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Cultural Construction of Empire

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JANNE LAHTI

Cultural Construction of Empire

The U.S. Army in Arizona and New Mexico

University of Nebraska Press Lincoln & London

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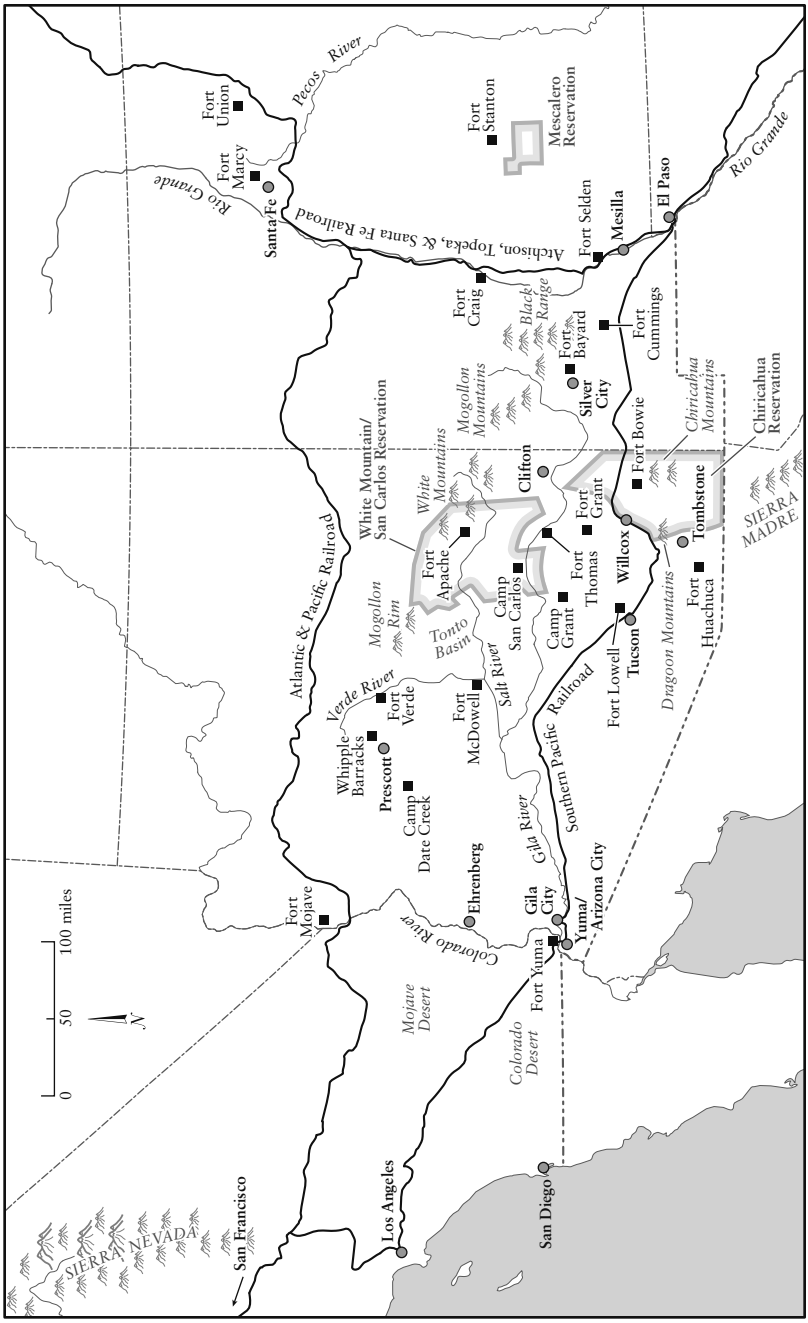

Map 1. Southwest borderlands.

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Introduction

A Colonizer Community in the Borderlands

In the colonies it is the policeman and the soldier who are the official, instituted go-betweens, the spokesmen of the settler and his rule of oppression. . . . The intermediary does not lighten the oppression, nor seek to hide the domination; he shows them up and puts them into practice with the clear conscience of an upholder of the peace; yet he is the bringer of violence into the home and into the mind of the native.

