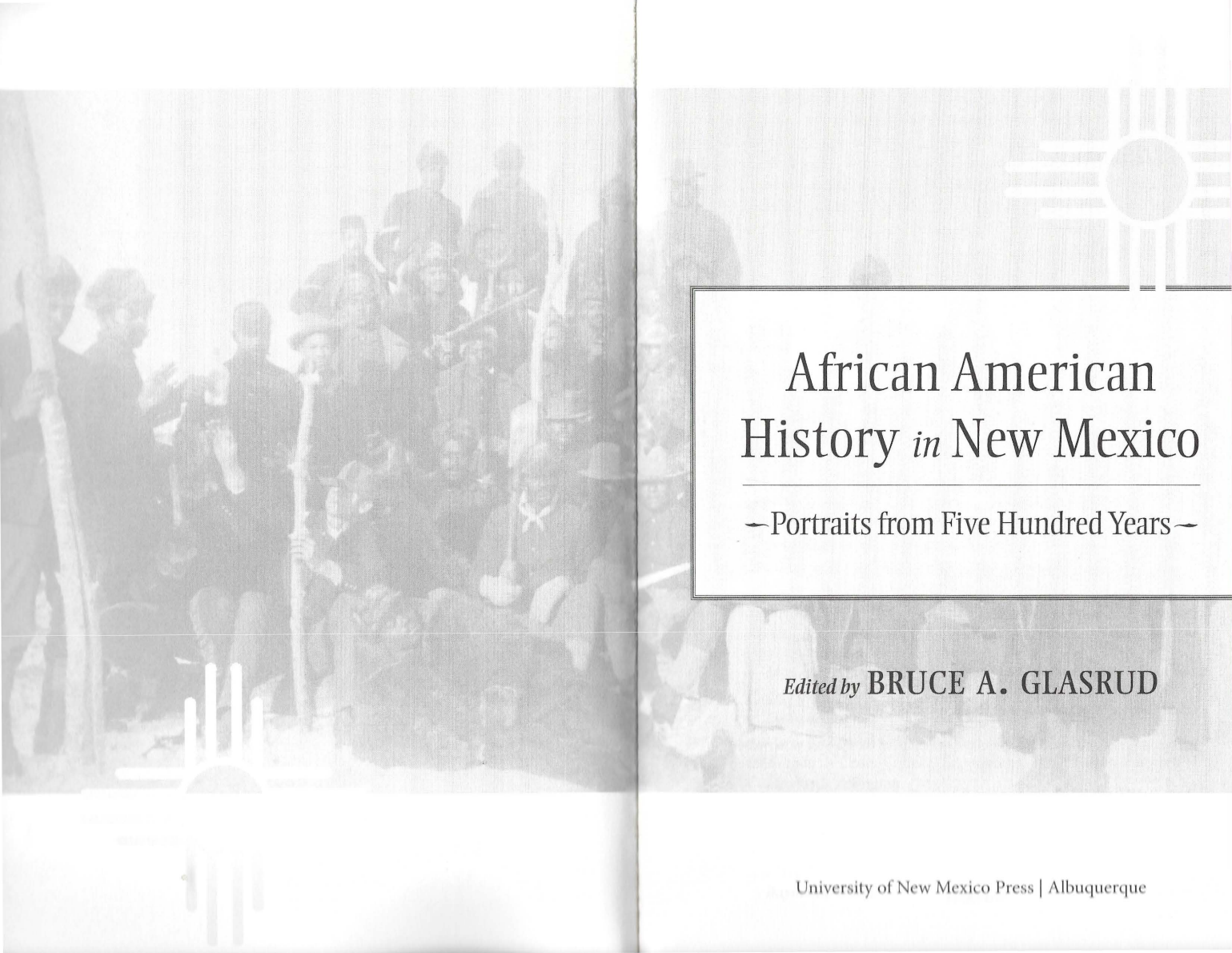




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10

Community Building on the Border

The Role of the 24th Infantry Band at Columbus, New Mexico,
1916–1922

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● ● ● The black military units created by Congress immediately after the Civil War played prominent roles in settling the West. In the past two decades a number of works have recognized the contributions of these regiments; however, most have dealt primarily with the military experience of blacks on the frontier in the post-Civil War era.¹ In the twentieth century these same black regiments continued their tradition of military service in the West when the Mexican Revolution brought black soldiers to duty along the Mexico–United States border.

