Soldiers of the Twenty-third Kansas Volunteer Infantry.
"To Serve Faithfully"

The Twenty-third Kansas Volunteer Infantry and the Spanish–American War

by Christopher C. Lovett

During the 1870s many African Americans moved to Kansas from Kentucky, Louisiana, Texas, Mississippi, and Tennessee. These migrants sought better economic opportunities and an escape from the political oppression imposed by the so-called "Re-deemers"—white elites who regained their pre-Civil War positions in the South following Reconstruction. Many settled in predominately white towns and cities, including Kansas City, Wichita, Lawrence, and Topeka, while others established colonies in such locales as Nicodemus and Dunlap. Although Kansas offered considerable promise, the state's citizens and lawmakers practiced systematic discrimination toward the exodusters, as the new immigrants were called.¹ The profession of arms, according to some in the black community, offered one path to racial and social equality for African Americans in Kansas, and by 1898 many black Kansans believed that the Spanish–American War could provide them an opportunity to achieve equality with white Kansans. Many hoped for this result despite the U.S. Supreme Court's 1896 ruling in Plessy v Ferguson, which set the stage for de jure and de facto "Jim Crow" discrimination in accommodations, education, and transportation throughout most of the United States.

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This article is the story of the Twenty-third Kansas Volunteers, a “colored” regiment recruited for service in the Spanish-American War. Since the white press rarely gave the Twenty-third much notice or credit, the regiment’s history and achievements have been virtually lost in the back pages of newspapers and forgotten documents in the state’s archives. But it is a story that needs to be told and added to the rich military tradition of African Americans in Kansas. Even more important, it is a tale of achievement and victory against the racial stereotypes and prejudice prevalent in Kansas during the Gilded Age.

During the Civil War blacks enlisted in the army and fought for the Union. Senator and General James H. Lane, despite Washington’s directives, helped organize a regiment of former slaves as early as August 20, 1862. Lane designated the unit as the First Kansas Colored Volunteers. The regiment, composed mostly of fugitives from Missouri and Arkansas, became a first-rate unit and was the first African American unit formed in a Northern state during the Civil War. Soon after its organization and without permission from the War Department, Lane ordered the regiment into Missouri “in the finest Jayhawking tradition” and defeated Confederate guerrillas at Island Mound near Butler.2

Following the Civil War black Kansans served in the unorganized militia in Lawrence, Leavenworth, Kansas City, Topeka, and Wichita. The units mostly were ceremonial and fraternal. Officers were not commissioned by the governor and the units, such as the Lawrence Guards, the Garfield Rifles of Leavenworth, and the Logan Rifles of Topeka, were not officially sanctioned by the state. Samuel W. Jones, who became the commanding officer of Company E, Twenty-third Kansas Volunteer Infantry in July 1898, noted that he was a former “captain of an independent militia company” and not of the National Guard.3 As late as 1886–1887, according to the Kansas Constitution, membership in “the militia shall be composed of all able-bodied white male citizens between the ages of twenty-one and forty-five years except such as are exempt by the laws of the United States or of this State.”4

In 1885 Adjutant General Alexander B. Campbell recommended that “the word ‘white’ be stricken from


4. Kansas State Adjutant General, Fifth Biennial Report, 1885–6 (Topeka: Kansas Publishing House, 1886), 15; Ariel E. Draper, Proceedings and Debates of the Kansas Constitutional Convention (Wyandotte, Kan.: S. D. MacDonald, 1859), 10. The situation found in the militia was no different from the status of education in Kansas. Prior to the dismissal of blacks from the militia under the National Guard reorganization of 1885, the Kansas legislature passed an amendment to the state school code that maintained racial segregation on the elementary level. The law only applied to schools in cities or towns of more than fifteen thousand people, but by the 1890s approximately 90 percent of the black population of Kansas lived in urban areas where legal segregation was the rule. The 1879 law applied to only three districts, but that number increased to twelve, and in 1945 Kansas City, Kansas, was authorized to segregate its high schools. See Paul E. Wilson, A Time To Lose: Representing Kansas in Brown v. Board of Education (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1995), 39.
the constitution.” Campbell believed that “it no longer means anything there, it being virtually stricken out by force of the constitution of the United States, yet it is a source of annoyance to many of our colored citizens, and our State constitution should be made to conform to the amendments affecting the colored race.” Campbell created an opening in his recommendations that “if the colored people desire to perform military duty, they should not be in terms forbidden by our organic law.” He believed that the provision was a mere “relief of the days of slavery which ought to be blotted out of our constitution.”

Ironically, the creation of the National Guard that same year allowed Kansas to purge blacks from the militia rolls by officially sanctioning designated units as fundamental to the Kansas National Guard. In 1889 Adjutant General John N. Roberts noted that the law of 1885, authorizing the establishment of the National Guard, repealed the old militia law. The repeal of that section of the law requiring annual enrollment of the unorganized militia meant those units not recognized as part of the Kansas National Guard vanished from the Kansas adjutant general reports after 1885. This was particularly true for black units that strove for official recognition. When blacks sought to integrate their paramilitary or fraternal units into the Kansas Guard, they were told that this could happen only if existing white units were disbanded. Guard officials, to placate African American concerns, inspected black formations but always found them to be deficient in training, leadership, and equipment. As a concession to the black electorate, the Republican legislature authorized payment to select black military organizations for armory space. But it was Governor John W. Leedy and the Populists, not the party of Lincoln, who were the first to offer black Kansans the opportunity to serve during the Spanish–American War.

The Republican Party usually took black voters for granted in the 1880s and 1890s, but the majority remained loyal. Before the outbreak of the Spanish–American War, however, blacks began questioning the tenets of the GOP, especially in regard to race. Consequently, some African Americans moved toward the Populist Party. On February 17, 1898, Topeka’s Colored Citizen attacked the Republicans, telling readers that the Emancipation Proclamation was issued not “out of sheer love and affection,” but out of military necessity. “The historical position occupied by the Republican Party in connection with emancipation, being constantly misrepresented, has created many mistaken ideas and impressions among our people.” Those views were echoed earlier, particularly by J. Monroe Dorsey, editor and publisher of the Parsons Weekly Blade, who believed that blacks should place their faith only in “a good Winchester and the wrought iron determination to use it.”

As with the rest of America, the black community and the black press followed the situation in Cuba as early as 1895. The Spanish–American War’s origins were linked to the quest to sell newspapers. Joseph Pulitzer and William Randolph Hearst had become involved in a fierce media competition that created a national frenzy involving sensational news stories, better known as “yellow journalism.” Both publishing giants used the Cuban revolution of 1895 to hawk papers and to dramatize Spanish misrule in Cuba. When Cuban rebels attacked sugar plantations, mills, and ambushed Spanish troops, Spanish commander General Valeriano “Butcher” Weyler instituted a concentration camp

6. Ibid., Seventh Biennial Report, 1889–90 (Topeka: Kansas Publishing House, 1890). 5. The Kansas Constitution was amended in 1887 and the word “white” was stricken from Article 8, Section 1, and adopted on November 6, 1888, by a vote of 223,474 to 22,251. See Kansas Statutes Annotated, Kansas and the United States Constitutions (1988), 148.
7. John N. Roberts to Lyman Humphrey, May 15, 1892, box 1, folder 2, Correspondence, Lyman Humphrey Administration, Records of the Governor's Office, Library and Archives Division, Kansas State Historical Society; Roberts to Humphrey, November 4, 1892, ibid. Unofficially blacks were barred from the Kansas Guard well into the 1960s.
8. Colored Citizen (Topeka), February 17, 1898.
system where he randomly imprisoned Cuban insurrectos. The newspaper moguls kept up the pressure on Madrid and Washington and inflamed passions on both sides of the Atlantic.  

