

STUDY GUIDE

Buffalo Soldier

Book, Music and Lyrics by
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Created in association with the Virginia Historical Society (now known as the Virginia Museum of History and Culture)

TEACHER RESOURCES

Virginia Rep's *Buffalo Soldier* and this study guide are presented in support of the Virginia Standards of Learning in History, Language Arts, Music, and Theatre.

AT THE LIBRARY

The Right to Fight: A History of African Americans in the Military
by Gerald Astor

Buffalo Soldiers in the West: A Black Soldiers Anthology by Bruce A. Glasrud and Michael N. Searles

The Forgotten Heroes: The Story of the Buffalo Soldiers by Clinton Cox

Buffalo Soldiers: Heroes of the American West by Brynn Baker

ON THE WEB

National Park Service: The Buffalo Soldiers and the Spanish-American War
[nps.gov/prsf/learn/historyculture/buffalo-soldiers-and-the-spanish-american-war.htm](https://www.nps.gov/prsf/learn/historyculture/buffalo-soldiers-and-the-spanish-american-war.htm)

U.S. Army: Buffalo Soldier Monument in Leavenworth, KS
kansassampler.org/8wonders/people/results.php?id=313

Please Note: Regarding the use of Black vs African American, when referencing history that pre-dates the recognition of "African Americans" as a term in the 1970s, we will use the term Black instead of African American.

BUFFALO SOLDIER



Buffalo Soldiers of the 25th Infantry, some wearing buffalo robes. Ft. Keogh, Montana, 1890. Source: Library of Congress

PLAY SYNOPSIS

Based on the true story of our nation's longest-surviving Buffalo Soldier and veteran of the Spanish-American War, this dramatic play with music tells the heroic story of the brave soldiers of the 9th and 10th Cavalries, who served our country well with little of the recognition they deserved. The story of the segregated black troops who served our country is told through the eyes of Jones Morgan, a 109-year-old black Buffalo Soldier who, in 1990, was found living in poverty in Richmond, Virginia.

The son of freed slaves, Mr. Morgan was the oldest living Buffalo Soldier in the nation. Even with his memory fading, Mr. Morgan's life story is the stuff of legend. His story tells how he ran away to become a Buffalo Soldier in 1898 at the age of 15.

A key element of Mr. Morgan's final years, and of this play, is the disagreement among reasonable people as to whether the events portrayed in this play are fact or fiction. The action of the play moves back and forth from Jones Morgan's memories of the Spanish-American War (1898) to the events of his final years in Richmond, Virginia and his attendance at the dedication of the Buffalo Soldier Monument in Fort Leavenworth, Kansas (1989 through 1993). Many people called Jones Morgan crazy, but two characters in the play, a wheelchair-bound Army reservist from Hawaii and an inner-city boy from Richmond, join forces to learn the truth about Jones Morgan.

Trooper Jones Morgan served in Cuba and was one of the many Buffalo Soldiers at the Battle of San Juan Hill. He was born in 1883 and passed away in Richmond, Virginia in 1993. His story not only encompasses the experiences of the Buffalo Soldiers in battle, but also tells of his battle to make his story (and that of the black soldier in Jim Crow America) known today.

The History of the Buffalo Soldiers

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At the beginning of the Civil War, the North expected the conflict to end quickly and was not prepared for the high death toll of the long war. The government soon turned to black Americans and asked them to join the fight. More than 150,000 men enlisted in all-black regiments in the Union Army. While a few of these men achieved military officer rank during the Civil War, they were never allowed to command troops, as the nation's leaders believed they lacked the needed skills and experience.

By the war's end, these skillful soldiers had taken part in over 400 battles and had helped the North preserve the Union. Soon after the Civil War ended, many settlers headed west to the American frontier. At the same time, the federal government set about taming the frontier by force, and soldiers were dispatched to the West. Among these soldiers were four newly formed black regiments which had been created by Congress on July 28, 1866 through legislation which allowed black men to join the Army during peacetime for the first time.

These regiments were soon to be known as Buffalo Soldiers, a name given to them by the Indian warriors they fought. There are several stories to explain this nickname. According to one story, the black soldiers wore furry buffalo hides in the winter. Another story says that Native Americans admired the soldiers' bravery just as they admired the strong and plentiful buffalo. The soldiers accepted this name with pride and the 10th Cavalry even included the buffalo in its regimental crest.

