

University of Mississippi

eGrove

---

Electronic Theses and Dissertations

Graduate School

---

2014

## Is This Freedom? Government Exploitation Of Contraband Laborers In Virginia, South Carolina, And Washington, D.C. During The American Civil War

Kristin Leigh Bouldin  
*University of Mississippi*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://egrove.olemiss.edu/etd>



Part of the [United States History Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Bouldin, Kristin Leigh, "Is This Freedom? Government Exploitation Of Contraband Laborers In Virginia, South Carolina, And Washington, D.C. During The American Civil War" (2014). *Electronic Theses and Dissertations*. 630.

<https://egrove.olemiss.edu/etd/630>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at eGrove. It has been accepted for inclusion in Electronic Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of eGrove. For more information, please contact [egrove@olemiss.edu](mailto:egrove@olemiss.edu).

“IS THIS FREEDOM?” GOVERNMENT EXPLOITATION OF CONTRABAND LABORERS  
IN VIRGINIA, SOUTH CAROLINA, AND WASHINGTON, D.C. DURING THE  
AMERICAN CIVIL WAR

A Thesis  
presented in partial fulfillment of requirements  
for the degree of Master of Arts  
in the Department of History  
The University of Mississippi

by

KRISTIN LEIGH BOULDIN

May 2014

Copyright Kristin L. Bouldin 2014  
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

## ABSTRACT

This thesis covers the exploitation of contraband laborers during the American Civil War in the Hampton Roads region of Virginia, the South Carolina Sea Islands, and Washington, D.C. In addition, it analyzes the actions of Union military commanders charged with care of the contrabands, and the failure of the federal government to create a uniform policy outlining how military officials should treat the contrabands. The thesis covers abuses ranging from failure to pay wages to a lack of medical care to the construction of disease-ridden camps to the impressment of contrabands for labor or military enlistment. It argues that military commanders in all three regions, despite numerous differences, including a military campaign in Virginia, leasing in South Carolina, and a lack of farmland in Washington, mistreated contraband laborers in order to reduce government relief expenditures, avoid dependency, instill an ideology of self-reliance, and focus resources on the war effort. The federal government, meanwhile, did little to stop such abuses or create a policy banning the mistreatment of contrabands. The thesis examines each region chronologically and provides comparative analysis throughout. As the evidentiary base, it uses letters of military officers, newspapers, military reports, correspondence, and other records, petitions sent to Congress and the President, letters from missionaries, aid workers lessees, and other Northern observers, and letters and petitions written by the contrabands themselves. The research for this thesis was completed at the University of Virginia, Duke University, the University of North Carolina, The College of William and Mary, the Library of Virginia, the Library of Congress, and the National Archives in Washington, D.C.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT .....	ii
INTRODUCTION .....	1
CHAPTER I .....	12
CHAPTER II .....	39
CHAPTER III .....	61
CONCLUSION .....	85
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	88
VITA .....	92

## INTRODUCTION

By late 1863, nine-year-old Carter Holmes should have had reason to celebrate. He had escaped slavery and found freedom within the Union lines at Washington, D.C. However, instead of placing him in school so he could obtain the education denied him in slavery, military authorities too concerned about dependency and making the contrabands work apprenticed him to a Maryland man who agreed to provide food, clothing, and schooling in return for Holmes's labor. Government authorities failed to ensure the man's compliance and he brutally abused Holmes for three years before the boy finally ran away from an employer no better than a slave master.<sup>1</sup>

This unfortunate incident was not a unique case during the Civil War. Throughout the war, military authorities defrauded, mistreated, exploited, and physically abused contrabands, who they often saw as a hindrance to the larger war effort and a drain on scarce government resources. At the start of the war, military authorities focused on the Fugitive Slave Act and the maintenance of loyalty from the Border States and refused to accept contrabands into the lines.<sup>2</sup> Even after Congress changed federal policy and ordered the army to accept fugitives, according to historian James Oakes, the Union army was overwhelmed by emancipation and was unprepared for the large numbers of freedmen who entered its camps and Congress, while

---

<sup>1</sup> Ira Berlin, Steven F. Miller, Joseph P. Reidy, and Leslie S. Rowland, ed., *Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation 1861-1867, Selected from the Holdings of the National Archives of the United States, Series I, Volume II, The Wartime Genesis of Free Labor: The Upper South* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 259.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, 245.

ordering the army to accept contrabands, did little to ensure humane treatment or prevent abuse, allowing military authorities to make their own decisions regarding the welfare of the contrabands.<sup>3</sup> In addition, military authorities focused on instituting a system of free labor and ensuring the contrabands worked while, according to historian Louis Gerteis, trying to prevent “violent and fundamental changes in the society and economy of the crumbling Confederacy,” which resulted in a system of plantation labor quite similar to the slavery the contrabands had escaped.<sup>4</sup> Even worse, army authorities failed to address overcrowding and disease within the contraband camps, which they saw as temporary employment depots rather than permanent refugee camps. Such abuse led to devastating outbreaks of smallpox and other diseases that killed thousands of contrabands before they had a chance to truly experience freedom. As James Oakes writes, “The contrabands-sometimes frozen, often starving- got sick and died in the very process that was supposed to free them.”<sup>5</sup> This paper will examine mistreatment and abuse of contrabands by army officers in the field and the failure of governmental authorities to create a uniform policy to address such abuse in three very different regions of the South: the Hampton Roads region of eastern Virginia, the South Carolina Sea Islands, and the Union capital in Washington, D.C.

Across the country during the Civil War, slaves ran to Union lines seeking freedom and protection from their owners. According to Ira Berlin, slaves “struggled to secure their liberty, reconstitute their families, and create institutions befitting a free people” by escaping slavery and

---

<sup>3</sup> James Oakes, *Freedom National: The Destruction of Slavery in the United States, 1861-1865* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2013), 139, 396, 420; Gene Dattel, *Cotton and Race in the Making of America: The Human Costs of Economic Power* (Lanham, MD: Ivan R. Dee Publisher, 2009), 209.

<sup>4</sup> Louis S. Gerteis, *From Contraband to Freedman: Federal Policy Toward Southern Blacks 1861-1865* (Westport: CT, Greenwood Press, 1973), 5.

<sup>5</sup> Oakes, *Freedom National*, 428.

fleeing to Union lines.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, according to Oakes, slaves recognized that the Union military represented a “counter-state” that protected freedom in the South and remained beyond the reach of slaveholders.<sup>7</sup> Such information passed quickly amongst the slave population, causing thousands of slaves to flee to what they saw as an army of liberation.<sup>8</sup> Especially after the Emancipation Proclamation, when the freedom of slaves fleeing to Union lines was officially recognized, slaves believed that freedom was guaranteed if they reached the Union army and were willing to work for wages.<sup>9</sup> These trends would hold true across all three regions, as slaves recognized that they could find freedom for themselves and their families by reaching Union lines.

In Virginia, the first contrabands ran to Union lines and military authorities haltingly developed a policy of hiring contrabands for military labor while also instituting a policy of farm labor on the limited number of abandoned plantations in the region.<sup>10</sup> In the South Carolina Sea Islands, meanwhile, all of the local whites ran away, leaving behind cotton plantations and thousands of slaves, which led to land sales and plantation leasing, allowing northern businessmen to abuse and mistreat contraband laborers in addition to exploitation by government authorities.<sup>11</sup> In Washington, D.C., on the other hand, contrabands worked almost exclusively for the government, but military authorities did little to address conditions at the overcrowded contraband camps, which were plagued with disease and rampant destitution throughout the war.<sup>12</sup> During the Civil War, military authorities focused on enforcing the Fugitive Slave Act,

---

<sup>6</sup> Berlin, ed., *Freedom: The Upper South*, 1.

<sup>7</sup> Oakes, *Freedom National*, 89.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, 106.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*, 344.

<sup>10</sup> Gerteis, *From Contraband to Freedman*, 20, 41.

<sup>11</sup> Oakes, *Freedom National*, 197-199.

<sup>12</sup> Berlin, ed., *Freedom: The Upper South*, 244, 247-251.

instituting a system of free labor rather than dependence on government charity, and avoiding the removal of resources from the larger war effort. As a result, they mistreated, exploited, and abused contrabands while federal authorities more focused on winning the war did little or nothing to create a uniform policy that would end such abuses.

The historiography on the topic of contrabands during the Civil War emerged relatively recently. Early histories either tended to ignore the contrabands entirely or, according to Gerteis, created racist arguments claiming that “antislavery men sought to destroy the social and economic order of the South” and portraying African-Americans as objects of white actions and decisions.<sup>13</sup> In a typical example of the period, Edgar W. Knight, writing in 1918, argued that Northern teachers who came to the South to educate contrabands were “despicable” and that their abolitionist ideas would only harm race relations.<sup>14</sup> Such arguments lasted until the 1960s and 1970s, when the Civil Rights Movement prompted historians to examine the “long-neglected Negro.”<sup>15</sup> In his work, Louis Gerteis analyzes federal contraband policy in Virginia, Louisiana, and Mississippi and gives vivid detail of the conditions faced by contrabands, but still portrays white officials and the government as the main actors and contrabands as passive recipients of federal decisions.<sup>16</sup> Willie Lee Rose’s 1964 work also echoes these trends, as she focuses almost completely on the actions of Northern missionaries in the South Carolina Sea Islands and how their decisions affected the contrabands, who are also portrayed as passive rather than active participants in the free labor experiment.<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup> Gerteis, *From Contraband to Freedman*, 3.

<sup>14</sup> Ronald E. Butchart, *Schooling the Freed People: Teaching, Learning, and the Struggle for Black Freedom, 1861-1876* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), x.

<sup>15</sup> Gerteis, *From Contraband to Freedman*, 3.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> Willie Lee Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction: The Port Royal Experiment* (London, Oxford University Press, 1964).

It would take until the 1980s for works to emerge that truly focused on the contrabands and how they worked to gain their own freedom and livelihoods despite government neglect. In 1979, Leon Litwack's work explored the end of slavery from the perspective of the contrabands, and included material about the camps and how contrabands struggled to earn a living despite horrid conditions. He argues that the "camps soon became overcrowded, disease took a heavy toll, the promised wages were often not paid, and many slaves came to feel they had been defrauded" but also that the "slaves themselves undermined the authority of the planter class" and tried their best to remain independent despite abuse and neglect by army authorities.<sup>18</sup> James Oakes, meanwhile, in his recent work, focuses on federal policy and the antislavery legacy of the Republican Party stretching back through the 1850s, but also includes copious detail on contrabands and their contributions to their own freedom, and how policies passed in Washington failed to correct horrendous conditions in the camps, as unprepared army officers often made their own decisions with little federal guidance. He argues that slaves running to Union lines forced the government to create a contraband policy, clearly indicating his focus on the contrabands as active participants in their own freedom.<sup>19</sup> This trend is reflected in another recent work by Jim Downs, who argues that army authorities saw contrabands as a burden and failed to provide proper medical care, resulting in thousands of deaths from disease in the camps, which could have been prevented with proper medical intervention.<sup>20</sup> He also focuses on the contrabands themselves and how they attempted to maintain a living despite the deadly conditions in the camps.

---

<sup>18</sup> Leon F. Litwack, *Been in the Storm So Long: The Aftermath of Slavery* (New York: Vintage Books, 1980), 130, 133, 137.

<sup>19</sup> Oakes, *Freedom National*, 166, 105, 416.

<sup>20</sup> Jim Downs, *Sick from Freedom: African-American Illness and Suffering during the Civil War and Reconstruction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 4.

Other recent historians also reflect this trend in works of local and regional history that also include material on contraband camps. Multiple historians have analyzed contraband camps in the nation's capital. While Margaret Leech included some material on the topic in her 1941 work, she focused on federal authorities and missionaries and included racially insensitive statements, such as "this primitive and childlike people," whom she portrayed as passive victims.<sup>21</sup> More recent authors, including Kenneth Winkle, Kate Masur, Allan Johnston, and Robert Poole, have included detailed discussions on conditions in contraband camps, the fugitive slave debate, and the vital contributions of contraband labor to the Union war effort in the capital, all while portraying the contrabands as active participants.<sup>22</sup> In his work, Winkle argues that Union authorities placed the war effort and profit motives above contraband welfare, resulting in few improvements to horrendous conditions. Furthermore, he discusses the impact of Border State loyalty in the decision to return contrabands as fugitives.<sup>23</sup> Masur, meanwhile, focuses on the desire of contrabands for equal rights and better treatment, particularly their protests of fugitive renditions.<sup>24</sup> Johnston and Poole, in contrast, focus on the horrific conditions in the camps and blame federal officials for failing to take corrective action.<sup>25</sup> Poole, however, blames unpreparedness for federal inaction, while Johnston argues for deliberate choice.<sup>26</sup> This regional historiographic trend is exemplified in works on eastern Virginia, as historians Glenn

---

<sup>21</sup> Margaret Leech, *Reveille in Washington: 1860-1865* (New York: New York Review of Books, 1941), 307.

<sup>22</sup> Kenneth J. Winkle, *Lincoln's Citadel: The Civil War in Washington, D.C.* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2013); The Smithsonian Anacostia Museum and Center for African-American History and Culture, *The Black Washingtonians: The Anacostia Museum Illustrated Chronology* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons, 2005); Kate Masur, *An Example for All the Land: Emancipation and the Struggle Over Equality in Washington, D.C.* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010); Allan Johnston, *Surviving Freedom: The Black Community of Washington, D.C. 1860-1880* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1993); Robert M. Poole, *On Hallowed Ground: The Story of Arlington National Cemetery* (New York: Walker and Company, 2009).

<sup>23</sup> Winkle, *Lincoln's Citadel*, 233, 349.

