“So here they are. The dog faced soldiers, the regulars, the 50 cent a day professionals, riding the outposts of a nation... They were all the same, men in dirty shirt blue.”

Thus ended John Ford’s epic western *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon*, which presents what traditionally has been the popular image of the army in the West: marching, fighting, and moving from one fortified post and one campaign to another. Indeed, the military’s impact on Kansas and western history is immense. The first soldiers, from Spain and France, made their way across the plains of Kansas, staking out empires and asserting exclusive trading rights with American Indians. Beginning in the early nineteenth century the United States Army continued this standard dispatching explorers, diplomats, and road builders westward—all “agents of empire building,” according to Francis Paul Prucha.

Frontier military history has existed since the first struggles between American Indians and European interlopers. The earliest accounts, even colonial Indian captivity stories, often are military based. Despite this long tradition, many people view military history as either an enigma or an anachronism. Traditional “boots and saddles” history was little more than myopic, ethnocentric accounts of battles and military leaders. In the West this meant campaigns against American Indians, told from the army’s point of view, promoting the idea that the military was a tool of civilization, sweeping savage barbarians out of the way of white progress. Some of the accounts were self-glorifying, used to promote reputations, justify past actions, or refute criticisms. George Armstrong Custer’s *My Life on the Plains* promotes his reputation as an “expert” Indian fighter and attacked critics of his actions during the 1868 Battle of the Washita. The volume of officers’ memoirs is massive, as is the material by local historians, antiquarians, and pulp novelists that frequently is myopic and of poor quality, intended to promote local tourism.

Unfortunately, much of the historical profession did not demand change or revision of standard military histories of Kansas and the West. Social historians thought military history was of little consequence to the historical profession. In his thorough and effective contribution to *Kansas History*’s review essay series, Professor Young surveys that traditional literature, analyzes the more recent, and suggests many areas in need of study. The ascendency of the so-called “New Western” history has positively impacted military history scholarship in recent years, but many challenges remain for the Kansas historian. While the “new...”
approach “debunks many myths surrounding the frontier, and ex-
amines the impact of European encroachment on minorities and the
environment, the field generally ignores the role of the army in the
West.”

The U.S. Army certainly did much more than fight Indians, even though this is a tragic, inter-
esting, and important part of the story. As Young clearly demon-
strates, the army was a major, if not the major, facilitator of westward
expansion and the economic develop-
ment of the West in that it was the
great early purveyor of federal largesse. In addition to defending the
frontier and bringing a mod-
icum of security to the region, the
military establishment explored and
mapped the West, aided in the
construction of a transportation in-
frastructure, “performed constabu-
lary duties when civilian authori-
ties were either nonexistent or incompetent,” established forts that became “centers of cultural ex-
change,” and distributed federal funds in the form of civilian con-
tracts and even direct relief in times of distress, as well as provid-
ing much needed medical care for everyons from baby delivery to fighting epidemic disease.

The editors hope this fine contribution to the review essay series will interest many of our readers and stimulate new scholarship. Professor Young per-
ceptively suggests many trails this research might follow and con-
cludes, “Only when we finish painting the picture of Kansas and
the military will we succeed in making our history comprehensive and inclusive, closer to the reality of our human existence.”

Virgil W. Dean
Kansas State Historical Society
Rita G. Naper
University of Kansas

The growing threat of Indian hostilities in the West brought an
expanded military presence to nineteenth-century Kansas. This Harp-
er’s Weekly Illustration depicts General Phil Sheridan and troops
departing from Fort Hays to engage in the 1868 winter campaign
during the Plains Indians.


5. Paul Prucha, The Sword of the Republic: The United States Army on the Frontier, 1783–1846 (New
University Press, 1947); Robert S. Leonard, Early Texas Military, 1822–1863 (New Haven: Yale
University Press, 1959); Goetzmann, Exploration and Empire: The Explorer and the Sci-
available on the role of army engineers and the road-building projects are Frank N. Schubert, Vanguard
of Expansion: Army Engineers in the Trans-Mississippi West (Washington, D.C.: Department of the
Army, 1946); W. Turmanne Jackson, Wagon Roads West: A Study of Federal Road Surveys and Construction in the