As a result, the American public clamored for war with the “Dons,” as newspapers called the Spanish at the time, and President William McKinley, the last Civil War veteran elected president, was sensitive to the national hysteria. He had seen war firsthand and realized, more than many others, the horrors of battle. Shortly before his death in 1901, McKinley would tell his private secretary that the Spanish–American War was “the greatest grief of my life.”  

The Spanish minister in Washington, Dupy de Lome, realized McKinley’s frustration and informed his government that the president was “weak and a bidder for the admiration of the crowd.” The de Lome letter was intercepted by the Cuban rebels and published by the Hearst press on February 9, 1898. Less than a week later, on February 15, the USS Maine, sent to Havana to protect American interests, mysteriously blew up while in the harbor. Many Kansans, both black and white, believed that the dastardly Spanish sunk the battleship, and they demanded swift retribution.

Hearst sent his best reporter, Richard Harding Davis, and his most talented artist, Frederic Remington, to Cuba to report on the conflict. In Havana, Remington became bored and wired Hearst: “There is no trouble here. There will be no war. I wish to return.” Hearst quickly replied: “You furnish the pictures and I’ll furnish the war.”  

Hearst organized the escape of Evangelina Cisneros, a woman Hearst claimed was imprisoned for defying the proposition of a Spanish officer. Her story only escalated the crisis, and created the impression that the Cuban rebels were “white.”

The Spanish government realized that it was hopeless to challenge the Americans in the Caribbean and was willing to reach an agreement with Washington by April 9. Unfortunately, McKinley was pressured by those within and without Congress to declare war on Spain. The pressure was so great that McKinley resorted to sedatives in order to sleep. On April 11 the president sent a message to Congress asking for “the forcible intervention” of the United States to restore peace to the troubled island. The headlines of the Topeka Daily Capital on that day cried: “It Is Certain To Be Armed Intervention In Cuba” and “M. Kinley Asked To Inform Ignorant Americans” of the crisis with Spain.

Historian Willard B. Gatewood Jr. was correct when he noted, “The editors of black newspapers in the state clearly sympathized with the oppressed Cubans whose plight was likened to that of black Americans in the South.”  

The State Ledger of Topeka, for instance, argued that “we are for saving Cubans because they are black.” Other African American papers believed that expansion would bring economic benefits to black Kansans, and some even wondered about the possibility of colonization to a more hospitable political climate. The Colored Citizen questioned whether “the Cuban government [can] offer an inducement to settle to American blacks?”


15. W. A. Swanberg, Citizen Hearst (New York: Scribner, 1961), 107; see William Randolph Hearst to John W. Leedy, April 19, 1898, box 2, folder 2, Correspondence, John W. Leedy Administration, Records of the Governor’s Office, Library and Archives Division, Kansas State Historical Society, hereafter cited as Governor’s Records.

16. Linderman, Mirror of War, 27.


19. State Ledger (Topeka), April 19, 1898; Colored Citizen, April 21, May 26, September 21, 1898.
As war neared, the political and racial situation in Kansas changed for most African Americans. The southern black press reported increasing incidents of vigilantism, and the articles reached readers in Kansas. The death of a young mulatto woman in Topeka who claimed that she was bearing the child of a leading white Topekan raised additional concerns. The plight of African Americans was no different in other parts of the state. The Colored Citizen reported that “if the Negro does not have a better show at the bar of justice in Heaven than he does at the bar of justice in Emporia, he had better jump his bond right now.” Even after the declaration of war on April 24, 1898, many Kansas blacks thought that the black community “will be induced to go to Cuba, so that our objectionable presence be removed from the mainland, leaving this vexed question [of racial justice for blacks] to be managed by Cuba either as a republic or a territory of the U.S., as best it can.”

President McKinley initially called for 125,000 volunteers to augment the small regular army. The president’s initial appeal required Kansas to supply three regiments of infantry, or approximately three thousand men. Because of the earlier politicalization of the National Guard as a militant arm of the Republican Party, Governor Leedy, a Populist, bypassed the National Guard when manning the volunteer regiments. Leedy’s decision, however, did not exclude former guard officers from choice billets with the volunteers. Instead, Leedy’s decision gave other men, even Republicans, a chance to win fame on distant battlefields with the volunteer units.

Kansas quickly reached its quota for volunteers, yet the first regiments—Twentieth, Twenty-first, and Twenty-second—were all white. As soon as the call was made, Harry Holmes and James Gage, two African Americans in Wichita, attempted to enlist but were rejected. Samuel Jones recalled, “These two men, bosom friends, applied to the enlisting officer the second day after the office opened. . . . They were refused, were told by the recruiting officer that he had no authority to enlist other than white men.”

Black community leaders supported American goals and hoped, as Willard Gatewood theorized, “that participation in the military effort must be of a kind that would enhance, not degrade, his status and rested upon the assumption that once the war was

20. Colored Citizen, March 3, 1898; State Ledger, March 5, 1898; Topeka Daily Capital, March 1, 2, 3, 1898. Dr. A. S. Embree, minister of the First Methodist Church in Topeka, was accused of “ruining” Lena Girth, a biracial woman, who died following an abortion. Two days later Lena Girth’s mother was accused of blackmailing Embree. The black physician who performed the “illegal operation” was charged with murder in Lena Girth’s death.


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over Uncle Sam would 'sweep his own door stone.'" 24

Still, an element of the black press was not fully supportive of American imperialism. The _Colored Citizen_, a Populist paper, argued that despite the war fever that followed the sinking of the _Maine_, a conflict with Spain would not take place unless "Wall Street so orders it." If war did come, however, black soldiers "will be the first sent to Cuba, to fight for it's [sic] freedom from Spanish banditry for the alleged reason that they can stand the climate better and stop a Spanish bullet as effectively as a white soldier can." 25

Ultimately, political issues drove the decision to recruit blacks in Kansas. In the 1890s the agrarian revolt that swept the nation and in particular the Plains attracted many small black farmers to the cause. James Beck was one such individual who had cast his lot with Kansas Populists. Beck was born in Jackson County, Tennessee, arrived in Kansas in 1875, and started farming in Wamego, Wabaunsee County. The agricultural troubles plaguing Kansas and the nation in the 1890s led Beck to enter state politics and the People's Party. More important, he became concerned with the Republicans' attitude toward blacks. While most blacks stayed with the GOP, Beck and some other black leaders supported the Populists, particularly Lorenzo Lewelling, the Populist candidate for governor, who had a decent record on race. After the 1896 Populist-Democratic fusion victory, Governor Leedy appointed Beck assistant state mining engineer. 26