<sup>24</sup> Masur, *Example for all the Land*, 4, 11.

<sup>25</sup> Johnston, *Surviving Freedom*, xxiii, 101.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*; Poole, *Hallowed Ground*, 35.

David Brasher and Robert Engs have written monographs exclusively focused on the experiences of the contrabands, their contribution to the Union war effort, and their struggle to form independent communities despite terrible conditions.<sup>27</sup> The historiography on contrabands, therefore, has come a long way since the racist polemics of the early twentieth century, as historians have moved from portraying contrabands as passive victims of federal neglect to active participants in the struggle for better conditions.

This paper will make new contributions to this historiography. It will add a comparative analysis by examining contraband camps and federal contraband policy in South Carolina, Virginia, and Washington, D.C. and by examining how vastly different military and economic circumstances in each region affected the development of contraband policy. Furthermore, it will use the voices of the contrabands themselves, as found in testimony, letters, and petitions, to tell the story of government mistreatment and of the efforts of the contrabands to fight for their basic rights. Finally, it will examine the difference between policies enacted in Washington and the actual reality on the ground in the camps, as army officers fitfully tried to create policy with little guidance from government authorities.

In addition, this paper is written as a moral history. In his work, Harry S. Stout states that moral history “imbues the present with a heightened sensitivity to what actors might have done, what they ought to have done, and, what, in fact, they actually did.”<sup>28</sup> This paper echoes his argument by not only describing federal mistreatment of contrabands, but by indicating how they could have easily helped the contrabands if they had given their welfare higher priority. In addition, this work also undermines the idea of emancipation as an “unambiguous moral

---

<sup>27</sup> Glenn David Brasher, *The Peninsula Campaign and the Necessity of Emancipation: African-Americans and the Fight for Freedom* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012); Robert F. Engs, *Freedom's First Generation: Black Hampton, Virginia, 1861-1890* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004).

<sup>28</sup> Harry S. Stout, *Upon the Altar of the Nation: A Moral History of the Civil War* (New York: Viking, 2006), xii.

triumph,” which fails to address federal exploitation of the freed slaves.<sup>29</sup> While certainly not criticizing the morality of the decision for emancipation itself, this work highlights the horrific conditions and mistreatment faced by contrabands and the failure of a government that passed the Emancipation Proclamation to correct such abuses. As Stout writes, “Only when the reader hears the anguished cries of the suffering... will the full moral dimensions” of the Civil War be revealed and the complete story of emancipation told.<sup>30</sup>

During the war, federal policy related to fugitive slaves evolved gradually from complete exclusion to hiring contrabands as government laborers, but still failed to adequately address the problems in the camps. Most of the policy, and indeed the term “contraband” itself, rose out of military necessity, as army officials saw the benefits of removing laborers from the Confederate war effort and adding them to the Union military machine.<sup>31</sup> In addition, giving the fugitives status as “contrabands” made them enemy property eligible for confiscation, but also did not free them, allowing antislavery policy to develop at a slower pace.<sup>32</sup> Early in the war, meanwhile, many army officers banned fugitives from camps due to fears of Border State loyalty, espionage, and the difficulty of determining whether a slave’s master was loyal or disloyal.<sup>33</sup> The First Confiscation Act, passed in 1861, freed fugitives who had been forced to work for the Confederate war effort along with their families, but any other fugitives were still excluded from Union lines.<sup>34</sup> Thousands of slaves still ran to Union lines, however, contributing to Congress’s decision to pass the Second Confiscation Act to further clarify the fugitive slave issue. The Act freed all slaves of disloyal masters regardless of whether they had worked for the Confederate

---

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, xvi.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, xxii.

<sup>31</sup> Oakes, *Freedom National*, 98, 102-103.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 102-103.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 182.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, 138-141.

war effort, and crucially for the contrabands, authorized the “President to employ black men within the Union army” to perform labor vital to the Union war effort.<sup>35</sup> At the same time, Lincoln banned the army from returning any fugitives and ordered “reasonable wages” for contraband laborers, a policy that was often ignored by officers in the field, resulting in contrabands across the South receiving little or no pay for government labor.<sup>36</sup> When Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation, which was largely based on the Second Confiscation Act, in January 1863, the fugitive slave question was finally resolved in favor of the contrabands.<sup>37</sup>

These policies, however, did little to regulate the everyday lives of the contrabands, and failed to correct abuses such as lack of wages, denial of rations, inadequate shelter, mistreatment by soldiers, and denial of even basic medical care. The federal government did not provide adequate guidance to its military officers, resulting in an army completely unprepared for the scope of the contraband camps. While, as Oakes writes, “labor in service to the Union remained a crucial guarantor of emancipation” for the contrabands, federal policy did not ensure that such labor was rewarded with decent and humane treatment.<sup>38</sup>

Such mistreatment can be explained in part by the pervasive racism in the North during the Civil War. Many northerners, not just lessees or army officials, held racist attitudes and did not support programs to uplift contraband laborers in the South. A significant portion of Northerners, according to Rose, opposed charity for anyone, including the contrabands, due to the “implications of paternalism and condescending benevolence that it conveyed” despite the

---

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, 226-238.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, 248. The lack of wages for contrabands is indicated by the primary documents in each region of Berlin’s *Freedom* collection.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 301.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, 201. For additional coverage of federal antislavery policy during the war, see Eric Foner, *A Fiery Trial: Abraham Lincoln and American Slavery* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2010), Gerteis, *From Contraband to Freedman*, William C. Harris, *Lincoln and the Border States: Preserving the Union* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2011), Hans L. Trefousse, *Lincoln’s Decision for Emancipation* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1975), and Allen C. Guelzo, *Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation: The End of Slavery in America* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2004).

fact that the contrabands clearly were destitute.<sup>39</sup> Many saw the contrabands as “children” incapable of making their own decisions, and these attitudes remained prominent among those charged with helping the contrabands.<sup>40</sup> Such opinions led to the focus on self-sufficiency, as military officials implemented contract labor programs that required contrabands to work for wages, and that only those who worked would receive assistance from the government.<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, any assistance would only be temporary to avoid the specter of permanent dependency, and many officials truly believed that such strict measures helped the contrabands learn how to survive in a free labor economy.<sup>42</sup> However, they failed to realize the scale of the poverty and destitution amongst the contrabands, and even made it worse by failing to pay wages and then refusing to provide assistance, clearly indicating how the idea of self-sufficiency became devastating for the contrabands.<sup>43</sup> Furthermore, according to Gerteis, emancipation worsened northern racism, as many white Northerners opposed a war they perceived as being fought solely for emancipation and rights for African-Americans, which only worsened the situation for the contrabands.<sup>44</sup>

Such racist attitudes also appeared in the “free-labor” ideology that did not provide a full freedom for contraband laborers in the South. The free-labor ideology prominent in antebellum America contributed to an emphasis on contraband labor at the expense of humane treatment. According to Eric Foner, the free labor ideology stated that all Northern men could become economically autonomous through hard work and that any worker could become an independent

---

<sup>39</sup> Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction*, 158.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid*, 140.

<sup>41</sup> Berlin, ed., *Freedom: The Upper South*, 15.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid*, 23.

<sup>44</sup> Gerteis, *From Contraband to Freedman*, 6.

property owner.<sup>45</sup> In reality, the idea of free labor failed to eliminate major inequity in labor relations and employers had complete control.<sup>46</sup> Such ideas became part of federal contraband policy, as “Republicans viewed the transition from slavery to freedom through the prism of free labor” and only saw the contrabands becoming wage laborers on plantations rather than independent proprietors or land owners.<sup>47</sup> Contraband policy, therefore, focused on proving the effectiveness of free labor rather than improving conditions in the camps. Contrabands were made to either work for the government or, in South Carolina, work on farms run by lessees, and both parties failed to provide even basics such as food and shelter or even the right to leave an abusive employer.<sup>48</sup> The free labor ideology, combined with the failure of federal policymakers to regulate treatment of contrabands once they reached Union lines, led to abysmal conditions in all three regions despite the differences among them. Such mistreatment of contraband laborers began during the first summer of the war at a remote outpost on the Virginia Peninsula commanded by a political general named Benjamin Butler.

---

<sup>45</sup> Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party before the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), ix.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, xvi, xxii.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, xxxii.

<sup>48</sup> Ira Berlin, Steven F. Miller, Joseph P. Reidy, Leslie S. Rowland, Julie Saville, ed. *Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation 1861-1867, Selected from the Holdings of the National Archives of the United States Series I, Volume III, The Wartime Genesis of Free Labor: The Lower South* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 22-23; Lt. Col. Edward W. Smith to Messrs. Brisbane, Wording, and Smith, 25 February 1864, in *Freedom, The Lower South*, ed. Berlin et al, 295.

## CHAPTER I

### HAMPTON ROADS, VIRGINIA

In the summer of 1861, Union troops held Fortress Monroe, located at the tip of the Virginia Peninsula outside Hampton, but held no territory beyond the fort.<sup>49</sup> To prevent the Union occupiers from utilizing the resources in the city, Confederate troops burned Hampton and fled, giving hundreds of slaves the opportunity to flee to freedom.<sup>50</sup> At this early stage of the war, however, the reaction of Union troops to the new arrivals was far from certain.

At this time, Union soldiers and policymakers were unsure whether to even accept fugitives into the lines, much less how to treat them once they arrived. In Hampton, however, slaves were forced to work under brutal conditions on Confederate fortifications within sight of Union-held Fortress Monroe. These slaves began to hear rumors that they “would be taken south” for further military labor and decided to gamble and flee to the Union bastion.<sup>51</sup> Frank Baker, James Townsend, and Sheppard Mallory became the first fugitive slaves to reach Fort Monroe. The three men offered to work for the Union Army in exchange for protection. General Benjamin Butler, who was in “great need of labor in [his] quartermaster’s department,” agreed. He justified his actions as taking “property designed, adapted, and about to be used

---

<sup>49</sup> Berlin, ed., *Freedom: The Upper South*, 87.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> “General Butler’s Contrabands,” in *The Civil War Archive: The History of the Civil War in Documents*, ed. Henry Steele Commager and Rev. Erik Brown (New York: Black Dog and Leventhal Publishers, 2000), 568; J. Michael Cobb, “Rehearsing Reconstruction in Occupied Virginia: Life and Emancipation at Fort Monroe,” in *Virginia at War: 1864*, ed. William C. Davis and James I. Robertson, Jr. (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2009), 140.

against the United States” away from the enemy, which led to the term “contraband of war,” meaning enemy military property liable to seizure by Union forces.<sup>52</sup> In addition, Butler stated that the Fugitive Slave Act did not apply to a foreign country, so masters could not reclaim their slaves from the fort.<sup>53</sup> President Lincoln ordered Butler not to return any fugitives, even women and children who were perceived to not work in order to prevent the separation of families, which resolved the issue of whether to accept contrabands but failed to provide any guidance on how they should be treated.<sup>54</sup>

Once the first three contrabands gained protection at Fort Monroe, more and more began arriving until hundreds had sought shelter behind Union lines, making the question of their treatment imperative.<sup>55</sup> Butler ordered Edward Pierce to “organize the contrabands into a labor force” to work for the military in the “engineer, ordinance, quartermaster, commissary, and medical departments.”<sup>56</sup> He divided the laborers into first and second class based on ability to work, and designated wages of ten dollars a month for first class hands and 5 dollars a month for second class, along with rations and clothing. The contrabands, however, only saw one or two dollars a month, due to deductions for clothing costs and a fund to support dependent contrabands who could not work.<sup>57</sup> Furthermore, any contraband who was sick for six days in a row or more than ten in a month lost half wages for the month.<sup>58</sup> Despite these deductions in their wages, Edward F. Pierce, the superintendent of contrabands at the Fort, stated, “They would be required to do only such labor as we ourselves had done... they would be treated kindly, and

---

<sup>52</sup> Benjamin Butler to Winfield Scott, 24 May 1861, in *The Civil War: The First Year Told by Those Who Lived It*, ed. Brooks D. Simpson, Stephen W. Sears, and Aaron Sheehan-Dean (New York: Penguin, 2011), 361-362.

<sup>53</sup> Brasher, *The Peninsula Campaign*, 35.

<sup>54</sup> Oakes, *Freedom National*, 99-100.

<sup>55</sup> Berlin, ed., *Freedom: The Upper South*, 87.

<sup>56</sup> General Orders No. 34, in *Freedom: The Upper South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 111.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

no one should be obliged to work beyond his capacity... and that they should be furnished... with full soldiers' rations."<sup>59</sup> His assertions would prove hollow, however, as contrabands in Hampton were abused, mistreated, and denied even these rudimentary wages by army officers. The conditions became so abysmal that one minister termed the program "government slavery" and the federal authorities in Washington did nothing to stop it.<sup>60</sup>

One of the major reasons for mistreatment of contrabands at Fortress Monroe was the indifference or outright hostility of army officers placed in charge of contraband labor. One observer stated, "what do government officers generally care how they treat these poor waifs, who have been cast up on their heartless protection?"<sup>61</sup> Soldiers and officers had signed up to fight the rebels rather than take care of contrabands, and many saw the contrabands as a "nuisance" and resented the new assignment.<sup>62</sup> According to historian Henry L. Swint, "To many members of the Federal armies... the plight of the freedmen seemed hardly less distressing than that of the slave," and such attitudes were common at Fort Monroe and the larger Hampton Roads region as well.<sup>63</sup> Even worse, many officers saw contrabands as "incompetent [and] unfit to determine their own best interests," and used these racist views to justify mistreatment and abuse.<sup>64</sup> Such attitudes, present under Butler's regime, became even worse when General Wool took over in late 1861, replacing Butler's relatively abolitionist soldiers, whose experience led to their transfer to the front, with troops much more hostile to the contrabands. These soldiers, according to historian Robert F. Engs, "struck upon a system of treatment that was hardly

---

<sup>59</sup> Edward Pierce, "The Contrabands at Fortress Monroe," in the *Atlantic Monthly*, November 1861 (Boston: Ticknow and Fields, 1861), Pamphlets in American History Collection, Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library, University of Virginia.