On March 9, 1916, Mexican Revolutionary Pancho Villa and a band of his followers launched an attack on Columbus, New Mexico, a small, isolated community in Luna County, three miles north of the Mexican border. Subsequently, the United States organized a punitive expedition under Gen. John J. Pershing to pursue Villa into Mexico. Two black regiments, the 10th Cavalry and the 24th Infantry, were part of the expedition.² Following the withdrawal of the Punitive Expedition from Mexico on February 5, 1917, the white 12th Cavalry and the black 24th Infantry were stationed at Columbus.³

By the end of March 1917 nearly 1,500 soldiers (1,170 black and 249 white) were stationed at Camp Furlong, just south of the railroad tracks in Columbus. Three years later, in March 1920, there were 4,109 enlisted men at the base, including 3,599 black and 510 white soldiers,

and 75 officers (1 black officer) present for duty. During the military buildup the civilian population of Columbus exploded, from barely 700 in 1916 to over 2,500 by 1920.⁴ At its height Columbus represented one of the single-largest black military communities ever to reside in the West.

Although some social activities at Columbus were segregated, blacks and whites jointly attended most public affairs and a high degree of tolerance prevailed between the races.⁵ While military bands had a tradition of community service and involvement,⁶ at Columbus they took part in most local events, performing at movies and in theater productions, boxing matches and baseball games, YMCA concerts and dances, and parades and holiday celebrations.⁷ Either the overwhelming numbers of the 24th Infantry or the quality of its band resulted in it participating to a greater extent than the 12th Cavalry band in local activities. By performing at integrated activities, the 24th Infantry band helped foster harmonious race relations and the spirit of community while providing blacks with a sense of pride and vibrant social life.

A great deal of interaction between the civilian and military communities centered on wartime community efforts. Two months after the Punitive Expedition left Mexico, the United States declared war on Germany. During the war the people of Columbus, like those across the state and nation, were active in raising funds for the Red Cross. Blacks played a role in many of these fundraising affairs, especially members of the 24th Infantry band. On June 19, 1917, the band provided music for a dance given by the finance committee of the Red Cross. Many of the townspeople as well as a number of officers and their wives from both the 12th Cavalry and the 24th Infantry attended the dance. According to the newspaper, "This was the first time this band had been heard for a local affair and the music made by our colored boys was highly enjoyed by all." The event raised about fifty dollars. The presence of the band was the only indication that blacks attended this activity.⁸

In May 1918 the Red Cross organized another drive to raise funds, and the black community of Columbus and Camp Furlong was involved in these efforts. The Red Cross regional office in Denver, Colorado, assigned Luna County a quota of \$7,000, including a quota for Columbus of \$1,400. The first meeting of the local fundraising

committee was held at Meadow's Drug Store, where they discussed strategy and different plans for the campaign. Chaplain Alexander W. Thomas, the black chaplain of the 24th Infantry, was selected to manage the drive among blacks.⁹

As part of the campaign, a series of fundraising activities were scheduled for the week of May 20–27, including three fundraisers featuring the 24th Infantry band. The black musicians gave their first performance in the form of a concert at the Columbus Theater on Wednesday night, May 22. The following evening the “colored people” gave a dance that was well attended and financially a huge success. On Friday night the band performed for a dance at the Chamber of Commerce building. Due in part to their efforts, the fundraising campaign was a success, as the people of Columbus had exceeded their quota by raising over \$2,200. The local newspaper praised Chaplain Thomas and the other Red Cross committee members for their efforts.¹⁰

In August the Junior Red Cross held a carnival that included food and dancing. The music for the event was jointly provided by the 12th Cavalry and the 24th Infantry bands. The program also included a vocal solo by the mayor's talented daughter, Treva Blair.¹¹

Often musicians from the 24th Infantry played at dances held by regimental officers. These affairs generally took place in the town of Columbus and were widely attended by civilians. One such occasion occurred on George Washington's birthday in 1918, when the officers of the 24th held a dance at the Moline Recreation Hall. Guests from nearby Deming, New Mexico, and El Paso, Texas, attended the party. The following month another dance was held and a large number of out-of-town visitors also were present.¹²