Leedy undoubtedly was willing to form a black regiment to increase his core supporters in the coming November elections. Some scholars believe it was the combined pressure of black church figures and black editors that contributed to Leedy's decision to raise a black regiment. 27 A survey of Leedy's correspondence in April and May 1898, with few exceptions, does not support that contention. Even before the declaration of war Leedy received a letter on April 1 from John L. Waller, a former deputy prosecutor from Shawnee County and ex-U.S. consul to Madagascar. Waller reminded Leedy of his prior service with the Lawrence Guards as first sergeant and second lieutenant and his


27. Gatewood, "Kansas Negroes and the Spanish–American War," 303–5; Citing the _State Ledger_ for June 25 and July 23, 30, 1898, Gatewood concluded that pressure existed to form a black regiment. See Willard B. Gatewood Jr., _"Smoked Yankees" and the Struggle for Empire: Letters from Negro Soldiers_, 1898–1902 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1971), 103. Gatewood, however, failed to examine the governor's administrative correspondence to see if black opinion leaders put undue pressure on Leedy at the time. Unfortunately, no such evidence exists.
willingness to offer his services to the state. Leedy no doubt informed Waller not only of his intentions but of the status of McKinley's first call, and he provided Waller with an indication of possibly creating a black regiment in the future. Waller wrote Leedy again on April 26 and noted, "Certainly, in as much as you have assured me in a formal letter that you would see that all the citizens of Kansas would be fairly treated in selecting volunteers in the honor of the government and free Cuba, you will allow us one out of the three regiments to be raised." Of course, like many other men of privilege and status in Kansas during the Spanish-American War, he sought command of the regiment. From Leavenworth, D. A. Jones wrote Leedy that a meeting of "Loyal and Patriotic Colored Citizens of this city and county will be held this evening for the purpose of organizing several companies of Colored Volunteers to serve in the army of the U.S. in the war against Spain or any other nation... provided that we are permitted to elect our own people as officers."

Beck told the annual meeting of the Kansas State Historical Society on January 16, 1900, that the idea to form the Twenty-third regiment "originated with me." Unlike some individuals in the black press, he believed that "it would not be practical to mix the colored and white boys in the same regiment." Unfortunately, Beck did not tell us very much about the early decision to form the unit, but efforts of leading black clergymen should not be discounted, particularly the efforts of Reverend William L. Grant of Topeka. Grant and Benjamin F. Foster met with the adjutant general and urged the organization of a black regiment. An account in the press quoted Reverend Grant as having said, "The colored men of Kansas desire a regiment of infantry" and that in several counties efforts are "now being made to complete the organization." A meeting was arranged between Leedy and a black delegation led by Reverend Grant on May 27. Leedy informed the delegation that it "would be impossible to arrange to recruit a full regiment of colored men at this time, but that arrangements might be made to give them representation by one or more companies." As a result, historians have had to speculate on the origins of the Twenty-third Kansas. Randall Woods, for example, claims that the Twenty-third originated with the initial hope that a black company would be attached to each of the three white regiments, but by then the three white regiments had departed Topeka.

James D. Stanley wrote Leedy that he had read an article in the May 3 Pittsburg Tribune that "you agreed to allow one Col. Company of Volunteers [and] I write you for permission of enlisting a colored company... from Cherokee and Crawford Counties, as


29. John L. Waller to John W. Leedy, April 26, 1898, box 2, folder 3, Governor's Records. This is the second of three letters Waller sent Leedy offering to organize a black unit.

30. D. A. Jones to John W. Leedy, April 30, 1898, ibid. Earlier, Jones was a member of the Garfield Rifles, a black militia unit. Leedy disregarded Jones's offer.

31. James M. Beck, "Organization and Services of the Twenty-Third Kansas Regiment," Kansas Historical Collections, 1897-1900 (1900): 143.


33. "No Colored Regiment, Though Some Colored Companies May Be Accepted," ibid.

34. "Colored Citizen," April 28, 1898, Pittsburg Tribune, May 3, 1898; Woods, A Black Odyssey, 183-90. Woods cites the article in the Colored Citizen of April 28 and a letter from W. H. Wilson from Fort Scott to support this position. See W. H. Wilson to John W. Leedy, May 26, 1898, box 2, folder 5, Governor's Records. A rumor in the press reported that Leedy was holding one company back for black Kansans. The Topeka press claimed, "In his call for troops Governor Leedy has provided for thirty-five companies. Kansas's quota is thirty-six companies, consequently there is a vacancy existing. It is rumored that the governor is holding back the call for the remaining company for colored men who desire to enlist. It is said that when the requirements of the present call have been met, the governor will call for recruits for one company, exclusively from the colored citizens of the state." See "Remembers the Colored Men. Governor Leedy Saving One War Company for Colored Citizens," in "Kansas in the Spanish-American War Scrapbook," 307. The Twentieth Kansas departed Topeka for California and arrived on May 20, the Twenty-first left Topeka on May 17, and the Twenty-second departed Topeka on May 25. From that information it appears doubtful that Leedy planned to attach black companies to the three white regiments. It seems more likely that Leedy was planning to organize an all-black unit, a "regiment minus," or a regiment containing only two battalions.

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we have a good many Colored young men who are patriotic and wish to help defend the cause of America." It appears that at least one Populist paper reported the initial article from the Colored Citizen of April 28, 1898, and Stanley was influenced by the report. Woods believed that recruiters from Leavenworth, Douglas, Wyandotte, and Shawnee Counties sent potential black recruits to Topeka. Yet, no evidence exists in the adjutant general reports or the governor's correspondence that confirms this assertion. However, many blacks appeared at Camp Leedy at the Topeka fairgrounds as an aftermath of rumors that the governor intended to add a company of African Americans to one of the three regiments. Likewise, a black enclave was located east of the fairgrounds near the current site of Monroe School, and the residents were attracted to the excitement found at Camp Leedy. The white volunteers had considerable time on their hands and, not surprisingly, some racially motivated trouble ensued.

In the late nineteenth century one form of recreational "fun" was "blanketing." Blanketing was a game in which a number of volunteers tightly held a blanket and proceeded to bounce a trooper into the air. For whites it was sport, but for black victims forced against their wills to participate, it was a form of harassment. On May 8, following one especially hideous blanketing incident, black Topekans and white volunteers proceeded to assault each other throughout the city. The situation was so serious that Major General Charles McCrum, camp commandant, ordered all blanketing stopped immediately.66 In light of the riot, it seems that if Leedy had sought to form a black regiment, or even attach a black company to the existing white regiments, he would have incited further trouble. Thus, Leedy's goal to form a black regiment would have to come after the white regiments left Topeka.