<sup>60</sup> Lewis C. Lockwood to Hon. Senator Wilson, 29 January 1862, in *Freedom: The Upper South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 113.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid*, 113.

<sup>62</sup> Engs, *Freedom's First Generation*, 18.

<sup>63</sup> Henry L. Swint, *Dear Ones at Home, Letters from Contraband Camps* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1966), 1.

<sup>64</sup> Engs, *Freedom's First Generation*, 17.

distinguishable from the slavery blacks were seeking to escape” and denied the contrabands wages, rations, clothing, and even freedom from the corporal punishment they thought they had left behind in slavery.<sup>65</sup>

Throughout 1861 and 1862, the army failed to pay contrabands wages for government labor. The army required all the contrabands who were able to work or “starve,” but then failed to pay the wages needed for the contrabands to survive.<sup>66</sup> Army officials, especially General Wool, justified this exploitation by claiming that wages went to a fund for dependents but often failed to even pay the two dollar wages still owed the contrabands after deductions for the fund.<sup>67</sup> Furthermore, by January 1862, the fund contained seven thousand dollars, more than enough to support the dependent contrabands, but wages were not increased for workers.<sup>68</sup> Ideas of dependence contributed to such actions by military officials, as many believed that contrabands had to be forced to work and “improve themselves” rather than rely on government handouts.<sup>69</sup> Many officials, in fact, believed that contrabands would not work without proper guardianship, and a mandatory wage labor system would be necessary to prevent idleness and permanent dependence.<sup>70</sup> According to historian Ira Berlin, many officers believed that contrabands- once freed, educated, and taught Christianity- would profit from freedom alone without the need for wages.<sup>71</sup> Contrabands who protested the lack of wages through work stoppages were “jailed and whipped” until they returned to work, despite the destitution of their families, indicating the clear

---

<sup>65</sup> Ibid, 21.

<sup>66</sup> Major Wm. P. Jones to Maj. John A. Dix, 5 June 1862, in *Freedom: The Upper South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 126.

<sup>67</sup> Berlin, *Freedom: The Upper South*, 88.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid, 88-89; Report from Col. T.J. Cram, LeG B. Cannon, and William P. Jones, 1862, in *Freedom, The Upper South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 113.

<sup>70</sup> Gerteis, *From Contraband to Freedman*, 34-35.

<sup>71</sup> Report from Col. T. J. Cram, LeG B. Cannon, and William P. Jones, 1862, in *Freedom, The Upper South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 113.

priority of instituting free labor and avoiding dependence at the expense of contraband welfare.<sup>72</sup> The most egregious reason for failure to pay wages, corruption, also became prevalent in Hampton. Officers cheated contrabands out of wages and even sold clothing and rations to make money for themselves at the expense of the contrabands.<sup>73</sup> For all these reasons, military officials owed ten thousand dollars in back wages by the end of 1862, with devastating consequences for the contrabands.<sup>74</sup>

Many contrabands protested to army authorities to gain the wages justly due them. Suthey Parker worked in the quartermaster department for two months and then as a military cook for ten months during 1862, but only received fifteen dollars total for a year of work, and was still trying to gain his back wages in September 1865.<sup>75</sup> Contrabands working in the Engineer's Department, meanwhile, reported their complaints to Minister Lewis Lockwood, who wrote to a United States senator seeking redress but to no avail, indicating the negligence of the highest government authorities in stopping the abuse of contrabands. Lockwood described contrabands who only received one dollar and "inadequate" clothing for six months of work despite the seven thousand dollars in the fund for dependents.<sup>76</sup> In another revealing letter, Orlando Brown, the superintendent of contrabands in Newport News, just northwest of Hampton on the Virginia Peninsula, states that one hundred contrabands working in the hospital had never received any pay, and that only thirty out of more than one hundred contrabands working for the quartermaster had received pay, indicating that military officials knew of the problem but took no action to remedy it, as Brown does not include any evidence of giving the contrabands back

---

<sup>72</sup> Ibid; Engs, *Freedom's First Generation*, 19; Lewis C. Lockwood to Hon. Senator Wilson, 29 January 1862, in *Freedom, The Upper South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 113.

<sup>73</sup> Engs, *Freedom's First Generation*, 21-23.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid, 23.

<sup>75</sup> Affidavit of Suthey Parker, 2 September 1865, in *Freedom: The Upper South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 110-111.

<sup>76</sup> Lockwood to Wilson, in *Freedom: The Upper South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 113.

pay.<sup>77</sup> Brown's superior officer, Major General Dix, reported to the Secretary of War, citing several complaints from unnamed contrabands, that they did not receive any pay until November 1861 due to the lack of a payroll system and that the army owed over thirty thousand dollars to the contrabands. He does not indicate any plan to institute payments, and Berlin states that payments did not begin until late 1863.<sup>78</sup> Even more telling, white laborers were paid regular wages of one dollar a day while contrabands received irregular if no wages, revealing the racism of army authorities and their exploitation of contrabands.<sup>79</sup> Even worse for the contrabands, a lack of wages was not the only hardship they faced, as corporal punishment, disease, and a lack of rations combined to produce unbearable conditions at the Fort.

Late in 1862, C.B. Wilder, superintendent of contrabands, wrote, "As the colored people increase in numbers, so [did] the hostility to them." Mistreatment by the army only became worse as the year went on.<sup>80</sup> Many contrabands died of disease due to lack of adequate rations, clothing, or shelter, and military authorities did little to address the problem. In winter 1862, "thousands of blacks were left without food, clothing, or the means to purchase firewood" during the harsh weather, contributing to a mortality rate of four to six a day.<sup>81</sup> As Engs writes, "Freedmen were frequently mistreated by their emancipators and many died as a result of army neglect" and abuse.<sup>82</sup> Even worse, many officers and soldiers still used corporal punishment on the contrabands despite earlier promises of humane and decent treatment.<sup>83</sup> In his letter,

---

<sup>77</sup> Contract Surgeon Orlando Brown to Major General Dix, 7 November 1862, in *Freedom: The Upper South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 135.

<sup>78</sup> Major General John A. Dix to Hon. Edwin M. Stanton, 13 December 1862, in *Freedom: The Upper South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 138-139; Emancipation League, *Facts Concerning the Freedmen: Their Capacity and Their Destiny, Collected and Published by the Emancipation League* (Boston: Press of Commercial Printing House, 1863), 5.

<sup>79</sup> Excerpts of Testimony of Capt. C. B. Wilder before the American Freedmen's Inquiry Commission, 9 May 1863, in *Freedom: The Upper South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 142.

<sup>80</sup> C.B. Wilder, quoted in Engs, *Freedom's First Generation*, 23.

<sup>81</sup> Engs, *Freedom's First Generation*, 22; Gerteis, *From Contraband to Freedman*, 24.

<sup>82</sup> Engs, *Freedom's First Generation*, 18.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid*, 19.

Lockwood not only cites whipping as a punishment for protest but also states that contrabands “have been knocked down senseless with shovels and clubs” by soldiers and officers, demonstrating the degree to which the army tolerated abuse of contrabands.<sup>84</sup> Historian Robert F. Engs further describes the physical abuse of contrabands by racist soldiers and officers, also revealing the scale of mistreatment. In a final example of exploitation during this period, Superintendent Wilder evicted one hundred contrabands, many of them women and children, from their home in Hampton to house a brigade of soldiers, and gave them land in Hampton, but also denied them any further government support and ordered them to “take care of themselves” in the city.<sup>85</sup> Wilder’s focus on minimizing expenses rather than treating the contrabands humanely exemplifies the conditions faced by contrabands in Virginia in 1861 and 1862, which even led some to return voluntarily to their former masters rather than continue to live under a system of “government slavery” that was no better than the true slavery they had escaped, due to a lack of wages, squalid camps, continued corporal punishment, and persistent poverty.<sup>86</sup> Unfortunately for the contrabands, the arrival of McClellan’s Army of the Potomac for the Peninsula Campaign would only worsen the situation.

During the Peninsula Campaign in summer 1862, General George McClellan and the Army of the Potomac advanced up the Peninsula towards Richmond, and came within miles of the capital before being repulsed by Confederate forces.<sup>87</sup> While all the soldiers were white, contrabands still played key roles in the Union war effort, but were not rewarded with even decent treatment. As Berlin writes, “The freedpeople quickly made themselves indispensable to

---

<sup>84</sup> Lockwood to Wilson, in *Freedom: The Upper South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 113.

<sup>85</sup> C.B. Wilder to Maj. Gen. Wool, 15 April 1862, in *Freedom: The Upper South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 120-121.

<sup>86</sup> Lockwood to Wilson, in *Freedom: The Upper South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 112; Engs, *Freedom’s First Generation*, 86-87.

<sup>87</sup> For a military overview of the campaign, see Stephen W. Sears, *To the Gates of Richmond: The Peninsula Campaign* (New York: Ticknor and Fields, 1992).

the Northern war effort,” but the Union army failed to properly compensate them, which led to “hardship for workers and their dependents.”<sup>88</sup> Contrabands gathered vital intelligence for Union forces, worked on fortifications and performed other military labor for both the Army and the Navy, which as Glenn David Brasher argues, played a significant role in early Northern success during the campaign and also “helped prepare Northerners to accept emancipation as a military necessity.”<sup>89</sup> While it may have helped increase support for emancipation, the campaign failed to improve conditions for contrabands, which only worsened as the labor needs of the military increased.

General McClellan, the Union commander, held decidedly proslavery views, and such ideas remained prevalent in his army, much to the detriment of the contrabands. As Superintendent of Contrabands Wilder reported, after the arrival of McClellan’s army, “The abuses... are continued, and in many cases... with increased rigor, by Rebel sympathizers, straggling Soldiers, and Governmental Officers.”<sup>90</sup> According to Brasher, soldiers “stole from African-Americans, physically abused slave children, and sometimes raped enslaved women” during their march up the Peninsula.<sup>91</sup> Even officers sold rations, evicted contrabands from homes for army use, and returned fugitives to the rebels despite a clear Article of War passed by Congress banning the army from returning fugitive slaves.<sup>92</sup> Some officers, according to Berlin, even took bribes from Unionist slaveholders to “uphold slave discipline” and even “serve as slave catchers, in defiance of federal law,” indicating that some army personnel would even resort to illegal activity to exploit contrabands.<sup>93</sup> Furthermore, soldiers “engaged in repeated

---

<sup>88</sup> Berlin, ed., *Freedom: The Upper South*, 91, 93.

<sup>89</sup> Brasher, *The Peninsula Campaign*, 5, 102-103.

<sup>90</sup> C.B. Wilder to Major General Dix, 27 June 1862, in *Freedom: The Upper South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 127.

<sup>91</sup> Brasher, *The Peninsula Campaign*, 140.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid*, 140; Oakes, *Freedom National*, 210.

<sup>93</sup> Berlin, ed., *Freedom: The Upper South*, 93-94.

rampages of pillaging, looting, and rape in freedmen's settlements" and stole crops from contrabands who were attempting to make an independent living on abandoned land around Hampton.<sup>94</sup> Edward Whitehurst, for example, cultivated eighteen acres and stated that Union troops took his crops, livestock, potatoes, and even flour, and did not give him any monetary compensation.<sup>95</sup> Such depredations made the contrabands afraid to start farms, and increased dependence on military labor, leading to even further exploitation by army authorities, as the treatment of those working for the army did not improve despite urgent military necessity.<sup>96</sup>

Contrabands working for the army performed tasks ranging from unloading transport ships to scouting to camp servants. However, they often failed to receive full wages, and some were not paid at all for weeks or months of difficult labor in the harsh Virginia summer.<sup>97</sup> When not enough contrabands volunteered for military labor, army authorities impressed squads of contrabands without regard for the impact on their families and dependents.<sup>98</sup> These forced laborers did not receive any higher wages than voluntary workers and often were not paid regularly if at all, increasing the hardship for their families.<sup>99</sup> When enough labor could not be found even by impressing local contrabands, authorities in Washington, D.C. forced large squads of contrabands to go to the Peninsula and work for McClellan's army, leaving their families behind in the squalid camps of the capital.<sup>100</sup> The Peninsula Campaign, therefore, resulted not only in a Union defeat but also, according to Engs, "proved devastating for army-black relations," as soldiers abused, impressed, failed to pay, and even stole from contrabands, all in

---

<sup>94</sup> Engs, *Freedom's First Generation*, 24.

<sup>95</sup> Testimony of Edward Whitehurst before the Southern Claims Commission, 31 July 1877, in *Freedom: The Upper South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 128-130.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid*, 25.

<sup>97</sup> Brasher, *The Peninsula Campaign*, 141, 174, 220; Cobb, "Rehearsing Reconstruction," 142.

<sup>98</sup> Cobb, "Rehearsing Reconstruction," 142.

<sup>99</sup> Brasher, *The Peninsula Campaign*, 141, 174; Berlin, ed., *Freedom: The Upper South*, 91-94.

<sup>100</sup> Berlin, *Freedom: The Upper South*, 246-247. For more on conditions in DC, see Chapter 3 of this paper.

the name of “military necessity.”<sup>101</sup> The “brutal” treatment of contrabands by Union soldiers would have even worse consequences after the campaign, as Dix, in an attempt to keep the contrabands away from Union camps, placed them on Craney Island, off the coast of Hampton and far from any troops.<sup>102</sup> The conditions on the island, however, belied any benevolent intentions, as poverty, disease, and death dominated the contrabands’ brief stay.