6. Michael L. Tate, “The Multi-Purpose Army on the Frontier: A Call for Further Research,” in
The American West: Essays in Honor of W. Eugene Hollin, ed. Ronald Lora (Tokyo, Ohio: University of
Tokyo Press, 1980); Robert Feurer, Forts of the West: Military Forts and Forts and Forts Commonly Called Forts

7. Robert Koonce, “Forts Osborne: Outpost on the Texas Frontier (Austin: Texas State Historical
Assn., 1994); Frank N. Schubert, Buffalo Soldiers, Bisons, and the Brass: The Story of Fort Robinson, Nebraska
(Shippenburg, Pa.: White Mane Publishing, 1993); William A. Dobak, Fort Riley and Its Neighbors: Mil-

8. For brief, readable histories of most of these facilities, see the Kansas Frontier Series, published in
Topeka by the Kansas State Historical Society. Prominent Kansas historian Leo Olver contributed Fort
Scot: George and Conflict on the Border (1996); Fort Hays: Keeping Peace on the Plains (1996); Fort Wallace:
Sentinel on the Smoky Hill Trail (1998); and Fort Harker: Defending the Smoky Hill (2000). Of the other two
books in the series are William McKale and William D. Young, Fort Riley: Citadel of the Frontier West
(2000), and J. Patrick Hughes, Fort Leavenworth: Gateway to the West (2000). Older studies of Fort Leav-
enworth are Elvid Hunt, History of Fort Leavenworth 1827–1937, 2d ed. (Fort Leavenworth, Kans.: Command and General Staff School Press, 1977); George H. Waddell, Sentinel of the Plains: Fort Leaven-
Riley is Robert H. Frie, The History of Fort Riley (Fort Riley, Kans.: Cavalry School, Book Depart-
ment, 1926).
The finest general histories of the United States military in the West come from the pen of Robert Utley. Starting in 1967 his two major volumes, Frontiersmen in Blue: The United States Army and the Indian, 1848–1865 and Frontier Regulars: The United States Army and the Indian, 1866–1891, detail all of the major campaigns of these years. Utley examined an army that spent most of its time patrolling or in garrison duty and on fatigue detail, split into small, isolated garrisons rather than united into a powerful fighting force. He argued that the army combated American Indians in a haphazard fashion, divided by distance, government policies, and personality conflicts in the officer corps, an interpretation reinforced by Robert Wooster in 1988 in his The Military and United States Indian Policy, 1865–1903.9 Utley’s third contribution, The Indian Frontier of the American West, 1848–1890, utilizes native sources and discusses cultural comparisons for the events of the decade, focusing on the officer corps in An American Profession of Arms, demonstrating that their West Point training usually guided their actions on the plains. He used officers’ personal writings to demonstrate that their belief were indeed the guardians of American civilization in the West. Edward Coffman relied heavily on official reports stored in the National Archives, combined with personal letters and diaries to create his history of the army prior to the Spanish–American War. In The Old Army: A Portrait of the American Army in Peacetime, 1784–1859, Coffman examined the lives of both enlisted men and their families as well as officers.10 Don Rickey, on the other hand, concentrated only on the enlisted men in the Indian Wars in his eminently readable


Forty Miles a Day on Beans and Hay. More than 75 percent of this book looks at life at the army post, from food and lodgings to education and entertainment. More recently, Durwood Ball reexamined the antebellum frontier army in Army Regulars on the Western Frontier, 1848–1861 and found an officer corps and army politically divided. His book also focuses on the army’s constabulary duties in the West, rather than Indian fighting.11

In Kansas, the military spent little time actually campaigning and even less in combat. In his personal diary Lieutenant J.E.B. Stuart described a typical campaign, reporting hunts and “a fine roast of buffalo,” an abundance of quail, deer, antelope, and prairie dogs, but routinely “saw no trace today of Indians.” Chasing hostiles was safer duty than escorting stagecoaches or guarding isolated station miles away from any support.12

The largest antebellum campaign in Kansas was Colonel Edwin V. “Bull” Sumner’s 1857 punitive expedition against the Cheyennes. Lieutenant Stuart and dragoon-turned-wagon master P.G. Lowe described a campaign plagued by incompetent guides, where men and animals alike suffered for lack of water.13 Historians dispute the effectiveness of Sumner’s campaign, Robert Utley believed Sumner’s actions temporarily humbled the Cheyennes and established peace, but more recent studies by William Chalfant and Elliott West show the campaign increased Cheyenne resistance.14

