



Our Parks, Our Stories

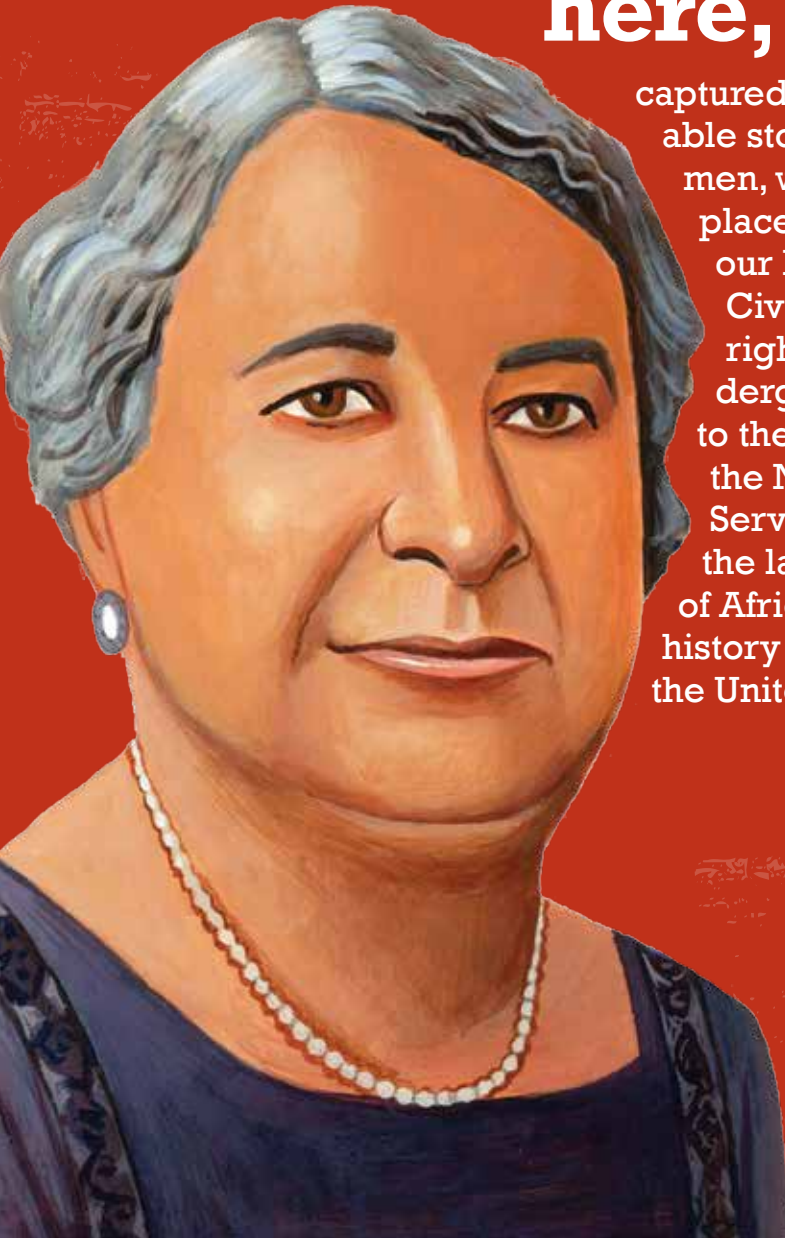
*Experience African
American History in Our
National Parks*

Mary McLeod Bethune
& Louis Armstrong

Our National Park System—400-plus units and counting—contains so much more than beautiful landscapes and iconic wildlife. The

African-American experience lives here, too,

captured in the remarkable stories of the men, women, and places that shaped our history. From Civil War to civil rights, from the Underground Railroad to the White House, the National Park Service is one of the largest stewards of African American history and culture in the United States.