After the first call, the next opportunity for a black regiment came when President McKinley made his second call for an additional 75,000 volunteers on May 25, 1898. The Kansas quota was set at 1,668 men, and Leedy made the decision on May 29 to create a black unit. It was a first; there were no black units in the Kansas National Guard before 1898. The black community enthusiastically endorsed Leedy's decision, which the governor hoped to turn into votes in the upcoming November election.67 A recent historian contends that even though Leedy had a cordial relationship with the black community and supported black interests, the African American community did not necessarily vote for him in the numbers the governor anticipated.68

With the decision made to form a black regiment, Leedy formally announced on June 22 that the Twenty-third Kansas Volunteer Infantry was to be commanded by black Kansans. Newspapers reported, "All new companies will be granted the same privileges accorded the white companies—that of electing their own officers." The Topeka Daily Capital reminded the public that "of course, they [the black troops] may elect white company officers if they choose."69 Many white Kansans willingly sought commissions in the Twenty-third, just as they did during the Civil War. Thomas J. Jackson of Newton, for instance, wrote the governor well before the war's outbreak on April 2 and requested "the authority to enlist a regiment of colored men." Jackson noted that his qualifi-

36. For support of that contention, see H. C. Corbin to J. M. Lewis, September 28, 1898, box 1, folder 5, Governor's Records; M. I. Luddington to John W. Leedy, October 4, 1898, ibid.; H. W. Wilson to Leedy, May 26, 1898, box 2, folder 5, ibid.
37. Gatewood, "Kansas Negroes and the Spanish–American War," 309. When the election was held only 283 of 800 men in the regiment actually voted. Traditionally, African Americans voted Republican, but in the 1890s a subtle change occurred that altered black voting patterns. Only 35 percent of the regiment actually voted according to the news reports, and other factors rather than Populist disenchantment could account for the low numbers. The Topeka Daily Capital, a Republican paper, reported "this shows that a surprising number were not of age or who for some other reason did not vote" (author's italics). See "The Soldier Vote," Topeka Daily Capital, December 8, 1898.
38. "The Colored Troops Will Be Officers by Men of Their Own Race," ibid., June 22, 1898. It should be noted that most accounts of the Twenty-third are found in the back pages of most white papers at the time, compared with accounts of the Twentieth, Twenty-first, and Twenty-second, found on pages one through five.
Following President McKinley's second call for volunteers, the decision to form the Twenty-third Kansas Volunteer Infantry was formally announced on June 22, 1898. Enlistees included E. and F. Simons (left) and Paul Shroeder (right).

Like Civil War veterans, some white political figures had hoped to receive commissions in the new regiment, but Leedy quickly put those ideas to rest and never entertained the likelihood of whites commanding black troops. The question of who would fill the key billets in the Twenty-third was open to speculation. The prime candidate to command the Twenty-third was Lieutenant Charles Young, the third black to graduate from West Point and the last black graduate for nearly fifty years. Leedy made inquiries of Young's availability by contacting the War Department on June 21, 1898. The War Department cabled Leedy and notified him that Young was commanding a black Ohio battalion at Camp Alger, Virginia. Through the good offices of Colonel Henry C. Lindsey, the regimental commander of the Twenty-second Kansas and politically a Populist, Leedy managed to offer Charles Young the command of the Twenty-third. Out of courtesy to his native state, Major Young notified Ohio governor Asa S. Bushnell of Leedy's proposal. Bushnell sent a telegram to Leedy proposing that the two battalions of the Twenty-third be merged with the Ninth Ohio, with the concurrence of the War Department. Then Major Young could be promoted to colonel, and Governor Leedy could appoint the lieutenant colonel and the majors of the Kansas battalions. Of course, according

39. Thomas J. Jackson to John W. Leedy, April 2, 1898, box 1, folder 10, Governor's Records.

to Bushnell, the combined unit would be designated as the Ninth Ohio.41

Young told Lindsey on June 22 that “after mature deliberation” he had to reject Governor Leedy’s proposal. Young wrote Lindsey, who forwarded Young’s letter to the governor, “that my action in this matter is based entirely upon my duty to my country, my race and myself.” Charles Young declined the offer and acknowledged it was a proposal that “no member of my race in America has ever held in the service of his country . . . and the honor is one I would like to possess.” Young decided to reject the offer and uphold his initial commitment to Governor Bushnell and the Wilberforce Cadets. Still, Leedy wired Young on July 1, and Young quickly responded and wrote Leedy that he had a responsibility for the fifteen cadets from Wilberforce University who joined the Ninth Battalion, since he was their instructor. More important, “Their parents allowed them to join this organization because I was here to care for them as far as possible: therefore I felt in honor bound to remain with the Ohio organization.”42

After Young refused Leedy’s offer to command the Twenty-third, the governor had to turn to a leading African American in Kansas to command the unit. While Leedy’s advisers sought a commander, the adjutant general’s office selected Topeka, Atchison, Leavenworth, Fort Scott, Wichita, and Lawrence as recruiting stations. Units were recruited geographically but not limited by those constraints. The adjutant general’s division, however, speculated that twenty-four thousand African American males of all ages were available in Kansas. From those figures, companies would be organized on the ratio of one company per 3,051 males. Eastern Kansas did not face a serious recruitment problem, but in western Kansas, where only three thousand blacks resided, the task was much more difficult.43

As previously mentioned John L. Waller, a prominent Kansas City Republican, was the first African American to volunteer to command the regiment. Following the official announcement, Waller wrote Leedy for an appointment but noted, “I have been informed that it is your intention to appoint my friend, Mr. Beck to the Lieut. Colonely of the two Negro battalions. In the event that you should do so, I will gladly serve as one of the majors to be appointed by your Excellency.” Waller indicated that his strength was not only his integrity, but that he could receive recommendations “of our best citizens of all parties.”44 J. Monroe Dorsey of the Parsons Weekly Blade volunteered to be quartermaster for the Twenty-third and supported Leedy’s decision to appoint James Beck and John Brown as majors for the two battalions, in the process leaving the door open for Charles Young’s appointment as commander of the Twenty-third.45

The Twenty-third was different from the other regiments raised in Kansas during the Spanish–American War. A regiment typically consisted of three battalions. Each battalion had four companies for a total of twelve. A regiment was commanded by a colonel with a lieutenant colonel serving as the executive officer. The battalions were commanded by majors and the companies by captains. The Twenty-third, to use modern terminology, was “a regiment minus,” since it lacked a third battalion. While the Twenty-third and Twenty-first had three battalions and twelve companies, the Twenty-third only had two battalions and eight companies. If the Twenty-third had been a complete, triangular regiment of three battalions, it would have been commanded by a colonel, with a lieutenant

41. Asa S. Bushnell to John W. Leedy, June 25, 1898, box 2, folder 7, Governor’s Records.
42. Charles Young to Henry C. Lindsey [Lindsey]. June 30, 1898, ibid.; Charles Young to John W. Leedy, July 1, 1898, box 3, folder 1, ibid.
44. John Waller to John W. Leedy, April 1, 1898, box 1, folder 10, Governor’s Records; Waller to Leedy, June 22, 1898, box 2, folder 9, ibid.
45. J. Monroe Dorsey to John W. Leedy, June 23, 1898, box 2, folder 7, ibid.
colonel second in command." Unlike the other regiments, the Twenty-third only had two majors in charge of the regiment's two battalions and a lieutenant colonel in command of the unit.

