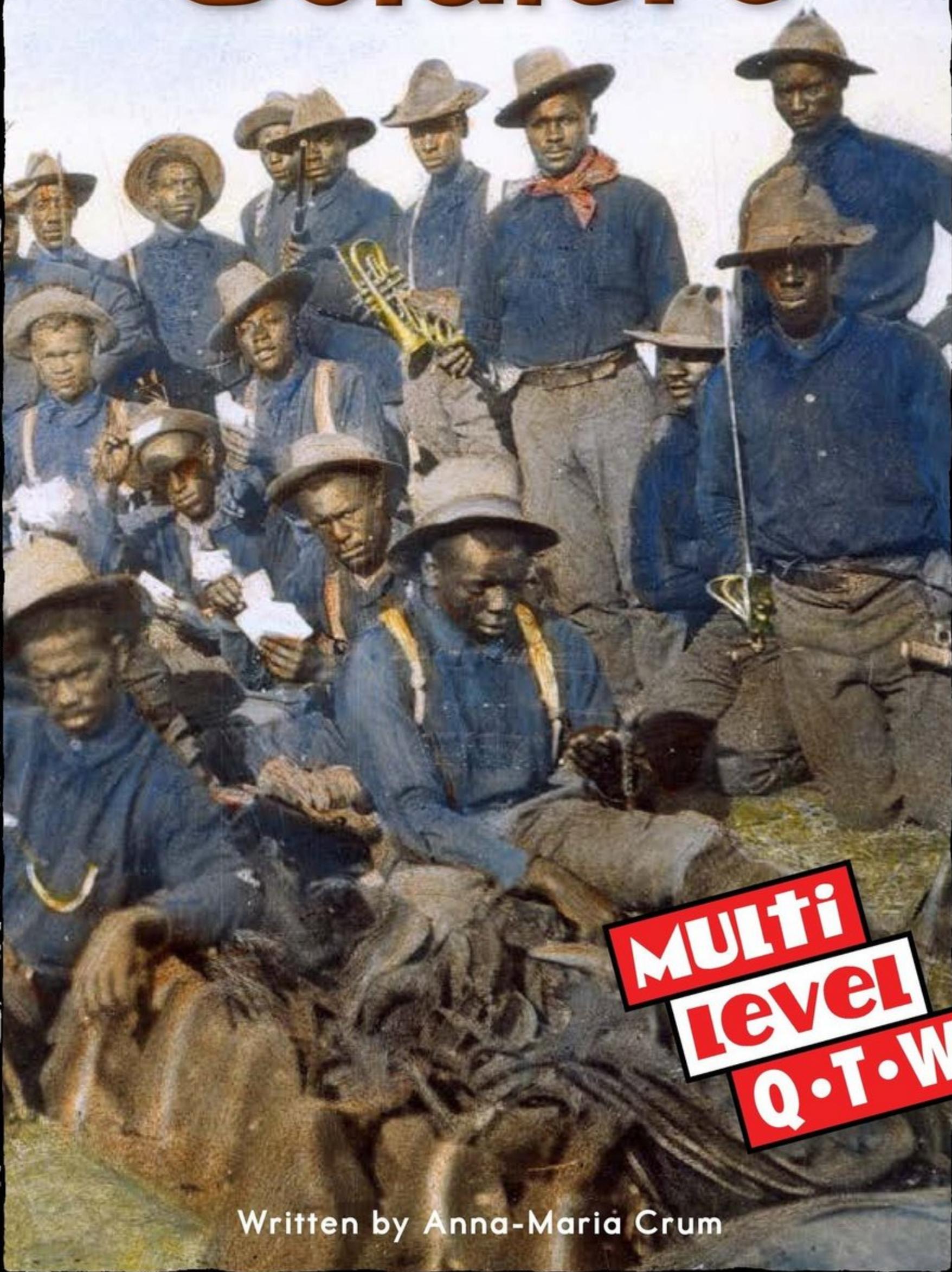


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The Buffalo Soldiers



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Written by Anna-Maria Crum

The Buffalo Soldiers