During the Civil War most regular army troops in Kansas were replaced with volunteer regiments from the North. Loyal Unionist Indians from Oklahoma and more than two thousand African Americans were part of the twenty-three regiments and four artillery batteries that Kansas volunteered believed their mission was to take the war to Missouri and punish Missourians for their pre-war activities. James H. Lane and Charles J. Jennison raised new regiments of volunteers, enlisting many of the same individuals who raided with them before the war.15


Historians provide no consensus about how to examine the contributions of Kansas during the Civil War. They agree that the battle of Mine Creek, October 25, 1864, was the largest clash between uniformed soldiers on Kansas soil. But Albert Castel, Alvin M. Josephy, and Jay Monaghan disagreed on how to define the western theatre of action, whether Bleeding Kansas caused the Civil War, or the actual military importance of Kansas in the conflict.17 Historians need a volume that looks at the complete picture of Civil War Kansas, border raids, uniformed conflicts, and army–Indian struggles, a book demonstrating how these are interrelated.

With manpower stretched thin, it was hard to fulfill antebellum missions of protecting settlers and the trails while patrolling the border for raiders and sending troops to fight Confederate forces. The strain and tension of abundant problems affected Kansas’s politics and development and is a story deserving to be told.

On the western plains, Kansas volunteers believed the regulars had been “soft” on the Indians and felt they could remove all obstacles to settlement by ending the “Indian problem” once and for all—by eliminating the cause, the Plains Indians. Increasing Indian attacks on wagons and stage lines in April 1864 caused General Samuel R. Curtis to send cavalry reinforcements from Fort Riley to the garrison at Fort Larned to augment escorts and keep the trails open. In response, General Curtis established two new posts, Forts Zarah and Ellsworth/Harker, to protect the lines of communication and movement on the military road between Fort Riley and Fort Larned. On September 25, 1864, General James G. Blunt’s men discovered a large camp of Arapahos and Cheyennes about seventy-five miles northwest of Fort Larned. Blunt drove them away from their camps, destroyed their supplies, and futilely chased them for two days until his horses gave out.18 Following the Civil War the military in Kansas focused mainly on removing the American Indian “obstruction” to expansion and settlement. Robert Utley’s books include several chapters that specifically target events affecting Kansas.

such as the Hancock campaign of 1867. Paul Hutton’s Phil Sheridan and His Army concentrates on Sheridan’s role in post-Civil War Indian campaigns, including the winter campaign of 1868. Chapter six provides a useful evaluation of other career officers who fought in the West. Four articles by Marvin H. Garfield discuss the concept of “frontier defense,” and all assume that the military needed to respond after Indian attacks and outrages. Two books, one by Craig Miner and William Unrau and the other by Miner alone, illustrate white–Indian relationships in Kansas. The End of Indian Kansas: A Study of Cultural Revolution, 1854–1871 examines the relationship between the white man’s land greed and paranoia and the demand for a military solution to the “Indian problem.” West of Wichita: Settling the High Plains of Kansas, 1865–1890 details armed clashes, attacks, and depredations in the western half of Kansas from the white perspective.19 Readers also may piece together the story of Kansas’s Indian wars by reading all eight volumes in the aforementioned Kansas Forts Series.

Numerous personal accounts, memoirs, and diaries detail military life and actions on the plains after the Civil War. Isaac Coates’s journal focuses on the key events and personalities involved in “Hancock’s War.” Correspondence between Captain Albert Barnitz and his wife, Jennie, offers insights on fort life as well as on the Seventh Cavalry. George A. Armis’s memoirs discuss combat, life, and army politics at Fort Hays and Harker.20

Currently no single book provides a complete picture of the struggle between American Indians and the military inside Kansas and how this relates to the greater struggle across the West. Kansas’s forts served as staging grounds for other major campaigns that impacted the settlement of the state. In 1845 Colonel Stephen Watts Kearny led 280 dragoons from Fort Leavenworth and Scott on a circular march to South Pass, Bent’s Fort, Colorado, and back home again. The purpose of this march was not only to impress natives with American military force and protect emigrants on the Oregon Trail, but it was to impress Great Britain with the availability of United States military forces in the event an armed struggle broke out over Oregon. When the Mexican War began in May 1846 Fort