Typically, holiday celebrations and special events included civilian and military, black and white, members of the town. These celebrations usually featured a full schedule of sporting activities, parades, and picnics. Dances, often a part of these festivities, were probably segregated. Some events, however, were particularly unique to Columbus. On March 9, 1919, a memorial service was held for the victims of Pancho Villa's raid. Among the speakers was Chaplain Thompson of the 12th Cavalry, and the 24th Infantry band provided music for the service. A variety of military and civilian officials participated in the well-attended program, including Mayor John R. Blair and Col. G. Arthur Hadsell, commander of Camp Furlong.¹³

The holiday celebration for July 4, 1919, was planned by a biracial committee composed of civilians, military personnel, and representatives of several welfare groups. Since segregated YMCA and War Camp Community Service (WCCS) facilities existed at Columbus, representatives from the black and white branches of these organizations were included on the committee. Titus Alexander (black) and H. J. Packard (white) represented the WCCS; M. F. Mitchell (black) and S. E. Shull (white) represented the YMCA. Other members of the committee were Col. George W. Biegler, chairman; Mayor John Blair; J. H. Culley of the American Red Cross; and Willard E. Holt, president of the Chamber of Commerce.¹⁴

An enormous crowd attended the Independence Day festivities. Lt. Col. Paul R. Manchester, grand marshal, and his mounted staff led a parade through the town, with Colonel Hadsell and the 24th Infantry and Colonel Biegler and the 12th Cavalry following behind. The bands of both units also participated, and at the intersection of Main and Broadway Streets the column halted and played “The Star-Spangled Banner.” Afterward, a large American flag was unfurled by Blanche Ritchie, whose father, W. T. Ritchie, was killed in Pancho Villa's raid. The citizens of Columbus, “with their splendid industrial floats and decorated automobiles,” followed the military procession in the parade. The day was filled with field events, baseball, cowboy sports, and boxing. Later, the 12th Cavalry band gave a “patriotic” concert at the corner of Main and Broadway, which was followed by speeches from Mayor Blair, who presided as master of ceremonies; Lt. James A. McCarthy for the military; Titus Alexander (the black WCCS representative) for the welfare organizations; and Willard Holt for the Chamber of Commerce. In the evening various balls and receptions were held at the army post.¹⁵

Later in the year a special celebration was held that indicated increasingly peaceful border conditions. On September 16 Columbus citizens commemorated Mexican National Independence Day with a parade. About thirty automobiles, predominately decorated with the Mexican national colors, paraded through Columbus led by a U.S. Army band. Later a barbeque dinner was served, and then the crowd, including Colonel Biegler and Mayor Blair, crossed the international border to continue the celebration in the town of Palomas. In the evening, back in Columbus, the 24th Infantry band provided music for

a tree dance at the Khaki Club, the black entertainment facility provided by the WCCS.¹⁶

One holiday celebration unique to the black community at Columbus was Juneteenth, which was celebrated each June 19 to commemorate emancipation.¹⁷ On June 19, 1919, Columbus blacks held a picnic at nearby Hermanas Grove to honor the day; however, many black soldiers were unable to attend. Earlier a large contingent of soldiers was sent to El Paso, Texas, to prepare for a confrontation with Pancho Villa's forces at Juarez, Mexico. Still, some soldiers marked the occasion in El Paso with blacks in that city at festivities at Washington Park. The musicians of the 24th Infantry were among those invited to participate.¹⁸

Military bands performed at a wide variety of community events. Minstrel shows had been a popular form of entertainment among Americans for many years, and Columbus citizens enjoyed these programs, too. On February 23, 1917, the men of the recently arrived 24th provided a free minstrel show in the Columbus Theater. The regimental band provided the music for the show, with a quartet from Company F offering "many pleasant selections."¹⁹ The event was widely attended by the citizens of Columbus and military officers and their wives. Although one historian has suggested that early members of the 24th Infantry objected to minstrel shows and refused to perform, records indicate that black soldiers at Columbus participated in these shows.²⁰

