vol. 3*”

**May 10, 1873:**

- James W. Smith—“*Humphrey’s Clock vol. 3*”

**May 17, 1873:**

- James W. Smith—“*Humphrey’s Clock vol. 3*”

**May 24, 1873:**

- James W. Smith—“*Comic History of England*”
  - Gilbert Abbott à Beckett, *The Comic History of England* (Bradbury, Evans, and Co., 1850).

**October 2, 1875:**

- Henry O. Flipper, “*Bancroft’s History of the U.S. vol. 10*”
  - George Bancroft, *History of the United States from the Discovery of the American Continent*, Vol. X (Little Brown, 1875).

**October 16, 1875:**

- Henry O. Flipper—“*Harper’s Magazine 40*”

**October 23, 1875:**

- Henry O. Flipper—“*Harper’s Magazine 39*”

**October 30, 1875:**

- Henry O. Flipper—“*Moore’s Works*”
  - Thomas Moore, *The Poetical Works of Thomas Moore* (Lee and Shepard, 1876).

**November 6, 1875:**

- Henry O. Flipper—“*Harper’s Magazine 43*”

**November 13, 1875:**

- Henry O. Flipper—“*Reveries of a Bachelor*”

**November 20, 1875:**

- Henry O. Flipper—“*Wide Wide World 1*”
  - Susan Warner (under the pseudonym Elizabeth Wetherell), *The Wide, Wide World. Vol. 1* (G.P. Putnam, 1852).

**November 27, 1875:**

- Henry O. Flipper—“*Harper’s Magazine 25*”

**December 4, 1875:**

- Henry O. Flipper—“*Harper’s Magazine 38*”

**December 11, 1875:**

- Henry O. Flipper—“*Harper’s Magazine 38*”

**December 18, 1875:**

- Henry O. Flipper—“*Harper’s Magazine 49*”

**December 24, 1875:**

- Henry O. Flipper—“*Venice, City of the Sea 1*”
  - Edmund Flagg, *Venice; the City of the Sea* (Scribner, 1853).

**December 31, 1875:**

- Henry O. Flipper—“*Venice, City of the Sea 2*”

**January 8, 1876:**

- Henry O. Flipper—“*Harper’s Magazine 47*”

**January 15, 1876:**

- Henry O. Flipper—“*Tales of the Civil Wars*”
  - Mary Gillies; illustrated by Myles Birket Foster, *The Carewes: A Tale of the Civil Wars, with Twenty-four Illustrations* (W. Kent, 1861). While we have not positively identified *The Carewes* as the referenced volume, we are led to it by the librarian’s having made “Wars” plural. This popular fiction (for young readers) traces the adventures of the aristocratic English Carewe family, especially of the eldest son, Henry. Gillies seeks to “give some idea, capable of being understood by [her] young readers, of the pure motives, the brave struggles, and the noble deeds, of those great men to whom [England] probably owes its present liberty under a constitutional queen” (v). The volume would seem an important data point in Flipper’s reading about patriarchy and power.

**January 22, 1876:**

- Henry O. Flipper—“*Frederick the Great and His Court*”
  - Luise Mühlbach, *Frederick the Great and his Court: An Historical Romance* (Chesterfield Society, 1866).

**January 29, 1876:**

- Henry O. Flipper—“*Frederick the Great and His Court*”

**February 25, 1876:**

- Henry O. Flipper—“*Sam Houston*”
  - Charles Edward Lester, *The Life of Sam Houston (The only Authentic Memoir of him ever published)* (J. C. Derby, 1855). This entry seems to be misdated and should be February 5, 1876.

**February 12, 1876:**

- Henry O. Flipper—“*Oeuvres de Cicero 4*”
  - Marcus Tullius Cicero, *Oeuvres Complètes de Cicéron*, ed. Désiré Nisard, (F. Didot, 1864).

**February 19, 1876:**

- Henry O. Flipper—“*Marcy’s Border Reminiscences*”
  - Randolph B. Marcy (USMA 1832), *Border Reminiscences* (Harper & Brothers, 1872).

**February 26, 1876:**

- Henry O. Flipper—“*19 Months a Prisoner of War*”

**March 4, 1876:**

- Henry O. Flipper—“*Harper’s Magazine 30*”

**March 11, 1876:**

- Henry O. Flipper—“*Ware’s Zenobia 1*”
  - William Ware, *Zenobia; or, The Fall of Palmyra* (2 Volumes) (H. G. Clarke and Co., 1844).