18. Utley, Frontiers in Blue, 286–90; Mckee and Young, Fort Riley, 54–56; Oliva, Fort Larned, 20–21; Oliva, Fort Harker, 23–24. General Curtis’s son Zarah, a major in the United States Army, was killed by William Quarles’s Confederate guerrillas at Baxter Springs in October 1863, and the general named the fort in his memory.
Leavenworth became the center for supplying western armies. Colonel Kearny’s Army of the West was a military promotion of manifest destiny, linking Kansas to the nation’s future. Having his first Dragoons as a nucleus, the army also mustered into service and outfitted the First Missouri Mounted Volunteers under Colonel Alexander Doniphan, then marched southwest and occupied Santa Fe in August 1846. In 1857–1859 troops from Fort Riley and Leavenworth went to Utah during the “Mormon War” to coerce the Mormon settlers to accept United States government authority.22

But the Kansas forts are best known for Indian fighting expeditions. In retaliation for the so-called Grattan massacre, Colonel William S. Harney marched from Fort Riley in August 1855 and attacked the Sioux with deadly force. This foreshadowed the role of Kansas forts in mustering, training, and equipping frontier regiments during the 1860s and 1870s as well as serving as supply bases for future operations. The Seventh Cavalry received most of its training and equipment at Fort Riley, and the Tenth Cavalry (buffalo soldiers) was organized at Fort Leavenworth. Forts Hays and Larned served as supply centers during the Hancock campaign of 1867, while Fort Dodge was a key link in the supply line from Fort Leavenworth to Camp Supply, Oklahoma, during Sheridan’s winter campaign of 1868. Fort Leavenworth served as official headquarters during the great Sioux War of 1876–1877 and became the burial place for many Seventh cavalrymen killed at the Little Big Horn. Finally, troops sent from Fort Riley participated in the Wounded Knee massacre in 1890.23


The story of the struggle between American Indians and the military is told in many accounts, detailing armed clashes, attacks, and attempts at peaceful settlement through treaties. This sketch from Harper’s Weekly depicts an 1867 Indian council at Fort Dodge between General Winfield Hancock and Kiowa chiefs.

As the Indian threat to transportation and settlements decreased, the military closed most installations in Kansas, leaving only Forts Leavenworth and Riley. Both forts benefited from the determination of leaders such as General William T. Sherman to increase the professionalism of the army and to combine the training of various combat arms. To accomplish this the School of Application for Infantry and Cavalry was established in 1881 at Fort Leavenworth. It evolved into the Command and General Staff College during the twentieth century, training officers for the Korean, Vietnam, and Gulf Wars. The Cavalry and Light Artillery School began operating at Fort Riley in March 1892, which in turn led to the development of the Mounted Service School (later the Cavalry School). Following World War II the Cavalry School was replaced with the Army General School, which operates as an officer candidate school, and the Aggressor School, which trains officers in the tactics national enemies might deploy. During World War I both Forts Riley and Leavenworth became induction centers and training grounds for more than 150,000 soldiers, building entirely new facilities, such as Camp Funston at Fort Riley, to fulfill their missions. The military repeated this effort in World War II, training more than 450,000 men during the conflict, and then serving as discharge centers for more than 250,000 troops, sending them back to civilian life. Naval Air stations established at Olathe and Hutchinson trained pilots for combat and served as shipping locations for aircraft built in Kansas factories. This military presence continues in Kansas today, as Fort Leavenworth, Fort Riley, and McConnell Air Force Base in Wichita each play vital roles in national defense planning.24

Exploration, Transportation, and Settlement

Beginning with the Spanish and the French, military explorers were observed, prepared to record what they saw and spread word about areas of potential growth and prosperity. Unfortunately, standard histories of the Spanish and French empires in North America, including those by Charles Gibson, David J. Weber, and W. J. Eccles, generally ignore Kansas. For several decades, beginning with the famous Corps of Discovery in 1804, the United States War Department commissioned numerous explorations, combining military and civilian resources and specialists. Army engineers measured longitude and latitude for accurate mapmaking, noted geological formations, collected flora and fauna for eastern museum and scientific societies, and studied local Indian populations both for potential enemies and partners in trade. As William Goetzmann explained, the collection, analysis, and publication of this information for public use was formalized

Beginning with the Corps of Discovery in 1804 the U.S. government commissioned numerous explorations combining military and civilian resources. Among the many nineteenth-century military explorers was Colonel Joseph E. Johnston (above), whose First Cavalry escorted surveyors to establish the southern boundary of Kansas in 1857.