In August 1918 the 24th Infantry band gave a concert at Camp Furlong's YMCA building, initiating a regular concert series that proved popular among soldiers and civilians alike. The performances featured the regimental bands from the 12th Cavalry and the 24th Infantry, which rotated concerts. An estimated 1,875 soldiers and civilians attended the 24th Infantry's performance at the end of the month.²¹

Smaller orchestras consisting of members from the 24th Infantry band provided music for a variety of functions in the black community. On October 29, 1919, the Dunbar Literary Circle held a Halloween ball for nearly five hundred guests at the 24th Infantry Khaki Club, purported to be "one of the largest and most elaborate affairs yet given in the city for some time." The facility was artistically decorated for the occasion, and "many of the novel and charming costumes were in evidence." The most striking feature of the evening was the search

for several \$2.50 gold pieces hidden throughout the hall. One of the 24th's orchestras provided the music, which was directed by "Musicalian of the First-Class [Robert] Thaddieus."²²

Black women, mostly wives of black soldiers, formed a variety of social clubs at Columbus, among them the 24th Infantry Women's Club, the Star Club, the Lilly White Club, the Silver Leaf Whist Club, and the Willing Workers. But the women's club activities sometimes included men, and on more than one occasion members of the 24th Infantry Women's Club had refreshments and dancing with their husbands after their meeting. Members of the regimental band usually furnished music.²³

Musicians from the 24th also performed at private parties and affairs held by members of the black community. Whist parties and dances were the most popular, as were birthdays and anniversaries of the higher-ranking enlisted men and their spouses. On June 3, 1920, Mrs. S. I. Prince, wife of Sergeant Prince of Company I, celebrated her birthday at Camp Furlong's Service Club. The party included whist and other games and dancing to melodies provided by members of the 24th Infantry band. Among the numerous guests were several members of the local black community, including Mrs. J. Hubbard, a representative of the local Red Cross, and Ruby Craig, hostess of the Service Club.²⁴

Religious activities were an important dimension of the black community at Columbus, and the 24th Infantry band participated at many services. The local African Methodist Episcopal (AME) mission enjoyed broad support from soldiers and civilians in the town. In August 1918 the black civilian and military community sponsored a charity ball featuring the regimental band to raise funds for the mission.²⁵

In April 1920 World War I personnel reductions forced the transfer of the 12th Cavalry, leaving only the 24th Infantry at Camp Furlong. Gradually, the army began to reduce the number of soldiers assigned along the New Mexico section of the international border. The 24th Infantry band retained its prominent role in providing music at a variety of functions, not only in Columbus but also at other area towns. On Memorial Day in 1921 the band played at Fort Bayard (near Silver City), and in November 1921 it played at the Armistice Day rodeo and celebration at Deming. Smaller orchestras consisting of 24th Infantry

band members continued to regularly perform at dances and social functions in the black community.²⁶

In early 1920 the Columbus Theater Orchestra was formed, consisting of black members of the military and civilian community. Besides providing music for movies, the band performed at a variety of functions, either separately or as a group. Soon renamed the Elite Jazzers, on July 23 they played at a dance for blacks at the Khaki Club and two weeks later at a dance for whites. The owner of the Columbus Theater, James L. Greenwood, arranged to have the orchestra furnish jazz music at dances and rallies for the Luna County Democratic Party. The Democrats proposed activities in every "city, village, and hamlet" in Luna County, and Greenwood believed that the orchestra would draw large crowds. On September 17, 1920, the orchestra provided the music for the Democratic Party's rally and dance at nearby Hondale, and the following night it played for a huge political rally in the national guard armory at Deming. Not about to forget their organizational roots, on December 5, 1920, the orchestra performed classical and other music in a program at the Columbus Theater.²⁷

In November 1920 band members formed a union and established price guidelines: "Dances—per man for the first three hours \$5 and \$1 for each hour over. Deming prices—\$10 per man till midnight. Silver City pricks—\$15 per man until 1 A.M. El Paso prices—\$7.50 for three hours." The new union elected William Warren as president and R. Jackson as secretary-treasurer.²⁸ Other black bands also existed, and in the summer of 1921 the Excelsior Orchestra, composed of members of the 24th Infantry band, advertised "music for any occasion." The band often performed at the Khaki Club.²⁹

Relations in Columbus between blacks and whites were not necessarily the ideal of racial harmony; however, a much better relationship developed and existed there than in many parts of the United States.³⁰ Inevitably, some residents did object to the presence of black soldiers. But business and community leaders realized the military was the economic base of the town, and if the 24th Infantry were removed from Columbus, it was unlikely they would be replaced by white troops. This knowledge no doubt contributed a great deal to the furtherance of satisfactory relations between civilians and black soldiers.

