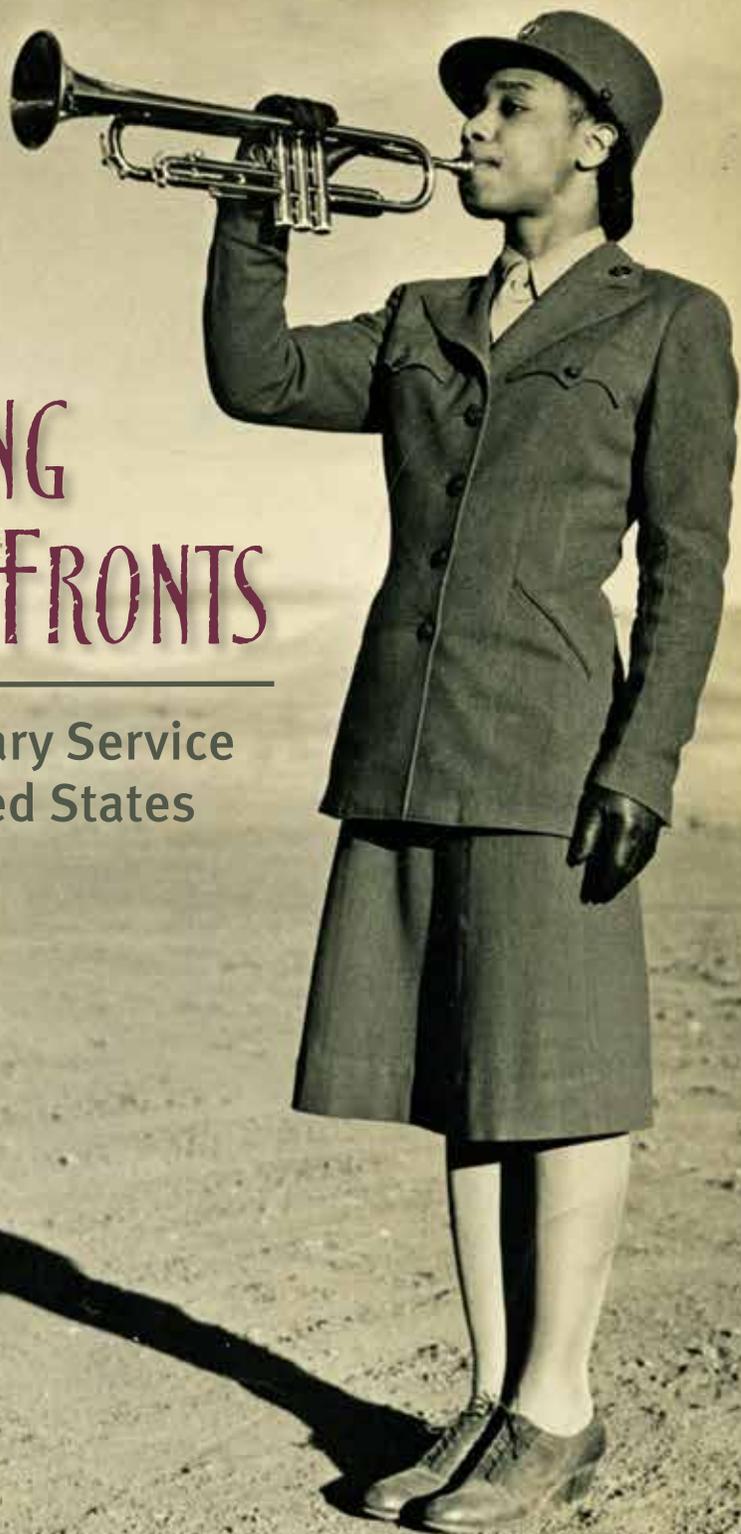


FIGHTING ON TWO FRONTS

Black Military Service
in the United States



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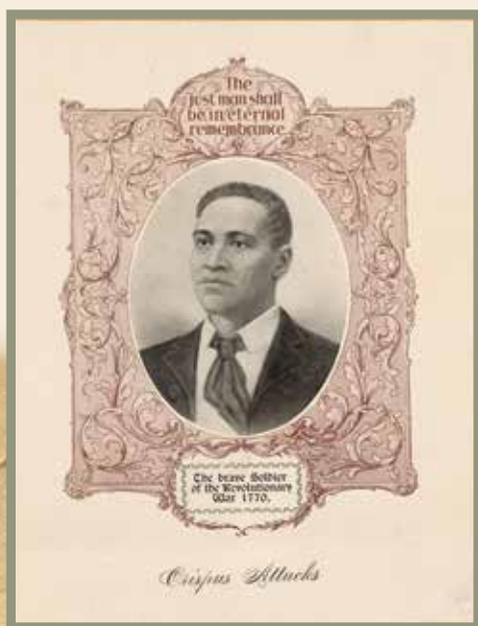
African Americans have participated in the armed forces since the birth of the nation in 1776. Since that time, they have often fought for dual reasons. During the American Revolution, they fought to free the United States from the oppression of Great Britain, but also with the promise of freedom from slavery. During the Civil War, they fought to restore the Union and to officially end slavery. During World War II, African Americans fought to end fascism abroad and racism at home. Throughout every war, they fought with courage and valor despite their oftentimes poor treatment. In *Fighting on Two Fronts: Black Military Service in the United States*, we tell the story of these brave men and women as they served and fought, not only for their country, but also for their freedom, pride and respect.

Women's Auxiliary Army Corps Officer,
Dovey Roundtree, 1940.
*Courtesy of the National Archives for
Black Women's History*



THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION 1776-1783

Overwhelmed by increasing taxes and inadequate representation in the British House of Parliament, the American colonists started a series of protests that led to the American Revolution. Among the first four men to fall was an African American