The Twenty-third mobilized so quickly that the adjutant general's office did not have time to locate tents for the troops. Likewise, finding black physicians to serve as regimental surgeons was an unresolved issue. Without acknowledging the level of discrimination in the Gilded Age, the white press stated that "colored physicians who are qualified to pass the [state] board's rigid examination are not as easy to find as a corresponding number of white physicians would be." Many white physicians volunteered for service in Cuba, but Leedy believed black surgeons could be found to fill those billets. Finally a three-man commission of doctors was formed to help recruit black doctors for the Twenty-third. Unlike the other regiments, the Twenty-third lacked a regimental surgeon but found two first lieutenants to serve as assistant surgeons. Charles S. Sunday of Topeka mustered in as a first lieutenant but was discharged in Cuba on December 24, 1898. Frederick D. G. Harvey of Kansas City was the other first lieutenant serving as an assistant surgeon.39

When the first 109 men of the Twenty-third were processed through Camp Leedy, 46 failed their physicals. Adjutant General Hiram Allen noted that although many met the height requirement (a minimum of five foot eight) they were well below the weight standards set by the army. According to the adjutant general, "one applicant, who was lithe and had muscles as hard as iron, fell short of the standard by nineteen pounds." The media reported that as many as one-third of the men seeking to enlist in the Twenty-third were rejected because of impaired eyesight. If the pattern continued, the Topeka Daily Capital believed, "there will be a great deal of trouble in filling the two battalions."40

By the end of June, additional volunteers had arrived at Camp Leedy and bivouacked near the exposition building. A lieutenant from the Eighth U.S. Cavalry was detached from his unit and entered into negotiations with Topeka merchants to supply the encampment with provisions for the Twenty-third. The objective was to provide Camp Leedy with enough provisions for the Twenty-third's eight companies. The Topeka Company, Company A, Twenty-third Kansas Volunteers, was mustered into service, and a contingent from Lawrence, Company B, arrived at the fairgrounds under the command of Captain Sherman A. Harvey, one of the most distinguished African Americans in Kansas, a Republican and a graduate of the University of Kansas. With the inclusion of the men from Lawrence, the strength level at Camp Leedy reached two hundred troops.41

Recruiters were active in enrolling men for the Twenty-third throughout Kansas and apprised the adjutant general's office of the number of men being sent to Camp Leedy. As a result of their efforts, additional troops arrived daily. Still, the press complained that the black community failed to demonstrate its patriotic ardor for the conflict. The Topeka Daily Capital reported that Leavenworth recruits were falling short of their recruitment goals, particularly after fifty-six recruits were accepted for service, yet only thirty-six had arrived in Topeka. From Fort Scott, only fourteen blacks enlisted. The paper went on to say that "three of the recruits were released from the county jail that they might fight for their country." Only one African American enlisted in Newton; two were available from Arkansas City.42

The press claimed that recent news of casualties at Santiago accounted for the lower than expected recruiting figures in the black community. The Topeka Daily Capital questioned the courage and patriotism

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The state’s recruitment goals for the Twenty-third, according to the press, were nearly complete by July 11. Fifty troops still were needed to reach the goal of 872 men, and Adjutant General Allen hoped to raise them in Kansas City, Kansas, where John Waller successfully recruited his company. Other Kansans offered their services or the services of others to help fill the ranks. A concerned citizen from Cottonwood Falls wrote Leedy that John Duncan, a local black clergyman, “is willing to enlist—and he would be a good man to do some recruiting here among the Colored people if he had the proper authority.” The regiment’s strength was not an immediate factor, since the War Department notified Governor Leedy that he was not authorized to raise a third battalion. The secretary of war’s decision of June 18 reached the governor’s office on June 20 and clearly reflected the negotiations taking place to end the conflict during the summer of 1898. Spanish-American negotiations made the recruitment of additional troops unnecessary for a war all but officially over, according to Washington planners. By late July the Twenty-third numbered 864 officers and men, with volunteers coming from Independence, Parsons, Coffeyville, and Cherryvale. Unlike the earlier white regiments, most of the men at Camp Leedy had received their uniforms and were issued the new “dog” tents, large enough for two men. When the second battalion had been organized, Adjutant General Allen sent the War Department a telegram on July 20 to inform U.S. Adjutant General H. C. Corbin that the

of African Americans and concluded that black recruits “folded their tents like Arabs and silently stole away” rather than serve in Cuba. Unfortunately, many Kansas editors overlooked the impact that long-term discrimination and increasing racial antagonism had upon Kansas blacks. Clearly, many African Americans viewed the conflict as a white man’s war fought by black men, echoing the sentiments of the black Populist press. To compensate for the lack of black males willing to volunteer in eastern Kansas, mustering officers sought recruits in rural Kansas and put existing recruits under guard. Still, many African Americans were willing to volunteer, according to Leedy’s correspondence. A. E. Jackson of Guthrie, Oklahoma, for instance, wrote Leedy “I am informed that you have not made up the quota of colored troops” and offered his services to raise “a company from the Indian Territory.”

52. A. E. Jackson to John W. Leedy, July 7, 1898; box 3, folder 1, Governor’s Records.
53. John Waller’s biographer, Randall Bennett Woods, notes that Waller placed ads in the American Citizen and encouraged men to join either of the two battalions formed in Topeka. Likewise, Waller’s wife and daughters prepared meals for the 117 men in his company to keep them from changing their minds about enlisting. See Woods, A Black Odyssey, 191–92. “Colored Troops Wanted.” Topeka Daily Capital, July 12, 1898; “The K. C. Company,” ibid., July 5, 1898. If the Twenty-third was to be limited to only two battalions, then the unit was short approximately fifty men. The other regiments had approximately 450 men per battalion, while the Twenty-third had approximately 425 per battalion. For a comparison, see Kansas State Adjutant General, Twelfth Biennial Report.
54. Herb A. Grisham to John W. Leedy, July 1, 1898, box 3, folder 1, Governor’s Records; Paul Jones to Leedy, July 13, 1898, ibid.; “Back Lieutenant Colonel Gov. Leedy Raises Him a Notch,” Topeka Daily Capital, July 20, 1898.
55. State Ledger, July 23, 1898.
Twenty-third Volunteers had achieved its recruitment goal and was ready for deployment.\textsuperscript{56}

Without being privy to the War Department's plans, the white community was unsure of Leedy's experiment at Camp Leedy with black officers commanding black troops, and the black community realized that the eyes of the nation were on the men of the Twenty-third. Although the \textit{Topeka Daily Capital} credited black troops in the Civil War and the Tenth Cavalry in Cuba for serving with distinction and valor, the editors noted the troops had been commanded by white officers. The \textit{Topeka} press questioned the wisdom of Leedy's decision and reinforced the public's apprehensions about the competency of black officers when it asserted that even the best troops, poorly led, "will make a poor show in battle."\textsuperscript{57}

While the regiment awaited orders, Lieutenant Colonel Beck trained the troops. News accounts related that the regiment drilled at least twice a day. Regular army advisers noted that "the Negroes . . . can be got [sic] ready for service" at Camp Leedy "as fast as at any of the big places of mobilization such as the white boys were sent to." With extended training, and without a clear idea if and when the regiment would leave Topeka, the adjutant general's office assisted the regulars by arranging for additional supplies to be sent to the camp to keep the troops fed for at least an additional forty days.\textsuperscript{58}

