



For Race and Country: The Life and Career of Colonel Charles Young

David Kilroy

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Charles Young served as the highest-ranking African American officer in the U.S. Army until 1917. During his career, he served on the western frontier, in the Philippines, and in Mexico, and as military attache to both Haiti and Liberia. Young was also an accomplished linguist, a musician and composer, a published author, and an active member of the black intelligentsia. A history of Young's life transcends the fields of military, diplomatic, and African American history. For those interested in the history of the United States between Reconstruction and World War I, his life offers a guided tour through one of the most important epochs in the American experience.

Charles Young's career was shaped by race. The army regarded him as an anomaly and sought to limit his visibility. He, on the other hand, used his profile to promote the cause of racial equality. As a soldier, he was diligent in his observance of duty. As a citizen, he was committed to the cause of black civil rights. For Charles Young, success was more than a personal dream, it was an obligation to his people. Young's ultimate goal was to attain the rank of general. Thus, his forced retirement on medical grounds in 1917 was a crushing blow, and, for him and his supporters, bore testament to the racism that permeated the armed forces and America.

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