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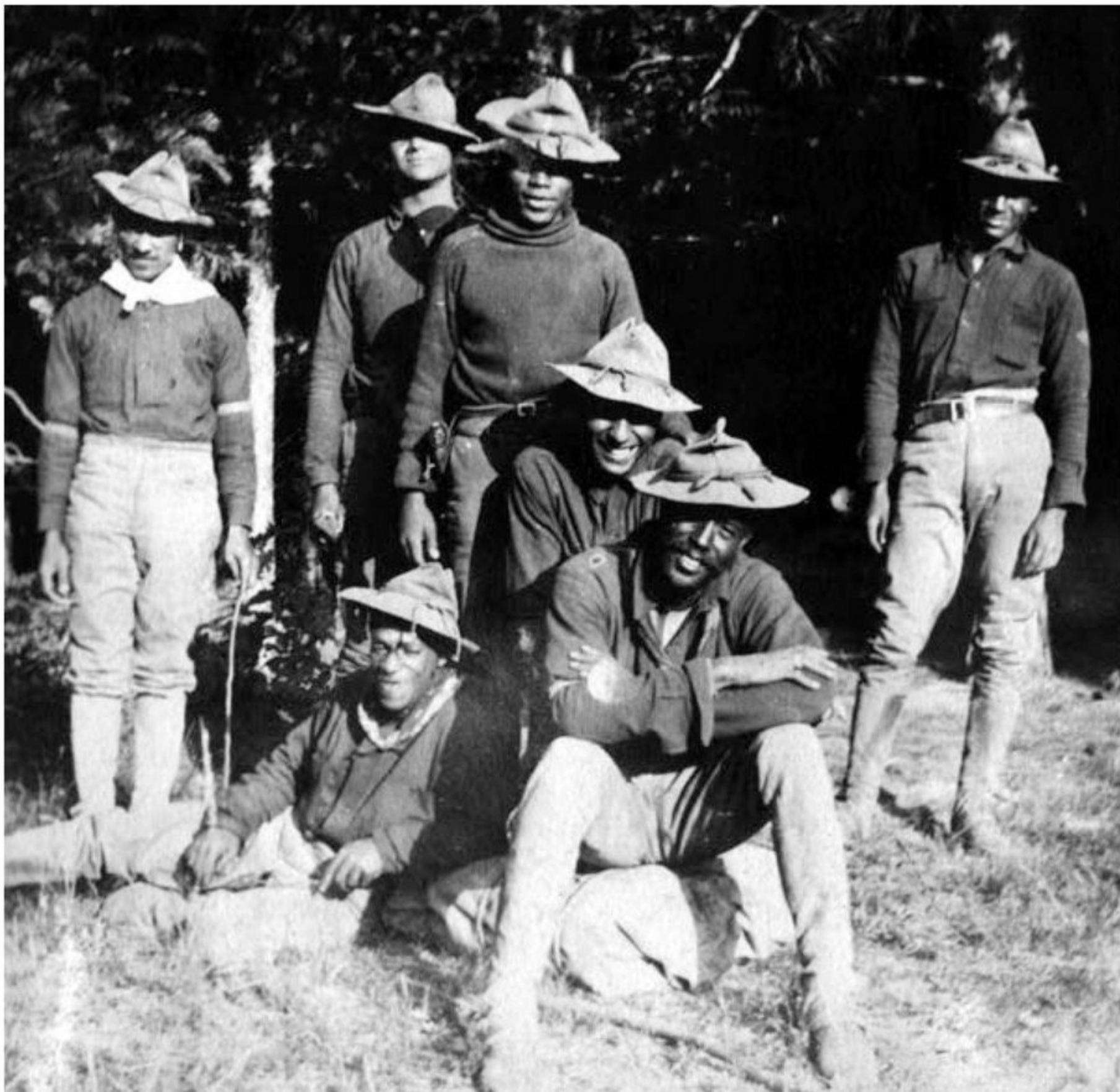
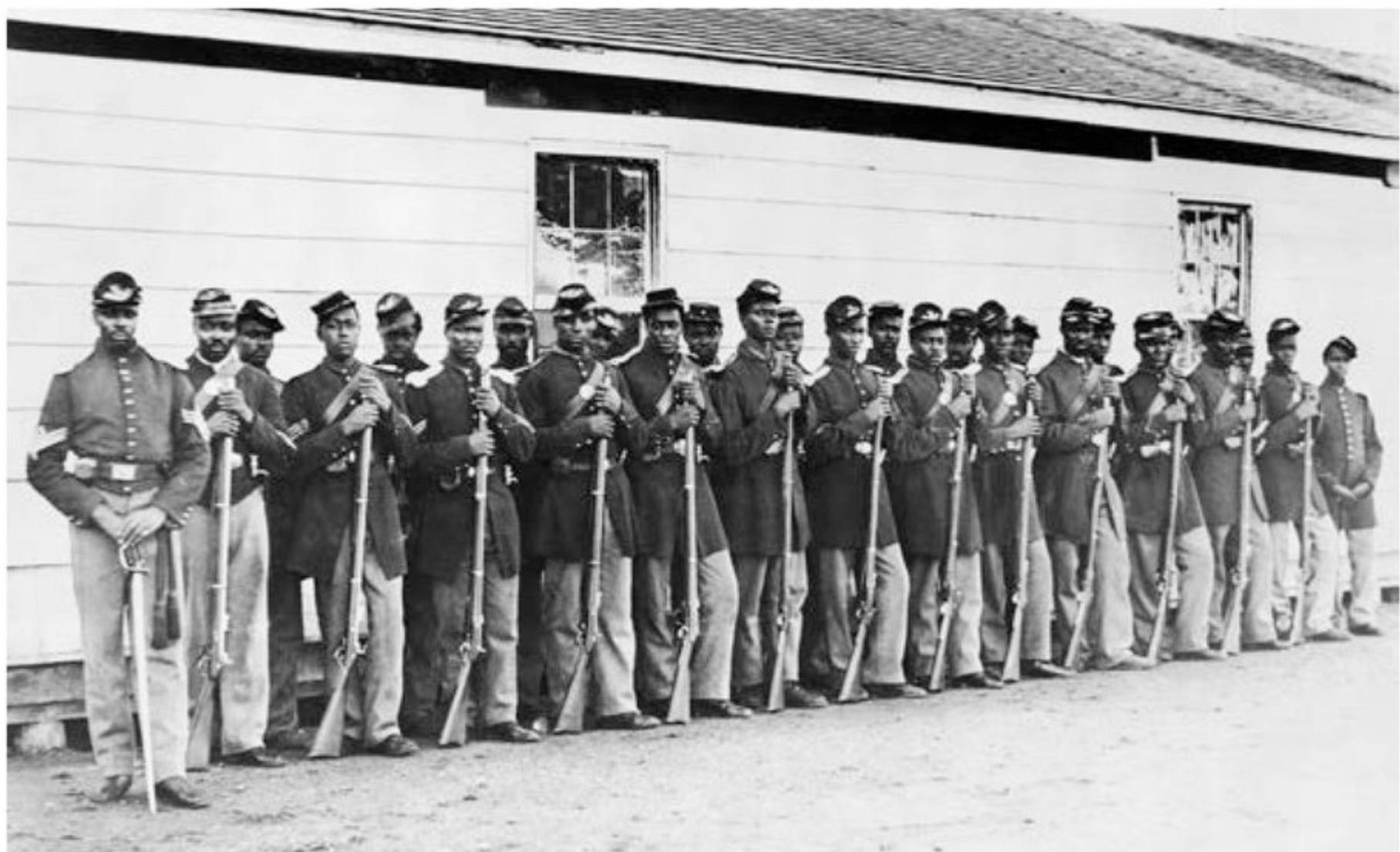


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Black Union Army troops in 1865

A New Army

Black soldiers have a long history in the United States. During the Civil War (1861–1865), for instance, more than 170,000 black soldiers fought for the North to end slavery in the South.