—FRANTZ FANON, *The Wretched of the Earth*

Truths are illusions about which one has forgotten that this is what they are.

—FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE, "On Truth and Lie"

In 1921 William Corbusier, a former army surgeon now in his seventies and in ailing health, returned for a visit to Arizona. Taking the railroad to Bowie, he stopped at the San Carlos Indian Agency. There the Apaches and Yavapais, former rulers Corbusier had fought against in the 1870s and 1880s, were confined in reservations and living in poverty, as the best lands had been taken by whites. "Most of them," Corbusier judged, "had made very little progress." Next he saw the Globe copper mines before driving by automobile to the Roosevelt Dam, a powerful symbol of civilization that

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had converted the Tonto Basin—through which Corbusier, in his words, "chased hostile Indians" in the 1870s—into a thirty-mile-long lake. Old campsites were now buried under many feet of water. Continuing to Phoenix he stopped his car at a monument erected to a dead army comrade and spotted "the old Apache Trail which in May 1874, I climbed in many places, leading my horse." During his tour Corbusier was able to compare the hardships of the past with what he understood as the progress of the present. Indians, rugged trails, wild nature, and warfare had made way for Anglos, railways, automobiles, extractive industries, and engineering marvels such as the Roosevelt Dam. The region that in the 1870s was still very much Apacheria had been transformed into the American Southwest. The indigenous homeland of the past was now a full member in the world's most powerful industrial nation. Conquest had come at a hard price for Apacheria and its inhabitants, but for Corbusier and his fellow army men and women the new era represented civilization's march over savage wilderness. According to their discourses, U.S. soldiers had saved the region and conquest had in fact been more like liberation.[1]

Over seventy years earlier, in 1846 the United States, then in the process of building its continental empire, fought a short war against Mexico. This conflict placed lands from Texas to the Pacific under U.S. rule. In New Mexico and Arizona, the United States found that formal control often meant little in an area dominated by powerful indigenous groups. Representing an intruder on indigenous lands, the U.S. Army engaged in a "second war of conquest" against the Apaches and Yavapais. The battles came to a close only with the famous surrender of Geronimo in 1886. For decades army officers, their dependents, and the enlisted men, born and raised in eastern United States or in Europe, found themselves in an unfamiliar physical terrain of deserts, valleys, and mountain ranges, fighting a war against people whose social divisions and culture they found difficult to comprehend and whose military skills and guerrilla-type tactics frustrated them. Furthermore, white men and women

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of the army were caught between an imperial center (eastern United States)—scarred and fatigued by a bloody civil war, focused on industrialization, and inclined to forget that the nation still had an army and ongoing wars—on one hand and a Hispanic-indigenous borderlands built on unfamiliar cultural foundations and natural geography on the other. Estranged, feeling abandoned by the general public in the East, uncertain of their social status, separated from a sense of purpose, dissatisfied with living so far away from home, frustrated by the everyday trials of colonial warfare and army life, and often unable to understand or value local ways of life in the colony, white army people sought to discover some justification and meaning to their mission and place value to their efforts.[2] With the official task of monopolizing violence for the U.S. regime, white army people were also interested in acquiring colonial authority, and they constructed identity, community, and power in discourse and in the social contexts of the everyday through difference.

At the heart of colonialism, Partha Chatterjee argues, lies the rule of difference. In the view first brought to wide attention by Edward W. Said, colonizers, the agent of empire, constructed themselves and their others in relation to each other, and their own identity and character developed as a consequence of the form they gave to others. Preoccupied with explaining white privilege and their right to rule others, the colonizers gained in authority and collective identity when differentiating and ranking colonial peoples and places and establishing a vision of reality that promoted the difference between the familiar "us" and the strange "them." This difference and colonizer superiority was built, codified, and maintained not only in discourse but in institutions and in the contours of everyday life, including travel and movement, public space, housing, and the domestic realm, as well as labor and leisure. The meanings of difference remained changing, flexible, and contested, as colonialism was never static or generic but displayed rich diversity and as the colonizers, with their limited power, produced less than successful hegemonic projects and formed tension-ridden and fractured

