

# The Legendary Colonel Charles Young ...Another look at Black Military History

By: Katy St. Clair



Colonel Charles Young is seated second from left.

Photo Credit: [National Afro-American Museum and Cultural Center](#)

New information has come to light linking legendary Buffalo Soldier and United States Colonel Charles Young to an early fraternal organization known as The Black Cats, or Beta Kappa Sigma, a little known but exemplary club for men at Wilberforce University in Ohio in the late 1800s.

Charles Young, America's first African-American colonel, earned many honored titles in his lifetime. Born to enslaved parents in Kentucky in 1864, Young went on to graduate from West Point and then devoted his life to proudly serving his country as a Buffalo Soldier. His acumen caused him to rise through the military ranks, from Captain to Major and Lt. Colonel, then achieving the highest honor for a black soldier at the time, full Colonel, in 1918. In addition, Young was the first black Superintendent of a National Park, California's Sequoia National Park. He also served as a military attaché to Liberia and Hispaniola. Along the way he received many honors, including the prestigious Spingarn Medal from the NAACP and various military medals.

The National Coalition of Black Veterans has been working tirelessly to obtain for Col. Young an honorary promotion to the rank of Brigadier General, an honor he more than earned in his life time, but because of the color of his skin never achieved. Congressman Charles Rangel and Congresswoman Barbara Lee joined by thirty-three other members of Congress have asked President Barack Obama to grant the promotion. The National Coalition of Black Veteran Organizations has commissioned the renowned sculptor Antonio Tobias Mendez to create a bronze maquette of the Colonel on horseback. The coalition has asked President Obama to accept the statue on behalf of the nation for Black History Month.

In 1912, the distinguished Omega Psi Phi Fraternity recognized Young's contributions, and bestowed upon him an honorary membership. The fraternity has often referred to Young as an "Omega Man," but now it looks like his primary association/membership was with another organization prior to his honorary affiliation with the Omegas. A photograph of the Colonel posing with another fraternal organization has surfaced, the Beta Kappa Sigma, at Ohio's Wilberforce University, where Young served as a Professor of Military Science from 1894-1898. In the photograph, he can be seen holding the "B K Σ" banner as he sits proudly among his peers, known as "The Black Cats." Not very much is known about the photograph, nor even the fraternity, which no longer exists. Ohiomemory.org claims that the organization was never incorporated or recognized by the university, but that it was the forerunner to every fraternity at Wilberforce thereafter. "The members met at various places, usually an attic room of some member," says the site. "'The Black Cat Club' was a club with the purpose of fostering good times among its members." This new information shines a light on not only the history of black fraternities in America, but shows yet another aspect of the life of Charles Young and the men he worked and served beside.

"In retrospect Colonel Young's life was a clear indication of his belief in the principles of scholarship, leadership, fellowship and service," says Charles Blatcher, III, chairman of the Black Veterans Coalition. He was an extraordinary man both then and now. It is clear why other organizations and the Omegas have sought to identify him with their cause. For the record one thing is for certain, he is a legendary Buffalo Soldier, Educator and Diplomat who has earned a place of respect in American History. Based on his thirty-two years of distinguished military service, the Black Veterans Community claims him and his history for the nation. "

For more information on the National Coalition of Black Veteran Organizations they can be reached at e-mail address: [cnmmmf@aol.com](mailto:cnmmmf@aol.com)

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