29. Charles I. Frémont’s 1843 expedition across Kansas noted the location of fresh water springs, timber stands, and river crossings that would guide settlement in coming years. During the 1850s the topographical engineers conducted the only systematic mapping of the West, including specific surveys to determine the best route for the transcontinental railroad, and published their information in thirteen volumes of data, along with an improved relief map of the United States in 1861. The War Department also undertook several specific surveys in Kansas that aided settlement in Kansas. In 1825 George C. Sibley surveyed the Santa Fe Trail, noting the trees and local crops grown along the route. Three years later Isaac McCoy surveyed reservation boundaries in eastern Kansas and established the boundaries of the Fort Leavenworth military reservation. In 1857 Colonel Joseph E. Johnston and elements of the First Cavalry escorted surveyors who established the southern boundary of Kansas. In every case the official reports, the surveyor’s comments, and the letters from expedition members all noted likely places for farming communities.

30. Other army engineers followed the surveyors, building military roads and bridges with army labor or spending government funds to contract the work. Spread thin across the frontier, the army needed good military roads to increase its mobility and lessen the cost of supplying frontier outposts. Federally built wagon roads would transport more people and provide the means of sending produce to market. Stage lines and eventually railroads would follow the same pathways west. When topographical engineer Lieutenant Francis T. Bryan surveyed the potential military road from Fort Leavenworth to Fort Riley and west along the future Smoky Hill River route, he called for bridges to be built over the Solomon, Saline, and Smoky Hill Rivers. He also insisted that the road between Fort Leavenworth and Fort Riley be improved, with new bridges along the way. By 1856 the civilian engineer accompanying Bryan claimed the military road and bridges moved the line of settlement forty miles west, and he predicted settlements to reach eighty-five miles west of Fort Riley by the spring of 1857. Leo Oliva, more than any other historian, has documented how the military built forts to protect commerce and travelers along the roads crossing Kansas. Starting with Soldiers on the Santa Fe Trail, Oliva detailed the symbiotic relationship of the army and civilians, and travel. The posts were a center of civilization for travelers, a rest stop on their journey. They could shop in the sutler’s store, have the post blacksmith repair their wagons or shoe their horses, receive medical aid, or just relax before traveling on.

The army promoted railroad construction and faster communication links. General Sherman convinced that the railroad would cut military supply costs and help subjugate the Plains Indians, directed frontier officers to aid railroad construction in every way possible. To that end troops routinely escorted railroad survey and construction crews. Forts loaned construction crews arms and ammunition, removed squatters from company claimed lands, and even allowed railroads to remove stone and timber from military reservations at no cost. The earliest post offices usually were established at military posts. Settlers mailed letters from these locations or used them for their return addresses, and they relied on the army to ensure mail delivery. Troops escorted crews stringing telegraph wires, dug postholes, and often served as repair crews. Telegraph service was vital to local ranchers and shop owners, who used post connections to stay in touch with eastern markets and suppliers. When telephone service first reached Forts Riley and Leavenworth, civilians once again were allowed access by generous post commanders. Troops of the Ninth Cavalry built the first telephone line from Fort Riley to serve Junction City in 1883.

