During the CivilWar African Americans could only serve as volunteer soldiers. It wasn't until after the war that African Americans could officially serve in the military. An Act was passed by the U.S. Congress in 1866 that allowed the Army to increase cavalry regiments by two. The 9th and 10th U.S. Cavalry regiments were then added. The men who joined the 9th and 10th U.S. Cavalry were all African Americans. They became the first officially designated all African American regiments to serve in the peace time army.

During the years that followed the Civil War, the vast western frontier lying west of the Mississippi River, was quickly being settled by pioneers. However, much of the western frontier was home to many Indian tribes. The government wanted these lands that the Indians occuppied, and used its power and military force to remove them. Some tribes refused to leave their land and go to reservations that were set aside for them by the government. The Army with its increased number of regiments, set out to remove these last bands of Indians and began to open new lands for the settlers.

The African American men of the 9th and 10th U.S. Cavalry were stationed throughout the western frontier. They fought Indians and Mexican revolutionaries, guarded railroad workers and new settlers, built Army forts, mapped the wilderness and helped civil authorities.