The four new black regiments were the 9th and 10th Cavalry and the 24th and 25th Infantry, two units of foot soldiers. White officers were assigned to serve with these regiments because the Army would not permit black officers. According to the law establishing the peacetime army, the black regiments were to be composed of men who "had served two years during the Civil War and had been distinguished for capacity and good conduct in the field." Eventually, these regiments included 12,500 newly enlisted black men and offered them steady pay, food and shelter, all of which were not easy to come by. Each enlistment was for a five-year term and paid \$13 a month.

While the Buffalo Soldiers' original assignment was to guard the American frontier, they went on to become valued servicemen in the Spanish-American War, in the Philippines, World Wars I and II, and the Korean War. During the first years of the Buffalo Soldiers, eighteen black soldiers were awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor for Gallantry. On February 2, 1948, President Harry S. Truman signed Executive Order 9981 ordering an end to segregation in the United States Armed Forces and ending the long and honorable service of the segregated troops known as the Buffalo Soldiers.

The Buffalo Soldiers seemed to be the forgotten heroes of the American Army until 1982 when General Colin Powell was stationed at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. During this time, he noticed that the only monuments to the brave soldiers were two alleyways named 9th and 10th Cavalry Streets and a stained glass window in the chapel. Powell began the project to create the Buffalo Soldier Monument. When Powell left Fort Leavenworth, Commander Carlton Philpot of the U.S. Navy took over the project. On July 25, 1992, Powell returned to Fort Leavenworth to unveil the Buffalo Soldier Monument. Jones Morgan was in attendance at this ceremony. In 1994, the United States Postal Service honored the Buffalo Soldier with the creation of a 29 cent stamp featuring a Buffalo Soldier on horseback.



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BUFFALO SOLDIERS AND THE SPANISH-AMERICAN WAR

In 1898, the 9th and 10th Cavalries and the 24th and 25th Infantries, also known as the Buffalo Soldiers, fought in the Spanish-American War in Cuba. The 10th Cavalry, of which Jones Morgan was a member, eventually fought in one of the most important battles of the war and saved Theodore Roosevelt's Rough Riders during the Battle of San Juan Hill.

In the 1890s, Cubans were struggling to become independent from their Spanish rulers, claiming that they were unjust and cruel. During this time, the United States sent the battleship U.S.S. Maine to Havana Harbor in Cuba on a "friendly" visit. The ship was also there to help evacuate Americans from Cuba if heavy fighting should break out. At 9:40 a.m. on February 15, 1898, a large explosion sank the Maine killing 260 crew members. Although no one knew the cause of the explosion, Spain was blamed. By April, the United States and Spain were at war.

The Buffalo Soldiers traveled to Tampa, Florida, where they boarded ships for Cuba. On June 22, they arrived in Cuba. The 10th Cavalry joined the Rough Riders in the hills named Las Guasimas. The Rough Riders were a group of young cowboys, adventurers, and wealthy young men led by Colonel Theodore Roosevelt, who knew little about fighting wars. While making their way through the jungle trees, the Rough Riders came under heavy gunfire from the Spanish sharpshooters. The highly trained and skilled Buffalo Soldiers came to their rescue.

On July 1, the Buffalo Soldiers and the Rough Riders fought and won the most important battle of the Spanish-American War, the battle of San Juan and Kettle Hills. The Buffalo Soldiers were once again needed to save the untrained Rough Riders. For their service and bravery in this battle, five Buffalo Soldiers were awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor for Valor. On July 3, the U.S. Navy defeated the Spanish naval squadron in Santiago's harbor. Two weeks later, Spain sought peace with the United States.



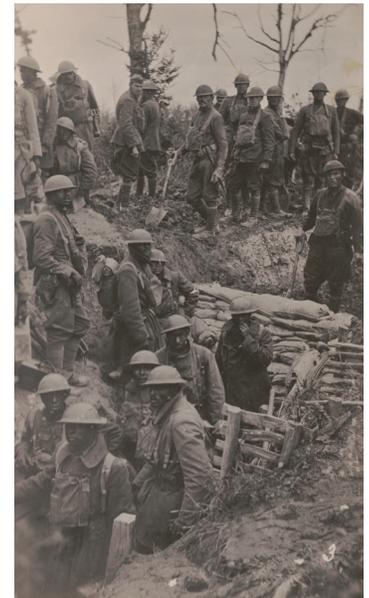
Buffalo Soldier, 25th Infantry, Co., between 1884 and 1890.
Source: Library of Congress