**March 18, 1876:**

- Henry O. Flipper—“*Ware’s Zenobia 2*”

**March 25, 1876:**

- Henry O. Flipper—“*Harper’s Magazine 46*”

**April 1, 1876:**

- Henry O. Flipper—“*Collins’s The Law and the Lady*”
  - Wilkie Collins, *The Law and the Lady*. (Harper & Brothers, 1875).

**April 8, 1876:**

- Henry O. Flipper—“*Collins’s Armadale*”
  - Wilkie Collins, *Armadale*. (Harper & Brothers, 1874).

**April 15, 1876:**

- Henry O. Flipper—“*Life of Daniel Boone*”
  - This is probably Cecil B. Hartley, *Life and Times of Daniel Boone, the Great Western Hunter and Pioneer* (John H. Potter, 1865).

**April 22, 1876:**

- Henry O. Flipper—“*Following the Drum*”
  - Teresa Griffin Vielé, *Following the Drum* (T. B. Peterson & Brothers, 1864).

**April 29, 1876:**

- Henry O. Flipper—“*Harper’s Magazine 44*”

**May 6, 1876:**

- Henry O. Flipper—“*Life on the Plains*”
  - George A. Custer (USMA 1861), *My Life on the Plains. Or, Personal Experiences with Indians* (Sheldon and Company, 1874).

**May 13, 1876:**

- Henry O. Flipper—“*Curiosities of Civilization*”
  - Andrew Wynter, *Curiosities of Civilization* (R. Hardwicke, 1860).

**September 2, 1876:**

- Henry O. Flipper—“*Sheridan and His Troopers*”
  - De B. Randolph Keim, *Sheridan’s Troopers on the Borders: A Winter Campaign on the Plains* (Claxton, Remson & Haffelfinger, 1870). A copy of this volume is held in West Point’s Special Collections and may have been the one Flipper borrowed.

**September 16, 1876:**

- Henry O. Flipper—“*American Baron*”

**September 23, 1876:**

- Henry O. Flipper—“*Scenes and Adv. in the Army*”
  - Philip St. George Cooke, *Scenes and Adventures in the Army; or, Romance of Military Life* (Lindsay & Blakiston, 1859).

**September 30, 1876:**

- Henry O. Flipper—“*Floating City*”
  - Jules Verne, *A Floating City* (Sampson Low, Marston, Low & Searle, 1874). Verne published *Une Ville Flottante* in 1871 in France. The book tells of intrigue aboard the SS *Great Eastern*, a marvel of an actual ship that, when it launched in 1858, was far and away the largest ship ever built.

**October 7, 1876:**

- Henry O. Flipper—“*Recollections of Byron*”
  - Robert Charles Dallas, *Recollections of the life of Lord Byron, from the year 1808 to the end of 1814: exhibiting his early character and opinions, detailing the progress of his literary career, and including various unpublished passages of his works: taken from authentic documents, in the possession of the author* (Printed for Charles Knight. Pall-Mall-East, 1824).

**October 14, 1876:**

- Henry O. Flipper—“*Recollections of Byron*”

**October 21, 1876:**

- Henry O. Flipper—“*Journey to the North Pole*”

**October 28, 1876:**

- Henry O. Flipper—“*From the Earth to the Moon*”
  - Jules Verne, *From the Earth to the Moon* (J. K. Holt, 1869). This is an early translation of this classic French science fiction work. Flipper would have found a provocative reference to West Point and artillery at the book’s opening.

**November 4, 1876:**

- Henry O. Flipper—“*Waverly Novels vol. 8*”

**November 11, 1876:**

- Henry O. Flipper—“*Scottish Chiefs*”
  - Jane Porter, *The Scottish Chiefs, a Romance in Five Volumes* (Longman, Hurst, Rees, and Orme, 1810). This volume centers on William Wallace and represents a very early example of the historical novel.

**November 18, 1876:**

- Henry O. Flipper—“*Scottish Chiefs*”

**November 29, 1876:**

- Henry O. Flipper—“*Wandering Jew*”
  - Eugène Sue. *The Wandering Jew* (Chapman and Hall, 1844–5). This is the first English edition of Sue’s 1844 serialized novel, *Le Juif errant*.

**December 2, 1876:**

- Henry O. Flipper—“*The Second Wife*”
  - E. Marlitt (pseudonym for Eugenie John), *The Second Wife, a Romance* (J.B. Lippincott & Co., 1874). This translation of an 1874 German romantic novel is by an author who often wrote against social prejudice, or caste.