man, Crispus Attucks. Although the colonists cried for freedom from British tyranny, they did not call for an end to slavery. To win freedom for the new nation and themselves, African Americans joined the fight on both the British and American sides. Approximately 50,000 men enlisted with the British Royal Crown and 5,000 with the Continental Army. By the end of the war in 1783, the 13 former British colonies had declared their independence and joined together as one nation.



Portrait of the first African American man to fall in the American Revolution, Crispus Attucks
Courtesy of the Library of Congress

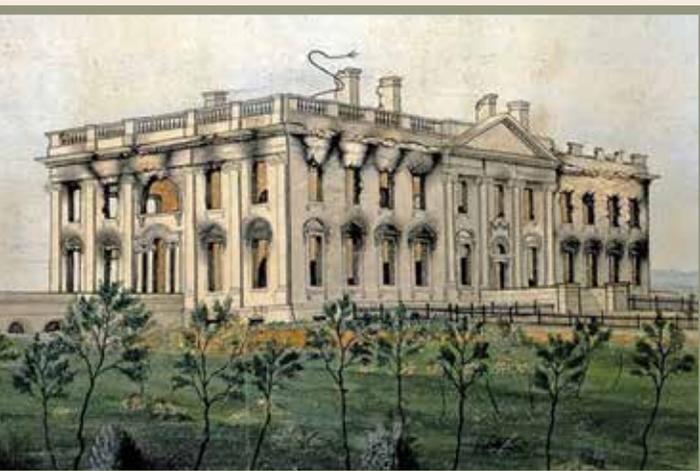
Portrait of Alexander Hamilton, aide to General George Washington, who appealed to slaveholders throughout the South to allow their slaves to participate in the fight, 1930.
Courtesy of the Library of Congress



THE WAR OF 1812 1812-1814

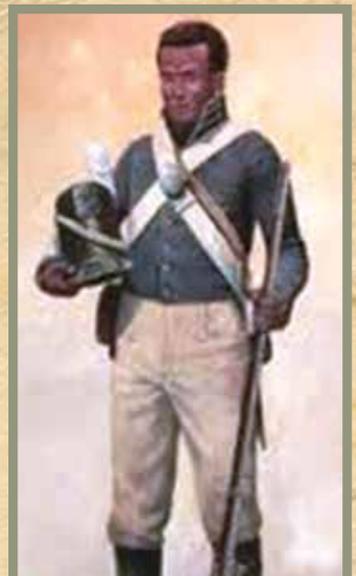
The War of 1812 was known as the Second War for Independence and it was the second major conflict for the young nation. The newly formed nation challenged Britain's interference with American trade and the conduct of the Royal British Navy. It was during the War of 1812 that the United States suffered great losses in its capital city. British troops marched through Prince George's County defeating American forces at Bladensburg. They continued their march to the capital and burned buildings in their wake.