In November 1862, Major General John Dix, commander at Fort Monroe, ordered the contrabands moved to Craney Island to make room for additional Union troops at the fort. However, he did not give any consideration to the wishes of the contrabands or the fact that many had steady government jobs at the Fort and, according to missionary Lucy Chase, viewed the island as a “slave-pen.”<sup>103</sup> The authorities, however, did not plan for the move, and the contrabands, according to Dix, were “forced to remain all night on the wharf without shelter and... food” and were “suffering with disease” due to exposure to the elements, and several contrabands died from illness.<sup>104</sup> In addition, Union soldiers took advantage of the situation and robbed the already suffering contrabands of what few possessions they had.<sup>105</sup> Some soldiers even physically beat the contrabands to force them onto the transport ships despite their weakened state from two days waiting on the docks. Soldiers and army authorities treated the contrabands so badly during the move, according to Gerteis, that some contrabands ran away due to fear of re-enslavement.<sup>106</sup> The bad conditions on the move, according to abolitionist observer F.W. Bird, contributed to high rates of disease on the island, causing many contrabands to be

---

<sup>101</sup> Engs, *Freedom’s First Generation*, 25; Brasher, *The Peninsula Campaign*, 123.

<sup>102</sup> Gerteis, *From Contraband to Freedman*, 26.

<sup>103</sup> Lucy Chase to “Our Folks at Home,” January 15, 1863, in *Dear Ones At Home*, ed. Swint, 21.

<sup>104</sup> Major Genl. John A. Dix to Hon. E. M. Stanton, 22 November 1862, in *Freedom: The Upper South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 136.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid*, 136-137; Major General John A. Dix to Brig. Gen. M. Corcoran, 26 November 1862, in *Freedom: The Upper South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 137; Gerteis, *From Contraband to Freedman*, 26-27.

<sup>106</sup> Gerteis, *From Contraband to Freedman*, 27.

unable to support themselves.<sup>107</sup> For the contrabands who survived the brutal mistreatment during the move, conditions on Craney Island would only deteriorate further during the ten months they spent on the disease-ridden island.

By January 1863, more than two thousand contrabands lived on the desperately overcrowded island, and shortages of everything from food to clothing to wages remained constant for the remainder of the year.<sup>108</sup> Chase reported nine hundred contrabands without clothing, and new arrivals overwhelmed the efforts of missionaries to distribute clothing and supplies.<sup>109</sup> In addition, she describes children who had almost no clothing and a lack of shoes, which forced her to “send sick and shivering women home” without adequate clothing or footwear.<sup>110</sup> The clothing shortage, furthermore, prevented many contrabands from working in the fields to support themselves, which only worsened their poverty, especially since Dix and the military authorities expected the contrabands to support themselves and not rely on government charity.<sup>111</sup> In addition to a lack of clothing, furthermore, the army failed to provide adequate rations for the contrabands, further contributing to suffering and disease. As Chase wrote, “The well on the Island were suffering for food, and we had nothing with which to tempt the convalescing,” indicating the scale of the food shortages.<sup>112</sup> Even worse, the paymaster, Lieutenant Sykes, fled the island without paying any wages in September 1863, and Dix still expected the contrabands to support themselves.<sup>113</sup> The lack of clothing and food, along with a continued lack of regular wages, caused “desperate poverty” on the island, especially after able-

---

<sup>107</sup><sup>107</sup> Testimony of F.W. Bird before the American Freedmen’s Inquiry Commission, 1863, in *Freedom: The Upper South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 177.

<sup>108</sup> Gerteis, *From Contraband to Freedman*, 27.

<sup>109</sup> Lucy Chase to “Home-Folks,” 20 January 1863, in *Dear Ones at Home*, ed. Swint, 29.

<sup>110</sup> Lucy Chase to “Home-Folks,” 29 January 1863, in *Dear Ones at Home*, ed. Swint, 45-46.

<sup>111</sup> Testimony of Miss Lucy Chase before the American Freedmen’s Inquiry Commission, 10 May 1863, in *Freedom: The Upper South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 154; Gerteis, *From Contraband to Freedman*, 28.

<sup>112</sup> Lucy Chase to “Dear Ones at Home,” 30 September 1863, in *Dear Ones at Home*, ed. Swint, 92.

<sup>113</sup> C. B. Wilder to Miss Chase, 25 September 1863, in *Dear Ones at Home*, ed. Swint, 86.

bodied men left for military work in 1863, leaving only women and children on the island with no way to support themselves.<sup>114</sup> For the contrabands, the failure of the army to provide even basic supplies would have even more horrendous consequences, as disease and mortality rates soared.

During the contrabands' ten-month stay on Craney Island, "hundreds sickened and died" from disease caused by exposure to harsh, "cutting" winds, and the aforementioned lack of basic supplies.<sup>115</sup> According to Gerteis, disease remained "rampant" during the entire period, and army authorities did almost nothing to address the problem, clearly indicating the scale of military neglect, mistreatment and abuse of contrabands in the Hampton Roads area.<sup>116</sup> According to Chase, two to three contrabands died a day, and "consumption" remained "prevalent" throughout the year.<sup>117</sup> Furthermore, even when the army did issue rations to contrabands, "the necessary exposure to which our half-clad people were subjected, when going for rations... brings coughs and colds into every barrack," demonstrating that army authorities directly contributed to the high rates of disease.<sup>118</sup> By the end of the contrabands' stay at Craney Island, rats plagued every barracks building and disease rates had never abated, proving that army authorities did little to improve conditions in nearly a year supervising the island. By September 1863, however, even army authorities began to seek a more permanent solution for the contrabands, although they focused more on free labor and having the contrabands support

---

<sup>114</sup> Berlin, *Freedom: The Upper South*, 94; C.B. Wilder to Miss Chase, 25 September 1863, in *Dear Ones at Home*, ed. Swint, 86; Emancipation League, *Facts Concerning the Freedmen*, 6; Brig. Gen. Edwin Wild to Gen. Butler, 15 April 1864, in RG 105, Virginia, National Archives.

<sup>115</sup> Berlin, ed., *Freedom: The Upper South*, 94.

<sup>116</sup> Gerteis, *From Contraband to Freedman*, 27-28.

<sup>117</sup> Lucy Chase to "Home-Folks," 20 January 1863, in *Dear Ones at Home*, ed. Swint, 29. Consumption was the nineteenth-century term for tuberculosis.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*

themselves rather than truly improving conditions, and these motivations led to the decision to institute government farms.<sup>119</sup>

At the same time that thousands of contrabands were suffering from disease and shortages of basic supplies, hundreds faced the same conditions in Yorktown, a few miles farther north on the Peninsula. At a settlement called “Slabtown,” which consisted of “dilapidated sheds and barns,” shortages of everything from housing to food to clothing contributed to appalling conditions.<sup>120</sup> Most of these contrabands were dependents of soldiers in the United States Colored Troops who had no way to support themselves and relied on government rations. However, according to Engs, out of ten thousand contrabands, army authorities only provided 5,401 rations, leaving nearly half to face starvation.<sup>121</sup> The awful conditions, furthermore, led to “frequent deaths from disease, exposure, and hunger,” further indicating the scale of military mistreatment of contrabands across Hampton Roads.<sup>122</sup> These contrabands would also eventually be settled on government farms, but not before army neglect and mistreatment had taken a horrific toll.

Before the contrabands could settle on government farms, they had to be moved off of Craney Island, and the army mistreated them just as much on this move as when they arrived on the island. They were banned from taking any crops they had managed to grow on the island and army authorities refused to issue rations, meaning that the contrabands went without food for the duration of the move.<sup>123</sup> Furthermore, the contrabands had only been issued half rations for the

---

<sup>119</sup> Berlin, ed., *Freedom: The Upper South*, 95.

<sup>120</sup> Engs, *Freedom's First Generation*, 27; Lucy Chase to “Dear Ones at Home,” 1864, in *Dear Ones at Home*, ed. Swint, 100.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>123</sup> Lucy Chase to “Dear Ones at Home,” 30 September 1863, in *Dear Ones at Home*, ed. Swint, 92.

period prior to the move despite hard labor demolishing the barracks.<sup>124</sup> The contrabands' tenure on Craney Island, therefore, was marked by exploitation, abuse, disease, and death from arrival to departure. Army authorities claimed that government farms would be a significant improvement, but the exploitation and mistreatment only continued.

In making the decision to set up the farms, General Dix focused on removing the contrabands from government support and placing them far away from the army, with the idea of having farm superintendents supervise their labor and thus freeing army officers of the burdensome task.<sup>125</sup> Large amounts of abandoned land were available since most of the whites in the area had fled in 1861, making the decision easier.<sup>126</sup> Major General Butler approved this program in early 1864, and contrabands were assigned to farms to begin planting that spring.<sup>127</sup> However, rather than helping the contrabands, the army focused on free labor and “self-sufficiency” on the farms. Military officials thought they were teaching contrabands to be self-reliant and independent, but failed to account for the desperate poverty amongst them and the very clear need for assistance.<sup>128</sup> As Captain Orlando Brown, the superintendent of contrabands in Norfolk, wrote, the goal of the farm program was “to leave them as far as possible to their own resources [and] to teach them that freedom from slavery is not freedom from labor.”<sup>129</sup> In fact, army authorities took the doctrine of self-reliance and free labor so far that they forced contrabands, even the families of soldiers in the United States Colored Troops, to move to government farms by cutting off their rations until they complied, with no regard to the desires

---

<sup>124</sup> Ibid, 93-94.

<sup>125</sup> Gerteis, *From Contraband to Freedman*, 29.

<sup>126</sup> Engs, *Freedom's First Generation*, 19, 29.

<sup>127</sup> Capt. C.B. Wilder to Maj. Gen. B.F Butler, 24 February 1864, in *Freedom: The Upper South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 187.

<sup>128</sup> Gerteis, *From Contraband to Freedman*, 33.

<sup>129</sup> Capt. Orlando Brown to Lt. Col. J. B. Kinsman, 12 May 1864, in *Freedom: The Upper South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 210.

of the contrabands.<sup>130</sup> In addition, authorities in Yorktown evicted oystermen, peddlers, and squatters out of their houses to make room for farm workers, even though many of these contrabands had legitimate jobs.<sup>131</sup> Once the army settled contrabands on the farms, either voluntarily or by force, the exploitation continued, as military authorities continued to focus on free labor at the expense of contraband rights. In addition, they wanted to maintain a “traditional” economy with as little disruption to the area as possible, and believed that only contrabands who worked on government farms could become self-sufficient.<sup>132</sup>

Despite the fact that the army controlled Fort Monroe and most of the surrounding area, and claims by army officials that farms were only set up in “secure areas,” the government farms still faced attacks from guerrillas and rebel sympathizers, leaving the contrabands vulnerable to re-enslavement or worse.<sup>133</sup> The area, according to Berlin, remained plagued with “die-hard rebels determined to prevent former slaves from engaging in any form of free labor” and army authorities failed to provide sufficient protection to the contrabands, with horrific results.<sup>134</sup> According to Engs, Confederate guerrillas did capture several contrabands from government farms and sold them back into slavery, clearly showing the scale of army neglect of contraband rights, as military authorities failed to protect even their freedom from slavery.<sup>135</sup> The problem became so bad in Norfolk that authorities had to form a company of contrabands for defense when the army refused to spare any soldiers to protect contraband farms.<sup>136</sup> When the army

---

<sup>130</sup> Capt. Brown to Lt. Col. Kinsman, 13 June 1864, in the Records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, Virginia, 1865-1872, RG 105, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC.

<sup>131</sup> --- to Lt. Col. Kinsman, 21 March 1864, in RG 105, Virginia, National Archives.

<sup>132</sup> Gerteis, *From Contraband to Freedman*, 32, 39-40.

<sup>133</sup> Engs, *Freedom's First Generation*, 29-30.

<sup>134</sup> Berlin, ed., *Freedom: The Upper South*, 97.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid*, 30.

<sup>136</sup> Testimony of Hon. F.W. Bird before the American Freedmen's Inquiry Commission, 1863, in *Freedom: The Upper South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 180; *Extracts from Letters of Teachers and Superintendents of the New England Freedmen's Aid Society, Educational Commission, Fifth Series*, October 15, 1864 (Boston: John Wilson and Son, 1864), 8.

leased plantations to private businessmen, the problem only became worse, as military authorities placed contrabands onto plantations run by lessees but failed to provide protection, despite clear evidence of the guerrilla threat. One rebel sympathizer who had abandoned his land early in the war returned to the area to find it leased by the federal government. He retaliated by viciously assaulting lessees and contraband workers. The army, despite the presence of thousands of troops, did little to stop him and other guerrillas that plagued the farms throughout the war, clearly indicating the devastating consequences the army's focus on free labor at the expense of the rights and welfare of the contrabands.<sup>137</sup> For the contrabands who escaped guerrilla attacks, however, conditions were little better, as military officials repeatedly cut rations and wages in order to ensure contrabands did not become dependent on the government, but with little regard to the continuing poverty and destitution.