Meanwhile black ministers in Topeka established a sanitary commission to look after the troops' moral and physical welfare. They provided books and other reading materials for the camp and earlier had organized a patriotic observation for the Fourth of July. With so many men in camp they also had to confront the problem of vice—gambling, whiskey, and prostitution. The situation became serious enough that officers decided to bar "disreputable women" from entering the camp and to close the compound to all females after 6:00 P.M.\textsuperscript{59}

But the war created a natural romanticism that made the men in camp particularly popular with the young ladies of Topeka. Women soon began collecting buttons from the tunics of various soldiers to whom they were romantically attached, and as a result the men of the Twenty-third became very familiar with their "housewives," or sewing kits, as they put their uniforms back in order. The popularity of the song "The Girl I Left Behind Me" no doubt contributed to the popular admiration of men in uniform. The \textit{Topeka Daily Capital} noted, "Army buttons are very popular with the colored girls and it may be laid down as a general rule that the boy who has all the buttons on his uniform has no sweetheart."\textsuperscript{60}

The war, and especially the Twenty-third Volunteers, captivated the interests of the black community throughout Kansas, and wartime emotions ignited a desire among women, both black and white, to do something before this great adventure passed them by. Coming as it did during an age of heightened political awareness among women, an outgrowth of their extended roles in the late-nineteenth-century American family, the Spanish–American War must have appeared as a fine opportunity.\textsuperscript{61} Women in Kansas were taking active roles in politics through the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, the Kansas Equal Suffrage Association, the People's Party, and the Woman's Relief Corps; and clearly women were motivated to participate in the war in some form, to further break the bonds of the traditional woman's sphere. As one woman noted, while the boys were "eager to go to war . . . women are no less anxious to work for the honor and glory of her

\textsuperscript{56} Of Colored Men: Governor Will Call for Two Battalions," in "Kansas in the Spanish–American War Scrapbook," 308–9. Alger's directive is attached to the article.


\textsuperscript{59} "For the Troop's Welfare," \textit{ibid.}, June 29, 1898.

\textsuperscript{60} "At Camp Leedy," \textit{ibid.}, July 26, 1898; "A Reception for Troops," \textit{ibid.}, July 20, 1898.

\textsuperscript{61} Michael Lewis Goldberg, \textit{An Army of Women: Gender and Politics in Gilded Age Kansas} (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997).
country. [H]ow I wish I was a man never so much as now.” Another wrote, “[A] mother-in-law is not much good at home and I wish my death to be a noble one[,] [D]o send me that I may prove my patriotism.”

Black women were no less patriotic, and a group of black women in Parsons told Leedy: “We think it is our duty to care for [the] wounded soldiers of our country.” One black woman from Kansas City wanted to be “a nurse for the Negro volunteers of Kansas or any other place that I may be useful... The reason I apply to you is because I fully realize that you have did more for my race than any other governor [sic] in the United States to my knowledge.” Not only did black women attempt to enlist in the Medical Corps, but after the Twenty-third was shipped to Cuba and reports reached the public of illness among the troops, they organized a relief association to mobilize the people at home. African American women in Topeka arranged for afternoon meetings to be held at the local Masonic Lodge at 618 Kansas Avenue to collect medical and hospital supplies to aid and comfort hospitalized soldiers in Santiago, Cuba.

The citizenry of Topeka, excluding the business community, waited with trepidation as the first payday—August 11—approached for the men of the Twenty-third. Naturally, the troops eagerly anticipated their wages. A reporter asked one soldier what he intended to do with his $15.65. “Send it home to my wife,” the soldier replied with a wink.” Retailers in Topeka believed that the men of the Twenty-third, like their white counterparts, would spend their earnings at the city’s lunch counters, on amusements, and for other forms of luxury, and thus be an economic boon to the city’s merchants. Topekans with little chance to reap a direct economic benefit, however, apprehensively awaited this occurrence.

62. Vera Gorman to John W. Leedy, April 20, 1898, box 1, folder 10, Governor’s Records.
63. Mrs. John E. Jacobs to John W. Leedy, August 25, 1898, box 3, folder 1, ibid.
64. Gertrude M. Johnson to John W. Leedy, June 1898, ibid., Gertrude E. Durden to John W. Leedy, July 9, 1898, ibid.

After the paymaster arrived, many soldiers went downtown for fun and were lured to the Smoky Row district, the local red light section of Topeka. In an incident clearly racial in scope, the police attempted to apprehend a disorderly soldier, identified as Private Ben Hickey of Company E. The State Ledger, a black paper friendly to the Republican Party, noted that if Hickey was only drunk, “why should they [the police] try to kill him which they cursed and did. We do not know unless they simply wanted to show that Charley Fellows was mayor, and that they would do as they d—m pleased.” When news of the incident reached Camp Leedy, Colonel Beck allegedly uttered to a local black policeman, “If it’s true that one of your officers has beaten up one of our men, as I hear, G—d— you, I’ll turn all of my men loose on your town, and see what you will do about it!” Some black soldiers appeared to threaten the policeman and only the timely order of the colonel saved him from physical harm.

When a large crowd estimated at six hundred attempted to break into the jail and release two detained soldiers—Private Hickey and Lieutenant William Green—Colonel Beck ordered a company of troops to surround the jail. When the crowd left, the two men were returned to camp badly bruised. The Topeka Daily Capital claimed, “The better element of the colored troops denounce the conduct of their riotous comrades, and on the quiet condemned Colonel Beck for his wild utterances.”

After the incident, the city marshal asserted that the police only wanted to maintain order, and he insisted that “it was the duty of the city [police] officers to protect the peace.” City fathers and state officials decided that something had to be done about moving the troops out of Topeka. Within days Charles Curtis, a Republican congressman, convinced President McKinley and Secretary of War Russell A. Alger to
arrange for the Twenty-third to be sent to Santiago, where the situation required "immune" regiments. Since African Americans were "immunes" or believed to be immune to yellow fever and malaria, they were to assist in garrisoning the city. Despite the Smoky Row incident, the Associated Press maintained that "the Twenty-third Kansas is a regiment of colored troops and is said to be an excellent organization."

Colonel Beck ordered his subordinates to strike camp at 3:30 A.M. on August 22. Officially, the regiment was to leave Topeka via the Santa Fe railroad at 9:00 A.M. At 8:00 A.M. Colonel Beck gave the order to move out, and the unit proceeded to march in good order down Topeka Avenue toward the state capitol. Once on the statehouse grounds, Governor Leedy and his staff reviewed the troops. One guest was missing: Congressman Charles Curtis, who did not want to be associated with Leedy and the Kansas Populists. After the governor told the troops that they were a credit "to their race," the Twenty-third marched past Fort Pillow on Ninth Street, home of the Grand Army of the Republic Post No. 321, on their way to the railway station to board the thirty-five cars assigned to move the regiment east.

After three days on the train, the men of the Twenty-third reached Jersey City, New Jersey. From there the men were transported to Brooklyn by ferry and marched to their transport. Along the way, another riot ensued as the men stormed bars, restaurants, and fruit stands near the wharf. Reporters claimed that the "immunes" had been without food for more than twelve hours and that they refused to board the transport to Cuba until they had been fed. One reporter maintained that "when refused food, [the men] laid down their guns and raised 11 places in the neighborhood. The police were powerless to check them."

