



In what ways did the exemplary military service of the Buffalo Soldiers enable the doctrine of White Supremacy?

Overview

Honorable Duty: The Moral Dilemma of the Buffalo Soldiers is designed to supplement your unit on the Spanish American War, the War for Independence in the Philippines, and American Expansionism in the Pacific. It also can be utilized for studies of civil rights and racism during the early 20th century. Resources in this packet introduce students to the African American soldiers who served in segregated army units during the early 1900s. Students will use historical analysis and critical thinking skills as they consider expansionism through the eyes of the African American soldiers and press. Using these resources, students also can conduct research into primary and secondary sources that continue the story of African Americans in the 20th century, as well as the national debate on the quest by other racial, cultural, and sexual minorities to obtain full citizenship through military enlistment.

Specifically, *Honorable Duty* links to the following standards:

National History Standard: Understands the historical perspective

- Understands that specific individuals and the values those individuals held had an impact on history.
Performance Standard: Students should be able to describe the impact that Buffalo Soldiers had on history.
- Knows different types of primary and secondary sources and the motives, interests, and bias expressed in them.
Performance Standard: Students should be able to cite viewpoints on expansionism from various Black newspapers and explain the motives, interests, and bias expressed in them.

SFUSD US History and Geography Standard 8.10

- Students understand the period of Reconstruction in the South and the development of Jim Crow society after Reconstruction ended.

Performance Standards:

Students should be able to describe patterns of racial segregation, lynchings and mob violence that limited civil and human rights for African Americans throughout the country in the last decades of the 19th century. (Performance Standard 8.10.5)

Students should be able to describe the leadership of African Americans who challenged assaults on civil and human rights. (Performance Standard 8.10.6)

Honorable Duty encourages Historical and Social Studies Analysis Skills, including historical interpretation in which students show the connections between particular historical events and larger political trends, as well as interpret past events and issues within the context in which the event unfolded. Students hone their skills in working collectively and respecting the opinions of others.



Introduce the topic of the Buffalo Soldiers once your class already has developed a working knowledge of the factors that contributed to the Spanish American War and the War for Independence in the Philippines.

Possible investigation #1

How do omissions in the historic record influence my understanding of history?

Summary

Students interpret African American participation in the Spanish American War and the War in the Philippines from different perspectives. They consider the impact of viewing an historic event from a singular perspective.

Materials

Buffalo Soldiers in the Philippine-American War

Quotes from individuals, newspapers, soldiers

Note: The quotes are in folders labeled Investigation #1 within this Lesson Plan folder.
Investigation

1. Students form small groups. Each group receives a different set of historic documents.
2. Students discuss the documents and the viewpoints expressed.
3. Students agree on 3-5 of the most important points in the narrative.
4. Students list these points on poster paper.
5. Students design one question they have as a result of reading their sources, and write it on their poster paper.
6. Posters are taped to the wall for viewing.
7. The class takes a "gallery walk" to review other group posters.
8. Students can read *Buffalo Soldiers in the Philippine-American War* at this point, if it seems appropriate.
9. Class discussion of the different narratives based on reading a singular perspective or source.



Buffalo Soldiers in the Spanish-American War

After the U.S. battleship Maine mysteriously exploded and sank in Cuba's Havana Harbor in February of 1898, the U.S. Congress and the President yielded to popular sentiment and declared war on Spain. Campaigns against Spain quickly began in Cuba and the Philippines.

The Buffalo Soldiers of the 9th Cavalry were among the first to arrive in Cuba, where they and troops from the 10th Cavalry fought beside Theodore Roosevelt's "Rough Riders." Over the course of the seven-month war, five Buffalo Soldiers received the Medal of Honor and 28 received the Merit of Honor for Bravery in battle.

Although Buffalo Soldiers fought bravely in both Cuba and the Philippines, participation in these conflicts was controversial. At home in the U.S., Blacks were deprived of civil rights by federal and state laws and were lynched and terrorized in the South. The African American community debated whether or not they should fight for a government that recognized them as citizens in name only.



Possible Investigation #2

How were dissonant opinions within African American communities voiced and received?

Summary

Students interpret issues of expansionism in the Philippines through the eyes of the Buffalo Soldiers and their community. They consider the differing viewpoints held by soldiers, newspapers, and African American activists.

Materials

Honorable Duty – Audio Narrative (CD Folder #3)

Honorable Duty – audio text

Buffalo Soldiers in the Spanish-American War

Quotes from the African American press

Investigation

1. Students read *Buffalo Soldiers in the Spanish-American War*.
2. The class listens to *Honorable Duty* audio narrative.
3. Students form small groups and receive a quote from the press.
4. They discuss and reach agreement on the meaning of their quote.
5. A spokesperson gives a short (1-2 minutes) explanation to the class.
6. Students work collectively or individually to express their own opinions by writing a letter to the editor of a paper or by drawing a political cartoon.



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Text for *Honorable Duty*

In 1898, when the U.S battleship Main mysteriously exploded in Cuba's Havana harbor, the U.S declared war against Spain. Fighting quickly began in the Spanish possessions of Cuba and the Philippines. Seasoned African American soldiers nicknamed "Buffalo Soldiers" were among the first to arrive in Cuba; where they fought courageously beside Teddy Roosevelt's less experienced Rough Riders.

"We white officers of the tenth cavalry could have taken our black heroes into our arms; they fought their way into our affections as they have fought their way into the hearts of the American people." - John Jay Black Jack Pershing, after leading the 10th cavalry up San Juan Hill, Cuba.

Letters from African American troops were printed in the black newspapers, along with editorials for and against black participation in the war. Several newspapers supported black involvement but also expressed a frustration that there were no African American officers.

"Separate colored brigades mean separate colored officers. No officers, no fight!"
- John Mitchell Junior.