As the United States fought for a second time to assert its independence, African Americans, enslaved and free, again fought for their freedom and equality. As with the American Revolution, African Americans were permitted to enlist in armed service. Among the men who served was, "Frederick" from Prince George's County who escaped from his owner, Benjamin Oden, to Baltimore in May 1814. Frederick was a man of mixed racial heritage, who later enlisted as William Williams in the 38th Infantry of the U.S. Army. His regiment was ordered to Fort McHenry in September where he suffered a traumatic leg wound from which he died two months later.



White House after the War of 1812.

Courtesy of the White House Historical Association

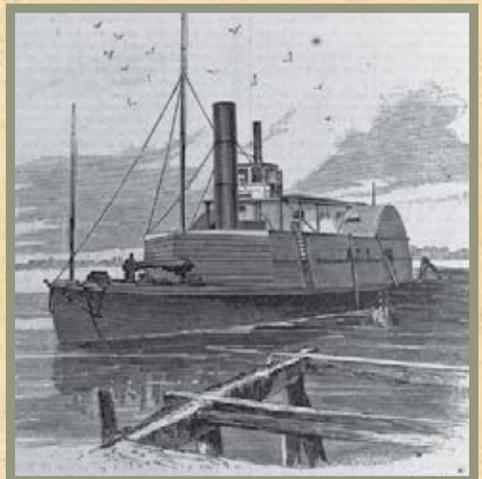


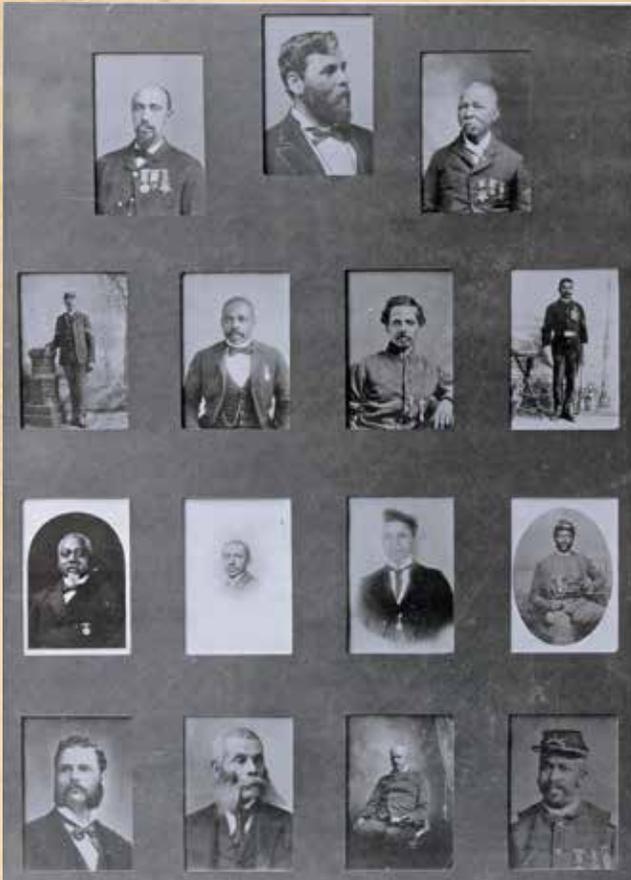
A Prince George's County enslaved man, Frederick, ran away and enlisted in the U.S. Army as William Williams, ca 1785. *Courtesy of Library of Congress*

THE CIVIL WAR 1861-1865

The bloodiest war in United States history, the Civil War, was fought between the northern Union forces and the southern Confederate forces. After President Lincoln was elected in 1860, several states beginning with South Carolina seceded from the United States forming a separate government and military powers. For four years, the two factions fought over states rights and economic issues, particularly slavery. African Americans were deeply invested in the outcome of the war as it would define their status as enslaved or free. Fighting for both the Union and Confederate governments, African American men, women and children participated in the fight. Approximately 10 percent of the Union Army and 15 percent of the Union Navy was African American. These men fought against the Confederate Army in combat and the Union government for equal pay and opportunity. An estimated one-third of all enlisted African Americans died during the war.

