



BUFFALO SOLDIERS STUDY

MARCH 2019



Buffalo Soldiers Study



An interpretive program held at the National Cemetery in the Presidio of San Francisco, Golden Gate National Recreation Area.



The 9th Cavalry at the fallen giant sequoia called "Monarch," in the Mariposa Grove of Yosemite National Park, 1905.

In 2014, Congress passed the National Defense Authorization Act (Public Law 113-291), directing the Secretary of the Interior and subsequently the National Park Service (NPS) to conduct a study to examine the role of the Buffalo Soldiers in the early years of the national park system. The goals of the study were to evaluate ways to

1. Increase public awareness and understanding of Buffalo Soldiers in the early history of the National Park Service, and
2. Enhance historical research, education, interpretation, and public awareness of the Buffalo Soldiers in the national parks, and develop ways to link the story to the development of national parks and African American military service following the Civil War.

The National Park Service conducted a nationwide outreach and information gathering effort involving members of the public, focus groups, and subject-matter experts, including a scholars' round table of NPS and non-NPS professionals. The study found that there are substantial gaps in our understanding of the history and significance of the Buffalo Soldiers and that broader capacity and coordination across the National Park Service is needed to accurately convey the history of Buffalo Soldiers' military service in parks.

The study identified the following four priority actions for meeting the study goals:

- A. Develop and maintain an online archive to organize and share links to primary and secondary source materials.
- B. Prepare a full historic context and annotated bibliography on the Buffalo Soldiers, including their stewardship of national parks.
- C. Develop a network program to leverage partnerships and provide support and technical assistance to parks, programs, and sites related to the Buffalo Soldiers.
- D. Develop a Servicewide Buffalo Soldiers Interpretive and Education Strategy and Toolkit.

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In addition, the study also identified 14 supporting actions to further meet those goals and needs. These supporting actions are presented in the following table.

Buffalo Soldier Study Supporting Actions

- 1 Develop interpretive or commemorative trails that represent important travel routes associated with the Buffalo Soldiers.
- 2 Develop new grant program to support programs and preservation projects of sites significant to the Buffalo Soldiers.
- 3 Partner with historical organizations to promote professional excellence in research, scholarship, and conduct peer reviews of historical research.
- 4 Locate soldiers' letters home to enhance park/partner research and document Buffalo Soldiers' experiences in national parks.
- 5 Develop an online story map illustrating the history and geography of the Buffalo Soldiers.
- 6 Develop a list of research opportunities for youth.
- 7 Partner with educators to develop national educational curricula and provide opportunities to bring the Buffalo Soldiers story to classrooms.
- 8 Develop consistent materials for youth and public engagement.
- 9 Create NPS travel itineraries around the theme of Buffalo Soldiers history.
- 10 Conduct locally place-based research to identify connections/sites in local communities and prepare case study biographies of individual Buffalo Soldiers.
- 11 Inventory, map, and document archeological or historical features as well as routes created by Buffalo Soldiers during their stewardship of national parks.
- 12 Develop new youth-oriented programs that involve park-specific Buffalo Soldiers history.
- 13 Recruit volunteers to interpret Buffalo Soldiers stories in the first person.
- 14 Conduct Buffalo Soldier outreach programming regularly and consistently.

Many of these priority and supporting actions would not need to be exclusively implemented by NPS programs or parks and could be accomplished by a variety of NPS partners where funding and interests align. Partnering with others would enhance the National Park Service's capacity to implement actions that could not otherwise be accomplished under currently constrained funding and staffing levels. The level of partner involvement could vary depending on the action and the partner.

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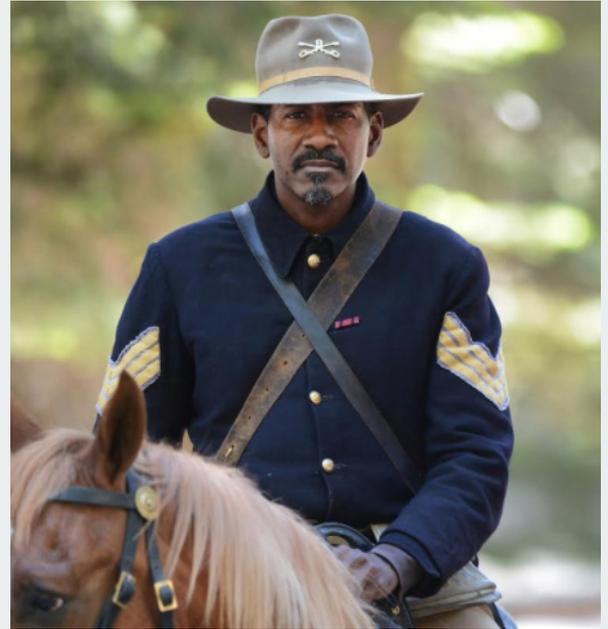
CHARLES YOUNG BUFFALO SOLDIERS NATIONAL MONUMENT JUNIOR RANGER PROGRAM

Who were the Buffalo Soldiers?

Although African Americans have participated in every war since the Revolutionary War, it was not until after the Civil War that they could enlist in the Regular Army. In 1866, Congress created six segregated regiments that were soon consolidated into four African American regiments: the 9th and 10th cavalries and the 24th and 25th infantries. They came to be known as “Buffalo Soldiers.”

The Buffalo Soldiers’ service was concentrated in the American West when the United States encouraged westward settlement to expand the nation and its institutions after the Civil War. Before the establishment of the National Park Service in 1916, the US Army was responsible for protecting our first national parks. Soldiers from the Presidio of San Francisco spent the summer months of 1899, 1903, and 1904 in Yosemite and Sequoia National Parks in the Sierra Nevada Mountains of California. They also served in Glacier National Park in 1910 and in Hawai’i National Park in 1915. In the parks, the Buffalo Soldiers’ tasks included blazing trails, constructing roads, creating maps, evicting grazing livestock, extinguishing fires, monitoring tourists, and keeping poachers and loggers at bay. They played a crucial role in events and achievements that shaped the parks, as well as the entire national park system.

For more information and a link to the Buffalo Soldier Study document, please go to http://parkplanning.nps.gov/Buffalo_Soldier_Study



Telling the story through first-person narratives has been highly effective for providing visitors opportunities to have meaningful connections with the Buffalo Soldiers as individuals.

The name “Buffalo Soldiers” is thought to have originated with the 10th Cavalry and was later used to refer to all four segregated units of the army because, reportedly, Plains Indians compared the soldiers’ hair to the fur of a buffalo. Other sources say that Indians nicknamed African American regulars “Buffalo Soldiers” because of their courage and valor in combat. Still others contend it is a combination of the two because buffalo were revered by tribal leaders so any comparison between men and buffalo was considered high praise. More research is needed to determine the exact origins of the name. Evidence that the African American regulars referred to themselves as Buffalo Soldiers during this period is unknown. In 1922, a buffalo was incorporated into the distinctive unit insignia for the 10th Cavalry, and the term was adopted with pride by African American units, which remained segregated through World War II.