The 24th Infantry's presence at Columbus was the continuation of a long and proud tradition of black military service in the West. While

stationed at Columbus, musicians from the 24th Infantry band participated in concerts and provided other entertainment, performing at segregated and integrated events and functions. They consistently provided music for movies and boxing matches and at a wide variety of events, from parties and parades to fairs, rodeos, and holiday celebrations. Throughout the 24th Infantry's stay at Columbus, its regimental band played an integral role in local activities, helping to foster community spirit and assist in maintaining harmonious race relations. Moreover, the band was a source of inspiration and pride for civilian and military blacks, and by providing entertainment for blacks at segregated events, the band helped create a more active and dynamic black community. Ultimately, reductions in the armed forces and peace along the international border led to the removal of black troops from Camp Furlong in late 1922. While the withdrawal of the 24th Infantry signaled the end of an era for the town, the experiences of its soldiers and band members illustrate some measure of racial cooperation and understanding through turbulent times.

ember 1, 1880. See also *Santa Fe Daily*

, 1888.

r 2, 1890; and Z. R. Bliss to Assistant
he Colorado, November 1, 1893, both

L. R. 65–89; Complaint of James A.
nt by Fort Bayard.

eneral, Department of the Colorado,
Fort Bayard.

Chapter 8

1. The author gratefully acknowledges the cooperation of two native New Mexicans in the preparation of this essay: Mitch Boyer, great-great-grandson of the dreamer William Henry Boyer, and Mitch's aunt, Emma Boyer Flournoy, granddaughter of Ella and Francis Boyer, the courageous pioneer couple who made the dream a reality, at least for a while. Both Mitch and Aunt Emma graciously gave personal interviews and shared private family reunion materials about the Boyer family.

Chapter 9

1. John Lardner, "That Was Pugilism: The White Hopes—1," *New Yorker*, June 25, 1949, 61. Lardner defines a "White Hope" as "an athlete of so-called Caucasian background who might retrieve the heavyweight championship, for the honor of his race, from a Negro incumbent."
2. *Weekly Optic and Live Stock Grower* (Las Vegas), February 17, 1912. Hereafter cited as *Las Vegas Optic*.
3. *Albuquerque Morning Journal*, February 8, 1912.
4. *Las Vegas Optic*, May 4, 1912.
5. *Albuquerque Morning Journal*, May 28, 1912; *Las Vegas Optic*, June 1, 1912.
6. *Albuquerque Morning Journal*, June 2, 3, 1912.
7. *Ibid.*, May 25, June 1, 1912.
8. *Ibid.*, April 14, June 4, 1912; *Las Vegas Optic*, July 6, 1912.
9. *Albuquerque Morning Journal*, May 23, 1912.
10. *Ibid.*, May 22, 1912; *Santa Fe New Mexican*, June 7, 1912.
11. *Las Vegas Optic*, July 27, 1912.

Chapter 10

1. Lawrence B. DeGraaf, "Recognition, Racism, and Reflections on the Writing of Western Black History," *Pacific Historical Review* 44 (February 1975): 22–51; Roger Nichols, ed., *American Frontier and Western Issues: A Historiographical Review* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1986), 208–9, 215, 263–64. For works dealing with black soldiers in the West,

see John M. Carroll, ed., *The Black Military Experience in the American West* (New York: Liveright, 1971); Marvin E. Fletcher, *The Black Soldier and Officer in the United States Army, 1891–1917* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1974); Jack D. Foner, *Blacks and the Military in American History* (New York: Praeger, 1974); Arlen L. Fowler, *The Black Infantry in the West, 1869–1891* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1971); and William H. Leckie, *The Buffalo Soldiers: A Narrative of the Negro Cavalry in the West* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1967). For accounts of blacks serving in New Mexico in the late nineteenth century, see three works by Monroe L. Billington: "Soldiers at Play: Fort Bayard, 1887–1896" (unpublished manuscript); "Black Soldiers at Fort Selden, New Mexico, 1866–1891," *New Mexico Historical Review* 62 (January 1987): 65–80; and "Civilians and Black Soldiers in New Mexico Territory, 1866–1900: A Cross-Cultural Experience," *Military History of the Southwest* (Spring 1989): 71–82.