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communities whose boundaries had to be constantly reaffirmed and guarded. Where the lines of exclusion would be drawn—for example in terms of race or the respectability of personal or collective behavior—in any colony or community was not a given, but a product of differing views and negotiation.[3]

In the Southwest borderlands, officers, soldiers, and the army dependents categorized, assigned meaning and value, and created a social connection to the place facing colonialism—its landscapes, societies, peoples, and events—constructing power and identity for themselves in the process. They were interested not only in making the Southwest and its peoples understandable but also in controlling, reordering, and incorporating them. The product of army people's writings, their "truth," was subjective colonial knowledge or what one might call "white mythologies," to revise a term from postcolonial theorist Robert J. C. Young.[4] In their white mythologies, army people built hierarchies of difference where the colonized place and its peoples were portrayed and ranked in accordance to army needs and visions and in relation to the social and cultural norms at the imperial center. Those who penned the mythologies occupied a privileged position, holding their own beliefs, standards, and practices to be universally valid. Officers, dependents, and white soldiers painted themselves as powerful nation makers who struggled against the elements and penetrated an unwelcoming, exotic, and peripheral border region, liberating it from an era of decay and stagnation. Officers and their wives sought to place themselves at the top of colonial social hierarchies as a brave, refined, and respectable group who embodied progress and Anglo civilization. Empowering white army personnel, helping them to gain a sense of privilege and purpose, and justifying their invasion of other peoples' land, army discourses made colonial warfare, the crushing of Apaches and the marginalization of Hispanics, and the reordering of the supposedly "peripheral" colonized region to better suit the national model seem right, even necessary. The imposed racial social hierarchy grounded on white superiority, the "othering" of colonial peoples, and the

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beginnings of a massive exploitation of natural resources fueled by outside investments was camouflaged as progress.

The army in the borderlands never formed a monolithic or united mass of colonizers. It constituted a community, an artificial imagined collective whose members were bound together by the same institution of violence and shared military goals and sense of mission but torn apart by class and race divisions. Scattered across Arizona and New Mexico, dozens of army villages, officially called forts or camps, formed living spaces where the life strategies and visions of the army elite of white officers and their dependents and the working class of white, black, and indigenous enlisted men defined community culture and dynamics.[5] Army villages functioned as important sites for building and displaying identity, power, and distinctions. In everyday life officers and their dependents had ambitions to gain colonial authority and establish themselves as the cream of the white middle class by setting an example of civilized life in the colony. They transplanted eastern values and practices in an effort to maintain a lifestyle fit for middle-class whites and to turn the army villages into "islands of civilization." In the process officers and their wives used leisure, living spaces, domestic life, and army journeys to showcase their class sensibilities and level of sophistication. In the end, many had to resort to compromises or readjust their goals, as the success of their efforts was not always what they had hoped. The identity of officers and their dependents also called for personal avoidance of manual labor and the power to get others to work for them. All enlisted soldiers were treated by the army as an underclass unfit for self-government. Their colonial privilege questioned, white soldiers were reduced into manual laborers and servants. They responded by deserting, working poorly, and building a rough yet liberating leisure world of their own. Locally hired indigenous soldiers functioned as colonized labor, a special racialized workforce characterized by the constant tension between integration and exclusion and between indigenous freedom and colonial control. In all, the army constituted a colonizer community,

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where boundaries of exclusion and privilege proved fluid and whose members produced projects characterized by ambitious goals, frustration, partial success, and renegotiation.

This study, interested in the social worlds, labor regimes, and culture of the U.S. Army in post–Civil War Arizona and New Mexico, is not a military history in the common understanding of the term but rather an exploration into the minds and actions of a group of white colonizers executing the expansion of an empire.[6] It not only approaches army people in the Southwest borderlands as a community of colonizers but holds that colonialism should be seen as a process where critically interrogating white colonizers' identity and mentality is as crucial as capturing the colonized (subaltern) voice or investigating the battles fought and dispossessions enacted.[7] To evaluate the nature and impact of colonialism, scholars need to understand how white colonizers thought and operated—how they built their power, justified their actions, categorized peoples and places, and made colonialism appear less harmful and exploitative. To do this it is necessary not only to discuss both army representations and actions but to map the connections between the two.