The system of contraband farms was clearly set up to ensure that the contrabands worked rather than to protect their rights. Each family worked a ten acre farm for half the crop, but the army also created a gang labor system and even "put a lien on the crops to ensure the payment of debts," including rent, clearly revealing the importance of ideas of self-sufficiency and free labor.<sup>138</sup> Since the first food crop would not be harvested until the fall, the army stated that it would issue rations to the contrabands until the crop became available for subsistence.<sup>139</sup> Aversion to contraband dependence and reliance on government charity, however, caused numerous instances of army officials reducing or even cutting rations on the farms. Superintendent Brown, for example, decided that the legal ration for contraband farm workers "was considerable greater than... necessary for their actual support" and cut rations in order to

---

<sup>137</sup> Capt. C.B. Wilder to Maj. Genl. Butler, 11 November 1863, in *Freedom: The Upper South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 164-165.

<sup>138</sup> Gerteis, *From Contraband to Freedman*, 40; Engs, *Freedom's First Generation*, 29.

<sup>139</sup> Engs, *Freedom's First Generation*, 29; Weekly Report, 1864, in RG 105, Virginia, National Archives.

save money without regard to the impact on contraband workers.<sup>140</sup> Even worse, when a drought devastated the 1863 crop, Brown refused to increase rations, and spent over eighty thousand dollars less than permitted on contraband rations, in order to “leave them as far as possible to their own resources” and avoid supposed dependence on government charity, even though unforeseen events, not a failure to work hard, had devastated the crop and left the contrabands without sufficient subsistence.<sup>141</sup> While the situation dramatically improved in 1864, as good weather produced a bountiful harvest that easily provided enough subsistence for the contrabands, the army still enforced rent charges and even charged for livestock fodder, clearly demonstrating the importance of self-reliance.<sup>142</sup> In perhaps the most telling indication of the true motivations behind government farms, the army made twenty thousand dollars in profits from the farms in 1864 alone, while cutting rations and charging contrabands for rent and fodder.<sup>143</sup> While the contrabands eventually provided their own subsistence, army officials still mistreated and exploited them, especially during the crop failure in 1863.

For contrabands both on and off the government farms, financial exploitation by the army was not the only worry. Union soldiers and officers routinely physically abused contrabands and suffered almost no retaliation from superiors. According to Gerteis, “northern soldiers generally found a crude amusement in the harassment of contrabands,” and such abuse continued throughout the war, long after McClellan’s army departed the Peninsula.<sup>144</sup> Soldiers even attacked contrabands working on farms, stole crops and livestock, and generally hampered the

---

<sup>140</sup> Testimony of Dr. Orlando Brown before the American Freedmen’s Inquiry Commission, 1863, in *Freedom: The Upper South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 150.

<sup>141</sup> Capt. O. Brown to Maj. George J. Carney, 9 December 1864, in *Freedom: The Upper South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 210-211.

<sup>142</sup> Capt. Chas. B. Wilder to Maj. Geo J. Carney, 30 December 1864, in *Freedom: The Upper South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 214, 218.

<sup>143</sup> Gerteis, *From Contraband to Freedman*, 41.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid*, 33.

ability of the contrabands to support themselves.<sup>145</sup> In Newport News, meanwhile, soldiers desecrated the only black church in the area, which also served as a school for one hundred children, ripping out floorboards, siding windows, pews, and sacred objects. No record exists of these soldiers being disciplined.<sup>146</sup> The soldiers at Fort Monroe did not behave any better, as the contrabands there were “abused and maimed, by the brutality of those under whom they work” and “were treated very roughly.”<sup>147</sup> Such physical abuse, combined with a continued lack of wages, meant, according to New York missionaries, that the contrabands were “worse off than they were in slavery,” and some even wanted to return to their owners.<sup>148</sup> These ideas came from the fact that contrabands and white officials had vastly different ideas of freedom. While military officials, according to Engs, wanted to “control” rather than help contrabands, and therefore focused on self-sufficiency, avoiding dependence, and the war effort, contrabands had other ideas.<sup>149</sup> They believed that freedom would mean decent treatment, wages for their work, and the end of impressment and separation of families, which they saw as a relic of slavery. To the contrabands, unpaid labor and impressment seemed too similar to the slavery they thought they had escaped, and so did corporal punishment and abuse by Union troops.<sup>150</sup>

Contraband women suffered even more, as the threat of rape by Union soldiers never went away. In Yorktown, several soldiers raped a young girl, prompting male contrabands to kill the soldiers, establishing both the sheer depravity soldiers were capable of and the ability of

---

<sup>145</sup> Berlin, ed., *Freedom: The Upper South*, 100; Capt E.W. Coffin to Brig. Genl. B.C. Ludlow, 21 April 1865, in Berlin, *Freedom: The Upper South*; ed. Berlin, et al, 237-238; Testimony of Edward Whitehurst before the Southern Claims Commission, 31 July 1877, in *Freedom: The Upper South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 129.

<sup>146</sup> Asa Prescott to Maj. Gen. Butler, 22 March 1864, in RG 105, Virginia, National Archives.

<sup>147</sup> *Report of a Committee of the Representatives of the New York Yearly Meeting of Friends Upon the Condition and Wants of the Colored Refugees*, Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library, University of Virginia, 12.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>149</sup> Engs, *Freedom's First Generation*, 17.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, 17-18, 21, 25.

contrabands to fight for their rights and their basic dignity as human beings.<sup>151</sup> According to historian Leon Litwack, such sexual violence against contrabands remained commonplace throughout the war, and he cites two disturbing cases of violent sexual assaults in Hampton.<sup>152</sup> These assaults clearly indicate the scale of army mistreatment and abuse of contrabands, as racist soldiers beat and exploited contrabands with little fear of repercussions.<sup>153</sup> As Litwack states, contrabands were “apt to encounter the same prejudices, the same exploitation... and the same capacity for sadistic cruelty” as they had in slavery.<sup>154</sup> Furthermore, most soldiers remained “reluctant liberators” at best and did not see contraband rights as a significant army objective.<sup>155</sup> Common soldiers, therefore, exploited and abused contrabands, and officers and higher authorities did little to stop it. Even for contrabands who escaped physical abuse, another threat loomed, as army officers desperate for labor began to impress contrabands into labor gangs by force.

In December 1863, Butler issued an order regulating the labor of contrabands, and, in particular, the practice of impressment that had been persistent since the Peninsula Campaign. He stated that men aged eighteen to forty five had to enlist if fit for service, and that government laborers would not be provided rations for themselves or their families and had to become self-reliant.<sup>156</sup> However, he also attempted to stop the practice of impressment, stating that “no officer or soldier shall impress or force to labor for any private purpose whatever, any negro” and ordered that any impressed laborers had to be given rations.<sup>157</sup> The government had to

---

<sup>151</sup> Ibid, 60.

<sup>152</sup> Litwack, *Been in the Storm So Long*, 130.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid, 125.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid, 128.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid, 127.

<sup>156</sup> General Orders No. 46, 5 December 1863, in *Freedom: The Upper South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 169-170.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid, 170.

ensure that impressment only occurred due to “military necessity” and that impressed workers received humane treatment and proper wages and rations.<sup>158</sup> The order, however, failed to stem the abusive practices of impressment in the region, as labor recruiters continued to force contrabands to perform hard labor without regard to the consequences for both their rights and the welfare of their families who depended on their wages, which often failed to come, leaving them destitute.<sup>159</sup>

Numerous instances exist of contrabands being impressed for military labor. During the latter stages of the contrabands’ tenure on Craney Island, labor recruiters promised contrabands their “long overdue wages” if they boarded a ship to see the paymaster, but the ship took them to Washington for unpaid labor on the fortifications instead, clearly indicating the base exploitation of contrabands by military authorities.<sup>160</sup> Around the same time in Norfolk, soldiers removed contrabands from their homes and even from church and forced them to board a ship for Washington, even though they still had not received any pay for several months of work at Norfolk.<sup>161</sup> John Jordan, for example, received only eighty six cents for a year’s labor, while William P. Johnson had not been paid at all in two years. Furthermore, soldiers impressed contrabands such as Nelson Sprewell who were clearly unfit for hard labor.<sup>162</sup> While these incidents occurred prior to the issuance of the order, it did little to improve the situation for contrabands, as the practice of impressment continued unabated.

In May 1864, despite the order prohibiting impressment except for urgent military necessity, Brigadier General Shepley ordered the impressment of workers for the fortifications at

---

<sup>158</sup> Ibid, 171-172.

<sup>159</sup> Berlin, ed., *Freedom: The Upper South*, 99.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid, 98; Emancipation League, *Facts Concerning the Freedmen*, 6.

<sup>161</sup> Asa Prescott to Hon. E. M. Stanton, 11 July 1863, in *Freedom: The Upper South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 157-158.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid.

Norfolk, and captured forty-five contrabands along with over one hundred women and children, who he moved to Norfolk with their husbands. While he promised twenty dollars a month and rations for the laborers, he failed to provide rations for families, and no record exists of whether he actually paid the wages promised.<sup>163</sup> One officer, Lieutenant Colonel Frank J. White, even impressed free blacks in addition to contrabands and placed workers in “a worst Bondage than the slaves ever was,” according to a Virginia Unionist observer.<sup>164</sup> As Captain Wilder, the Superintendent of Contrabands, wrote in an observation of the practice in general, “How unjust that they must stay here, after a long absence from home, and be impressed... often without a cent for expenses, or but barely enough to get them home, without being paid off.”<sup>165</sup> His assessment accurately describes impressment for military labor, as army authorities focused on the war effort and claiming military necessity forced contrabands to perform hard labor while failing to provide rations or the wages needed to support their families, resulting in destitution and poverty for the women and children left behind.<sup>166</sup> While labor recruiters mistreated contrabands, however, the most brutal form of impressment was practiced by recruiters for the United States Colored Troops.

Beginning in late 1863, military impressment “separated hundreds of black men from their families and sent them to the battle front,” where difficult labor and hard fighting took a terrible toll.<sup>167</sup> As Engs writes, “men were dragged away to army encampments and ordered to enlist” and faced brutal punishments if they resisted.<sup>168</sup> Numerous contrabands testified to an army court of inquiry describing the harsh tactics used by recruiters. James Holsten, for

---

<sup>163</sup> Capt. O. Brown to Lt. Col. J. B. Kinsman, 12 May 1864, in *Freedom: The Upper South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 191-192.

<sup>164</sup> B.L. Parrish to Hon. Mr. Stanton, 16 January 1865, in *Freedom: The Upper South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 219.

<sup>165</sup> Capt. C.B. Wilder to Lt. Col. Laws H. Pelouze, 8 August 1863, in *Freedom: The Upper South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 160.

<sup>166</sup> Berlin, ed., *Freedom: The Upper South*, 99.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid*, 104.

<sup>168</sup> Engs, *Freedom's First Generation*, 30.

example, stated that recruiters confined him to the guardhouse when he refused to enlist, despite disabilities that clearly rendered him unfit for service.<sup>169</sup> Mills Burton and James Colden, meanwhile, despite having families that depended on the wages from their government jobs, also were confined in the guardhouse until they gave in and enlisted.<sup>170</sup> Recruiters even forced fourteen-year-old Benjamin Crumpler and forty-three-year-old John Bond to enlist despite the fact that neither was of military age.<sup>171</sup> Recruiters also took advantage of the illiteracy of the contrabands by forcing them to leave their mark on enlistment documents they clearly did not understand, indicating clear exploitation of contrabands even by members of black regiments.<sup>172</sup> The worst cases of military impressment, however, involved punishments sadistic enough to be seen as torture used to force contrabands to give in and enlist. According to Engs, many recruiters placed contrabands in jail with a ball and chain until they enlisted.<sup>173</sup> William Carney, for example, refused to enlist and recruiters locked him in the guardhouse, denied him food and water, and forced him to carry heavy, fifty-pound balls continuously until he enlisted, and then punished him again for failure to “properly” take the enlistment oath.<sup>174</sup>

Such practices clearly demonstrate how brutally military recruiters could exploit and abuse contrabands to fill the ranks, without regard to the fact that contrabands often had families dependent on their wages or disabilities that prevented them from serving in the first place. As Engs writes, “Impressment was final proof that not even emancipation and black participation in the war effort could change army attitudes” and demonstrated the “army’s unwillingness to care

---

<sup>169</sup> Testimony of James Holsten, in Testimony of Witnesses in the Matter of Alleged Impressment of Colored Men by Col. J.T. Nelson, RG 105, Virginia, National Archives. A guardhouse is a military prison.

<sup>170</sup> Testimony of Mills Burton, in Testimony of Witnesses, RG 105, Virginia, National Archives.

<sup>171</sup> Testimony of Benjamin Crumpler and John Bond, in Testimony of Witnesses, RG 105, Virginia, National Archives; Examination of Alleged Cases of Impressment by Sergeant Roberts, 148<sup>th</sup> NY, RG 105, Virginia, National Archives.

<sup>172</sup> Testimony of George Colden, in Testimony of Witnesses, RG 105, Virginia, National Archives.

<sup>173</sup> Engs, *Freedom’s First Generation*, 30. This is not the William Carney who won the Medal of Honor.

<sup>174</sup> Testimony of William Carney, in Testimony of Witnesses, RG 105, Virginia, National Archives.

for the freedmen or do the job with any degree of goodwill.”<sup>175</sup> Impressment, therefore, whether for military labor or army service, exemplifies military mistreatment of contrabands and federal inability to prevent it, as no one in Washington stepped in to stop the brutal practice of impressment in Virginia. While contrabands caught in the net of impressment suffered greatly during this period, their families in the camps fared little better, as they faced disease, poverty, and high mortality, and army authorities focused on avoiding dependence on the government, despite clear evidence of need.