Maggie Walker

Turning Nickels into Dollars

Maggie Lena Walker never paid much attention to those who told her she “couldn’t.” In an age of strict racial segregation and oppression and nearly two decades before American women won the right to vote, Maggie Walker established a newspaper, the *St. Luke’s Herald* (1902), and became the first American woman of any race to serve as president of a bank, the St. Luke’s Penny Savings Bank (1903). She reasoned such enterprises would starve the “lion of prejudice” while simultaneously creating a measure of economic independence and prosperity for

Richmond’s African-American community. The St. Luke’s Penny Savings Bank, which became Consolidated Bank & Trust in 1931, was “the oldest continually operated black-owned bank” until it was acquired in 2005.



Charles Young

Slave, Soldier, National Park Guardian...

Born into slavery in Mayslick, Kentucky in 1864, **Charles Young** rose from humble beginnings and adverse circumstances to become only the third African American to graduate from West Point in the 19th century. As Young advanced in rank and successfully acquitted a wide range of assignments, his career trajectory inspired countless African Americans who had few such public role models to inspire them. In 1903, 13 years before the creation of the National Park Service, Captain Young commanded a detachment of the Ninth U.S. Cavalry (Buffalo Soldiers) on a summer detail in Sequoia National Park in Central California. As an acting superintendent

(the first African American to hold that position), Young and his men built roads, patrolled aggressively to defeat illegal grazing and poaching, and initiated the first efforts to buy private property inside the park’s boundary.

To learn more, visit the Charles Young Buffalo Soldiers National Monument in Xenia, Ohio. www.nps.gov/chyo.

The Homefront Disaster that Ended Segregation in the Military

On July 17, 1944, a munitions explosion destroyed the naval loading dock at **Port Chicago, California**, and killed 320 men—the largest disaster to strike the American home front during the Second World War. When remaining African-American sailors refused to return to the task of loading munitions onto ships, the Navy deemed their actions a mutiny; fifty men were selected for prosecution. Thurgood Marshall, then chief counsel for the NAACP, flew to San Francisco to help lead the defense.

The six-week trial resulted in the conviction of all 50 defendants each of whom received a sentence of 15 years in prison. In January 1946, 47 of the Port Chicago men were released from prison and ultimately discharged from the Navy “honorably” but their mutiny convictions

still stood. Freddie Meeks was exonerated by President Bill Clinton in 1999. The effort to obtain pardons for the remaining Port Chicago sailors is ongoing.

The work stoppage by African American sailors hastened the end of segregated military units. The Navy feared additional “subversive behavior” if all-black crews were used, but the war continued. So black and white sailors were integrated in the hopes of dispersing radical elements and lessening their influence; the move quickly showed that integrated crews could work together to complete a mission. In that way the Port Chicago explosion and mutiny served as the catalysts that would lead to President Truman’s 1948 executive order to desegregate the military.

To learn more, visit www.nps.gov/poch.

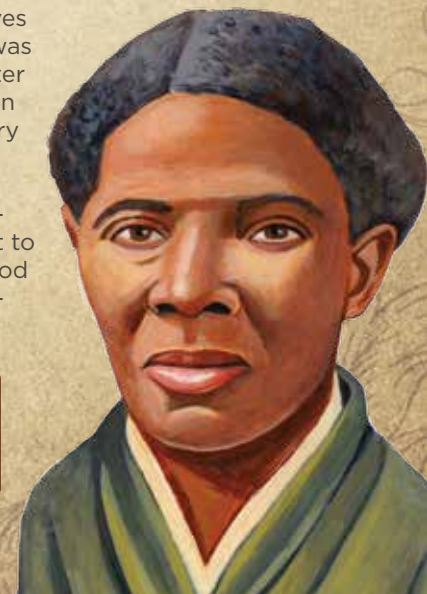
Please note at the publication of this document the Port Chicago Naval Magazine National Monument is open to the public by appointment only. Call 925.228.8860 ext. 6520 to arrange a visit or learn more.