Although Sherry L. Smith forcefully pointed it out more than a decade ago, it often seems less than obvious among the academic mainstream today that the army offers an excellent laboratory for studies of social history. Even less understood is the notion that the army has much potential in labor history and cultural history of colonialism. Arguably, the "frontier" army continues to be a less than trendy subject among academic historians. A quick survey of recent Southwest and borderlands history—which has broken new ground and introduced more sophisticated understandings concerning image making, travel writings, and the meanings of whiteness, race, and ethnic identity—shows that the army has at best been given a small side role in the story, but more often it has remained completely off the scholarly radar. For instance, a new study on the making of Indians, Mexicans, and Anglos in Arizona that includes in its discussion

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government officials drawing boundaries of race and class seems to have forgotten the army, while a recent investigation of Germans in nineteenth-century New Mexico barely mentions one of the largest groups of Germans in the area: the U.S. Army enlisted men.[8]

Furthermore, while historians of the U.S. West have long been fascinated with overland migration or have written about European visitors, such as the famous British explorer Sir Richard Burton, the army remains largely absent in most descriptions of travel in the West, and army texts are not usually recognized as travel writings. For instance, one recent history of travels in the Southwest includes only one army narrative, thus overlooking the vast amount of army texts pertaining to the subject.[9] It is probable that historians of the U.S. West in general still erroneously cling to perceptions of soldiers as men of action engaged in Indian warfare and isolated from the western society, seeing them as a group largely unconnected to what Samuel Truett calls "borderland dreams" or "industrial frontiers."[10]

The reasons for this lack of interest might have something to do with military historians themselves. Often army history has been connected to top-down stories and outdated approaches that celebrate the army's cause.[11] Equally often, and in some ways quite naturally, much of army history has been preoccupied with the many aspects and details of military campaigns and battles or the lives of key army commanders. Army history has appeared conservative and peripheral to the larger field, where the interest for the past twenty years or so has been on critical analyses of race, class, and gender and on environmental history and ordinary people's everyday lives. The American West has been approached, in the words of influential New Western historian Patricia Nelson Limerick, both as a "place undergoing conquest and never escaping its consequences" and as "one of the great meeting zones of the planet."[12] Military historians need to address more fully, and in all their varied, grimmer, and complex meanings, the two central themes of recent western history: conquest (and its legacies) and meeting grounds. Although several interesting studies have begun to enlarge the scope of research

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on army-civilian relations, economic history, the army's noncombat role, and even architecture in the army villages, much still needs to be done.[13] One of the little-discussed sides of army life that would need critical analysis is travel. While military historians have studied the exploits of army explorers, described conditions in the field during military campaigns, or at times explored army wives' travels, the journeys that officers, their wives, and enlisted men regularly embarked on to reach their western stations have been the subject of limited interest.[14] In most historical works, the army is readily present in the West. It never arrives to a specific place from anywhere; there is no journey or travel writing, and it seems as if army members did not have anything to say about how they got to different locations.[15] In reality, white army men and women traveled from one region to the next often and wrote voluminously of their journeys.

Studies of black soldiers have been in the forefront, opening the discussion on race and the army.[16] But, apart from a recent work by Kevin Adams, the social worlds and identities of white soldiers and officers—especially the varied aspects and intersections of whiteness, class, manhood, and power—remain less explored, although the army offers a natural field for that kind of investigation.[17] Much of army history has omitted the contested and constructed meanings of whiteness and the intersections of race and class in army identity and community. In recent years whiteness studies have demonstrated that race is a social construction, a public fiction, and that whites are not born, but they are made through factors specific to time, place, and class.[18] Further complicating of what being "white" actually means, Matthew Frye Jacobson has shown that during the mid-1800s massive immigration of "undesirable" Europeans fractured all-inclusive formulations of whiteness in the United States into a hierarchy of white ethnicities with an emphasis on degrees of difference. This hierarchy reflected the perceived supremacy of the native-born Anglo-Saxons, while questioning the whiteness of many white ethnic groups, especially the Irish and the Jews.[19]

