Buffalo Soldier Teacher Resources

References

Web sites:

http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/Help/search.html

http://www.nps.gov/prsf/history/buffalo_soldiers/index.htm

http://www.lipmagazine.org/~timwise/

http://www.nps.gov/yose/nature/articles/buffs.htm

http://www.buffalosoldier.net/

http://www.nps.gov/pwso/honor/thompkins.htm

Books:

The Buffalo Soldiers :
A Narrative of the Negro Cavalry in the West. By W.H. Leckie

Buffalo Soldiers: by Tom Willard

The Forgotten Heroes: by Clinton Cox

Black, Buckskin and Blue: African American Scouts and Soldiers on the Western Frontier by Art T. Burton

Buffalo Soldiers: by Taressa Stovall

Buffalo Soldiers and Officers of the Ninth Cavalry:
[1867-1898] By Charles L. Kenner

Ready and Forward

Courage and patriotism are not restricted to a single group of people or culture. Achievements of the African-American "Buffalo Soldier" regiments (9th and 10th Cavalry, 24th and 25th Infantry) portray selfless and dedicated participation in the settling of the American frontier and the development of the United States as a world power. The courage of these Black soldiers meant not only valor in the face of danger, but a spirit to serve to their country despite discrimination, segregation, and repressive laws.

From inception in 1866 until integration after 1948, the Buffalo Soldier regiments were segregated, and with only a few exceptions, the officers in charge were Caucasian. Nevertheless, soldiers of the four Black regiments overcame extreme adversity on the battlefield and at home to establish themselves as among the most effective military units in the Army.

Ready and Forward was the motto adopted by the 10th Cavalry

Origin of the Name

Herb Peck Jr., Collection

The legendary name, "Buffalo Soldier," is said to have originated with the Plains Indians, who thought that the hair of the black soldiers resembled the fur of the buffalo, and that their fighting spirit made them worthy opponents. The name first appeared in a letter from a frontier army wife to *The Nation* magazine in 1873, and it was soon widely adopted by writers and journalists. The soldiers seldom used the name amongst themselves, but they did accept the name as complimentary, and eventually the buffalo was used in the crest of the 10th Cavalry Regiment.

Ninth Cavalry Insignia

Tenth Cavalry Insignia

On the Western Frontier

On the frontier, black troops were renowned for their fierce fighting spirit

After Congress established the African American regiments in 1866, they were quickly sent to the American frontier states and territories. There, they scouted and patrolled vast expanses of challenging terrain, provided security for settlers, built roads, and installed telegraph lines. They also spent endless hours performing drills, inspections, parades, and caring for their horses and equipment. The troopers faced a mix of danger and boredom accentuated by rigid military discipline. They fought more than 125 engagements against the Cheyenne, Apache, Kiowa, Ute, Comanche, and Sioux.

The black regiments were frequently ordered to return hostile Indian tribes to their reservations. These activities created feelings of moral dilemma and a sense of irony for some of the black troops, since many were former slaves and others were Seminole Negroes, whose ancestors had fled slavery and joined Seminole tribes in Florida.

The First Black Officers

Lieutenant Henry O. Flipper

In 1877, Henry O. Flipper was the first black officer to graduate from West Point Academy. He served in the 10th Cavalry until 1881, when he was discharged under questionable circumstances. Two more academy graduates followed him: John Hanks Alexander, class of 1887, and Charles Young, class of 1889. They were joined by five African American chaplains: Allen Allensworth, Henry V. Plummer, George Prioleau, Theophilus Gould Steward, and William Anderson. Chaplains were military officers that did not lead troops. The black chaplains saw to the spiritual needs of the segregated regiments and taught those soldiers lacking a basic education.

Black officers faced challenges both on the battlefield and at the post. Although the army had an official policy of non-discrimination, it could not guarantee equality or social acceptance. It was not until 1901 that the first black soldiers, Benjamen O. Davis and John E. Green, would break the barrior to rise from the enlisted ranks to commissioned officers, and it would be 45 years after Charles Young graduated from West Point before Benjamin O. Davis, Jr. became the fourth black West Point graduate.

The War with Spain

Post card showing the charge of San Juan Hill.