The troops eventually boarded the transport USS Vigilance for Santiago and their adventure in Cuba. At 7:00 A.M. on August 25, the Vigilance passed Sandy Hook, New Jersey, set a course for Santiago, and arrived in Cuba six days later, on August 31. Once ashore, they discovered that the Eighth Illinois, another black regiment, had arrived two weeks before and had established a headquarters in San Luis. The Twenty-third was the second of three black units in this vicinity; the other was the Ninth Louisiana Immunes, a black unit commanded by white southerners. According to historian Willard Gatewood, the Illinois and Kansas troops believed that they were exceptional, since they were commanded by men of their own race. The three black regiments guarded the five thousand Spanish

72. "The Start to Cuba," in "Kansas in the Spanish–American War Scrapbook," 329–30; "Colored Deserters," ibid., 330. The Topeka police claimed that four or five soldiers deserted as the Twenty-third pulled out of town. This charge was apparently a canard perpetuated by the Topeka Daily Capital, as according to the adjutant general's report no cases of desertion were recorded for the Twenty-third Kansas. See "Table Showing Strength of Volunteer Regiments from Kansas . . ." Kansas State Adjutant General, Twelfth Biennial Report, facing 70.

prisoners of war before they were repatriated to Spain, and the troops manned the town’s defenses against possible guerrilla attack. When the tensions diminished, all three regiments helped restore vital services to San Luis Province by improving roads, repairing bridges, and establishing modern sanitary facilities in the region.75

Once in Cuba, the men of the Twenty-third realized that they were no more immune to malaria and yellow fever than were the white troops who had proceeded them. Captain William B. Roberts, commanding officer of Company F, wrote on September 7, “We have little [sickness] in camp, most of what we have is bad colds and malaria. We have 24 men in the hospital but none seriously sick.”76 Within a week, three other soldiers were hospitalized, but according to Roberts, “our sick list is small compared with the 8th Illinois, which is camped near us here in San Luis.

We have only 27 on sick report in our regiment . . . . There have been five deaths in the 8th Illinois, four dying from sickness and one killed by an accidental gun shot, but we have none as yet.”77

Within a few days of Roberts’s last letter, Private Thomas H. Gaddie of Company G died from typhoid. Gaddie’s death was followed by that of Private Fred Kuykendall, a musician from Topeka and a member of Company B, who died from yellow fever.78 Ten men of the Twenty-third died from malaria, typhoid, or dysentery before the regiment departed from Cuba on March 1, 1899.

The unit also experienced morale problems, and the adjutant general’s report noted that a number of soldiers were reduced in rank and at least five had been court-martialed. Private Ben Hickey, a central figure in the incident in Smoky Row in August, was court-martialed and dishonorably discharged on December 13. The specific charges that contributed to Hickey’s court-martial remain unknown, but he was not the only soldier dismissed from the service. In fairness to the Twenty-third, similar problems plagued the other Kansas regiments during the Spanish–American War. A near mutiny occurred, for instance, in Company E, Twenty-first Kansas Volunteers, but nothing that serious transpired while Lieutenant Colonel James Beck was in command of the Twenty-third.79

Yet, despite the hardships faced by all, some, such as Captain John Waller, were favorably impressed with the land. “A year’s touch of American hand,” he wrote the Parsons Weekly Blade, “and civilization will make Santiago one of the greatest places for money-

76. Roberts quote in ibid., 190.
77. Roberts quote in ibid., 196.
79. J. M. Lewis, Leedy’s private secretary, wrote to General Corbin, adjutant general of the U.S. Army, on October 20, 1898, and in traditional understatement told Corbin that “Quite a number of soldiers from the 21st Kansas regiment were detailed to do hospital work at Lexington, and are afraid that they are not going to be mustered out with their regiment.” See Lewis to Corbin, October 20, 1898, box 3, folder 1, Governor’s Records; George Schlegel and James B. Cully to John W. Leedy, October 18, 1898, ibid.; E. H. Olinger to Leedy, September 20, 1898, ibid.; Edwin Tabor to Leedy, September 22, 1898, ibid.; P. H. Cucumber to Leedy, November 1, 1898, ibid.
making in Cuba, because it sits in the midst of a rich agricultural and thickly populated country." And despite the poverty that reigned supreme, Captain William B. Roberts wrote, "This is a great country of possibilities."

Although black officers were forced to confront racism even in this "great country," clearly racial discrimination and the lack of economic opportunity in Kansas influenced some soldiers to remain in Cuba once their duties had ended. Upon his return to the United States, Major John Waller gathered his family and left for Santiago. For other soldiers enlistment in the volunteer regiments going to the Philippines served as another avenue of escape from the limited possibilities found at home.

The War Department notified the Kansas adjutant general's office that the Twenty-third would leave Cuba and return to Fort Leavenworth, and the Twenty-third broke camp at San Luis and traveled by train to Santiago for embarkation on March 1, 1899. After five days at sea aboard the USS Minnewaska and three days on a troop train, the unit reached Fort Leavenworth on March 9. Once off the train, the troops stretched and some told reporters that it was nice to return to Kansas. Unlike other volunteer units, the Twenty-third was assigned a barracks on post. Upon their return the troops received few if any public demonstrations in their honor, unlike the white regiments, who had been greeted with cheers and celebrations.

Not all troops returned with the regiment; some were too ill to make the journey and were discharged in Cuba. Private William G. Norman of Company G remained in Cuba after the regiment departed, was discharged by telegraphic order on April 10, and died shortly thereafter. Norman's death, however, did not appear in the official statistics of the regiment. A year later, in March 1900, his body was exhumed and his remains were returned to his family in Kansas City.

Still others, as previously mentioned, chose to stay. "Kansas will not get back more than one-half of the Negro troops who are now in Cuba," speculated John Waller in October 1898. "It is not sickness and death that will keep them in Cuba for the Kansas soldiers are in a healthy condition." Instead, Waller noted that the troops had lost their hearts to Cuban women. Perhaps Waller used marriage as a mask for his own sense of alienation and dissatisfaction within the regiment. He was wrong about the number of troops that would remain in Cuba, yet he returned there with his family and attempted to find both economic opportunity and racial justice far from home.

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ficially, the Twenty-third was mustered out of federal service on April 10. Many of the troops returned to their homes and continued with their lives. One such individual was Captain Samuel Jones of Company E, or the Wichita Company. Like so many of the men of the Twenty-third, Jones missed the excitement and sense of purpose at home that he had found while in uniform.


81. According to his biographer, John Waller long advocated "personal and racial development." It was precisely that quest that found Waller, after returning to Kansas with the Twenty-third, taking his wife and daughters to Cuba. Waller invested heavily on the Island, and before his return to the United States in 1900, the former captain and consul was "working as a superintendent of a street gang for Barber Asphalt Paving Company" in Santiago. Later Waller left Kansas City for good and spent his last years in Yonkers, New York, where he edited the Progressive American. John L. Waller died in New York after contracting pneumonia in October 1907 at the age of fifty-six. Waller is the best known of the officers of the Twenty-third Kansas. He led a remarkable life; he was born into slavery and died a leading black aristocrat. See Woods, A Black Odyssey, 196. Three officers from the Twenty-third would go on to serve with the Forty-eighth and Forty-ninth U.S. Volunteer Infantry in the Philippines. Second Lieutenant Jerry White, formerly of Company D, Twenty-third Kansas, was promoted to first lieutenant in the Forty-eighth. Captain William H. Hawkins, commanding officer of Company H, would serve with the Forty-ninth, as would his second lieutenant, George E. Payne. See Kansas State Adjutant General, Twelfth Biennial Report, 65, Gatewood, "Smoked Yankees" and the Struggle for Empire, 199.