In the Southwest borderlands, race, whiteness, and class

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interpenetrated when structuring the army experience. For officers, dependents, and white soldiers, racial privilege was significant but so were perceptions of class, and they used both as sorting techniques when constructing their identities and building hierarchies of the world around them. It was racial otherness that primarily defined both the Apaches and the Hispanics in army eyes. While white army personnel often painted Apaches as a racially distinctive enemy, an antithesis of whiteness, they mainly excluded Hispanics as nonwhite on the grounds that their racially mixed ethnicity had degenerated their Spanish blood. All army texts certainly were not blind to class divisions among the Hispanics and the Apaches, but in general they placed less significance on class when codifying the difference of these two groups. On the other hand, although there were many white immigrants among the soldiers and civilians in the border region, class usually overshadowed ethnicity, as army people described and ranked Anglos. Still, drawing a too-rigid boundary to separate race and class as markers of social differentiation or to simply say that race trumped class, or vice versa, in some particular sector of the army experience is risky. In army usage racial and class categorizations lacked the fixed permanence they often became associated with in the twentieth century. In army minds, race was not simply the same as skin color but rather a set of more or less permanent traits and characteristics, and class did not simply equal social position or labor status but was also something made visible in behavior, taste, and character. Class and race were acted out on an everyday basis, and those who failed to act, for instance, white or middle class, could risk losing their status. For example, while in many army texts the region's prospectors and gamblers were classified as lower-class people, in some ways the army also hinted that these people were actually jeopardizing their whiteness by acting in an uncivilized manner. There were also concerns about imperial contamination inside the military, about falling out of class or race because of the harmful influence of the colony. On the other hand, some in the army implied that the Apaches could possibly escape

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their racial status as antiwhite and, with the help of the civilizing process, become clones of white people. What the army experience reveals is that whiteness and class need to be analyzed together, by connecting lines between them and by treating them not as fixed or timeless categorizations but as changing and interpenetrating factors.

While several historians of the post–Civil War army have noted that manual labor often took much of the soldiers' time, they usually have not approached soldiers' lives through the medium of labor.[20] Enlisted men represented a group who had voluntarily contracted their work output to the federal government, but whose daily lives were more similar to that of common laborers than to any ideal of professional soldier. Soldiers were only randomly trained in military skills because labor assignments or military campaigning took most of their time. Both white and black troops worked as servants for the officers and their families or sweated constructing and maintaining military villages, roads, and telegraph lines. Many soldiers felt cheated and misguided, thinking that the realities of army life were not what they had signed up for. Also, even colonial warfare often consisted of guarding some strategic location, which usually meant a plethora of labor chores for soldiers. War also included another line of soldier work: actual military campaigning, which in Apacheria meant exhausting and frequently fruitless chases punctuated by the rare opportunity for combat.

The discussion of soldiers as workers and soldiering as work not only widens the boundaries of what counts as work and who are regarded as workers in the history of the American West but establishes the multiracial, instead of biracial, character of the army by including the indigenous soldiers.[21] So far histories discussing the lives of the common soldier have ignored the indigenous presence, while many studies of army campaigns often note indigenous contributions in passing, merely reminding readers that indigenous men participated in the action on both sides.[22] Studies that discuss their experience more fully have treated indigenous men not as workers or soldiers but as army's sidekicks, as "allies," "auxiliaries,"

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"friendlies," or, most often, "scouts," using the term widely circulated in the discourses of nineteenth-century army personnel.[23] Indicating that indigenous duty was mainly reconnaissance, the term "scout" does not adequately describe what most indigenous men actually did in the army. Moreover, while a surging scholarly interest in Native American labor history has demonstrated that indigenous people actively sought work and used it for negotiating the changes brought on by the U.S. invasion, these studies have usually not integrated indigenous soldiers into their narratives.[24] In the nineteenth-century U.S. West, the army was an option to armed resistance and overflowing reservations, and in many cases it introduced indigenous men to wage labor and the American labor market. Recognizing that, like black and white troops, indigenous soldiers deserve to be discussed as workers and as members of the army community does not mean that the indigenous work experience or position was similar to other soldiers. In fact, it was difference that made the indigenous soldiers colonized labor.