"We don't need white officers for our leaders, we can lead ourselves." -W.T. Goode.

But many believed that African Americans should not fight at all until equality and freedom were secured at home. Ida B. Wells, leading activist declared that, "Negroes should oppose expansionism until the government is able to protect the Negro at home."

Others agreed, "If the government wants our support and services, let's demand our safety and protection at home. When we are guaranteed freedom and equality before the law as other American citizens, then we will have the right to take up arms in defense of our country." -The Indianapolis Freeman.

However, the majority of African Americans hoped the troop's historic actions would win respect for all blacks.

"It is the time that every patriot hearted young colored man should come to the front and defend this honor and show that we are true American citizens, that we can protect our homes and government." - John E. Lewis, 10th cavalry.

"Let it be said that the Negro soldier did his duty under the flag whether that flag protects him or not." - Edward A. Johnson.

Following victory against Spain in 1899 the U.S. took control of the Philippines and made it a territory. Filipinos fought a war of independence against U.S. rule from 1899-1902. Black soldiers and black communities throughout America debated whether or not African American troops should fight against other people of color in a war of expansion. Most Buffalo soldiers viewed their assignment as a duty that was expected of them.



“Our greatest aim is to maintain our standing among American soldiers and add another star to the already brilliant crown of the Afro-American soldier. We are now arrayed to meet what we consider a common foe, men of our own hue and color, whether it is right to reduce these people to submission is not a question for the soldier to decide.”- M.W. Settler, 25th infantry.

“It pays to be a little thoughtful. The strife is no race war; we are to share in the glories or defeats of our country’s wars, that is patriotism pure and simple.”- Indianapolis Freeman.

But even in the midst of war there was a great deal of empathy between Buffalo soldiers and Filipinos.

“I have mingled freely with the natives and have had talks with American colored men here in business in order to learn reasons for this insurrection and I must confess, they have a just grievance, expansion is too clean a name for it.” - Unsigned, Wisconsin Weekly Advocate.

“Why must the American Negro come to fight us, when we are as much a friend to him and have not done anything to him? He is all the same as me and me all the same as you. Why don’t you fight those people in America who burn Negroes that make a beast of you?”- Filipino man interviewed during the War for Independence.

“I feel sorry these people and all that have come under control of the United States. You have no idea how these people are treated by the Americans here.” - Patrick Mason 24th infantry.

There were African American soldiers who joined the Philippine cause, however the vast majority of Buffalo Soldiers served with distinction until the U.S. declared victory in 1902. Over 500 troops made their home as civilians in Manila after the war. The rest returned to the United States to continue the struggle for equal rights. Only recently have the tremendous contributions of black Americans in the military been recognized. In a 1993 speech, the commander of the Presidio, Colonel Gregory Wren honored the legacy of the Buffalo Soldiers.

“Members of the 9th and 10th cavalry were not only black American heroes they were authentic American heroes. Since these great Americans served, thousands of other brave black Americans have followed their lead and went in harm’s way for our nation, always moving the cause for equality and justice forward and upward, step by step, sacrifice by sacrifice.”



Quotes from the Black Press

All quotes are excerpted from *The Black Press Views American Imperialism (1898-1900)* by George P. Marks, III, Arno Press and The New York Times, NY 1971.

It is now said that colored troops are to be sent to the Philippines. The sooner the better. The Negroes must be taught that the enemy of the country is a common enemy and that the color of the face has nothing to do with it.

-- Indianapolis *Freeman*, July 1, 1899

It pays to be a little thoughtful . . . The strife [against the Philippines] is no race war. It is quite time for the Negroes to quit claiming kindred with every black face from Hannibal down. Hannibal was no Negro, nor was Aguinaldo [the Filipino nationalist leader]. We are to share in the glories or defeats of our country's wars, that is patriotism pure and simple.

-- Indianapolis *Freeman*, October 7, 1899

A majority of the Negroes in this country are opposed to expansion. A government that is powerless to protect its own citizens should never attempt to seize other governments by invasion and throw around them an American protectorate, which is nothing more than political and physical oppression. Expansion is a fraud and the American Negro has long since come to the conclusion that before any government attempts to throw the protecting arm around a foreign foe, it should first protect its own citizens.

-- Washington *Bee*, February 4, 1899



Quotes from the Black Press (continued)

The annexation of territory as a result of war with Spain is becoming a serious question for discussion and is not confined alone to the right of our government to acquire territory by purchase or conquest. The matter of the treatment of these people who belong to the dark-skinned races is a matter which concerns us. The conduct of men in the future can only be determined by observing their conduct in the past. Experience and not promises weighs more potently in these matters, and the treatment which the Indians, the Chinese, and the Negroes have received at the hands of the white Americans speaks in no uncertain tone -- it would be deplorable to have the inhabitants of the Philippine Islands treated as the Indians have been treated or the people of Cuba or Puerto Rico ruled as the Negroes of the South have been ruled

-- Coffeyville *American*, February 11, 1899

For the black man there is no glory in war, nothing save carnage, death, injustice, and - at last, unrelenting jibes, sneers, and calumny. No; there is no honor, and but slight reward; and since the brave black soldier must fight in this unholy war in the Philippines, let him fight like he can, in such furious onslaughts that nothing but the walls of hell can withstand him; and prove, to those vile creatures who would rob him of his glory and prowess, the soldier that he is, the most courageous, the most enduring, and the finest soldier the world has known.

-- Kansas City *American Citizen*, July 14, 1899

It is the consensus of opinion with the majority of Negroes who are opposed to the present treatment of the Negro in the United States that any black man who enlists to fight the Filipinos is perfectly satisfied with the abuse heaped upon him in this country.

--Chicago *Broad Ax*, August 7, 1899