83. Daily American Citizen (Kansas City, Kan.), March 13, 1900.

84. "They'll Not Come Back," Topeka Daily Capital, November 1, 1898.

85. See letters and comments in the Plainsdealer (Topeka), January 13, 27, 1899. The Plainsdealer reported that "Captain John L. Waller, one of the colored Kansas company, is in trouble in Cuba, charged with padding the pay roll of his company. We hope that it is not true, as it would appear that Mr. Waller has had enough trouble in the past few years." See "Doings of the Negro," Ibid., January 27, 1899.

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The inducement was precisely that thrill that would lead many men, both black and white, to volunteer for service in the Philippines. Alfred M. Booker, a former second lieutenant with the Twenty-third, wrote Governor William E. Stanley, "My application was sent direct to the President, and I have favorably heard from his Honor. All I now need, it seems, is your recommendation, which I hope will be granted." Other members of the Twenty-third applied as well; even John L. Waller, now an expatriate, wrote a letter from his home in Cuba supporting Clifton French, a former corporal in his old unit, for a commission.87

Some veterans of the Twenty-third saw the crisis in China during the Boxer Rebellion, the last Chinese effort to expel the "foreign devils" from China before the Chinese revolution in 1911, as an opportunity to regain their lost luster, and they hoped for volunteer regiments to be raised as they were during the Spanish–American War. During the crisis, Sherman Harvey wrote Governor Stanley and reminded him how the governor had "treated the Twenty-third Kansas on its return from duty in Cuba," a return without the adulation afforded the white regiments, particularly the Twenty-first and Twenty-second, which did not serve abroad. Still, he told the governor that he was willing to raise a black volunteer regiment if needed. Oscar Overrr, the first sergeant of Company A, also asked for authority to raise a regiment. Overrr told Stanley that surely "you know [me, since] you promoted me to the rank of 2nd Lieutenant but the promotion came too late." However, he claimed that it was not Stanley's fault that he did not receive the appointment. Instead, he blamed James Beck, his commanding officer for delaying his promotion. This was an intentional slap at Beck, a Populist, and a charge that Overrr had hoped would endear him to Governor Stanley. Fortunately, the situation in China never required large-scale American military intervention, and American volunteers were not needed to restore order in China.

A few veterans of the Twenty-third, as late as 1905, were found in the Philippines. The Plaindealer reported that Bedford B. Hunter, once discharged from the Forty-ninth Volunteer Infantry, remained in the Philippines. Hunter became a school superintendent, and local black papers in Kansas referred to him as "professor" because of his academic attainments. He told the Plaindealer that he had seen William Hawkins and Sherman Harvey, both formerly of the Twenty-third, who had established law firms in the Philippines. When asked if he planned to leave the Philippines, Hunter told the Plaindealer that he did not, since "he does not meet the poisonous prejudice there as he does in the United States."88

The Twenty-third became a victim in the partisan struggle between the Republicans and their political opponents. James Beck and John Brown, senior regimental officers and Populists, were vilified by the Republicans and their allies in the black press long after the war ended.89 John Leedy had hoped to forge a new coalition between the races to bring reform to Kansas politics and possibly bring racial justice to the state. Leedy was defeated at the polls in 1898 and died in poverty in Edmonton, Alberta, on March 14, 1935. Leedy's dream of a biracial reform party remained unfulfilled well into the twentieth century.90

86. According to the data provided to the adjutant general's office, the War Department reported that 1,295 Kansans served in volunteer regiments in the Philippines. Sixty-three blacks served in either the Forty-eighth or Forty-ninth Volunteer Infantry, which were volunteer black infantry regiments. It is fair to assume that many of those men had served with the Twenty-third in Cuba. See Kansas State Adjutant General, Twelfth Biennial Report, 12-13.

87. A. M. Booker to W. E. Stanley, August 1, 1899, box 17, folder 6, Correspondence, W. E. Stanley Administration, Records of the Governor's Office, Library and Archives Division, Kansas State Historical Society (hereafter cited as Governor's Records–Stanley); John L. Waller to Stanley, September 1, 1899, ibid.

88. S. A. Harvey to W. E. Stanley, July 20, 1900, box 17, folder 7, ibid.; Oscar Overrr to Stanley, August 8, 1900, ibid.

89. "He Likes The Philippines!" Topeka Plaindealer, January 2, 1905.


91. Leedy was the only Kansas governor to become an expatriate after obtaining Canadian citizenship. For more information on John W. Leedy, see Socolofsky, Kansas Governors, 126–29.
Despite the best efforts of the Republican establishment, they could not for long conceal the racial animus found in Kansas. Early in 1901 events unfolded in Leavenworth that highlighted the actual state of race relations in Kansas in the late Gilded Age. In the early evening of January 15, 1901, a mob approached the state penitentiary at Lansing and demanded that Warden James B. Tomlinson turn over Fred Alexander, a black suspect in a rape murder in Leavenworth. Newspapers reported that two companies of the Kansas National Guard were released from protecting the prisoner, since Leavenworth sheriff Peter Everhardt had no need for the troops. Instead, the warden returned Alexander to Everhardt, who surrendered Alexander to the mob. Alexander was then mutilated and burned alive in downtown Leavenworth.\(^92\)

The message was clear: if you were black and lived in Kansas, it was best to be seen and not heard. It would be seventy years before Kansas blacks would have a chance to join the Kansas National Guard and fulfill the dreams of James Beck, John Brown, and the men who answered the call and stood their post with the Twenty-third Kansas Volunteers. Today, few people remember the sacrifices made by those men, and the one dedicated memorial to them located in Lakewood Park in Topeka no longer survives. The partial remains are housed in a warehouse of the Kansas National Guard. Who will remember the men of the Twenty-third? Who will recall their personal struggles for racial and social justice? It is now left to future generations of Kansans, black and white, young and old, to keep their memory alive.

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\(^{92}\) J. B. Tomlinson to W. E. Stanley, January 19, 1901, box 3, folder 3, Governor’s Records–Stanley, “Horrible Punishment for a Horrible Crime,” *Leavenworth Times*, January 16, 1901; “A Horrible . . . Kansas Crime!” *Topeka Plaindealer*, January 18, 1901; “Kansas Crime Reviewed,” ibid., January 25, 1901. The *Topeka Plaindealer* believed that Populists and Democrats were responsible for the crime, but the two companies of the Kansas National Guard never left their armories. Kansas State Adjutant General, *Thirteenth Biennial Report*, 1901–02 (Topeka: State Printer, 1902), 54–56. Governor Stanley called for the sheriff’s ouster, but in August 1901 Sheriff Everhardt was still on the job. The Alexander case drew national attention to the problem of lynching in the United States. Many whites in Kansas believed that if Kansas had capital punishment at the time, the Alexander lynching would not have happened.