2. For a good discussion of the Punitive Expedition, see Clarence C. Clendenen, *Blood on the Border: The United States Army and the Mexican Irregulars* (New York: Macmillan, 1969); and Robert B. Johnson, "The Punitive Expedition: A Military, Diplomatic, and Political History of Pershing's Chase After Pancho Villa, 1916–1917" (PhD diss., University of Southern California, 1964). See also William G. Muller, *The Twenty-Fourth Infantry Past and Present: A Brief History of the Regiment Compiled from Official Records, Under the Direction of the Regimental Commander* (n.p., 1923; repr., Fort Collins, CO: Old Army Press, 1972); L. Albert Scipio II, *Last of the Black Regulars: A History of the Twenty-Fourth Infantry Regiment (1869–1951)* (Silver Springs, MD: Roman, 1983); and Edward L. N. Glass, *The History of the Tenth Cavalry, 1866–1921* (Tucson, AZ: Acme Printing, 1921; reprint, Fort Collins, CO: Old Army Press, 1972).
3. Black soldiers in the 9th and 10th Cavalries performed duty on the border prior to Villa's raid and the Punitive Expedition. The 9th Cavalry, at Douglas, Arizona, since September 1912, and the 10th Cavalry, at Fort Huachuca, Arizona, since November 1914, were stationed along the border to enforce neutrality laws and protect U.S. interests following the outbreak of the Mexican Revolution in 1910. See 9th Cavalry Returns, September 1912–December 1915, and 10th Cavalry Returns, November 1914–1916, Returns from Regular Army Cavalry Regiments, 1833–1916, microcopy number 744, Records of the Adjutant General's Office, Record Group 94, National Archives, Washington, D.C. Also see Glass, *History of the Tenth Cavalry*, 65–66; Post Returns, Columbus, New Mexico, July 1914–February 1916, Post Returns, Hachita, New Mexico, December 1915–July 1916, Post Returns, Camp Furlong, New Mexico, March–July 1916, Returns from U.S. Military Posts, 1800–1916, microcopy number 617, Records of the Adjutant General's Office, Record Group 94, National Archives, and Post Returns,

