

Colonel Charles Young

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Charles Young Buffalo Soldiers
National Monument
Ohio



Charles Young and other cavalry troopers posing for a photo next to their horses.

As a soldier, diplomat, and civil rights leader, Charles Young overcame stifling inequality to become a leading figure in the years after the Civil War when the United States emerged as a world power. His work ethic, academic leadership, and devotion to duty provided a strong base for his achievements in the face of racism and oppression. His long and distinguished career as a commissioned officer in the United States Army made him a popular figure of his time and a role model for generations of new leaders.

With the colored officer, social equality is a small thing, but social equality means much. He is working for bigger things in life.

Taken from personal notes by Charles Young, c. 1918, Coleman Collection



Portrait of Colonel Charles Young, February 1919

Childhood: From Enslavement to Freedom

Young was born to enslaved parents in 1864 in Mays Lick, Kentucky. After his birth, his father, Gabriel, would eventually escape enslavement and join the 5th Regiment, U.S. Colored Heavy Artillery in February, 1865 in Ohio. Shortly after the war, young Charles and his parents moved to Ripley, Ohio, where they sought a new life in the Ohio River town. He thrived there and at age 17, graduated with academic honors from his integrated high school class in 1881. After high school, Young taught at the African-American elementary school and continued his education under the tutelage of African-American abolitionist John Parker. He also would complete college coursework at Xavier University in Cincinnati.



Cadet Young poses for a class portrait. c. 1888

West Point

In 1883, Young took the entrance exam to the U.S. Military Academy at West Point. He tallied the second best score among those who tested. The following year he gained entry to the Military Academy. On June 10th, 1884, Charles Young became the ninth African American to attend West Point. He faced constant racial insults and social isolation from fellow cadets, as well as from instructors who all resented his presence there. Despite these impediments to his progress, Young would persevere and become only the third African American to graduate from West Point, at that time. His accomplishments became a source of pride for all African Americans.



Charles Young and two other African-American soldiers while bivouacking on the western plains in Wyoming.

A Lifetime of Remarkable Military Service



Soldiers of the 9th Battalion, Ohio Volunteer Infantry under the command of Charles Young, standing at attention. c. 1898

Buffalo Soldier

In 1866, Congress established six all-black regiments to help rebuild the country after the Civil War and to patrol the remote western frontier during the “Indian Wars.” Although the pay was low for the time, only \$13 a month, many African Americans enlisted because they could earn more and be treated with more dignity than they often received in civilian life. According to legend, American Indians called the black cavalry troops “buffalo soldiers” because their dark, curly hair resembled a buffalo’s mane and because they fought with fierce bravery and a fighting spirit similar to that of the buffalo. African-American troops accepted the name with pride and honor.

Because of an assignment mix-up, Young would have to wait three months after graduating from West Point before joining his new troop. Originally assigned to join the 25th Infantry,

Young protested as he had already purchased equipment for joining a cavalry unit. Eventually, the newly-commissioned 2nd Lieutenant joined the 9th Cavalry at Fort Robinson, Nebraska. After a year, marked by constant isolation and hostility, Young was transferred to Fort Duchesne, Utah, where the command and fellow officers proved more welcoming. Here, Young mentored Sergeant Major Benjamin O. Davis, Sr. who later became the first African American to attain the rank of General.

Between 1889 and 1907 Young served in western posts and rose to the rank of captain. He also taught military science, served as a military attaché, and fought with distinction during the Philippine-American War, winning the praise of his commanders for his troops’ courage and decorum in and out of combat.

In 1903, Young was assigned to protect Sequoia and General Grant (now Kings Canyon National Park) National Parks. In doing so, he became the first African-American Superintendent of a national park. Young directed his Buffalo Soldiers to blaze early park trails, build roads, produce maps, drive out trespassing livestock, extinguish fires, monitor tourists, and keep poachers and loggers at bay.

Charles Young became the highest ranking African-American officer serving in the Regular Army until his death in 1922. His career is marked by the challenges military leadership faced in dealing with the rising star of an African-American officer within the existing racial constraints of the military and society. Like the Buffalo Soldiers he led, Young embraced the opportunities provided by serving his country, even as he fought to overcome discrimination.

Military Attaché and Rising Officer

In 1904 Captain Young became the first Military Attaché to Haiti and the Dominican Republic, joining 23 other officers (the only African American among them) serving in such diplomatic posts in the Theodore Roosevelt administration. He won President Roosevelt’s praise for his monograph on the people and customs of Hispaniola, his maps, and his many dispatches. Young’s experiences in foreign service and as a commander in the Philippines formed the basis of his book *The Military Morale of Nations and Races* (1911). In 1912 Young was promoted to major and served in Liberia as a military attaché. In 1916, Major Young was awarded the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People’s (NAACP) prestigious Spingarn Medal in recognition of his “Services in organizing the Liberian Constabulary and roads in the Republic of Liberia.”