Twenty-five African American men received the Medal of Honor during the Civil War including, seven sailors in the Union Navy, and fifteen members of the United States Colored Troops. Of these twenty-five men, six were from Maryland: William H. Barnes, William H. Brown, Decatur Dorsey, Christian Fleetwood, James H. Harris and Alfred B. Hilton.





Several of the African American Medal of Honor Winners, ca 1870
Courtesy of the Library of Congress

RIGHT: Susie King Taylor served as a nurse, laundress and teacher to First South Carolina Volunteers, the first regiment of freedmen formed in the South.
Courtesy of the Library of Congress



LEFT: Robert Smalls, born a slave in South Carolina, stole his master's steamship, *The Planter*. With his family and a few comrades, Smalls piloted the ship and its cargo of Confederate artillery triumphantly into Union lines where he received a hero's welcome, May 1862.
Courtesy of the Library of Congress

BUFFALO SOLDIERS

Following the Civil War, most soldiers returned to their homes to rebuild their lives. The approximately 10,000 African American soldiers who chose to remain in the armed forces were segregated into six regiments (later four) of enlisted men: The 24th and 25th Infantry and the 9th and 10th Cavalry. These “Buffalo Soldiers” (said to be named by Native Americans because their hair resembled buffalo fur in look and texture), went on to serve with distinction in a variety of assignments in the west.

The African American soldiers served in segregated units and faced danger, hardships and discrimination from army command and the white civilian population. Bladensburg native Henry Vinton Plummer was appointed by President Chester A. Arthur as Chaplain of the 9th Cavalry. After ten years in this position, Plummer was dismissed for conduct unbecoming an officer and court marshaled. Believing that racism played a role in his discharge, Plummer worked until his death to clear his name. It was not until 2005, due to the efforts of his family that Plummer’s dishonorable discharge was changed to honorable.



LEFT: Henry Vinton Plummer

TOP: Soldiers of the 25th Infantry in Montana, 1890. Some of the men are wearing buffalo skin coats.

Courtesy of the Library of Congress

MIDDLE: The Last of the Seminole Negro Indian Scouts, ca 1880.

Courtesy of the Library of Congress

BOTTOM: One of the Buffalo Soldiers’ duties was to protect what would become America’s first National Park. These soldiers pose during their first patrol from Missoula, Montana to Yellowstone with mountain bikes, ca 1870.

Courtesy of the Montana Historical Society, Research Center Photograph Archives, Haynes Foundation Collection



THE SPANISH AMERICAN WAR

APRIL - AUGUST 1898

At the dawn of the 20th Century, America was on the verge of becoming an imperialist power. It was during this period that revolutionaries in Cuba and the Philippines began fighting for independence from Spain. In 1898, with an eye toward increasing its influence in the western hemisphere and a desire to use Manila Bay, Philippines for its strategic location, the United States entered the battle in support of the revolutionaries. Using the sinking of the battleship *USS Maine* as a cause, the U.S. sent both white and black troops first into Cuba, and then into the Philippines to battle the Spanish.

Believing the war was one of independence, many African Americans enlisted in the army to support the Cubans. Buffalo Soldiers were sent into combat in Cuba and received praise for their skills in battle. By the end of the war, six African Americans earned the Medal of Honor, five were Buffalo Soldiers from the 10th Cavalry Regiment, and one was a U.S. Navy sailor.