The Good Old Ship of Zion

Harriet Tubman was a very religious woman. As a conductor on the Underground Railroad she used Biblical imagery to convey secret messages to enslaved relatives and friends she sought to free. In 1854, Tubman, who was illiterate, had a friend in Philadelphia write a coded letter which she then sent to Jacob Jackson, a free black man who happened to live on Maryland’s Eastern Shore, very close to Tubman’s brothers. When the letter was intercepted and Jackson questioned about its message—a series of religious phrases rendered in no particular order—Jackson feigned ignorance. He then went straight to Tubman’s brothers to tell them to make ready; the “good old ship of Zion” (Tubman) would be coming at Christmastime to take them north to Freedom.

To learn more, visit the Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad National Monument in Cambridge, MD. www.nps.gov/hatu.

Harriet Tubman



Want to Learn More? Plan a Visit to One of These Historic Sites

WEST

Fort Davis National Historic Site,
Fort Davis, Texas

Port Chicago Naval Magazine National
Memorial, Richmond, California

Presidio of San Francisco, California

Yosemite National Park, California

SOUTH

Cane River Creole National Historical Park,
Natchitoches, Louisiana

Little Rock Central High School National
Historic Site, Little Rock, Arkansas

Martin Luther King, Jr. National Historic
Site, Atlanta, Georgia

Natchez National Historical Park,
Natchez, Mississippi

New Orleans Jazz National Historical Park,
New Orleans, Louisiana

Selma to Montgomery National Historic Trail,
Selma, Alabama

Tuskegee Airmen National Historic Site,
Tuskegee, Alabama

Tuskegee Institute National Historic Site,
Tuskegee, Alabama

MIDWEST

Brown V. Board of Education National
Historic Site, Topeka, Kansas

Charles Young Buffalo Soldiers National
Monument, Xenia, Ohio

George Washington Carver National
Monument, Diamond, Missouri

Nicodemus National Historic Site,
Nicodemus, Kansas

NORTHEAST

African Burial Ground National
Monument, New York, New York

Boston African American National
Historic Site, Boston, Massachusetts

New Bedford Whaling National Historical
Park, New Bedford, Massachusetts

MID-ATLANTIC

African American Civil War Memorial,
Washington, DC

Booker T. Washington National
Monument, Hardy, Virginia

Carter G. Woodson Home National Historic
Site, Washington, DC

Fort Monroe National Monument,
Hampton, Virginia

Frederick Douglass National Historic Site,
Washington, DC

Harpers Ferry National Historical Park,
Harpers Ferry, West Virginia

Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad
National Monument, Cambridge, Maryland

Maggie Lena Walker National Historic Site,
Richmond, Virginia

Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial,
Washington, DC

Mary McLeod Bethune Council House
National Historic Site, Washington, DC

Petersburg National Battlefield,
Petersburg, Virginia



Who We Are & What We Do

NPCA has served as the leading voice of the American people on behalf of their national parks since 1919. We work with over 800,000 members, activists, and allies to protect our national parks for future generations. That means advocating for the policies, legislation, and funding that help the National Park Service preserve the nation's most precious resources including sites and programs that commemorate the African-American experience. That includes working with the Association for the Study of African American Life & History (ASALH) to host a discussion of African American women in the national parks, advocating for park funding, which ensures newer units like Port Chicago will be able to engage more visitors, and implementing a successful grassroots campaign to add the Colonel Charles Young Buffalo Soldiers National Monument to the National Park System.



How Can You Help?

- **Become a member** of NPCA today!
- **Add your voice (and vote)** to the growing chorus of national park advocates and tell your elected representatives to support national parks.
- **Visit a national park** yourself—and bring a friend.
- **Visit www.npca.org** to learn more about the National Park Service, our National Park System, and discover opportunities for advocacy, service, learning, and recreation in your parks.



Illustrations by Charlie Powell

Port Chicago sailor