While army historians have discussed the opinions officers voiced regarding certain regions or indigenous groups, they have paid scant attention to the paradigms of postcolonial theory.[25] They have not approached the army as a group of colonizers, embraced the subjective representational nature of history, or fully investigated the links between army discourses and power. In short, historians have not written an army history centered on representations, colonial knowledge, and difference. Involving a critical stance, a close but suspicious reading of sources, and the asking of awkward questions, postcolonial theory questions the European narrative of progress and modernity and the assumption that the western point of view is normative and objective. The standard postcolonial premise is that knowledge is not innocent but connected to operations of power and in service of colonial conquest. Postcolonial theorists, most notably Edward Said, have shown that the power of colonizers was bound to, created, and sustained by the discourses of colonial peoples, places, and projects that colonizers themselves constructed and imposed

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on the minds of the colonizer and colonized alike. Importantly, the discourses, Said writes, could "*create* not only knowledge but also the very reality they appear to describe." He also points out that what structured and enabled the discourses was "the idea of European identity as a superior one in comparison with all the non-European peoples and cultures."[26]

While acknowledging that postcolonial studies have invigorated historical research, historians such as Dane Kennedy and Frederick Cooper have criticized it for favoring ahistorical analyses of literature over a thorough understanding of historical contexts and for producing a static and abstract generic colonialism that sees the colonizers as an "undifferentiated, omnipotent entity" with totalizing designs and fails to appreciate the uncertainties and inconsistencies in colonial projects.[27] In historical research, analyses of representations should never replace all discussion of events or ignore change over time. When discussing the army community, historians should balance attention between discursive representations (army stories) and social experience (army actions) and describe the construction of army identities and relations in discourse and in the activities of army members. Colonizers' texts always reflect not only the specific historical contexts in which they were produced but also the personal and group agendas and motives of those who penned them. Therefore, colonialism needs to be explained as a place- and time-specific phenomenon grounded on historical realities, with an understanding of the peoples producing colonial power.[28]

Lately scholars studying colonialism—Ann Laura Stoler, Catherine Hall, and Antoinette Burton, among others—have brought attention to the role of the intimate and the domestic in the grounding of colonial rule and identity as well as on the linkages between the colony and the metropole. Ann Stoler especially has stressed the significance of private lives, the management of the household, and the domains of the intimate in creating, displaying, and securing colonizer identity and in defining the cultural distinctions on which the memberships of different communities and racial groups

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relied. Colonizer communities, Stoler writes, were socially fractious and politically fragile, and they created cultures—"homespun creations in which European food, dress, housing, and morality were given new meaning in specific colonial social orders"—for cultivating their difference from others in the colonized region and maintaining social distinctions among themselves.[29] It was far from irrelevant how living space in the army villages was organized or how army members lived, what kind of homes they had, what they ate, and how they worked, traveled, spent leisure time, or consumed money. The construction of a specific social order inside the villages and the orchestration of living space, domestic life, and leisure allowed officers and wives to make a visible statement of superiority in everyday life. For enlisted men, labor and living conditions set them apart from the officers, and leisure functioned as their principal realm for discovering social freedom.

It was Edward Said's ideas that brought the idea of colonialism from distant places to the heart of European culture. More recently, by emphasizing the transnational interconnectedness of imperial exchanges, or when urging a critical return to the connections between metropole and colony, or race and nation, scholars have demonstrated how the imperial centers and the colonies made each other, the links between them being relations of power.[30] Thus, what happened in the Southwest borderlands was not isolated to the border region but connected to the imperial center in numerous ways. For example, white army people built their identity and power in relation to the colony and the imperial center. They wanted status in the local social order but also sought to claim national recognition and historical importance for themselves through their achievements in "liberating" the border region. Their desire for power and prestige in the colony was linked to their position as outcasts in the imperial center. In other words, the army, shunned in the East, wanted to reclaim importance through its exploits in the western colonies. Also, when army men and women moved back and forth between the colony and the metropole, their ideas of race and class and the

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colonial knowledge they produced moved with them. Officers were among the first white Americans with college-level training to move to the Southwest. Many of them, enjoying personal or family ties to politicians, business owners, and newspaper journalists in the East, tried to make themselves heard and actively circulated their views. They published memoirs, engaged in extensive personal correspondence, and contributed to professional journals and various local and national papers.[31]

Army experiences and discourses also provide an example of the process where white America defines itself and its others through encounters with peoples in what to Americans represent distant lands. The national character of the United States and the identity of white America was and is even today to a significant degree constructed through encounters—literary, real, and imagined—with different peoples in various places around the world. Often this encounter has taken place during a time of crisis, war, or conquest. In the twentieth century, Americans, for instance, carved an understanding of themselves and others through involvement in the two world wars and the bipolar age of the cold war, while in the post-9/11 world Americans reassess the meanings of self and other in places such as Iraq and Afghanistan.