After the Civil War ended in 1865, the U.S. Army formed the first peacetime **regiments** of black soldiers. These regiments would come to be known as the **Buffalo Soldiers**.

Former soldiers, former slaves, and other black men joined. The army presented them with new **opportunities**. As former farmer Charles Creek said, “I got tired of looking mules in the face from sunrise to sunset.”



Field workers stand in a Florida cotton field in 1879. Hard labor was the only work available to many black people after the Civil War—often the same work they'd done as slaves.

Although the Civil War ended slavery in the United States, black people still faced **discrimination**. It was hard for them to find work. When they did, they were often paid less than white workers or weren't paid at all. Black people often weren't allowed to live in the same places as white people. It was also hard for black people to gain an education.

In 1866, the army paid black soldiers the same as white soldiers—\$13 per month. Black soldiers needed to write messages and understand orders and maps. Those who couldn't were taught to read and write. The army provided them with food, clothes, shelter, work, and the chance for adventure.

Most of these men were being sent to the western **frontier**—the Great Plains, deserts, and mountains west of the Mississippi.

The Original Buffalo Soldiers

Two of the black units formed in 1866 were the 9th and 10th Cavalry Regiments. Many historians consider the 10th to be the original Buffalo Soldiers. Like the other black regiments, the 10th Cavalry faced many challenges.

Many white soldiers and officers didn't think black soldiers should serve in the army. They gave the black soldiers old or lame horses as well as poor or damaged supplies. The food that black soldiers received was never as good as the food for white soldiers. If a white soldier stole from or hurt a black soldier, the white soldier often went free.



Black officers weren't allowed to lead, and white officers often didn't want to lead black regiments. Colonel Benjamin Grierson was a rare exception. He led the 10th Cavalry for twenty-two years, from 1866 to 1888.

Word Wise

Infantries are made up of soldiers who fight on foot. In the past, *cavalries* were made up of soldiers who rode horses. Today, cavalries are made up of soldiers in vehicles.



This map shows important forts where the Buffalo Soldiers served in the late 1800s.

Despite such treatment, the 10th Cavalry and the other regiments of black soldiers continued to perform their duties. Their regiments were often praised for their work and conduct. Black soldiers were also much less likely to quit.



Outlaws rob a stagecoach in 1880. This drawing records the scene as described by a witness.

Out West

The West was a wild place during the late 1800s. More and more **settlers** were moving into the area. Outlaws often stole cattle and horses. They also robbed banks as well as stagecoaches, which provided important supplies and mail to the settlers.