**December 9, 1876:**

- Henry O. Flipper—Eliot’s “*Adam Bede*”
  - George Eliot (Pseudonym of Mary Ann Evans) *Adam Bede* (William Blackwood and Sons, 1859). This English, Victorian, pastoral novel engages with complications of love, seduction, and infanticide.
- Johnson C. Whittaker—“*Uncle Tom’s Cabin*”
  - Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin; or, Life Among the Lowly* (John P. Jewett & Company, 1852). This is the most influential American antislavery novel of the antebellum period.

**December 16, 1876:**

- Henry O. Flipper—“*Poe’s Works vol. 2*”
  - Edgar Allan Poe, *The Works of the Late Edgar Allan Poe with Notices of His Life and Genius by N.P. Willis, J.R. Lowell, and R.W. Griswold in Two Volumes. Vol II. Poems and Miscellanies* (J.S Redfield, Clinton Hall, 1850).

**December 23, 1876:**

- Johnson C. Whittaker—“*Hall’s Arctic Research*”

**January 20, 1877:**

- Henry O. Flipper—“*Empress Josephine*”
  - Cecil B. Hartley, *Life of the Empress Josephine, Wife of Napoleon I* (G.G. Evans, 1860). West Point’s Special Collections holds a copy of this edition; it may be the copy Flipper borrowed.

**January 27, 1877:**

- Johnson C. Whittaker—“*Empress Josephine*”
- Henry O. Flipper—“*Arabian Days Entertainment*”

**February 3, 1877:**

- Henry O. Flipper—“*Annals of a Fortress*”

**February 10, 1877:**

- Henry O. Flipper—“*Scott’s Poems vol. 2*”

**February 17, 1877:**

- Henry O. Flipper—“*Arabian Nights vol. 1*”

**February 24, 1877:**

- Johnson C. Whittaker—“*Life of Lincoln*”
- Henry O. Flipper—“*Harper’s Magazine 19*”

**March 3, 1877:**

- Henry O. Flipper—“*Lever’s Tom Burke vol 2*”
  - Charles James Lever, *Tom Burke of “Ours”* (William Curry, Jun. and Company, 1844).

**March 10, 1877:**

- Henry O. Flipper—“*Waverley Novels vol 18*”

**March 17, 1877:**

- Henry O. Flipper—“*Waverley Novels vol 11*”

**March 31, 1877:**

- Henry O. Flipper—“*Curtis’s Prue & I*”
  - George William Curtis, *Prue and I* (Dix, Edwards & Co., 1856). This series of mannered sketches is by a prolific writer of the period. Curtis was an abolitionist and later an advocate for the rights of freedmen and other progressive causes, such as women’s suffrage and public schools. Curtis married Anna Shaw, who was the daughter of the prominent abolitionist, Francis Shaw, and the sister of Colonel Robert Gould Shaw, who led the all-Black 54th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry in the assault on Fort Wagner.

**April 7, 1877:**

- Henry O. Flipper—“*Campagne de 1796*”

**April 14, 1877:**

- Henry O. Flipper—“*Waverley Novels vol 6*”

**April 21, 1877:**

- Henry O. Flipper—“*Campagne du Gen. Bon.*”
  - Louis-Alexandre Berthier, *Relation des campagnes du Général Bonaparte en Egypte et en Syrie* (Rue Neuve, 1799/1800). The use of French in the abbreviated record accords with the fact that reading French in Flipper’s era was still deemed an essential skill for West Point graduates.

**May 5, 1877:**

- Henry O. Flipper—“*John Halifax Gentleman*”
  - Dinah Craik, *John Halifax, Gentlemen* (Hurst and Blackett, 1856).

**May 12, 1877:**

- Henry O. Flipper—“*Kingsley’s Westward Ho*”
  - Charles Kingsley, *Westward Ho!* (Thomas Y. Crowell & Co., 1855). This English Historical novel of adventure looks back at the conquest of England over the Spanish in Elizabethan times, advocates for the growth of the British Empire, and expresses anti-Catholic views.

**May 19, 1877:**

- Henry O. Flipper—“*Don Quixote*”
  - Miguel de Cervantes, *The History of Don Quixote de la Mancha* (Philadelphia: Davis, Porter & Coates, 1867).

Our support for this project was inspired, in part,  
by Major Fallon Hayes's service to the United States of America  
and her role in leading, developing, loving, and inspiring  
the cadets under her command in the Second Regiment at the  
U.S. Military Academy at West Point, including our son.

—*Bremond and Michael MacDougall*

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