- Camp Furlong, New Mexico, March 1916–December 1922, Records of the Adjutant General's Office, Record Group 407, National Archives (hereafter cited as Post Returns, Camp Furlong, RG 407.)
4. Post Returns, Camp Furlong, RG 407, March 1917, March 1920. The only black officer at Camp Furlong was the chaplain of the 24th Infantry.
 5. Horace D. Nash, "Blacks on the Border: Columbus, New Mexico, 1916–1922" (master's thesis, New Mexico State University, 1988), 170–74.
 6. For a general history of military bands, see William Carter White, *A History of Military Music in America* (New York: Exposition Express, 1944), esp. 90–108. Unfortunately, this work does not specifically mention the bands of the black military regiments. For a brief account of military bands in the West during the late nineteenth century, including those of the black regiments, see Thomas Railsback and John P. Langellier, *The Drums Would Roll: A Pictorial History of U.S. Army Bands on the American Frontier, 1866–1900* (London: Arms and Armour Press, 1987). For other accounts of black regimental musicians, see Billington, "Soldiers at Play," 5–7; Billington, "Black Soldiers at Fort Selden," 65–66; Billington, "Civilians and Black Soldiers," 78–81; Fletcher, *Black Soldier and Officer*, 86–88; and Fowler, *Black Infantry*, 62–64.
 7. Nash, "Blacks on the Border," 170–74.
 8. *Columbus Courier*, June 22, 1917. In July 1918 the army increased its authorization for regimental bands from thirty-eight to forty-eight members. In 1922 the authorization was reduced to thirty-six. White, *History of Military Music*, 100–105.
 9. *Columbus Courier*, May 10, 24, 1918. Chaplain Alexander W. Thomas, Methodist Episcopal (black), was assigned as chaplain to the 24th Infantry in autumn 1917.
 10. *Ibid.*, May 17, 24, 31, 1918.
 11. *Ibid.*, August 16, 1918.
 12. *Ibid.*, February 22, March 29, 1918.
 13. *Ibid.*, March 7, 14, 1919.
 14. *Ibid.*, June 13, 27, July 11, 1919. The segregation of WCCS and YMCA facilities was nationwide practice. See Arthur S. Barbeau and Florette Henri, *The Unknown Soldiers: Black American Troops in World War I* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1974), 41; Charles Flint Kellogg, *NAACP: A History of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People*, vol. 1, 1909–1920 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1967), 259; and Emmett J. Scott, *Scott's Official History of the American Negro in the World War* (n.p., 1919; reprint, New York: Arno Press, 1969), 386–87, 398–407.
 15. *Columbus Courier*, July 11, 1919.
 16. *Ibid.*, September 12, 19, 1919.
 17. On June 19, 1865, Union general Gordon Granger notified Texans about the end of slavery from Galveston. Nash, "Blacks on the Border," 126–27. Most black communities celebrate January 1, the day the Emancipation Proclamation went into effect in 1863, as Emancipation Day. Fletcher, *Black Soldier and Officer*, 87.
 18. *Columbus Courier*, June 13, 20, 27, 1919; *El Paso Herald*, June 19, 1919.
 19. *Columbus Courier*, February 23, 1917; Alvin F. Harlow, "Minstrel Shows," in *Dictionary of American History*, vol. 4, rev. ed. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1976), 359; Billington, "Soldiers at Play," 7; Fowler, *Black Infantry*, 84. For a detailed history of minstrels, see Edward Le Roy Rice, *Monarchs of Minstrelsy, from "Daddy" Rice to Date* (New York: Kenney, 1911).
 20. Fletcher, *Black Soldier and Officer*, 100; *Columbus Courier*, March 8, 1917, August 30, September 27, October 4, 1918.
 21. *Columbus Courier*, July 26, August 9, 23, 1918.
 22. *Ibid.*, October 10, November 7, 1919; Safe Deposit Record Cards, Columbus State Bank Records, Luna County Courthouse, Deming, New Mexico. Thaddieus was a member of the 24th Infantry band.
 23. *Columbus Courier*, April 18, May 30, June 6, 13, July 4, 18, 25, August 1, 8, 15, 22, September 5, 1919, January 23, 30, March 12, June 3, 4, 7, 20, December 3, 1920.
 24. *Ibid.*, November 14, 19, 1919, January 23, 30, March 12, June 3, 4, 7, 20, December 3, 1920.
 25. *Ibid.*, November 24, 1916, February 16, 1917, August 16, 1918, May 30, June 6, 13, September 19, 1919; *Deming Headlight*, October 28, 1921.
 26. *Columbus Courier*, July 23, September 28, October 25, 1920; *Deming Graphic*, August 9, 1921; *Deming Headlight*, June 2, 10, 1921.
 27. *Columbus Courier*, July 23, 30, September 24, December 5, 1920.
 28. *Ibid.*, November 5, 1920.
 29. *Columbus Mirror*, June 21, July 5, 15, 22, 1921; *Deming Headlight*, July 15, 22, 1921.
 30. Gerald D. Nash, *The American West in the Twentieth Century: A History of an Urban Oasis* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1977), 73; John Hope Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of the Negro Americans*, 5th ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1980), 323–60; Chaplain's Monthly Reports, Alexander W. Thomas, January 1919, box 7, Record Group 247, Office of the Chief of Chaplains, National Archives. For more detail on race relations in Columbus, see Nash, "Blacks on the Border"; and "Investigation, Twenty-fourth Infantry, Columbus 1922," file in the Governor Merritt C. Mechem Papers, New Mexico State Records Center and Archives, Santa Fe, New Mexico.