

Statement of Renotta Young to the Ohio House Armed Services Committee

Mr. Chairman and distinguished members of the Ohio House Armed Services Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on behalf of the Charles Young Buffalo Soldiers National Monument. My name is Renotta Young. I am a descendent of Colonel Charles Young and president of the Colonel Charles Young Foundation. It is an honor and a privilege to speak here today in support of HB 238, legislation to designate July 28 as Buffalo Soldiers Day. I was deeply moved to see your committee take this important stance in honor of the Buffalo Soldiers, who served our country so valiantly. With Americans across the nation demanding that we reckon with our nation's legacy of systemic racism, it is crucial that these heroic historical figures be recognized, celebrated, and their stories told.

History of the Foundation

The Colonel Charles Young Foundation was organized to promote and foster young people's leadership skills based on the legacy of Colonel Charles Young so they are well-equipped to excel academically and be prepared for pivotal roles in their current and future communities. But the journey to start this foundation was a personal one.

My brother Lawrence and I grew up in a house down the road from Colonel Young's home, in Wilberforce, Ohio. This is where my aunt and uncle— Colonel Young's two children—lived. They were professors, fluent in multiple languages. My aunt taught classical pianists. My parents moved to Wilberforce because of my aunt and uncle when Lawrence was nine months old and I was in the third grade. We were raised by those two professors and our parents under the Young family directive and philosophy to make a positive difference to society. No peer pressure, professional mission, or academic standards could outmatch the Young directive!

In thinking back over those formative years, the one thing Colonel Young's children never understood was why their father had given land he owned out West to the federal government. As brilliant as they were, they could not process that decision. But Colonel Young understood the enormous importance of setting aside and protecting the beauty of national park land for public enjoyment rather than private gain. His foresight left a lasting legacy not only for him, but for all the men and women who pioneered in their field.

History of the Colonel Young National Monument

On March 25, 2013, President Obama established, through executive order, the Charles Young Buffalo Soldiers National Monument, at the home of Colonel Young. However, the work that went into achieving this milestone began long before and included myriad people and organizations who believed that this true American hero's story should be known to all and cherished forever.

Two organizations that have steadfastly supported the preservation of Charles Young's legacy, Omega Psi Phi fraternity and the National Afro-American Museum and Cultural Center (NAAMCC), went to great lengths and expense to ensure that the house would remain intact in the hopes of becoming the centerpiece of a national park. The Colonel Charles Young Foundation works directly with the National Park Service management and staff to support the growth of this monument, which owns the home and the Young estate. After much-needed restoration, currently underway, the monument plans to officially open to the general public.

Colonel Charles Young Biography

Colonel Charles Young was a distinguished army officer, cartographer, teacher, and soldier-diplomat who pioneered the entrance of African Americans into fields that were previously closed to them. He was born in Mays Lick, Kentucky, on March 12, 1864, one year before the end of the Civil War. He moved with his parents to Ohio at the age of six months and graduated from the integrated Ripley High School in 1881. When he entered the United States Military Academy at West Point in 1884, Young was the ninth African American to be admitted, and the third and last to graduate until nearly half a century later.

After his graduation from West Point in 1889, Lieutenant Young served with the Ninth U.S. Cavalry on the Western frontier. In 1894, he was assigned by the War Department to teach military science and tactics at Wilberforce University in Ohio. Young commanded the 9th Ohio Infantry Regiment on the home front during the Spanish-American War in 1898 and served in the Philippine Islands during the Philippine-American War as a captain and troop commander. While serving at the Presidio of San Francisco, Captain Young was appointed the first black national park superintendent at Sequoia National Park in 1903. He was subsequently appointed as military attaché to Haiti and the Dominican Republic in 1904, the first African American to serve as such. In addition to gathering intelligence and drafting maps, Young reported to the War Department on Haitian society and government, and wrote a book titled *Military Morale of Nations and Races* (1912).

After a second tour in the Philippine Islands during its occupation, he returned to the U.S. and served at Fort D.A. Russell in Wyoming. From 1912 to 1915 newly promoted Major Young served as military attaché to Liberia, where he helped to reorganize the Liberian Frontier Force to insure the continued sovereignty of that country. In 1916 he was awarded the Spingarn Medal by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) for his exceptional work in Liberia. Young served as a squadron commander in the 10th Cavalry Regiment during the punitive expedition against Pancho Villa in Mexico from 1916 to 1917, where he was promoted to lieutenant colonel. After redeploying to the U.S., Young established an officer training school African American soldiers at Fort Huachuca, Arizona.

In 1917, Young was medically retired and promoted to colonel. He was recalled to active duty in 1919 and accepted a second appointment as military attaché to Liberia. Colonel Young died in Lagos, Nigeria, on January 8, 1922, and was reinterred at Arlington National Cemetery in 1923.

Buffalo Soldiers

In the late 19th and early 20th Century, America's Buffalo Soldiers—members of segregated black cavalry units of the U.S. Army—like Colonel Young, played an important yet little-known role in the history of our national parks. The African American soldiers of the 24th Infantry and 9th Cavalry were responsible for patrolling the 320-mile route between the Presidio in San Francisco and Sequoia and Yosemite National Parks. Their soldiers built roads and trails along the route and protected these new parks from poaching, illegal logging, fire, and trespass grazing.

Starting in 1903, Colonel Young led the Buffalo Soldiers. He was assigned as the acting superintendent of Sequoia National Park for the summer and is regarded as the driving force behind completion of a much-needed wagon road through the park as well as the trail to the top of Mount Whitney. The road and trail are still in use today.

The Buffalo Soldiers must be celebrated and their history told. They had a central role in helping to protect, build, and preserve America's national parks. By voting for HB 238, to designate July 28 as Buffalo Soldiers Day, you will help foster awareness and knowledge about the critical role they played in the protection and development of some of our nation's natural treasures.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my testimony. I would be glad to answer any questions that you or other members of the subcommittee may have.