In February 1898, the battleship *Maine* mysteriously blew up in Havana's harbor, killing 260 American sailors. The war with Spain began in April. Over 3,000 Buffalo Soldiers served with distinction on the battlefields of Las Guasimas, El Caney, and San Juan Hill. They fought up San Juan Hill beside white regular army regiments and the 1st Volunteer Cavalry —the Rough Riders—led by Lieutenant Colonel Theodore Roosevelt. After the battle, Rough Rider Frank Knox said, "I never saw braver men anywhere," and Lieutenant John J. Pershing wrote, "They fought their way into the hearts of the American people."

Although the war was promoted as a fight to liberate Caribbean and Philippine islanders from Spanish oppression, the participation of Buffalo Soldier and black volunteer regiments was controversial within the African American community. Blacks questioned whether they, who were deprived of civil rights by federal and state laws and were being lynched and terrorized in the South, should fight overseas for a government that recognized them as citizens in name only.

Beyond the Call of Duty

William H. Thompkins

The Medal of Honor was created in 1862 to recognize enlisted soldiers who "distinguish themselves by their gallantry in action and other soldier-like qualities." It is the highest military award for acts beyond the call of duty. Sixteen African American men earned the award in the Civil War. During the Indian Wars, 18 more black men received the Medal of Honor and many others the Certificate of Merit. After five Buffalo Soldiers earned the Medal of Honor for valor in the Spanish American War, no other African Americans would receive the medal until the Korean War, when two soldiers were posthumously honored. In 1997, President Clinton presented the Medal of Honor to seven Black soldiers for gallantry in World War II—only one recipient was still alive.

The selfless acts of privates William H. Thompkins, Fitz Lee, Dennis Bell, and George Wanton during the Spanish American War exemplify black valor. In the face of overwhelming enemy fire, these men voluntarily rescued wounded U.S. and Cuban comrades from a beach in Cuba. Each received the Medal of Honor. Sergeant Thompkins is buried at San Francisco National Cemetery along with 450 other Buffalo Soldiers.

The Fight for Empire

After the Spanish-American War, the United States remained in Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Philippines. In February 1899, Filipino nationalists (*Insurectos*) led by Emilio Aguinaldo resisted American domination and began attacking U.S. troops. All four black regiments reported to the Presidio on their way to war. They were honored for their service in the Philippines, and several senior Black noncommissioned officers became officers in the newly formed Philippine Scouts.

There was considerable opposition to the Philippine War within the African American community of the United States. Many black leaders and newspapers supported Filipino independence and felt it was wrong for the United States to subjugate non-whites in what was perceived to be the beginnings of a colonial empire. In spite of this, most African Americans felt that a good showing by Black troops in the Philippines would enhance their cause for equality at home.