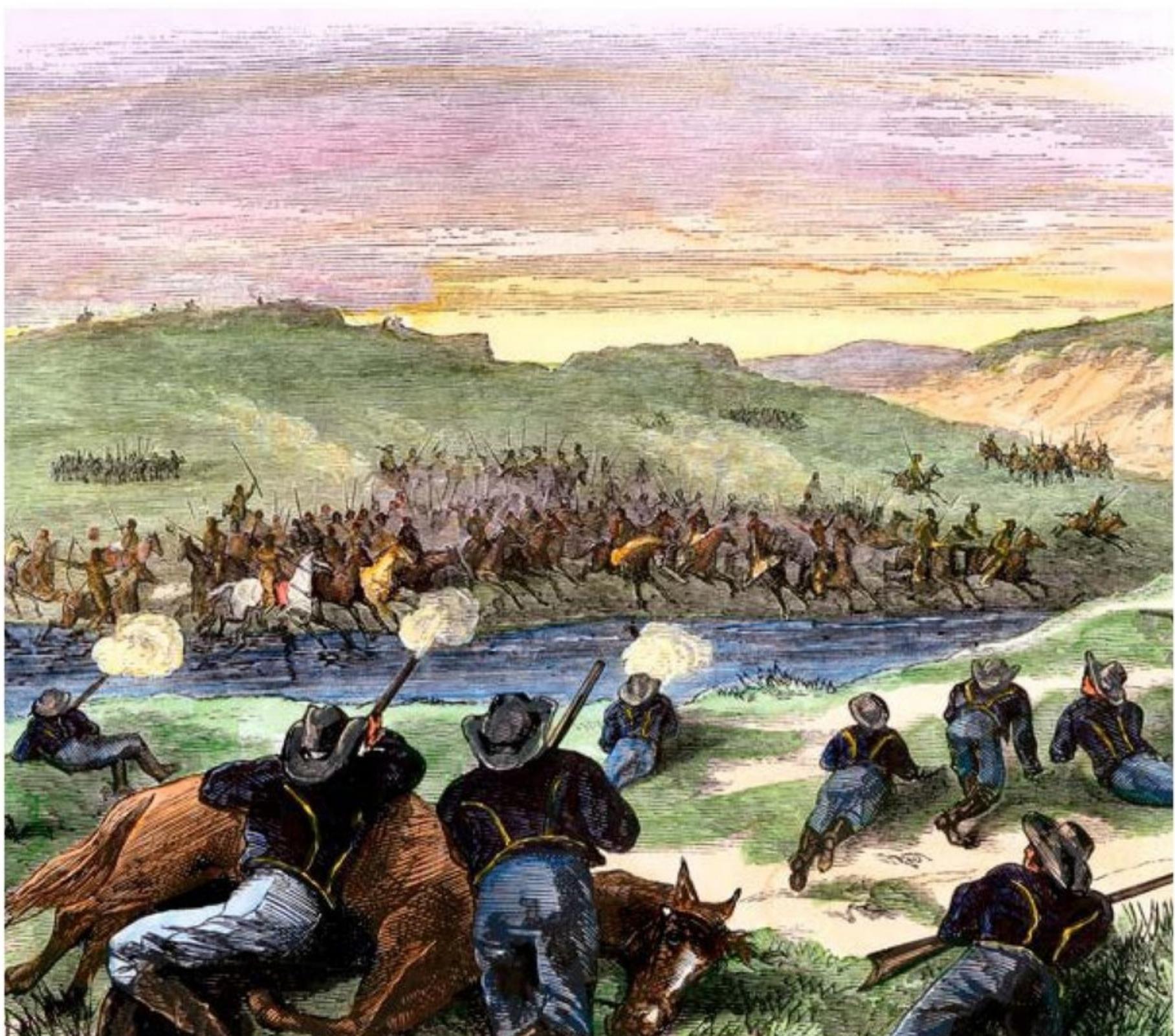


A group of Sioux Indians in 1891, probably on or near the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota

Meanwhile, the growing United States pushed Native Americans off the lands they had lived on for thousands of years. The U.S. government forced different Indian tribes to make deals. The government ordered them to move to poorer land on **reservations** but promised them food and other supplies. The government did not keep its promises. The broken deals angered Native Americans. Some tribes began attacking soldiers and settlers, taking back land and supplies.

Regiments of black soldiers were ordered to protect settlers, towns, and supplies from outlaws and Native Americans. Yet because of their skin color, the black soldiers were not often welcomed in towns.

Between 1866 and 1875, the 10th Cavalry was **stationed** in different places around Kansas and Indian Territory (now Oklahoma). It was during this time that they earned the name Buffalo Soldiers.



Nineteenth-century illustration of an 1868 battle between Buffalo Soldiers and southern Plains Indians

The name came from Native Americans. Some say Comanches gave the 10th the name, while others say it was the Cheyennes. One story is that the name came from the black soldiers' hair being similar to the dark, woolly hair between a buffalo's horns. Other stories say that the name came from the black soldiers' strength in battle, which was like a trapped buffalo's. Wherever the name came from, all the regiments of black soldiers soon adopted it.