The History of the Buffalo Soldiers

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A CHRONOLOGICAL HISTORY OF BLACKS IN THE U.S. ARMED FORCES

- 1770** On March 5, Crispus Attucks, a former slave, is among the first to die in the Boston Massacre.
- 1776-1781** 7,000 black American soldiers and sailors take part in the Revolutionary War.
- 1862-1865** 186,000 Blacks serve in black regiments during the Civil War; 38,000 black soldiers lose their lives in more than 400 battles.
- 1866-1890** Units of black soldiers, known as Buffalo Soldiers, are formed as part of the U.S. Army.
- 1872** John H. Conyers becomes the first Black admitted to the U.S. Naval Academy.
- 1914-1918** More than 400,000 Blacks serve in the U.S. armed forces during the First World War.
- 1918** Two black soldiers, Henry Johnson and Needham Roberts, become the first Americans to receive the French Medal of Honor (Croix de Guerre).
- 1940** Benjamin O. Davis, Sr., becomes the first black general in the active Regular Army.
- 1941-1945** American forces in World War II include more than a million black American men and women.
- 1948** President Harry S. Truman signs Executive Order 9981, ordering an end to segregation in the U.S. armed forces.
- 1950-1953** Black and white forces fight side by side in Korea as separate black fighting units are disbanded.
- 1965-1973** Twenty black soldiers are awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor during the Vietnam War.
- 1971** Samuel L. Gravely becomes the first black admiral in the history of the U.S. Navy.
- 1975** Daniel "Chappie" James becomes the first African American to achieve the rank of four-star general.
- 1989** Colin Powell becomes the first African American Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, advising the President on military matters.
- 2003** Approximately 254,000 African Americans serve in the Army as an active-duty, Reserve or National Guard Soldier, or as an Army civilian, according to the U.S. Office of Army Demographics. This is 20.3% of the total Army.
- 2008** America elects its first African American President of the United States, Barack Obama. He is the 44th president and became the Commander in Chief of the Army and the U.S. armed forces.
- 2014** African American Soldiers made up 21% of the active-duty Army, 15% of the National Guard and 22% of the Army Reserve.



Engineers of the 302nd Engineer Regiment repairing a roadway over a trench and black soldiers of the 92nd Infantry Division (Buffalo Soldiers) in a trench headed into action in the Argonne Forest, France, during World War I. 1917. Source: Library of Congress

Every day, African American soldiers serve the United States - in Afghanistan, Iraq, Kuwait, South Korea and many other nations - among many overseas operations. Today's black soldiers follow in the footsteps of those who have served with distinction and honor for hundreds of years.

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dialogue: a conversation between two or more characters in a story or play

quotation marks: (“ ”) used to show the beginning and end of a piece of dialogue

Read the quotes below from the play. Discuss them as a class, and answer the questions below.

“I am Lieutenant Colonel Theodore Roosevelt, soon to be named... the Republican Nominee for Governor of the Great State of New York. I am fighting this splendid little war in Cuba, newspaper reporters everywhere...”
-*Lieutenant Colonel Theodore Roosevelt*

“Two U.S. Cavalry regiments escorted more wagon trains through the Great Plains, protected more settlers in the Texas Territory, came charging over the rise, bugles blaring, to fight fearlessly in more battles than any other regiments. They were the Ninth and Tenth Cavalries... They were black. Recently freed slaves or the children of slaves.”
-*Roy Moore, Jr.*

“Nobody ever keep a record about what we colored troops do. If the boy’s got a diary, then let him have it... All these reporters ‘round here- you think they’re writin’ down stuff about us?”
-*Samuel Bynum*

“Sergeant George Barry, cap’n, one of the buffalo boys from the tenth. He was de first on top [of San Juan Hill]. Bully Bob -Colonel Roosevelt - he and de Rough Riders got all de credit, an dey did fight mighty brave, but the Buffalo Soldiers got der first.”
-*Trooper Jones Morgan*

“This is Samuel Bynum. Whatever you read in this book about our lives here in Cuba, that is what he lived. When his country needed him, he was there. And he died, today, a hero of the Battle of Kettle Hill. Don’t forget him.” (He writes and tucks the journal under Bynum’s belt, leaving it to mark the body.)
-*Trooper Jones Morgan*