By late 1864, no more abandoned land remained available, meaning that contrabands, mostly the dependents of men working for the government, had to live in squalid camps in desperate poverty.<sup>176</sup> In one camp, twelve contrabands lived in a one room house, and several homes at a camp near Downey Plantation were “unfit for human habitation.”<sup>177</sup> The contrabands, according to New York missionaries, “presented a miserable appearance” due to a lack of clothing and rations.<sup>178</sup> As Engs wrote, in 1864 and 1865, “much destitution and hunger” occurred in the contraband camps, and also led to disease and higher mortality rates.<sup>179</sup> Smallpox and yellow fever, along with numerous other diseases, took a “frightful toll” and medical authorities did little to improve conditions.<sup>180</sup> Even in an orphanage, a shortage of vegetables caused fifty-one preventable cases of scurvy, indicating the degree of medical neglect of the contrabands.<sup>181</sup> A school superintendent working for the American Missionary Association referenced mortality rates of four to five a day and stated, “With a virulent disease

---

<sup>175</sup> Engs, *Freedom's First Generation*, 31.

<sup>176</sup> Berlin, ed., *Freedom: The Upper South*, 105.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid, 106; Testimony of F.W. Bird before the American Freedmen's Inquiry Commission, 1863, in *Freedom: The Upper South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 178.

<sup>178</sup> Report of the Committee of the Representatives, University of Virginia, 16-17.

<sup>179</sup> Engs, *Freedom's First Generation*, 53.

<sup>180</sup> Berlin, ed., *Freedom: The Upper South*, 106.

<sup>181</sup> A.A. Surg. C.K.S. Millard to Surg. Henry A. Martin, 19 February 1864, in *Freedom: The Upper South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 186.

raging in our midst, we find these means insufficient to save them from absolute suffering.”<sup>182</sup>

Despite the clear evidence of horrendous conditions in the camps, however, military authorities focused more on ensuring that the contrabands all had jobs and remained self-sufficient and did little to address the overcrowding, disease, and poverty in the camps, even as contrabands determined to escape slavery and achieve freedom no matter what the obstacles continued arriving at Union lines.<sup>183</sup>

According to Berlin, “attempts to alleviate destitution ran afoul of efforts to conserve scarce resources and reduce expenditures,” indicating that military authorities emphasized the need to save money, with devastating consequences for the contrabands.<sup>184</sup> Furthermore, authorities focused on avoiding dependence and making the contrabands self-sufficient, resulting in wage and ration cuts that the contrabands could not afford. Only families of soldiers and those clearly unable to work could get government rations, and the commissary officer spent over eighty thousand dollars less than permitted on contraband rations, clearly demonstrating the importance of economy rather than contraband welfare.<sup>185</sup> In Norfolk, Orlando Brown, the Superintendent of Contrabands, decided that the contraband ration allowed by army regulations was too expensive and cut it almost in half in order to save money, but made no mention of the impact on the already impoverished contrabands.<sup>186</sup> Even worse, commissary officers began charging contrabands five cents per ration, even for the dependents of soldiers who had been promised government sustenance, and refused to issue rations to those who could not pay unless

---

<sup>182</sup> H.S. Beals to Col. Kinsman, 16 February 1864, in *Freedom: The Upper South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 185.

<sup>183</sup> Brasher, *The Peninsula Campaign*, 142.

<sup>184</sup> Berlin, ed., *Freedom: The Upper South*, 106.

<sup>185</sup> Col. O. Brown to Maj. George J. Carney, 9 December 1864, in *Freedom: The Upper South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 209-210.

<sup>186</sup> Orlando Brown to J.B. Kinsman, 23 March 1864, in RG 105, Virginia, National Archives.

they were truly “helpless,” revealing the degree of exploitation of contrabands in the name of self-reliance.<sup>187</sup>

In addition to cutting rations, army authorities also failed to pay contrabands their wages for government labor, continuing an exploitative practice that persisted throughout the war. One quartermaster failed to properly audit the payroll records for contrabands working in his department, which resulted in their wages being denied, even though the army owed them four months of back pay.<sup>188</sup> According to Engs, contrabands “rarely” received the “just wages” due them for government labor, and the army often owed them several months of back pay.<sup>189</sup> Abraham Cannaday, for example, worked at a government sawmill for over a year and failed to receive any wages. He stated, “I have not recevd a cent of money and my famley is aseffring for the sorport of my labor,” indicating both the degree of army exploitation of contraband labor and the efforts by contrabands to protest for their basic rights.<sup>190</sup> No record exists of army authorities granting him the wages clearly owed him, even as the war came to an end. In addition, “many of the black workers employed at Fortress Monroe in the first months of the war were still trying to collect their pay at its end,” demonstrating that army authorities failed to stem the clear exploitation of contraband labor despite repeated orders and regulations calling for fair wages.<sup>191</sup> While government laborers suffered exploitation at the hands of their employers, women and children forced to sign labor contracts fared little better, as private employers also exploited and abused them, while government authorities did little to enforce the regulations of the contracts even when they resulted in clear mistreatment.

---

<sup>187</sup> William S. Leonard to C.S. Henry, 30 April 1864, in RG 105, Virginia, National Archives.

<sup>188</sup> William J. Leonard to General Butler, 18 March 1864, in RG 105, Virginia, National Archives.

<sup>189</sup> Engs, *Freedom's First Generation*, 55.

<sup>190</sup> Abraham Cannaday to Sir, 3 May 1863, in *Freedom: The Upper South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 239.

<sup>191</sup> Berlin, ed., *Freedom: The Upper South*, 90, 101.

In late 1864, Frank T. White, the provost marshal, issued an order requiring all contrabands to work either for the government or for a private employer with a labor contract.<sup>192</sup> He stated that employers had to provide “good compensation” to the contrabands, at the rate of twelve dollars a month for men and five dollars a month for women.<sup>193</sup> Contrabands who could not find any other job had to sign a labor contract with a private employer, and even though the army had set wage rates, employers often “forced” contrabands to sign contracts designating lower wages, and some even only provided “nothing more than food and clothing” as compensation, and army authorities failed to intervene and prevent such mistreatment.<sup>194</sup> Peter Hack, for example, hired Sidney Hach for one year but only provided food, clothing, and shelter as compensation.<sup>195</sup> Peter C. Mason, meanwhile, hired Harriet Selby for six dollars every three months, but also required her to buy her own clothing and food, although he did provide clothing for her children.<sup>196</sup> As a final example, a Mr. Dix hired David Chandler for fifteen dollars a month, but failed to provide food, clothing, or shelter for him or his family.<sup>197</sup> Even worse for contrabands forced into an exploitative contract, the army “rigidly enforced” the contracts and refused to allow them to leave an abusive employer no matter how harsh the labor conditions.<sup>198</sup> The system of labor contracts, therefore, demonstrates the consequences of the army’s emphasis on self-reliance and the free labor ideology, as officers focused on reducing dependence and forcing the contrabands to work without regard to exploitative employers seeking to take advantage of the vulnerable contrabands. Furthermore, while army officers supervised the

---

<sup>192</sup> Lieut. Col. Frank T. White to Col. E.W. Smith, 28 February 1865, in *Freedom: The Upper South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 226.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid*, 230.

<sup>194</sup> Berlin, ed., *Freedom: The Upper South*, 107.

<sup>195</sup> Labor Contract No. 81, RG 105, Virginia, National Archives.

<sup>196</sup> Labor Contract No. 107, RG 105, Virginia, National Archives.

<sup>197</sup> Labor Contract No. 87, RG 105, Virginia, National Archives.

<sup>198</sup> Berlin, ed., *Freedom: The Upper South*, 107.

creation of the contracts, they failed to ensure employers actually abided by their provisions, providing additional opportunity for exploitation that continued until the end of the war in 1865.

Overall, whether at the fortifications of Hampton, the camps of McClellan's army, Craney Island, government farms, contraband camps, or the farms of private employers, army authorities exploited and abused contrabands in order to support the war effort, maintain economy, and avoid dependence on the government. Officers failed to provide rations, clothing, shelter, and wages, failed to intervene to stop epidemics, impressed workers by force, and tolerated mistreatment of contrabands by abusive soldiers and private employers. As Engs writes, "The majority of blacks spent their first years of freedom in wretched poverty, confined to inadequate housing in refugee camps, and barely able to subsist on irregular government wages or scanty government rations."<sup>199</sup> While the contrabands had escaped slavery, therefore, they found a quasi-freedom marred by poverty, disease, separation of families, and overcrowding, but still managed, through hard and difficult labor, to overcome the worst of the army mistreatment and become, in the words of Robert Engs, "freedom's first generation."<sup>200</sup> Hundreds of miles to the South, another group of contrabands would face a similar battle, not just against army mistreatment but also exploitation by another group of northerners: plantation lessees.

---

<sup>199</sup> Engs, *Freedom's First Generation*, 57.

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid.*

## CHAPTER II

### SOUTH CAROLINA

The South Carolina Sea Islands, located just off the coast, had a “black majority, large plantations, the slaveholders’ seasonal absence... and a task organization of labor.”<sup>201</sup>

Therefore, every plantation contained very large numbers of slaves, giving the area a much higher proportion of slaves than Tidewater Virginia. In addition, the slaves worked the task system, where they completed a given task each day, and had much more independence than slaves in other areas of the South that used the gang labor system.<sup>202</sup>

In November 1861, a Union naval flotilla commanded by Admiral Samuel Francis Du Pont arrived and occupied the islands without opposition. All of the whites immediately fled the area, leaving their slaves behind. In contrast to Virginia and Washington, therefore, Union troops encountered large numbers of slaves whose masters had left, rather than slaves who ran to the lines in small groups. As Du Pont wrote, the whites fled due to fear of their slaves rather than the Union military, and he refused to use his sailors to protect the slave property of rebels.<sup>203</sup> Du Pont, however, foreshadowed the racism soon demonstrated by Union authorities by remarking that the slaves “were filthy but friendly, with scarcely any modification of the pure African feature.”<sup>204</sup> One of these slaves, Sam Mitchell, became scared of the gunfire and went to

---

<sup>201</sup> Berlin, ed., *Freedom: The Lower South*, 87.

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>203</sup> Admiral Samuel Francis Du Pont to Sophie Du Pont, 13 November 1861, in *The First Year*, ed. Simpson, 597-598.

<sup>204</sup> *Ibid.*

his mother for comfort from what he believed to be a thunderstorm. His mother replied, “Son, dat ain’t no t’under, dat Yankee come to gib you Freedom.”<sup>205</sup> During four years of occupation, the Yankees would grant Mitchell and his fellow contrabands freedom, but would also compel them to grow cotton for government superintendents and plantation lessees, both of whom abused and exploited contraband laborers.

In December 1861, while military authorities were still trying to come up with a plan for the contrabands, a New Jersey businessman wrote to the Secretary of the Treasury asking to establish a plantation at Port Royal to grow cotton and argued that “a great moral influence would be exerted on the leading men in the rebellion” to give up the war.<sup>206</sup> A group of Vermont investors, meanwhile, wanted to prove that free labor would be more productive than slavery by leasing plantations and hiring black labor.<sup>207</sup> While federal authorities did not act on these suggestions in 1861, they foreshadowed the system of plantation leasing that would begin to emerge later in the war and contribute to gross exploitation of the contrabands. In 1861, however, the army turned to military labor.

General Thomas Sherman, the commander in the Sea Islands, set up contraband camps at Beaufort and Hilton Head, and placed General Rufus Saxton in charge of them.<sup>208</sup> The contrabands eagerly arrived at first and took jobs working for the army, but the “discouraging” conditions in the camps caused many to leave in disgust. They were paid three to five dollars a month, but also had to buy rations for their families and never received enough clothing.<sup>209</sup> According to B.K. Lee, the Superintendent of Contrabands at Hilton Head, the contrabands were

---

<sup>205</sup> Testimony of Sam Mitchell, WPA Interview, 1937, in *The First Year*, ed. Simpson, 603.

<sup>206</sup> New Jersey Businessman to the Secretary of the Treasury, 18 December 1861, in *Freedom: The Lower South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 120.

<sup>207</sup> Ellis, Britton, and Eaton to Hon. S.P. Chase, 3 February 1862, in *Freedom: The Lower South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 123.

<sup>208</sup> Berlin, ed., *Freedom: The Lower South*, 88.

<sup>209</sup> *Ibid*, 88-89.

“very destitute” and had almost no clothing during their time working for the army.<sup>210</sup> Furthermore, soldiers working at the camps engaged in “plundering the negro houses of everything of any value” despite the threat of punishment.<sup>211</sup> Worst of all, a smallpox epidemic ravaged the camps in 1862, the army only had six doctors to treat all of the contrabands, leading to inadequate care and higher mortality.<sup>212</sup> The desolate conditions, combined with the fact that women and children in the camp did not work, caused General Sherman and the army authorities to consider another system for the contrabands that would not only put women and children to work in addition to the men, but also make money for the government to support the contraband program. To the contrabands, it seemed suspiciously similar to the slavery they had left behind.<sup>213</sup>

To raise the funds needed for rations, clothing, and other expenses, military authorities knew they had to force the contrabands to grow cotton. The contrabands, however, supported themselves on their old plantations by growing food crops and had no interest in growing the crop associated with slavery. Therefore, both the army and officials in Washington set up the superintendent system, where government superintendents would organize the contrabands and send them to work on plantations growing cotton for government benefit.<sup>214</sup> The superintendents, furthermore, would be paid by Northern aid and missionary societies rather than the government, which cut government expenses even further.<sup>215</sup> The goal of the program, as outlined by Edward L. Pierce, who inspected the area for the Treasury Department, became “the

---

<sup>210</sup> Testimony of B.K. Lee before the American Freedmen’s Inquiry Commission, June 1863, in *Freedom: The Lower South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 113.

<sup>211</sup> Aide-de-Camp to the Commander of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade, SC Expeditionary Corps, 11 November 1861, in *Freedom: The Lower South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 114-115.