The first African American Four Star General, Benjamin O. Davis Sr., began his military career during the Spanish American War as a volunteer with the 8th U.S. Volunteer Infantry stationed in Georgia, ca 1940.
Courtesy of the National Archives





Headville, Ga.
Copyright, 1898, by W. L. Langley.
St. Louis, Mo

9150—Tramp, tramp, tramp for Cuba—24th U. S. Infantry.

Soldiers from the 24th
Infantry marching in
Cuba, 1898.

*Courtesy of the Library of
Congress*

African American soldier
poses with rifle, ca 1898.

*Courtesy of the Library of
Congress*



Electric Photo Co., 909 Franklin Street,
TAMPA, FLA.

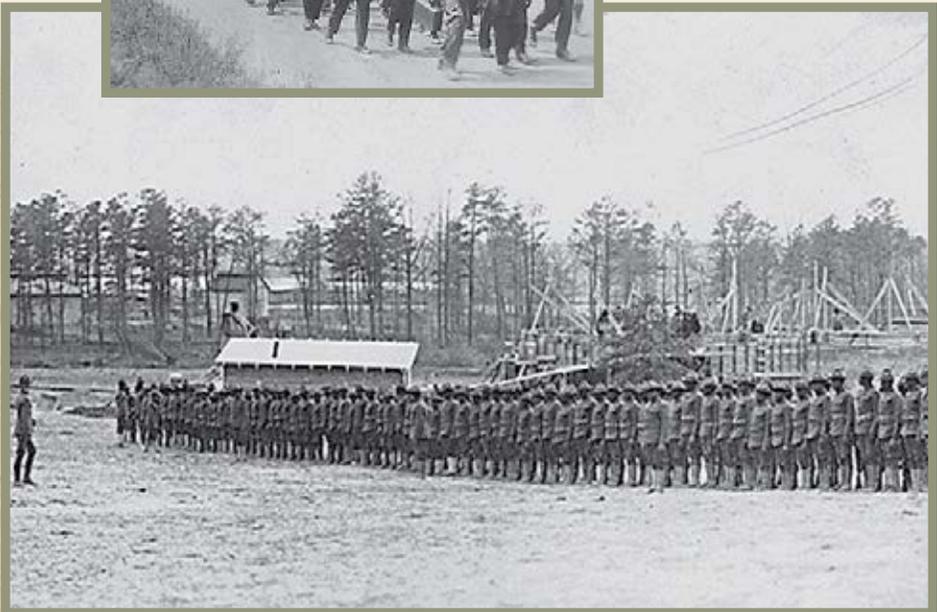
WORLD WAR I

AMERICAN PARTICIPATION 1917-1918

By the start of the twentieth century the United States had become a major world leader. Following the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand in June 1914, war broke out in Europe between the Central Powers and Allied Powers. The U.S. remained neutral until 1917 when it joined forces with the Allied Powers. At that time, 10,000 African Americans were in the Army and 5,000 in the Navy. By the end of the war more than 370,000 had been drafted into service, but less than a quarter of these men saw combat. Despite these odds, some African American soldiers received the French Legion of Honour for bravely fighting alongside French forces.



New recruits arriving
at Fort Meade,
Maryland, 1917.
*Courtesy of the
National Archives*



African American troops at attention at Fort Meade, Maryland, 1917.
Courtesy of the National Archives

WORLD WAR II

AMERICAN PARTICIPATION 1941-1945

In 1939, German Chancellor Adolph Hitler's army invaded neighboring Poland. This act prompted a military response from France and sparked the Second World War. Initially, the conflict consisted of the Allied Nations including Great Britain and France fighting the Axis powers of Germany, Italy and Japan. The United States entered the war in December 1941 after the bombing of the U.S. Naval Base at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, by the Japanese Navy. One of the heroes of the attack was an African American, Doris "Dorie" Miller. He was a mess man on the *USS Arizona*. When the ship came under fire, Miller manned a machine gun and successfully defended the ship from attack. For his heroic efforts, Miller was awarded the Navy Cross for heroism.



