

**Rhode Island Storyteller- Dramatist to perform Dramatic Re- enactment about
Woman Buffalo Soldier at URI**

Kingston, RI – November 8, 2001- In conjunction with the Rhode Island State Council for the Arts (RISCA) and Stories by Melody, the University of Rhode Island Multicultural Center will present Only A Woman, a dramatic re-enactment based on the life of Cathay Williams, the only known woman to enlist in the highly acclaimed African American regiments, known as the Buffalo Soldiers, on Thursday, November 29, 2001 at 7:00 pm in the Multicultural Center Hardge Forum, Room 101.

In the aftermath of the Civil War the United States Congress authorized the creation of twelve regiments to lead in the pacification of the West. Six of these regiments – the 9th and, 10th Calvary and the, 38th, 39th, 40th, and 41st Infantry – predominantly African American –were held in high esteem for their valor in combat. According to legend, their Native American foes paid them the ultimate compliment by observing that the soldiers fought with the courage of the buffalo. At least ten of the Buffalo Soldiers received Congressional Medals of Honor.

Born near Independence, Missouri in 1842, Cathay Williams grew up in captivity on the estate of William Johnson, a wealthy white farmer. When Johnson died in 1861, Cathay Williams became familiar with the military milieu as a servant for the 13th regiment of the Union army under a Colonel Benton; and later as a cook in Washington, D.C. under General Philip H. Sheridan. On November 15, 1866 she enlisted in the 38th Infantry, U.S. Colored Troops, under the name of William Cathay. Since no physical exams were required upon entrance, Cathay Williams was able to conceal her identity until she was discharged on October 18, 1868.

Reflecting the austerity of the conditions she faced on the frontier, military records indicate that she encountered illness on four occasions, forded the muddy Rio Grande River, and mutinied at Fort Cummings, New Mexico, along with fellow soldiers. Like many other hardy frontier women of the era, she adapted to the condition of her spartan lifestyle. After leaving the army, she purchased land in Trinidad, Colorado. Ironically, her request for a military pension based on her years of service and honorable discharge was denied.

Inspired by seeing a painting of Cathay Williams conceived by artist Morgan Monceaux, Melodie Thompson has created a tough minded and humorous dramatic portrait of Cathay Williams. “As a former resident of Texas, I was deeply moved by Melodie Thompson’s performance and the many layers of meaning, the attention to detail, and the depiction of historical context,” says Melvin Wade, Director of the Multicultural Center, who viewed the performance several months ago.

The performance is free and open to the public. University classes and individuals interested in the subject matter of the performance may call (401) 874-2851.