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Picture Books

The Buffalo Soldier
Sherry Garland
Ronald Himler, illustrator
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"Seems like this being freedmen's not what it's cracked up to be," says the soldier-narrator. His journey begins with his Ol' Master riding up to announce the end of the Civil War, and carries him through the Western frontier as a Buffalo Soldier. He joins one of six African-American regiments in the U. S. Army, dubbed "Buffalo Soldiers" by the Cheyenne, because their looks, bravery, and tenacity reminded the Plains Indians of the buffalo they long admired.

From the initial training, with a sergeant "mean as a skunk" who tells them, "Troopers, you got to train harder than the rest 'cause all the nation is watching you," through acting as an escort service to supply wagons or mail coaches, or protecting the telegraph crew, the book takes readers through the life of a buffalo soldier.

The author has written more than twenty-five volumes about history and interesting people, including *Voices of the Alamo* and *The Lotus Seed*. Her books have been selected for awards from the American Library Association's Notable Children's Books, Reading Rainbow, and Best Books for Young Adults. She tells the story of the buffalo soldiers with sympathy and eloquence, from the stinky feet and dirty boots in the barracks, to the waltzes and quadrilles at the fine holiday celebration. Garland includes a historical note at the start of the book, and a selected bibliography for readers who would like to learn more about a fascinating and relatively unknown period of history.

The illustrator has provided art for more than eighty books, such as *The Wall* and *The Caged Birds of Phnom Penh*, and received numerous honors, including ALA Notables and the Society of Illustrators Silver Medal. His poignant, dreamy color paintings bring the story to life on every page, from Mama falling down on her knees to cry her relief over the end of slavery, to our hero's wife, Sally, hoping a blizzard would freeze her husband's fingers off so he couldn't sign up for five more years he stayed for thirty).

Readers of all ages will enjoy learning about the courageous soldiers of the Ninth and Tenth Cavalry, as they protected settlers, guarded mail routes, and faced the hardships of weather, prejudice, and war. The African-American regiments had the lowest desertion rates of the time, in spite of freezing storms, blistering deserts, and undesirable assignments; this book demonstrates why the Cheyenne deemed them worthy of their nickname—Buffalo Soldiers.