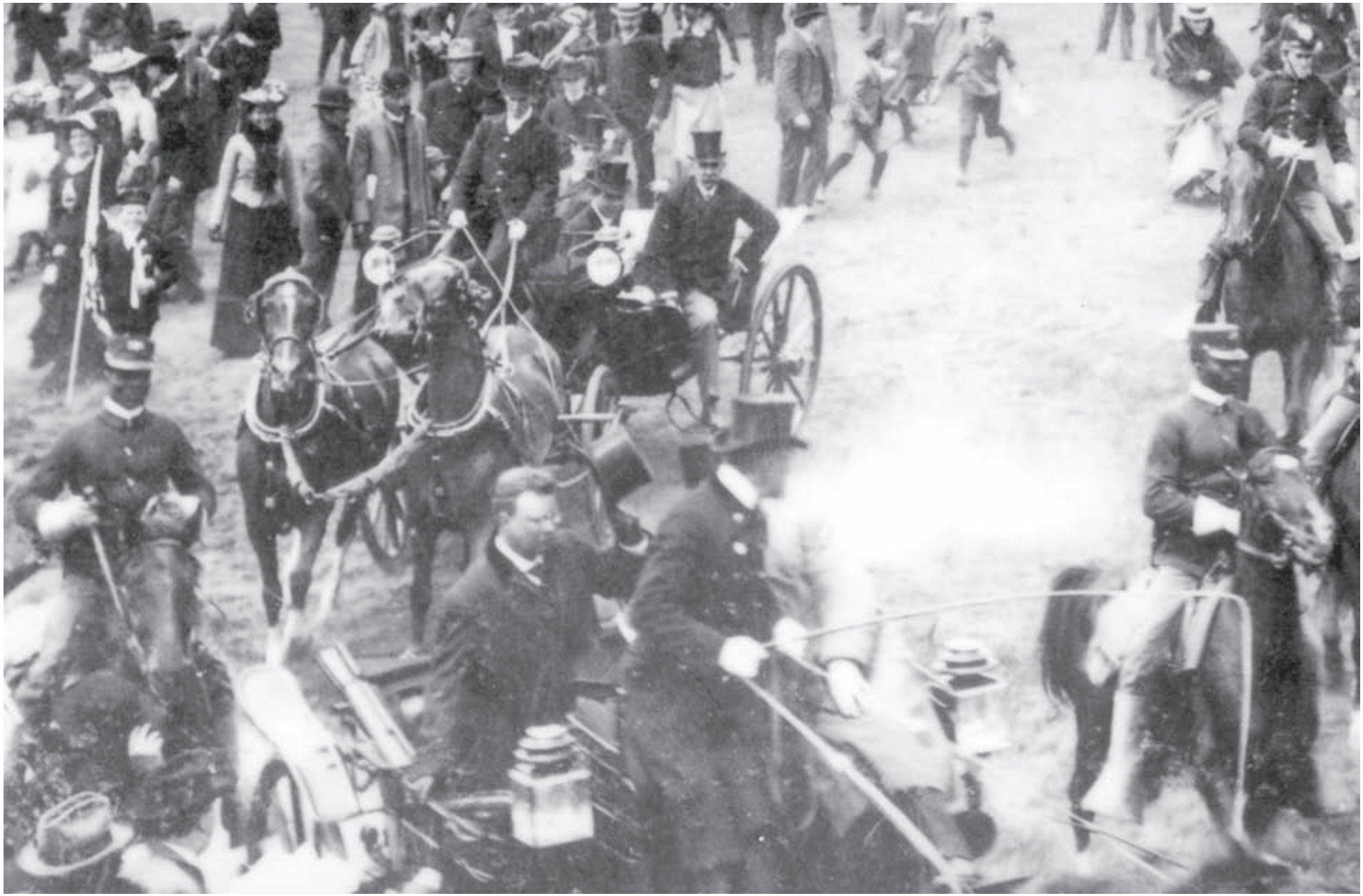
U.S. Army Military History Institute

Presidio Garrison

Twenty-fourth Infantry, Yosemite, 1899

On returning from the Philippine War in 1902, four 9th Cavalry companies were garrisoned at the Presidio of San Francisco until 1904. Garrison life was largely uneventful, consisting of the usual work details and guard mount. However, in the spring of 1903, these units were assigned two special missions. They were to patrol Yosemite, Sequoia, and Kings Canyon national parks over the summer, protecting them from logging, livestock grazing, poaching and fires. In addition, "I" Company was to serve as special escort to President Theodore Roosevelt during his California tour, the first time black troops were given this honor.

Theodore Roosevelt's relationship with his African American constituents was inconsistent. In 1904 Roosevelt raised hopes for racial equality when he invited educator Booker T. Washington to be the first black guest to dine at the White House. Then, in 1906 a small group of 25th Infantry soldiers were involved in an incident in which a civilian was killed and a police officer wounded at Brownsville, Texas. Unable to identify the guilty men, the Army, backed by President Roosevelt, dismissed without honor 167 black infantrymen, none of whom were found guilty of any wrongdoing.



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Mt Vaca
Sonoma Mtn
Napa
Fairfield
SOLANO
Jackson
CALAVERAS
San Andreas
TUOLUMNE
Sonora
Leavitt Pk
Bridgeport
Matterhorn Pk
Tioga Pass
Half Dome
Mt Lyell
Pilot Pk
MARIPOSA
NEW EXCHEQUER DAM
Mariposa
Kaiser Peak
Black Mtn
FRIANT DAM
Madera
MADERA
Merced
MERCED
SAN JOAQUIN
Stockton
Modesto
STANISLAUS
Martinez
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Mt Diablo
San Rafael
Mt Tamalpais
Point Bonita
SAN FRANCISCO
OAKLAND
Altamont Pass
ALAMEDA
Pillar Point
Redwood City
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Questionable Pk
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