

# The Buffalo Soldiers

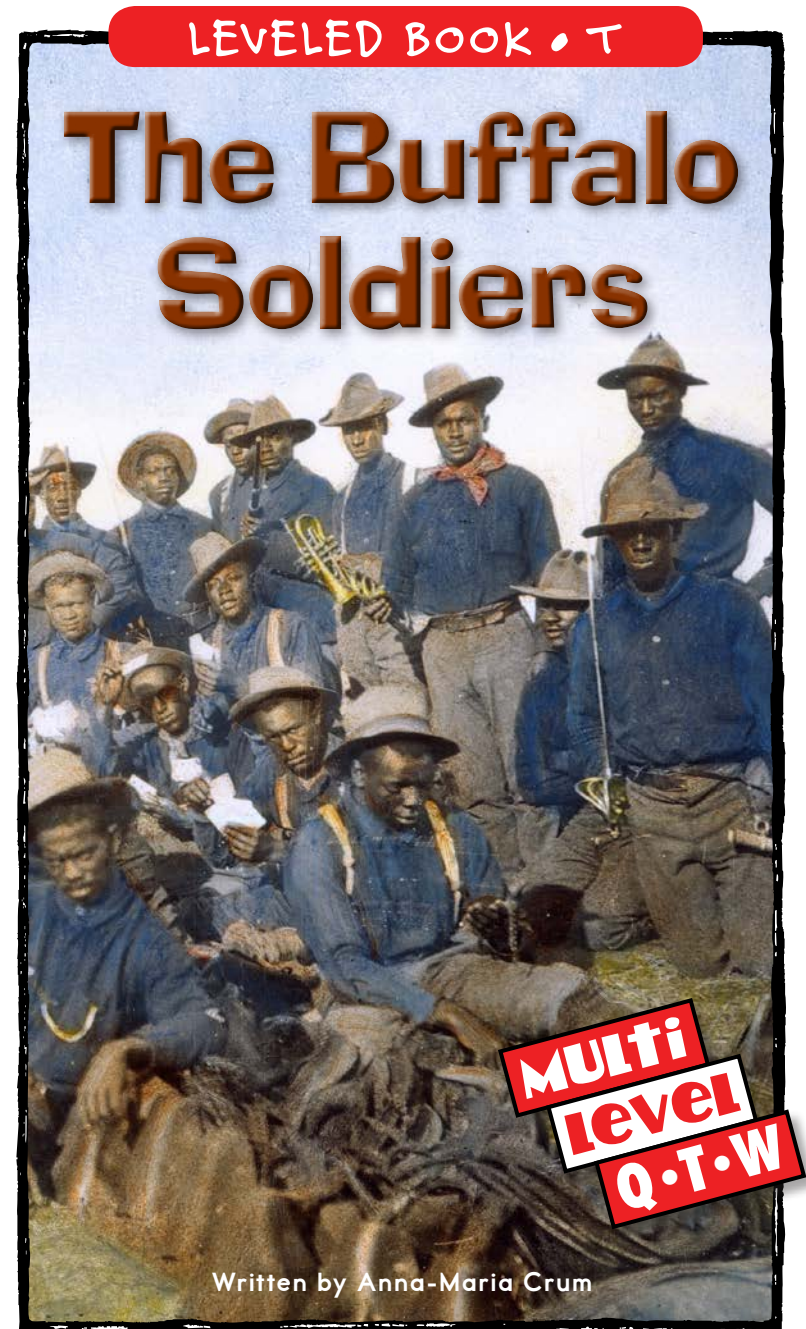
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# The Buffalo Soldiers



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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

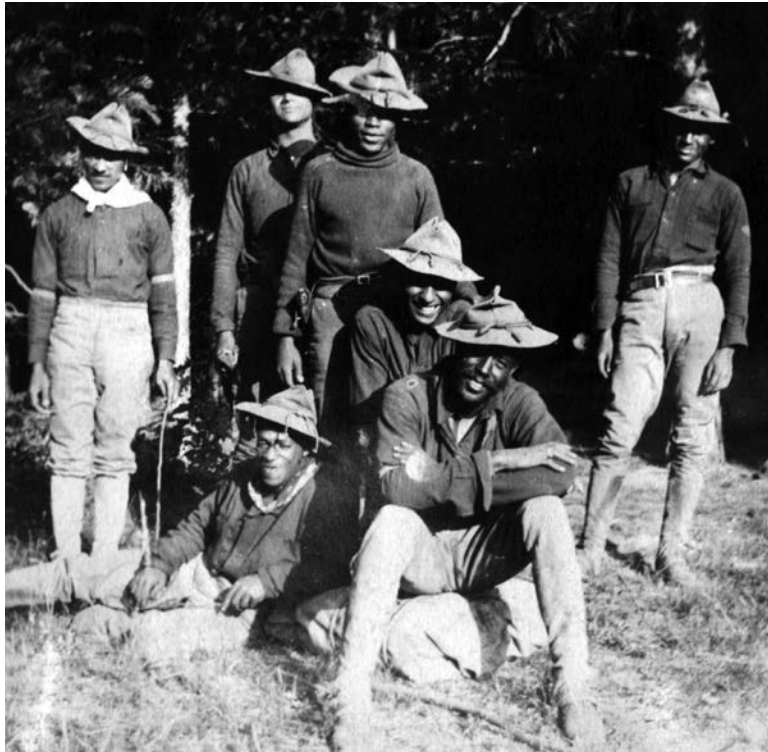
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Level T Leveled Book  
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## A New Army

Black soldiers have a long history in the United States. Thousands fought for both U.S. and British forces in the Revolutionary War,



Black Union Army troops in 1865

even though neither side gave them the same rights as white men. Even more black soldiers—more than 170,000—fought for the North's army during the Civil War (1861–1865).