<sup>212</sup> Edward L. Pierce to Hon. S. P. Chase, 2 June 1862, in *Freedom: The Lower South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 193.

<sup>213</sup> Berlin, ed., *Freedom: The Lower South*, 89, 95; Brig. Gen. T.W. Sherman to Genl. L. Thomas, 15 December 1861, in *Freedom: The Lower South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 119.

<sup>214</sup> Berlin, ed., *Freedom: The Lower South*, 89-95.

<sup>215</sup> *Ibid*, 93.

integration of former slaves into the market economy” through the production of cotton using free labor, but specifically not to allow the contrabands to obtain land.<sup>216</sup> Furthermore, Pierce claimed that the program would allow for contrabands to be “protected, educated, assured a secure family life, and paid wages.”<sup>217</sup> For the contrabands, however, the reality remained far removed from even this ideal created by white officials, as superintendents impressed them, failed to pay wages or provide rations, and even failed to provide protection from Confederate guerillas, and the military authorities, rather than intervening, remained complicit in the exploitation of contrabands.

Despite Pierce’s promises of “generally kind and humane” treatment, soldiers and cotton agents stole from contrabands who were already desperate to support themselves and their families.<sup>218</sup> Soldiers in Port Royal, for example, despite the fact that authorities never enacted a policy for living off the land, stole not only the corn crop but also all of the livestock from the plantations, leaving them “miserably bereft” and the contrabands destitute without a way to support themselves by farming, since work animals were essential to all aspects of plantation agriculture.<sup>219</sup> In addition, Pierce states that none of the plantations in the area had enough supplies to last the year due to the depredations of soldiers, indicating the scale of army exploitation of the contrabands.<sup>220</sup> At Fuller Plantation on St. Helena Island, meanwhile, soldiers took five sheep and two lambs from contraband Richard Sams, and also stole most of the corn on the plantation without regard to the fact that it was the only sustenance for the contrabands, again demonstrating the degree of mistreatment not just by officers but common soldiers as well.<sup>221</sup>

---

<sup>216</sup> Edward L. Pierce, as quoted in Berlin, ed., *Freedom: The Lower South*, 94.

<sup>217</sup> *Ibid.*, 93.

<sup>218</sup> Edward L. Pierce to Hon. Salmon P. Chase, 3 February 1862, in *Freedom: The Lower South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 138.

<sup>219</sup> Edward L. Pierce to Hon. S.P. Chase, 14 March 1862, in *Freedom: The Lower South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 163.

<sup>220</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>221</sup> T. Edwin Ruggles to Edward L. Pierce, Esqr, 11 April 1862, in *Freedom: The Lower South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 181.

Soldiers in the Seventy-Ninth New York, finally, stole cows and sweet potatoes from Superintendent Edward Philbrick's plantation, again removing crucial sustenance crops from the contrabands.<sup>222</sup> While these actions indicate clearly the degree of abuse and exploitation of contrabands in South Carolina, contrabands who managed to avoid theft still faced a different type of mistreatment.

In February 1862, General Sherman issued General Order Number Nine, which outlined treatment of contrabands working on government plantations. Superintendents had to pay regular wages, provide adequate rations and clothing, and treat contrabands humanely while also ensuring that they worked to support themselves.<sup>223</sup> Later in 1862, another order designated wages of six dollars a month for first class laborers and four dollars a month for second class laborers, with both groups also receiving rations.<sup>224</sup> However, as historian Willie Lee Rose writes, it was much simpler for generals and federal authorities to write orders "than it was for army officers in the field to carry them out," and violations of the orders by superintendents became common while army authorities failed to intervene on behalf of the contrabands.<sup>225</sup> According to Gerteis, military authorities had no money for wages until late April 1862, and even then only had five thousand dollars for four thousand contrabands. As a result, contrabands only made nine dollars a year from February 1862 until January 1863 for difficult plantation labor.<sup>226</sup> In contrast, contrabands in Virginia made five dollars a month for military labor, while wages in Washington reached twenty dollars a month, indicating the scale of low wages in South

---

<sup>222</sup> Excerpts from E.S. Philbrick to Ned, 12 April 1862, in *Freedom: The Lower South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 187.

<sup>223</sup> Order of Brig. Genl. T.W. Sherman, General Order No. 9, Head Quarters, E.C., 6 February 1862, in *Freedom: The Lower South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 154.

<sup>224</sup> Capt. Hazard Stevens to the Supt. Dept. of Contrabands, 28 March 1862, in *Freedom: The Lower South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 177.

<sup>225</sup> Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction*, 13.

<sup>226</sup> Gerteis, *From Contraband to Freedman*, 54.

Carolina, especially when the army clearly had the resources to pay contrabands higher wages in other regions.<sup>227</sup> Pierce noted such shortcomings but claimed that he did not want wages to become a “burden” to the government, even though they only amounted to forty cents a day, clearly indicating the priority of economy rather than contraband rights.<sup>228</sup>

Numerous examples exist of such attitudes, as superintendents failed to pay contrabands and military authorities focused on economy did little to intervene. At Coffins Point Plantation, Philbrick, the superintendent, had not paid the contrabands from December 1862 through March 1863, and also failed to issue clothing or provide adequate medical care, forcing the contrabands to wear clothing eighteen months old. Despite Philbrick’s complaints to the army, military authorities failed to issue him the clothing or money he needed, resulting in conditions so horrid that some contrabands stated that they had received better treatment from their old masters.<sup>229</sup> On Phrogmore Plantation, meanwhile, the contrabands also failed to receive adequate rations or wages from the government and prepared to leave for the contraband camps and jobs with the army, which at least promised regular wages, clearly showing the degree of mistreatment of plantation laborers since life in the squalid camps promised better compensation.<sup>230</sup>

Unfortunately for the contrabands, these examples proved to be the norm rather than the exception, as Pierce reported that superintendents across the Islands failed to pay their contrabands regular wages or provide adequate food or clothing, and that northern aid societies had to intervene to prevent complete destitution.<sup>231</sup> Furthermore, military authorities focused on

---

<sup>227</sup> General Orders No. 34, in *Freedom: The Upper South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 111; Brig. Gen. James S. Wadsworth to the Hon. Sec. of War, 25 September 1862, in *Freedom: The Upper South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 269.

<sup>228</sup> Edward L. Pierce to Hon. Salmon P. Chase, 3 February 1862, in *Freedom: The Lower South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 144, 147.

<sup>229</sup> Edw. S. Philbrick to Edw. L. Pierce, Esq., 26 March 1862, in *Freedom: The Lower South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 168-170.

<sup>230</sup> Richard Soule, Jr., to Edward L. Pierce, Esq., 29 March 1862, in *Freedom: The Lower South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 179.

<sup>231</sup> Excerpt from Edward L. Pierce to Hon. S.P. Chase, 2 June 1862, *Freedom: The Lower South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 201-202.

economy only issued rations to contrabands when soldiers stole their food crop, disregarding the fact that contrabands had no sustenance until they could harvest the first crop in the fall.<sup>232</sup> As General O. M. Mitchel, the commander of the Department of the South, wrote, “I doubt whether the negroes feel that their condition has been at all improved since their escape from the control of their masters” and that even “lower depths of degradation and suffering” may result “in consequence of the fact that the government cannot care for them.”<sup>233</sup> Superintendents and the army, therefore, exploited contraband labor to make profits from cotton while expending as little as possible on wages and rations, which clearly demonstrates the priority of economy rather than the basic rights of the contrabands. While contrabands on plantations across the Sea Islands suffered from a lack of wages, those on Edisto Island also had to face the threat of rebel guerillas, despite the fact that Union troops ostensibly occupied the Islands.

At Edisto Island, a small group of Confederate raiders managed to recapture the island and several of the contrabands, who faced re-enslavement.<sup>234</sup> The remainder had to leave behind their crops and flee to Port Royal as “impoverished refugees” with nothing but the clothes on their backs.<sup>235</sup> As Brigadier General Rufus Saxton, the military governor, wrote, “Two thousand negroes have been thrown out of employment from the lands they were cultivating... and are now destitute upon my hands.”<sup>236</sup> Furthermore, Saxton did not have adequate food and clothing or jobs on the plantations for the refugees, almost ensuring continued poverty since they had neither supplies nor a way to support themselves.<sup>237</sup> He had to resort to hiring the contrabands to

---

<sup>232</sup> Excerpts from Testimony of Capt. E. W. Hooper before the American Freedmen’s Inquiry Commission, June 1863, in *Freedom: The Lower South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 238-241.

<sup>233</sup> O.M. Mitchel to Geo. S. Coe, Esq., 28 September 1862, in *Freedom: The Lower South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 213.

<sup>234</sup> Berlin, ed., *Freedom: The Lower South*, 91.

<sup>235</sup> *Ibid*, 98.

<sup>236</sup> Brig. Genl. R. Saxton to Hon. E.M. Stanton, 4 August 1862, in *Freedom: The Lower South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 209.

<sup>237</sup> *Ibid*.

make baskets for the army to give them a way to earn even minimal wages.<sup>238</sup> In October 1863, several months after the raid, Secretary of War Stanton observed that “the freedmen were found to be in a destitute condition” and still had not received regular jobs and wages.<sup>239</sup> By the end of the year, Stanton had authorized the recruitment of black soldiers to defend the plantations and end the guerrilla threat, but not before the refugees from Edisto Island suffered poverty or even re-enslavement at the hands of the rebels, demonstrating the inability of military authorities to protect even the freedom of the contrabands.<sup>240</sup>

During the period of government plantations, another group arrived at the Sea Islands determined to help the contrabands. Missionaries from New York and Boston, nicknamed “Gideonites,” arrived to teach the contrabands “civilization and Christianity” and to ensure their independence and ability to support themselves.<sup>241</sup> During the course of the war, the missionaries tried to overcome racism, exploitation of contrabands by the army and plantation lessees, and the free labor ideology and truly improve conditions for the contrabands, but they faced obstinate resistance from government authorities who tended to ignore them and continued their mistreatment of contrabands.<sup>242</sup> Colonel Nobles, for example, hated Edward Philbrick and his fellow missionaries, calling them “damned abolitionists” who wanted to “breed discontent among the negroes,” and actively worked to undermine his efforts at uplift.<sup>243</sup> Many officers and plantation superintendents, in fact, viewed the missionaries as threats to their authority and tried to remove them from their plantations.<sup>244</sup> Even worse, according to Willie Lee Rose, most of the

---

<sup>238</sup> Ibid.

<sup>239</sup> Capt. R. Saxton to Brig. Gen. M.C. Meigs, 2 October 1863, in *Freedom: The Lower South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 262.

<sup>240</sup> Ibid, 269.

<sup>241</sup> Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction*, 41.

<sup>242</sup> Ibid, 287, 293.

<sup>243</sup> Edw. S. Philbrick to Edw. L. Pierce, Esq., 27 March 1862, in *Freedom: The Lower South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 172-174.

<sup>244</sup> W.C.G. to --, 24 March 1862, in Elizabeth Ware Pearson, ed., *Letters from Port Royal: Written at the Time of the Civil War* (Boston, V.B. Clarke Company, 1906), 12.

common soldiers held racist beliefs and hated the missionaries as being too generous to the blacks and did everything in their power to undermine them.<sup>245</sup> Military authorities, therefore, rather than supporting the efforts of the missionaries to help the contrabands, viewed them as a threat to their system of contraband plantation labor and hindered their efforts at benevolence, clearly demonstrating the priority on free labor rather than the welfare of contrabands.

While most of the missionaries remained committed to the mission of benevolence, meanwhile, some began to work with the government in the exploitation of contrabands. Despite the resistance of the contrabands, missionaries compelled them to grow cotton on the government plantations, which they saw as the only way to earn money for uplift programs.<sup>246</sup> Worse, some missionaries started stores on the government plantations and charged inflated prices for basic necessities to cheat the contrabands out of their wages.<sup>247</sup> These examples would be a preview of the later plantation leasing program, as some missionaries, particularly Edward Philbrick, put benevolence aside in order to make money, even if it meant the exploitation and abuse of the contrabands they had supposedly come to help.<sup>248</sup> In the meantime, however, missionaries would be the one group opposing the direct tax sales of abandoned land, which would begin the exploitative process of plantation leasing.

Prior to the direct tax sales, a debate ensued over the private leasing of plantations. Philbrick claimed that the government system was no better than slavery since the contrabands did not receive wages or clothing, and he advocated leasing a plantation and using clothing to pay the contrabands. In particular, he argued that Colonel Nobles, a government superintendent, failed to provide rations or wages to the contraband laborers. According to Philbrick, leasing

---

<sup>245</sup> Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction*, 60-61, 66.

<sup>246</sup> *Ibid*, 128.

<sup>247</sup> *Ibid*, 220, 228.

<sup>248</sup> Gerteis, *From Contraband to Freedman*, 56.

would solve these problems by allowing private enterprise to take over a government system that clearly was not working.<sup>249</sup> Not all of those at the Sea Islands, however, agreed with his views. Edward L. Pierce hated the very idea of leasing and argued that lessees only wanted profit and would exploit the contrabands in order to make large profits, leading to “the worst vices of the slave system.”<sup>250</sup> In June 1862, an act of Congress and its repercussions would prove Pierce’s argument correct, as government land sales led to rampant speculation and profit-seeking at the expense of the contrabands, clearly indicating the federal government’s emphasis on profit rather than contraband rights.

