

Name: _____

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Buffalo Soldiers

- 1 Following the U.S. Civil War, regiments of African-American men known as buffalo soldiers served on the western frontier, battling Indians and protecting settlers. The buffalo soldiers included two regiments of all-black cavalry, the 9th and 10th cavalries, formed after Congress passed legislation in 1866.
- 2 For more than two decades in the late 19th century, the 9th and 10th cavalries engaged in military campaigns against Native Americans on the Plains and across the Southwest. The Buffalo Soldier's main charge was to protect settlers as they moved west and to support the westward expansion by building the infrastructure needed for new settlements to flourish. The buffalo soldiers captured horse and cattle thieves, built roads and protected the U.S. mail, stagecoaches and wagon trains, all while contending with challenging terrain, inadequate supplies and discrimination.
- 3 It's unclear exactly how the buffalo soldiers got their nickname. Archivist Walter Hill of the National Archives has reported that, according to a member of the 10th Cavalry, in 1871 the Comanche bestowed the name of an animal they revered, the buffalo, on the men of the 10th Cavalry because they were impressed with their toughness in battle. Other sources theorize the name originated with the belief of some Native Americans that the soldiers' dark, curly, black hair resembled that of a buffalo. Whatever the case, the soldiers viewed the nickname as one of respect, and the 10th Cavalry even used a figure of a buffalo in its coat of arms.
- 4 When the Indian wars ended in the 1890s, the buffalo soldiers went on to fight in Cuba in the 1898 Spanish-American War; participate in General John J. Pershing's 1916-1917 hunt for Mexican revolutionary Pancho Villa; and even act as rangers in Yosemite and Sequoia national parks. The nation's oldest living buffalo soldier, Mark Matthews, died in at age 111 in Washington, D.C., in 2005.