

Fort Des Moines

Fort Des Moines in Iowa was the first military training site where African Americans could train to become officers in the U.S. Army. The first all-black 25th *Infantry Regiment* started its training in 1903, just two years after the base was first established. Previously, African Americans had served in the army, but they were very few who became officers. Even President Woodrow Wilson held the view that African Americans had neither the intelligence nor the bravery to lead their troops into combat. But when the U.S. entered World War I this *mentality* began to change. In October 1917, the first class of 639 African American soldiers graduated as captains or lieutenants. This was a big step towards a movement that would push for equal rights for African Americans all over the U.S. At this point in time the African American vote was still very limited, and they were still *racially segregated* by law.

Between 1942 and 1945, during World War II, Fort Des Moines trained the first female officers for non-combat duty in the Army. This, again, was a small stride towards a larger movement for gender equality in the United States.

Vocabulary

Racially segregated: By law, public facilities and government services (such as education) were separated into “white” and “colored”.

Infantry Regiment: A group of soldiers trained, armed and equipped to fight on foot.

Mentality: Way of thinking

Answer the question below on a separate piece of paper.

Do you think it is fair that African Americans had to use separate bathrooms, buses and schools, but they could serve in the military alongside the white soldiers?

Did you know that women are still technically not allowed to serve in combat? Why do you think this is?