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

Many black men who joined these regiments had fought in the Civil War. Many others were former slaves. As farmer-turned-soldier Charles Creek said, “I got tired of looking mules in the face from sunrise to sunset, thought there must be a better livin’ in this world.” He and others joined because the U.S. Army presented black men with new **opportunities**.





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, and 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 U.S. Army paid black soldiers the same as white soldiers—\$13 per month. Because black soldiers needed to write messages and understand orders and maps, those who couldn't were taught to read and write. The army provided soldiers 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

The first black units formed in 1866 were the 38th through 41st Infantry Regiments and the 9th and 10th Cavalry Regiments. Many historians consider the 10th to be the original Buffalo Soldiers.

First **stationed** at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, the 10th Cavalry was led by Colonel Benjamin Grierson, a white man. 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. They gave them hot wool uniforms to wear in summer. During the winter, black soldiers were often wet and cold. The food they 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.

### Word Wise

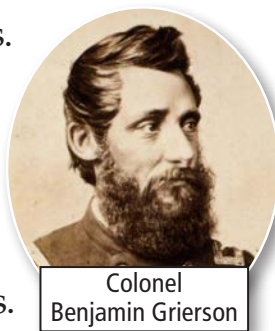
*Infantries* are made up of soldiers who fight on foot. In the past, *cavalries* were made up of soldiers who rode horses. Today, cavalries are made up of soldiers in vehicles.



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

Colonel Grierson asked to have his unit moved to another fort. They were moved, but things were much the same wherever they went.

Despite this 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 much less likely to quit or cause trouble than many white soldiers.



Colonel Benjamin Grierson



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 in. Because the area was so huge, it was hard to keep order. 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 **expansion** of the United States also pushed Native Americans off the lands they had lived on for thousands of years. The U.S. government ordered the different Indian tribes to make deals forcing them onto poorer land on **reservations** but promising them food and other supplies. The government did not keep its promises, which 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 rarely 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.



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

Wherever the name came from, all the regiments of black soldiers soon adopted it. They knew that the buffalo was sacred to Native Americans, and only a respected enemy would be named for it. In time, they even added an image of the buffalo to their flag.

## The 9th and 10th Cavalries Combine

In 1875, the 10th Cavalry was sent to Texas, where it joined the 9th Cavalry. At that time, the government was trying to force the Apache tribes to move onto reservations



Apache chief Victorio in 1877

in Arizona. Knowing the government would not keep its promises, and not wanting to live on poor land far from their home, the Apaches fought back. The warrior chief Victorio had led a band of excellent fighters since the 1850s. They had been attacking settlements and U.S. troops for years.

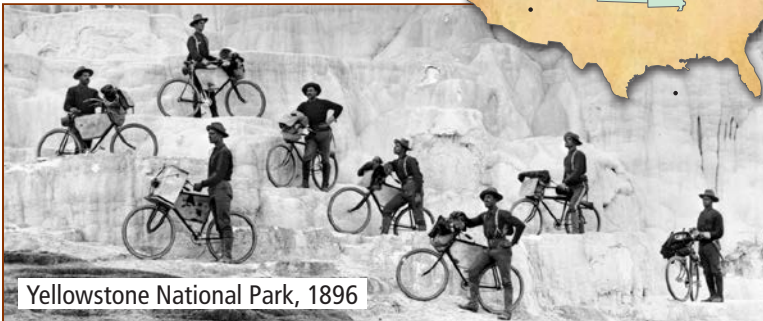
Colonel Grierson and the 9th and 10th Cavalries were ordered to capture Victorio. After many battles and chases, they finally drove him into Mexico. He died there in 1880. Afterward, the 10th Cavalry remained in the Southwest for years, trying to bring the Apaches under control. The 9th Cavalry was sent to Indian Territory, where they fought outlaws and settlers who were trying to take land set aside for Native Americans.



## Later Service

The Buffalo Soldiers continued to work in the West, earning fourteen Medals of Honor between 1870 and 1890. The Medal of Honor is the highest award a U.S. soldier can earn.

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

How would you like to ride a bike without brakes—in the mountains? That's just what the Buffalo Soldiers did in the 1890s. The army wanted to see if bikes could replace horses since bikes were cheaper and easier to care for. The soldiers rode 1,900 miles from Fort Missoula, Montana, to St. Louis, Missouri.

After that war, between 1899 and 1904, the Buffalo Soldiers worked as park rangers, serving in several national parks in California. 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, but they were still called Buffalo Soldiers and were still led by white officers. They were kept separate from white soldiers until the Korean War, when the troops were mixed in with other units.



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





The Buffalo Soldier Monument at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas

## The Buffalo Soldiers' Legacy

People haven't forgotten about the Buffalo Soldiers. Many books have been written about them and monuments raised to them.

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

<b>buffalo</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	another name for the American bison; a large, cowlike animal with a big head, large hump, and short horns (p. 4)
<b>discrimination</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	the unfair treatment of a person or group based on gender, race, age, religion, or other differences (p. 5)
<b>expansion</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	an increase in the size, amount, volume, or scope of something (p. 9)
<b>frontier</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	a wilderness area at the edge of a country's official border or settled region (p. 5)
<b>opportunities</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	chances to do something (p. 4)
<b>regiments</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	military units that consist of two or more large groups of soldiers (p. 4)
<b>reservations</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	land set aside by the United States government for Native Americans (p. 9)
<b>service</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	work done for an organization or government, especially in a branch of a country's military (p. 15)
<b>stationed</b> ( <i>v.</i> )	based in or assigned to a place or position for a specific activity (p. 6)