In March 1916, Major General John J. “Black Jack” Pershing led an expedition against revolutionary leader Pancho Villa in response to his attack on a garrison at Columbus, New Mexico. Major Young distinguished himself in combat, leading a squadron of the 10th Cavalry in a heroic pistol charge against the Villista

forces to save an outflanked American unit and rescue American wounded.

On the eve of U.S. entry into World War I, Young was on track to become the first African-American General in the U.S. Army. Examination boards recommended him for a wartime promotion, but also noted medical concerns about his fitness to serve. At about the same time, increasingly influential southerners pressured President Wilson’s administration into shifting Regular Army black troops from front line combat to prevent the likelihood of African-American officers commanding white troops. This resulted in all four Regular Army regiments of Buffalo Soldiers being moved to positions nowhere near the European Theater of war. In mid-1917, Young would be promoted to Colonel but then medically retired due to high blood pressure and kidney problems which surfaced during his physical examination. The Administration was conveniently rid of “the problem” as described by Secretary of War Newton Baker in a note to Wilson. Although he experienced racism throughout his military career, he remained disappointed that his record of achievement could not

prevail against those in the military and elsewhere, who could not stomach the thought of a black officer in command of white troops.

Young protested his retirement and continued to work for the civil rights of all African-American soldiers. In June 1918, he rode his horse 500 miles from Wilberforce, Ohio to Washington D.C. to prove his physical fitness. He met with Secretary of War, Newton Baker, but nothing more would come of his stirring ride until later that year. Young returned to active duty just days before the November 1918 armistice that ended the war. After the war, he continued his attaché work in Liberia. While on a field assignment that took him to Lagos, Nigeria, he contracted a deadly kidney disease and would die on January 8th, 1922. His body would be interred in Lagos after a military funeral.

At the urging of his wife and other notable African Americans, his body was repatriated to the U.S. in 1923. Colonel Charles Young became only the fourth soldier to be honored with a funeral service at the Arlington Memorial Amphitheater before interment in Arlington National Cemetery.

A Home in Wilberforce

In 1894, Young received a detached service assignment to report to Wilberforce, Ohio. There he began teaching the new military science and tactics course at Wilberforce University. Young organized the military training program which grew to over 100 cadets by the turn of the century. Few such programs existed at civilian colleges or universities and none at African-American institutions. He developed the curriculum and served as a role model for the young men. His first of multiple teaching tenures there ended in 1899. The assignment gave Young an opportunity to reestablish his Ohio roots not far from where he grew up.

It was at Wilberforce that Young began a life-long friendship with the intellectual W.E.B. DuBois (co-founder of the Niagara Movement and the NAACP) and Paul Laurence Dunbar (nationally prominent African-American poet and writer). After he married in 1903, Charles and Ada Young made their permanent home in Wilberforce. In 1907, the Young’s and Charles’ widowed mother bought the house pictured. He would fondly refer to it as “Youngsholm”. While his career spanned the globe, Young considered Wilberforce his home where he raised a family, mentored a successive generation of leaders, and found intellectual refuge.

On May 30th, 1974, “Youngsholm” was designated a National Historic Landmark. On March 25th, 2013, the house and its farmland was established as a National Monument by President Barack Obama. It became the 401st unit of the National Park Service.



c. 1910

National Afro-American Museum & Cultural Center



2015

NPS Photo / Tom Erigberg

Planning Your Visit

New to the national park system as of March 25th, 2013, Charles Young Buffalo Soldiers National Monument is continually being developed for regular public visitation. It is open to the public on select days throughout the year. For up-to-date information on the history and planning of the park, open house dates, and volunteer opportunities, please call the park at 937-352-6757 or visit the park website at www.nps.gov/chyo

Information and Directions:
www.nps.gov/chyo/planyourvisit
email: chyoinfo@nps.gov

Mailing Address:
P.O. Box 428
Wilberforce, Ohio 45384-0428

Physical Address:
1120 U.S. Route 42 East
Wilberforce, Ohio 45384

The National Park Service cares for special places saved by the American people so that all may experience our heritage.

Learn more about the National Park Service
Visit www.nps.gov or www.findyourpark.com



**Charles Young
Buffalo Soldiers
NATIONAL MONUMENT**