“And I am deeply mindful of the debt I owe to those who went before me. I climbed on their backs. I will never forget their service and their sacrifice. And I challenge every young person here today: don’t forget their service and sacrifice. And climb on their backs, to be eagles!”
-*General Colin Powell, Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff*

1. How is Roosevelt’s characterization of the war in Cuba different than that of the Buffalo Soldiers? What did he have to gain from the war?
2. When General Powell referred to “climbing on the backs” of those who came before him, what do you think he meant?
3. Why do you think Jones left his diary on Bynum’s body? Why did he say, “Don’t forget him.”?
4. Why was Roy Moore Jr. presenting information about the Buffalo Soldiers at the elementary school?

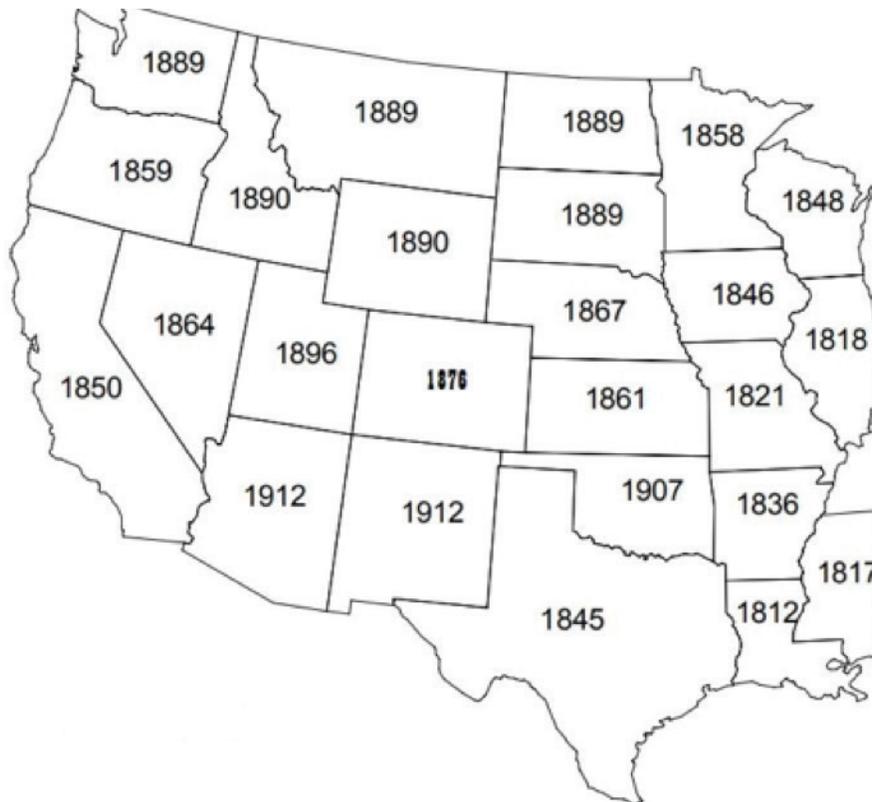
Questions and Activities

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1. Many Buffalo Soldiers participated in military actions designed to drive Native Americans off of their homeland. In small groups, discuss the parallels in the history of Native Americans and Blacks, particularly in regard to their loss of freedom.
2. The legend of the Buffalo Soldiers was kept alive for many years by Jones Morgan, who told his story to anyone willing to listen. Many family histories are also kept alive orally. Write about and then share your family histories with the class.
3. Black Americans have willingly taken part in every major American war, battle, and campaign. With a partner, research the specific roles that black Americans and African Americans played in the Revolutionary War, the War of 1812, the Civil War, World Wars I and II, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, and Persian Gulf War.
4. The era of the Buffalo Soldier ended with the desegregation of the Armed Forces in 1948. In groups or with a partner, discuss how this may have influenced or reflected the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s.

LAND OF THE BUFFALO SOLDIERS

The Buffalo Soldiers played an important role in the settlement of the American West, made up of all the states shown in the map below. Identify the states which the Buffalo Soldiers helped to settle. The dates shown indicate when each state achieved statehood. (Consult a map to see if your answers are correct.)



Cues at the Theatre

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