A FRONTIER CONSTABULARY

During the nineteenth century the army routinely bolstered civilian law enforcement, supported authorities where they existed, and performed constabulary duties when civilian authorities were either nonexistent or incompetent. As the frontier moved west, territorial officials frequently used regular army troops as members of the posse comitatus. Historians Jerry Cooper and Barton Hacker examined the army’s role as strikebreaker and union buster in the nineteenth century, concluding that officers saw strikes as a sign of disorder and sympathized with the creation of the Corps of Topographical Engineers in 1838. The published reports from John C. Fremont’s 1843 expedition across Kansas note the location of fresh water springs, timber stands, and river crossings that would guide settlement in coming years. During the 1850s the topographical engineers conducted the only systematic mapping of the West, including specific surveys to determine the best route for the transcontinental railroad, and published their information in thirteen volumes of data, along with an improved relief map of the United States in 1861. The War Department also undertook several specific surveys in Kansas that aided settlement in Kansas. In 1825 George C. Sibley surveyed the Santa Fe Trail, noting the trees and local crops grown along the route. Three years later Isaac McCoy surveyed reservation boundaries in eastern Kansas and established the boundaries of the Fort Leavenworth military reservation. In 1857 Colonel Joseph E. Johnston and elements of the First Cavalry escorted surveyors who established the southern boundary of Kansas. In every case the official reports, the surveyor’s comments, and the letters from expedition members all noted likely places for farming communities.

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businessmen. Troops from Kansas forts helped crush the nationwide Great Rail- road Strike of 1877 and the Pullman Strike of 1894.31
Charged with enforcing federal laws and treaties on Indian land, the army cracked down on illegal whiskey traders in Indian Territory and removed white squatters on Indian land. Troops from Fort Riley removed squatters from the Osage and Kaw Reservations during the 1860s and early 1870s.32
In 1843 Captain Philip St. George Cooke’s First Dragoons prevented Texans from robbing Mexican trade caravans along the Santa Fe Trail. Soldiers from Fort Dodge and Fort Hays pursued horse thieves, while soldiers recruited by the Ellis County sheriff broke up the famous Collins–Bass gang, killing Collins and recovering twenty thousand dollars in gold coin. Soldiers at Fort Hays served as town guard when civilian authorities failed to keep the peace in Hays City. Jim Leiker demonstrated how these actions, combined with the fact that part of the garrison was African American, displeased many of the locals.33
The military’s role as frontier constabulary during Bleeding Kansas is studied more than any other time period. Led by West Point trained officers, the troops saw themselves as devoted public servants, performing unpopular duties while enduring public abuse. The army was contemptuous of disorderly frontier society, and officers suspected civilians exploited the army for their personal gain. For six years troops from Fort Leavenworth and Fort Riley regularly intervened between proselyltery and free-soil partisans, preventing bloodshed and lessening property loss. Some military actions are well documented: Edwin Sumner dissolved the Topeka legislature; Philip St. George Cooke prevented Jim Lane’s “army” from destroying Lecompton; and Cooke’s troops combined with Joseph Johnston’s to prevent an attack on Lawrence in September 1856.34

AGENTS OF CIVILIZATION AND CULTURE

It is difficult to determine how successfully the military promoted “civilization” in Kansas. Schools and literacy, association with members of “decent” society, religion, and advanced thinking all were considered signs of a developed society. Many military retirees settled near their own posts, becoming influential members of the community. John Gates and Jim Sherow have clearly shown that military outposts and their garrisons were not isolated but rather served as centers of cultural exchange.35
Officers’ wives also played a major role in the “civilizing” process. Sandra Myres, Patricia Stallard, and Michael Nacy demonstrated that these women frequently served as social critics, disparaging the lack of social graces, schools, and uncouth behavior they saw in nearby towns. The numerous published personal reminiscences of officers’ wives are a great resource for historians and have helped introduce more social history into traditional military history.36
The military has helped build civilization by fostering schools, churches, and music. Local children attended post schools before public schools existed, and in the twentieth century students left the forts to attend public high schools. Post chaplains invited settlers to attend services in the post chapel, and they ministered to the surrounding area if needed. Christmas celebrations held in the post chapels were shared and appreciated by the local civilian population. Regimental bands posted to Forts Riley, Leavenworth, and Hays played at agricultural fairs, combined military and civilian balls, fundraisers for charities, and July Fourth celebrations.37

