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American Wars, the frontier was expanding rapidly westward. The army was used to assure the safety of Americans, moving westward, from Indian tribes. This duty fell largely to the black regiments. Little known is the fact that fourteen Medals of Honor were won by blacks in the period from 1869-1890. Four of these medals were won by a group known as the Seminole Negro Indian Scouts; men who had fled to Mexico after the Seminole Wars. They had been recruited by Major Zenas Bliss of the 25th Infantry and served under Lt. John Bullis. In 26 major expeditions against the Indians, not one death was experienced by the Scouts. They were without peer during this period.

The black troops, called Buffalo Soldiers by the Indians, were involved in all phases of opening the West. They guarded the mails and rails, opened new roads, mapped and charted new territories and fought the Indians.



Harriet Tubman, master spy

**Spanish American War**  
 "Back Home" (the Northeast and South), things were not faring well for the blacks. Stronger Black Codes were being enforced throughout the nation, the KKK was ruling some municipal and state governments, and suffrage was almost non-existent.

The entrance into the Spanish-American War saw the usage of the four Black Regiments. Despite the strict isolation from their white counterparts (except in the thick of battle), and the harassment they suffered enroute to battle, Col. Theodore Roosevelt, commander of the Rough Riders, was impressed with their spirit and ability. Later, Roosevelt was to declare that the black soldier was a malingering in battle; for, at one point, he asserted that he had to order them to the front a gun-point. He did not point out the black soldiers were obeying orders to move to the rear to get supplies or remove casualties. This information was backed up by white soldiers, but Roosevelt never retracted his statement.

In addition to the Black Regulars, several units from state militias (National Guard) were activated. Among them were: the 9th Ohio, commanded by West Pointer Charles Young; the 3rd Alabama Infantry; the 6th Virginia Infantry, thousands from Indiana and Company L of the 6th Massachusetts.

Eight men of color won the Congressional Medal of Honor in the war in Cuba; and these Smoked Yankees, as they came to be called by the Cubans, were the last to receive the Medal until the Korean War.

**World War I**

At the end of the Spanish American War, volunteers were mustered out of the service. Any vacancies in the regular army ranks were quickly filled by volunteer veterans. Not so were the vacancies in the commissioned officer ranks. The practice of promoting black volunteer non-commissioned officers to officer status during a crisis and returning them to their original appointment (or civilian status) was renewed. However, white volunteers were actively recruited as officers in the regular army. This device of passing over qualified blacks was perceived as a deliberate act of racism by the black community. In order to prevent anger from erupting into violence, John R. Lynch was appointed a captain in the regular army as the first and only black paymaster. Benjamin O. Davis, elevated to the lieutenantancy as a volunteer in the Spanish-American War, was reduced to sergeant with the 9th cavalry, a position he had prior held. After Lynch's appointment as paymaster, Davis was commissioned a second lieutenant. Corporal John Green of the 24th Infantry passed the exam for lieutenantancy, and was so appointed. All three ap-



pointments were made in 1901; there would be no more for sixteen years.

Matters steadily worsened for blacks both in and out of the service. The infamous Brownsville (Texas) affairs in 1903 found 167 black soldiers guilty of an ugly accusation, even after proof was offered to the contrary. All were given dishonorable discharges. Among the dismissed soldiers, who were part of the 25th Infantry Regiment, were six Medal of Honor winners, and thirteen who were cited for bravery.

After several years of debate concerning the manner in which the matter was handled, a new court of inquiry of five white Southern officers, was formed in 1909. About half of the dishonored soldiers were called upon to testify, the remainder were dismissed. Arbitrarily, the army reversed its call on fourteen of the 167. It would not be until 1972 that the balance of the men would be vindicated. At that time, only one bitter, elderly gentleman, Dorsey Willis of Minneapolis, was living.

When the U.S. entered the war in 1917, once more blacks answered the cause. Once more they sought a chance to prove that the black man was willing to sacrifice his life, if necessary, to achieve his rights as an American citizen.

Black citizens demanded a chance to prove their patriotism, and a form of appeasement was offered. The black unit of the Washington, D.C. National Guard was called upon to secure important sections of the Nation's Capital; building important to the government (including the White House), water and electricity supplies, bridges and roads. This action by the government was greeted with pride. However, the underlying reasons was unshared: Germans would be easily spotted in their ranks as infiltrators.