Displaying less emphasis on chronological narrative, this work is mainly thematic, the chapters exploring structures of thought and human interaction and the workings of power. Each chapter functions like a window that offers a view into a house that is the U.S. Army experience in post–Civil War Arizona and New Mexico. The first chapter sets the historical context for the discussion of the army community through a short history of Apacheria. It explores the changes in the geopolitical power of the Apaches, the creation of Hispanic-indigenous borderlands, the pivotal moments in the U.S.-Apache wars, and the nature of the colonial regime the United States established.

The next three chapters assess the army relationship with the

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border region, focusing on social relations and lived experience, as well as on patterns of knowledge production. Chapter 2 looks to army people's origins and status in the East before describing army journeys to Arizona and New Mexico. It discusses travel methods and routes, the significance of class en route, and army representations of the journey. The discussion of army travels and the investigation of army narratives establishes journeys as sites in the production of colonial power and demonstrates how the journey to colonial stations—in addition to daily life in the army villages—produced class identity and the learning of social place. The next chapter turns attention to white army personnel's representations of the Apache heartlands—the landscapes, nonindigenous peoples, and settlements of south-central Arizona and New Mexico—by discussing the army's social relations with the Anglos and Hispanics in the area. It also maps how army people produced the past, present, and future of the region and asks what role they reserved for themselves in all this. The important question that runs through this chapter is how army writings represented the borderland's potential for white futures and the reasons behind the changes that took place in much of army representations in the 1880s. Chapter 4 places the spotlight on the army's production of enemies. It investigates how and why white army people made the Apaches the colonized other and highlights the relationship between colonial knowledge (army stories of Apaches) and governance (the army's acts of violence and management targeting the Apaches). This chapter ends with a short discussion on the impact of colonial knowledge on Apache history, and how the representations produced by white colonizers have influenced the approaches and terminology used by historians.

The last three chapters shift the discussion more firmly to the contested dynamics and intimate social fabrics within the army community. Focusing on officers and their wives, chapter 5 discusses the orchestration and representation of public and domestic space in the army villages. The next chapter looks at life and social order in the army villages through the lenses of labor and leisure. The principal

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aim is not to describe or list all types of labor and leisure activities, nor to count their prevalence on a monthly or yearly basis, but rather to discuss how labor and leisure structured the army community and helped define the collective identities and differing cultures of the white elite of officers and dependents on the one hand and white enlisted men on the other. The final chapter discusses the implications of the Apaches—the white army people's "principal enemy"—becoming workers in the multiracial army. While pointing out how the army used the Apaches and exploring the discourses white army personnel penned of the Apache workforce, this piece is also interested in how Apaches caught in the margins of empire actively sought ways to influence and counter the reshuffling of power in their world by working in the army.

Sources in this book were used to recover the experiences of past persons and to understand the construction of knowledge, identity, and relations in discourse. When appropriate I also paid attention to silences in the process of historical production, seeing silencing as an activity in the arsenal of the colonizers.[32] Sources were examined to uncover no absolute truths, but to illustrate subjective experiences with an emphasis on the group rather than on the individual. This investigation approaches a person as a representative of his or her race, class, gender, nation, or some other socially constructed collective first and as an individual second. Partially subduing individuality for group collectives allows for a social reading of representations and for discussions of power between, and within, the army community and the colony that surrounded it, thus providing structure for the investigation of the army experience. In all, sources tell about the character of the army community, not of the army institution. They describe the peoples and their ambitions, fears, mentalities, relations, divisions, and hierarchies—the manifestations of power among a certain colonizer body.

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