Dorie Miller receiving
the Navy Cross, 1942.
Courtesy of the
Library of Congress

THE TUSKEGEE AIRMEN

The most celebrated of African Americans during the war were pilots that came to be known as the “Tuskegee Airmen.” Trained at Tuskegee Institute in Alabama, they were led by General Benjamin O. Davis, Jr. They flew over 15,500 sorties, escorted 200 heavy bombers deep into German territory and completed 1,578 missions. For their work, the Tuskegee Airmen accumulated an impressive number of awards and honors. This included 150 Distinguished Flying Crosses, a Legion of Merit, a Silver Star, 14 Bronze Stars and 744 Air Medals.



Tuskegee Airmen in training, 1940.
Courtesy of the Library of Congress



Tuskegee Airman services plane, 1940.
Courtesy of the National Archives

AFRICAN AMERICAN NURSES

During World War II, African American women were employed largely as nurses at army hospitals abroad and in the United States. For the majority of the war, African American nurses were limited to caring for German prisoners of war. The army also imposed a quota, which limited the number of African American women who were allowed to enlist in the U.S. Army Nurses Corps. At the same time, ironically, the Army began publicly discussing the shortage of nurses in the Armed Forces and the possibility of drafting nurses.

African American nurses tending to combat victims in Europe, 1940.
Courtesy of the National Archives



First African American nurses in England, 1944.
The last nurse in the fourth row is Marion Ridgeley of Prince George's County.
Courtesy of the Library of Congress



THE KOREAN WAR 1950-1953

In the aftermath of World War II, Korea, was divided between the communist North and capitalist South. After five years of battles along the border, the northern People's Army invaded the southern Korean Republic. On June 25, 1950, the first military action of the Cold War began as approximately 75,000 North Koreans crossed into South Korea. The United States and other members of the United Nations quickly went to the aid of the South. American troops were in Korea by July, fighting not just for South Korea, but against communism. This war also marked the end of segregation in the armed services; the last regiment of the Buffalo Soldiers was disbanded. Many of the men and women who served in newly desegregated armed services were promoted and served in more elite units. After three years of fighting and negotiations, the war came to an end. More than 5 million soldiers and civilians, including 40,000 U.S. soldiers were killed during the war.



Corporal Arthur Warrell drives two wounded North Korean prisoners to a hospital, August 1950. *Courtesy of the National Archives*



Regiments were integrated for the first time in Korea, Sergeant Clay Goldston is standing third from left, 1953. *Courtesy of Clay Goldston*

THE VIETNAM WAR 1955-1975

Another Cold War era conflict fueled by communist and anti-communists factions, the Vietnam War, lasted for twenty years. After the communist supported North Vietnamese invaded South Vietnam, President Dwight D. Eisenhower sent U.S. troops and weapons to aid the South. By the 1960s, the U.S. had sent more than 3,000 military personnel to Vietnam and within the next ten years more than fifteen times that number of American troops had been killed in Vietnam. Most of these men were subject to the draft with a disproportionate number being African American. More than 17 percent of all active duty personnel were African American.



Dak To, Vietnam. An infantry patrol moves up to assault the last Viet Cong during "Operation Hawthorne," June 7, 1966.

Courtesy of the National Archives



During “Operation Oregon” an African American infantryman is lowered by members of the recon platoon. April 24, 1967.

Courtesy of the National Archives



From the founding of the United States, African Americans have been willing participants and supporters of its armed services. Even before they were granted citizenship, African American soldiers used their service to demonstrate loyalty to their country. They believed that military service was a noble calling that would prove their value and help in their fight for equality; the results have been mixed. While the military has often been the American institution that has demonstrated a willingness to extend equal opportunity to African Americans, it has been bound by law and custom.



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Department of Parks and Recreation, Prince George's County
Natural & Historical Resources Division / Black History Program at Abraham Hall
7612 Old Muirkirk Road, Beltsville MD 20705

This exhibition is part of Celebration! Black History Month 2013.
For information on other Black History programs, please call 240/264-3415,
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The Department of Parks and Recreation encourages and supports the participation of individuals with disabilities. Register at least a minimum of two weeks in advance of the program start date to request and receive a disability accommodation.