34. Ball, Army Regulars, 72–88.
The military has always responded to civilian needs during emergencies in Kansas. Other than George E. Omar Jr.'s account of medical care at Fort Riley, and the personal accounts of a few post surgeons, little is published on this topic. Military doctors often were the first and only medical professionals in the area, thus civilians turned to them when home remedies would not work. Doctors treated gunshot wounds, set broken bones, dealt with injured children, and amputated frostbitten or gangrenous limbs. Fort Dodge post surgeon William S. Tremaine treated everything from simple lacerations to cholera and reputedly delivered every baby born in the area. Starting in the 1860s military physicians at Fort Riley had rural medical practices that comprised a fifty-mile radius. During massive disease outbreaks they treated soldiers and civilians alike, putting themselves at risk to help the ill. Ramon Powers, Gene Younger, and Jim Leiker have examined the causes and paths of the deadly 1867 cholera outbreak. Powers and Younger accepted the nineteenth-century view that soldiers spread the disease, while Leiker insisted that poor sanitation and hygiene in the railroad camps and towns contributed to the deaths of hundreds of soldiers and civilians. Fort Riley military medical personnel responded again when influenza struck the region in 1918–1919.

There is no comprehensive survey of how many times military personnel have responded when Kansans faced natural disasters. Virgil Dean and George Omar have noted how the military mirrored society at large in that racism existed, but members of the military had mixed feelings about American Indians. They fought against them, defended them from white troublemakers, and alternately saw them as innocent victims or barriers to civilization. At some posts Indians were employed in various positions, the most common being as scouts. This photograph of Colonel George A. Custer and his Indian scouts was taken during the Black Hills Expedition in 1874.

The military confronts racial issues because it maintains the primary construction of the red man white. Bonnie Lynn-Sherow and Susannah Ural Baker demonstrated how this reasoning process continued during World War I, as the Office of Indian Affairs saw the army as the perfect tool for assimilation at Camp Funston, Fort Riley.

Two of the early standards focusing on the African American soldier's experience in the West are William H. Leckie's study of the Ninth and Tenth Cavalry Buffalo Soldiers, and Arlen Fowler's Black Infantry in the West, 1869–1891. Both works praise the efforts of the African American units in the face of institutional racism. Jim Leiker recently examined violence between white civilians and black soldiers at Fort Hays, and he refuted the idea that black soldiers passively accepted all "frontier justice" that whites chose to hand out. Instead, the soldiers banded together to protect themselves, challenged discrimination, and sought justice by armed force if necessary. Finally, Willy Dobak revised and expanded Tom Phillips's 1970 dissertation to review the total life experiences and contributions of all the black soldiers serving in the West.

The army, by stationing black regiments in posts near predominantly white communities, made Kansans face racism. White Kansans were happy when these insightful essay on race relations discusses the issues of race statewide, but this is an area of study in which military and social histories frequently intertwine. The military mirrored society at large in that racism existed, but the military also offered minorities opportunities to prove their worth that did not exist in the civilian world.

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The federal government subsidized people to move west and create communities near the forts.

Military spending always has been one of the pillars of the Kansas economy. Federal spending began with exploration, purchasing supplies and animals for trips across the plains. When the government began building forts it required civilian contract labor as well as soldiers as fatigue parties. The Kansas Forts Series volumes discuss hiring civilian artisans to cut stone, masons to construct buildings, and carpenters for numerous tasks. Once built, the forts hired civilian employees, especially to clerk for the quartermaster. Civilian payrolls increased during times of war, but freighting and supply contracts provided the largest influx of federal dollars into the Kansas economy. Isolated frontier posts required that supplies be shipped to them from central depots at Fort Leavenworth, Fort Riley, or elsewhere until they became self-sufficient. Few posts could have supported themselves from local farmers’ trade. Civilians competed for government contracts; some freigh ters followed troops to each newly constructed post for the chance to win a supply contract. Many recently retired soldiers, such as Percival Lowe, stayed in the region, used their army contacts to win civilian contracts, and became freigh ters.

In essence, the federal government subsidized people to move west and create communities near the forts. Federal dollars created local commercial and social elites, and town-building spurs usually coincided with new federal spending in the region. Once towns were established, soldiers spent most of their pay on local entertainment, usually alcohol and prostitutes. Acknowledging the profitability of a military presence, Kansas civilians would do almost anything to win federal dollars. Many officers from General Sherman down to local commanders criticized locals for “crying wolf” about any Indian threat—a frequent ploy to establish or maintain frontier posts. Some freigh ters followed troops to each newly constructed post for the chance to win a supply contract. Many recently retired soldiers, such as Percival Lowe, stayed in the region, used their army contacts to win civilian contracts, and became freigh ters.

