

# The buffalo soldiers: triumph of the human spirit

[History](#)



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

The reluctance of history to honor them has been long overshadowed by their conquering of the American West. In 1864 an escaped slave named Elijah Marris and a group of others had joined the Army in Louisville. Marris writes about his freedom as a soldier, " Still must I move at the command of a white man, and I said to myself is my condition any better now than before I entered the Army" (Marris, 25). Yet, he would go on to become a Buffalo Soldier, fighting in operations against Native Americans during the Indian Wars. The dark skin and bristly hair of the black troops reminded the Indians of the free-roaming bison and gave the soldiers their name (Brown, 71). According to Brown, " From 1866 to the Spanish-American War [...] one in every five soldiers on the western frontier was black" (Brown, 71). Often overlooked, they have endured through history as the units that conquered their enemies and triumphed over the American West.

Cathay Williams was the only woman to serve as a buffalo soldier. In the fall of 1867, she was stationed in New Mexico where she protected miners and immigrants from Indian attacks (Field and Hook, 10). She pretended to be a man to join the Army and triumph over her dependence on family and friends. After a year of honorable service, she says, " finally I got tired and wanted to get off. I played sick" (" Cathay William's Story"). The medical staff recognized her as a woman and she was immediately discharged. She spent the remainder of her life wandering around the West and working as a laundress.

The Buffalo soldiers were up against fierce fighting in the West in a harsh and hostile environment. Severity and shortage highlighted life for a Union soldier in the arid West. In 1877, while the soldiers were waging war in Texas, the 90-degree temperatures portended a grim outlook. The Indians,  
<https://assignbuster.com/the-buffalo-soldiers-triumph-of-the-human-spirit/>

Red Young Man, and their Comanche allies would observe from a safe distance while the Buffalo soldiers suffered from the heat and thirst from a shortage of water (Carlson 27). Still, they were able to rise above the elements to protect settlers, railroads, and migrants. The adversity shared with white troops helped garner an appreciation for the black soldiers, and would occasionally see respect rise above prejudice. (Field and Hook, 10). The brave men and women that comprised the Buffalo Soldiers have often been given little historical recognition. Men such as Elijah Marris not only served the Union but were also instrumental in inspiring other soldiers to join. Faced with the difficulties of Army life in the Indian Wars, fellow white soldiers grew to admire the black regiments. These courageous souls, some of America's unsung heroes, faced death and despair to triumph over slavery as well as the American West.