

THE HOUSTON MUTINY

On August 23 Negro soldiers of the Twenty-fourth Infantry precipitated a riot in the city of Houston, Texas, which resulted in the death of seventeen persons and the wounding of more than a score. It is reported that more than one hundred and twenty-five Negro soldiers were involved in the riot. These soldiers stole company ammunition, seized their rifles, and started toward the city, shooting indiscriminately. They murdered a militia captain and mutilated his body. They killed mounted police who attempted to halt them. The rioters were stopped only by the intervention of Illinois Guardsmen and armed citizens of Houston.

Such is the bare outline of what appears to have been one of

the most disgraceful mutinies of American troops in our history. Whatever the findings of the military authorities as to the cause for this mutiny, nothing can minimize the bitter truth that American soldiers in uniform, in time of war, did mutiny and shoot to death a commissioned officer of the army, officers of the law, and peaceable citizens.

The penalty for such mutiny is, and should be, death, but even this extreme penalty, unless promptly inflicted upon the guilty soldiers, will lose something of its effect. It does not need to be said that the extreme penalty should be visited upon the guilty soldiers at the hands of a military, and not a civil, tribunal.

At the time of the Brownsville riot Mr. Roosevelt waited until he had received the report of the Inspector-General before he ordered the dismissal from the service of those Negro soldiers who shielded their guilty comrades from the law, but then he acted at once and inexorably. That was in time of peace. The Houston riot, a much more serious affair, has occurred in time of war. The President, as Commander-in-Chief of the Army, should in the present instance, and we of course believe will, move to have the trial and punishment of the Negro mutineers of Houston expedited in every possible way. The authority of the President to act is unquestioned and unlimited.

So much for the military and criminal side of the Houston riot. The mutiny has, however, one other serious phase which cannot be ignored. Twice within recent years Negro regulars have been guilty of mutiny *en masse*.

Negro soldiers have been drawn from the more substantial elements of their race, for the army has offered to the Negro, to whom other doors have been closed, opportunity for a "career." A great majority of those Negroes who have taken the enlistment oath have rendered faithful service, but neither they nor Negroes in civil life can afford to ignore the stain cast upon their racial honor by Brownsville and Houston.

If Negro leaders remain silent at the present time, they will prove recreant to a great opportunity to serve their people and the cause of racial tolerance. Let them visit upon these Negro mutineers the same unanimous condemnation which the white race, North and South, visited upon the white rioters of East St. Louis. If this opportunity to vindicate their loyalty to a cause greater than the future of any single element in our population is ignored, the country will certainly be slow in recognizing the necessity or the advisability of training Negro officers for service and of trusting Negro soldiers either to the discipline of members of their own race or to white officers who are not fortified in their authority by the presence in the vicinity of white troops.