The importance of military spending on the Kansas economy continued into the twentieth century. Many forts closed, but building continued at Fort Riley and Fort Leavenworth, pouring millions of dollars into the local economies. During World War I both forts expanded and became training centers for hundreds of thousands of young men. These soldiers required food and supplies, which meant more local contracts. World War II brought expansion not only at Forts Riley and Leavenworth, but it also necessitated the construction of naval airfields in Olathe and Hutchinson. Billions of dollars in contracts supported the airplane plants in Wichita, changing the population and prosperity of that city forever. Additional federal funds arrived in communities across the state as military-built POW camps housed and supplied the German troops sent there.

Today the impact of military spending is still immense. In 2002 the army and other government agencies connected with Fort Riley spent $688,518,714 in the region to feed, house, and supply the troops and their dependents at the post, as well as to continue ongoing construction projects. For the same fiscal year the economic impact of Fort Leavenworth on the area was $451,699,675. Little wonder state and local leaders writing their hands and appeal to Washington to keep the state’s military installations intact.

Military and Kansas History

"Who owns History?" is a question Eric Foner has raised for us to consider. Each generation asserts its right to claim and interpret the past, to reserve its regional events for special consideration. Kansans have every right to claim ownership of their past while acknowledging its links to the national story. Military history will be rewritten as new questions, information, and priorities enter the field. History is about discovery; and to that end we must consider our course in pursuing further study of the relationship between the military and Kansas history. What specific books need to be written? We need a comprehensive and balanced examination of the military campaigns in Kansas—a combination of the available materials to present issues and campaigns from both American Indian and soldier/civilian perspectives. Additionally, we need a new work on the Indian frontier in Kansas, both before and after the Civil War, an up-to-date volume on Civil War Kansas and the West, demonstrating the connections between politics, Indian

44. Dobak, Fort Riley and Its Neighbors.
45. Statistics from Fort Riley Public Affairs Office and Fort Leavenworth Public Affairs Office.
issues, and the greater war; and studies of Forts Riley and Leavenworth in the twentieth century, continuing the story where the Kansas Forts Series leaves off.

Thorough research studies would entail utilizing the experiences of average soldiers whenever available, not just the view from “officers’ row.” Were soldiers “just doing a job,” or did the average soldier see himself as an advance agent of civilization? Nor should junior officers be ignored. Kansas post records list hundreds of officers from both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Surely many of them kept journals and diaries or wrote letters and created other types of documents. We can benefit from knowing these soldiers’ views about serving in Kansas; tracking down and assembling these first-hand accounts would help us understand the events of the time.

While uncovering officers’ accounts we must not forget those of their dependents, such as letters from wives living in Kansas. Where are the letters and observations of Millicent Kidd and family stationed at Fort Larned? Priscilla White, whose husband was chaplain? Or May Preston Radford, first lady of Fort Leavenworth and wife of Colonel Stephen Watts Kearny? To begin, however, all of the existing army wives’ accounts about Kansas should be pulled together into an anthology. Such a task would entail collecting and editing the letters of Biddle, Roe, Baldwin, Grierson, Barnitz, and Custer, among others. Sandra Myres’s decades-old call to action should not be ignored either. We can fill out the missing parts of the picture of army life. Where is the seamy side of army life—sexual abuse, infidelity, drinking, drug use, and other regular life occurrences?

Dobak’s detailed analysis of the economic impact of nineteenth-century Fort Riley is a model to follow. What is needed next is comprehensive study of the impact of all the early forts. How many soldiers retire and settle in Kansas? What is their impact on the local communities and educational institutions? In the twentieth century we have numerous isolated studies about World War II but no comprehensive look at the impact of military spending on the state during that war, or during the twentieth century as a whole. We also should examine in detail how the military impacted the creation of both the transportation and communications infrastructures in the state.

Finally, we need to change how textbooks cover the role of the military in Kansas history. Many authors appear uncomfortable with military history; either the traditional basic campaigns are covered with the Turnerman “advance of civilization” viewpoint, or the military disappears beneath a wave of social issues, ideology, or charges of race hatred. Just as military history has embraced social history and balanced its study, so too must the textbooks. Only when we finish painting the picture of Kansas and the military will we succeed in making our history comprehensive and inclusive, closer to the reality of our human existence.