The Buffalo Soldiers may have been named for the buffalo coats they sometimes wore.

The 9th and 10th Cavalries Combine

In 1875, the 10th Cavalry was sent to Texas. There it joined the 9th Cavalry. At that time, the government was trying to force the Apache tribes to move onto reservations in Arizona. The Apaches knew the government would not keep its promises. Also, they didn't want to live on poor land far from their home. Some Apaches fought back.



Chief Victorio in 1877, who led Apaches against the U.S. Army

The 9th and 10th Cavalries were ordered to stop Apache attacks. The 10th Cavalry remained in the Southwest for years, trying to bring the Apaches under control. By contrast, the 9th Cavalry was sent north to Indian Territory. There they fought outlaws and settlers who were trying to take land set aside for Native Americans.

For more than twenty years, the 9th and 10th served on the frontier from Texas to Montana. The Buffalo Soldiers earned fourteen Medals of Honor between 1870 and 1890. The Medal of Honor is the highest award a U.S. soldier can earn.

Later Service

In 1898, the Buffalo Soldiers fought in the Spanish-American War. They took part in many battles and earned five Medals of Honor. Even so, some leaders in the U.S. Army still thought black soldiers were unable to perform as well as white soldiers.



Yellowstone National Park, 1896

Buffalo Soldiers on Bikes

In the 1890s, the army wanted to see if bikes could replace horses since bikes were cheaper and easier to care for. The Buffalo Soldiers rode 1,900 miles from Fort Missoula, Montana, to St. Louis, Missouri. The roads were bad. They crossed the Rockies, rivers, and shifting sandhills, and still averaged 50 miles a day. Before long, though, bikes were replaced with motorcycles.

Between 1899 and 1904, the Buffalo Soldiers worked as park rangers in several California national parks. They built roads and trails, fought forest fires, and stopped people from hunting animals and stealing timber.

During World Wars I and II, new black regiments formed. They were still called the Buffalo Soldiers and were still led by white officers. They were kept separate from white soldiers until the Korean War (1950–1953), when they were mixed in with other units.



A unit of black and white soldiers serves together in Korea in 1950.



The Buffalo Soldier Monument at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas

The Buffalo Soldiers' Legacy

History remembers the Buffalo Soldiers as tough men who took on tough jobs. Although they were often treated poorly and often faced discrimination, they fought to prove they were good at their jobs. Their bravery and service are an important part of America's story.

Glossary

buffalo (<i>n.</i>)	another name for the American bison; a large, cowlike animal with a big head, large hump, and short horns (p. 4)
discrimination (<i>n.</i>)	the unfair treatment of a person or group based on gender, race, age, religion, or other differences (p. 5)
frontier (<i>n.</i>)	a wilderness area at the edge of a country's official border or settled region (p. 5)
opportunities (<i>n.</i>)	chances to do something (p. 4)
regiments (<i>n.</i>)	military units that consist of two or more large groups of soldiers (p. 4)
reservations (<i>n.</i>)	land set aside by the United States government for Native Americans (p. 9)
service (<i>n.</i>)	work done for an organization or government, especially in a branch of a country's military (p. 15)
settlers (<i>n.</i>)	people who make a new, permanent home on a frontier (p. 8)
stationed (<i>v.</i>)	assigned to a place (p. 10)

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Front cover: Members of the U.S. 10th Cavalry on San Juan Hill, Cuba, following the hill's capture during the Spanish American War in 1898

Back cover: Henry Johnson was awarded the Croix de Guerre (Cross of War) in 1919 for bravery in battle. The French medal is awarded to those who perform heroic deeds in combat, including foreign forces allied with France.

Title page: Nine Buffalo Soldiers who won the Croix de Guerre return home in 1919.

Page 3: Buffalo Soldiers stationed at Yosemite National Park in 1899

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