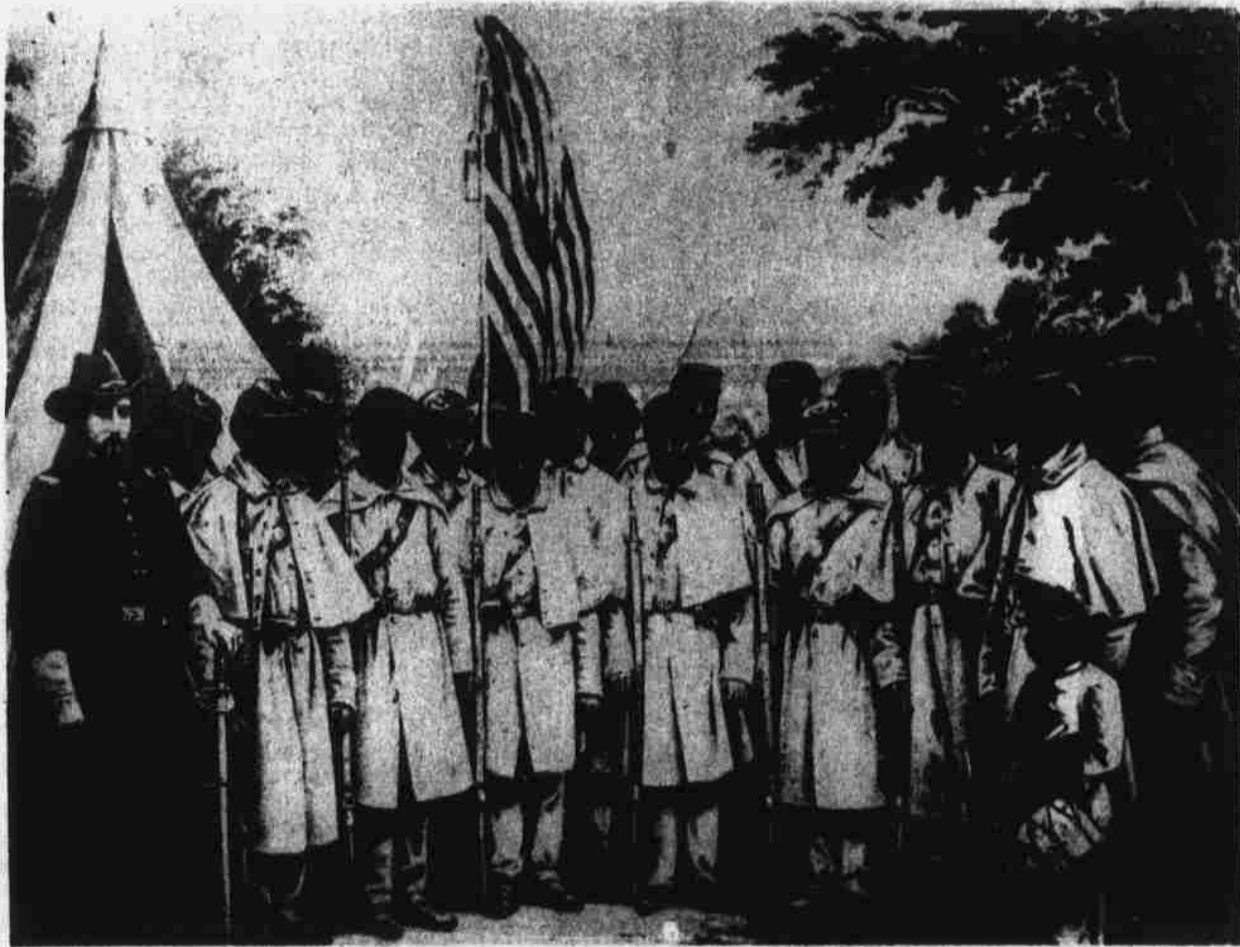
A lobbying committee was also formed to seek training for blacks as officers. The success of this

group was indicated by the formal opening of such a camp in Des Moines, Iowa in June, 1917. In October, 639 were graduated as officers. The total number of blacks commissioned as officers during the war was 1353.

As the highest ranking black officer at the start of



William Tillman commanded a ship captured by The Confederates



Recruiting Poster during the Civil War

**YOUR DOG NEEDS VITAMINS, TOO.**

**Sergeant's**  
the pet care people

**Everybody deserves a chance to make it on their own. Everybody.**

Success doesn't come easy in our competitive society. It takes talent, guts, perseverance and hard work to rise to the top. But everybody—regardless of race, creed, color or sex—deserves a chance to make it on their own. The National Urban League is dedicated to achieving that. And there are things you can do to help. To find out exactly what you can do to help, contact your local Urban League or write to our national headquarters.



**National Urban League**  
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