

CREATING THE REGIMENT AND ITS BAND

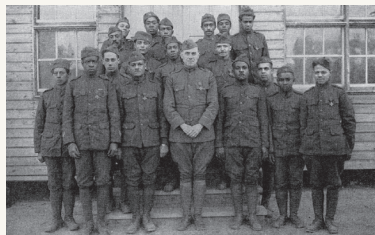
On June 2, 1913, after six years of African Americans rallying to have their own military unit, Governor William Sulzer signed a bill authorizing the 15th Infantry of the New York National Guard. However, the regiment did not officially form until June 16, 1916, when William Hayward was appointed as Colonel. In December of that year, Colonel Hayward raised funds to form a regiment band and assigned James Reese Europe, a rising New York musician and composer, as bandmaster. Europe's friend and fellow musician and composer, Noble Sissle joined as drum major and lead singer. Europe also recruited eighteen Puerto Rican musicians, who are often overlooked in history and who had a significant impact on the band's success.

Both Hayward and Europe hoped a regiment band would encourage enlistment. Once America entered World War I on April 7, 1917, the 15th was the fastest New York regiment to reach war-time strength of over two thousand men.



James Reese Europe and his band, 1919.

Image courtesy of Kelly Miller's *History of the World War for Human Rights*



Although the appointment of a white man as lead officer dashed the regiment's hope of an African American leader, Colonel Hayward was a strong proponent for his men.

Image courtesy of National Archives and Records Administration

James Reese Europe (left) and Noble Sissle (right) at Camp Dix, 1917.

Image courtesy of Noble Sissle Jr.