The direct tax sales provide stark evidence of government complicity in allowing lessees to exploit the contrabands, in this case by denying them land and selling it instead to northern businessmen who mistreated the contrabands to make a profit. The Direct Tax Commission formed to regulate the sales and favored wage labor rather than independent land ownership. As historian Lawrence N. Powell writes, “Federal authorities were reluctant to lease or sell subdivided plantation tracts to the freedmen.”<sup>251</sup> In addition, he argues, northerners and government officials thought that blacks needed to learn from businessmen before becoming qualified for land ownership.<sup>252</sup> In making these arguments, he correctly assesses the true motives of the commission, which had the interests of businessmen and speculators rather than the contrabands in mind. The Commission gained title to the land by claiming it for nonpayment

---

<sup>249</sup> Edward S. Philbrick to Edward L. Pierce, 26 March 1862, in *Freedom: The Lower South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 168-170; Edward S. Philbrick to Ned, 12 April 1862, in *Freedom: The Lower South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 182-184.

<sup>250</sup> Edward L. Pierce to Hon. Salmon P. Chase, 3 February 1862, in *Freedom: The Lower South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 142-143.

<sup>251</sup> Lawrence N. Powell, *New Masters: Northern Planters during the Civil War and Reconstruction* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1998), 4.

<sup>252</sup> *Ibid*, 5.

of taxes and sold it at open land auctions, giving Northern whites a clear advantage over the destitute freedmen, who could only bid for “charity land.”<sup>253</sup>

Many groups working with the contrabands saw the true motives of the sales. Missionaries called for reform, allowing the contrabands to preempt small plots of land for later purchase, and the sale of small plots of land to avoid speculation, but the government did not change their policy, despite warnings of the profit motives of lessees and speculators.<sup>254</sup> Another northern minister also unsuccessfully tried to illustrate the lack of land for contrabands and the consequences for their independence and well-being.<sup>255</sup> Most telling, even army officials complained about the sales, including Brigadier General Saxton, who stated that “these helpless people may be placed more or less at the mercy of men devoid of principle” as speculators bought the land.<sup>256</sup> Despite these complaints, at the actual auctions, sixty thousand acres were sold but twenty thousand went to speculators and most of the rest was reserved for government use, leaving very little for contrabands and leaving the path open to exploitation by lessees.<sup>257</sup> Furthermore, the land sales indicate how even army officials in the area were unable to prevent the federal government from exploiting contrabands in order to make a profit and increase government revenue. Most of the land purchased by army officials ended up with speculators anyway through resale. The land sales, therefore, illuminate the true motives of both military

---

<sup>253</sup> Berlin, ed., *Freedom: The Lower South*, 107.

<sup>254</sup> E.W. Harper to Educational Commission, 21 April 1864, in *the Second Annual Report of the New England Freedmen’s Aid Society, Educational Commission, Presented to the Society April 21, 1864* (Boston: Office of the Society, 1864), 16.

<sup>255</sup> Northern Minister to Commissioner of Internal Revenue, 23 February 1864, in *Freedom: The Lower South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 291.

<sup>256</sup> Brigadier General Rufus Saxton to Hon. Edwin M. Stanton, 13 May 1862, in *Freedom: The Lower South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 220.

<sup>257</sup> Testimony of Judge A.D. Smith before the American Freedmen’s Inquiry Commission, June 1863, in *Freedom: The Lower South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 229-233.

officials and the federal government: making profits to support the larger war even if it meant exploitation of contraband laborers.<sup>258</sup>

Another example of government mistreatment of contrabands due to the focus on profits is the failure of the land preemption initiative. This program, set up by Saxton and other sympathetic officials on the islands, would have allowed contrabands to purchase land at \$1.25 per acre for a maximum of forty acres.<sup>259</sup> Saxton did not consult the Direct Tax Commission before announcing his plan, however, and it met stiff opposition from the commissioners and officials in the Department of the Treasury, further indicating the complicity of the federal government in the exploitation of contrabands, even when military officials were trying to prevent such mistreatment. Tax commissioner William Henry Brisbane argued that “The true friend of the Negro... ought to encourage white men to purchase plantations among them as protectors, teachers, and employers” at government land auctions.<sup>260</sup> He also argued that speculators would take advantage of the contrabands at any type of land auction, but still called for the end of preemption based on a lack of available land for the contrabands.<sup>261</sup> In September 1864, the Secretary of the Treasury cancelled preemption, which, Ira Berlin argues, led directly to the destitution of the contrabands and to the entry of lessees who focused on profit rather than black rights and dignity.<sup>262</sup> As Lieutenant Colonel Edward W. Smith, referring to the eviction of contrabands who had preempted land that was later sold to whites, said, it was a “monstrosity of

---

<sup>258</sup> Powell, *New Masters*, 35.

<sup>259</sup> Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction*, 287, 294; Gerteis, *From Contraband to Freedman*, 55; Circular, Headquarters United States Forces, Beaufort, South Carolina, 16 January 1864, in *Freedom: The Lower South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 276.

<sup>260</sup> William Henry Brisbane to Hon. Joseph J. Lewis, 12 December 1863, in *Freedom: The Lower South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 276.

<sup>261</sup> *Ibid*, 285.

<sup>262</sup> Berlin, ed., *Freedom: The Lower South*, 109-110, 288.

administration as would shock the conscience of Christendom.”<sup>263</sup> In contrast to Virginia and Washington, where federal authorities never broached the topic of giving land to the contrabands, officials in South Carolina briefly considered it before allowing speculators and lessees to take over the land and exploit contraband laborers.

In the land sales that followed the cancellation of preemption, fifty percent of the available land went to lessees, who quickly hired contraband labor for the plantations. The end of preemption, therefore, demonstrates the government’s focus on profits at the expense of the rights of contrabands, who not only were denied access to land for themselves but then faced with working for exploitative lessees who would stop at nothing to make money. As Colonel Smith stated, the government’s “yielding to the clamor of greedy avarice” would have disastrous consequences for the contrabands, as the lessees proceeded to exploit their laborers while army authorities did nothing to stop it.<sup>264</sup>

Lessees paid lower wages for planting and maintaining the crop than for picking in order to force the laborers to stay on the plantations, and often provided only garden plots rather than rations, forcing the contrabands to grow or buy their food with their meager wages, and often, also buy clothing.<sup>265</sup> Even worse, according to the *New York Tribune*, planters would sell their crops and “run away with the proceeds, leaving the Negroes in rags and foodless, with winter just coming on,” clearly indicating that lessees focused on profit and exploited contraband laborers to get it, and that local authorities did nothing to stop them.<sup>266</sup> Lessees also used creative tactics to lower labor costs, including cutting a month “into discrete units of labor-time”

---

<sup>263</sup> Lt. Col. Edward W. Smith to Messrs. Brisbane, Wording, and Smith, 25 February 1864, in *Freedom, The Lower South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 295.

<sup>264</sup> *Ibid*, 294.

<sup>265</sup> Berlin, ed., *Freedom: The Lower South*, 49.

<sup>266</sup> *New York Tribune*, as quoted in Powell, *New Masters*, 6.

to reduce hours worked and therefore wages.<sup>267</sup> Perhaps the most telling evidence of mistreatment is that many contrabands ran away from lessees due to exploitation and abuse, and some even said that the lessees treated them worse than their old masters had during slavery.<sup>268</sup> The fact that local military authorities not only allowed the land sales to lessees but then did nothing to stop them from abusing contrabands clearly indicates a focus on profits and ensuring the labor of the contrabands rather than protecting their basic rights. As a New England aid society stated, the contrabands' faith in Northerners is "too often abused" due to lessee mistreatment.<sup>269</sup> In fact, a lessee from Boston provides the clearest example of exploitation of contrabands by lessees in order to make a profit, while army authorities stood by and did nothing.

Philbrick purchased or leased one third of the land on St. Helena Island and hired contraband labor. He claimed to pay \$6.50 a month, but truly only paid \$4.40 a month and did not pay the laborers at all during "slack months," so the contrabands truly only made \$3.30 a month (or fifty five cents a day).<sup>270</sup> These rates, which compared very poorly to government salaries in Virginia and Washington, indicate a focus on profit rather than contraband rights, and military authorities failed to enforce their own wage regulations, allowing Philbrick to continue to exploit his laborers.<sup>271</sup> His opinion that high wages caused idleness and that blacks had to support themselves only further reveals his true motives.<sup>272</sup> As Powell argues, "Philbrick disdained the practice of giving privileges to laborers" and "made them buy everything that they might need for their daily existence" despite the very low wages he paid them, clearly proving

---

<sup>267</sup> Powell, *New Masters*, 103.

<sup>268</sup> *Ibid*, 115-116.

<sup>269</sup> *Extracts from Letters of Teachers Fifth Series*, 4.

<sup>270</sup> *Ibid*; Gerteis, *From Contraband to Freedman*, 56.

<sup>271</sup> *Extracts from Letters of Teachers Fifth Series*, 4.

<sup>272</sup> Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction*, 223.

his focus on profit.<sup>273</sup> In fact, he grew seventy three thousand bales of cotton for only twenty thousand dollars labor costs and made eighty one thousand dollars profit, clearly indicating his real reason for leasing land in South Carolina, especially since he initially arrived as a missionary supposedly devoted to helping the contrabands before becoming a lessee.<sup>274</sup>

Both federal and military authorities could have stopped Philbrick's clear exploitation of contrabands but failed to act. Philbrick himself acknowledged his low wages in a letter to the Direct Tax Commission, stating that he makes his laborers use the crop to feed themselves and takes away wages for subpar work, showing both his clear exploitation of the laborers and the failure of government officials to enforce their own regulations.<sup>275</sup> Furthermore, several of the contrabands working for Philbrick wrote to President Lincoln in a desperate attempt to improve their labor conditions and end Philbrick's abusive behavior. They stated that Philbrick's wages "were not enough to sustain live," and that he charged excessive prices for basic necessities at plantation stores. Even worse, despite the ban on corporal punishment, one of Philbrick's agents whipped a freedwoman and never faced punishment.<sup>276</sup> No record exists of Lincoln or any other government official disciplining Philbrick or attempting to enforce their own orders and regulations, indicating a focus on the larger war effort at the expense of the welfare of the contrabands. Furthermore, Philbrick was just one of many lessees exploiting and physically abusing contrabands in South Carolina, and federal authorities from Lincoln down to local military commanders failed to do anything to prevent it. Such neglect, along with the land sales themselves, effectively demonstrates the federal government's focus on economy, revenue, and

---

<sup>273</sup> Powell, *New Masters*, 88.

<sup>274</sup> Gerteis, *From Contraband to Freedman*, 56; Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction*, 299.

<sup>275</sup> Edward S. Philbrick to Direct Tax Commission, 14 January 1864, in *Freedom: The Lower South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 278-279.

<sup>276</sup> South Carolina Freedmen to the President, 1 March 1864, in *Freedom: The Lower South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 297-298.

the larger war effort rather than protecting the basic rights of the contrabands. This conclusion agrees with historians such as William C. Harris, who argues that the federal government focused on reunion and the war before emancipation and contraband rights throughout the war, and James M. McPherson, who argues that slaves did force the federal government to focus more on emancipation, but that the war effort always remained the central focus, especially since Union victory was necessary to achieve emancipation.<sup>277</sup>

By this point, the continued exploitation of the contrabands had caused “widespread distrust of the intentions of the Government” among the freed people, and the abuses only continued during the later stages of the war.<sup>278</sup> The behavior of common soldiers did little to change this attitude, as soldiers abused and robbed the contrabands with seeming impunity despite the presence of officers who had the power to curtail such behavior.<sup>279</sup> At Saint Helena Island, seven intoxicated sailors beat several contrabands, killed their cow, and even attempted to rape several black girls before the contrabands successfully subdued them.<sup>280</sup> William Mitchell, meanwhile, testified that soldiers stole his mule, which he had been given by Union officers for his help on a military expedition.<sup>281</sup> In a truly horrid example of soldier abuse of contrabands, drunken officers of the Twenty-Fifth Ohio raped a woman while claiming to search for recruits, establishing that officers committed such depraved exploitation of contrabands.<sup>282</sup> According to General Saxton, the soldiers, who generally held racist views, stole crops, livestock, and money

---

<sup>277</sup> William C. Harris, *With Charity for All: Lincoln and the Restoration of the Union* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1997), 1; James M. McPherson, “Who Freed the Slaves?” in *Drawn With the Sword: Reflections on the American Civil War*, ed. James M. McPherson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 193.

<sup>278</sup> Brig Gen. R. Saxton to Hon. Edwin M. Stanton, 30 December 1864, in *Freedom: The Lower South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 327.

<sup>279</sup> Berlin, ed., *Freedom: The Lower South*, 95.

<sup>280</sup> Report of William E. Park, 18 March 1862, in *Freedom: The Lower South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 167-168.

<sup>281</sup> Affidavit of William Mitchell, 21 May 1864, in *Freedom: The Lower South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 314.

<sup>282</sup> Rev. Abram Mercherson to His Exelency Maj. Gen. J. G. Foster, 12 August 1864, in *Freedom: The Lower South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 314-316.

and even sexually assaulted women, and did not face anywhere close to appropriate military discipline for their actions. Such actions, he stated, were “demoralizing to the negro and have greatly hindered efforts for their improvement and elevation.”<sup>283</sup> Even the highest military authority in the area, therefore, knew that soldiers abused and exploited contrabands and acknowledged the failure to address the problem, indicating that protecting the contrabands was not the highest priority. The abuse by soldiers would continue, as recruiters for United States Colored Troops regiments used increasingly harsh measures to gain recruits, even to the point of shooting contrabands they claimed to be deserters, without penalties from army authorities or the War Department.<sup>284</sup>

In March 1862, around the same time as the land sales, General Hunter, commander of the Department of the South, instituted a program of conscription of contrabands for United States Colored Troops regiments.<sup>285</sup> The fact that white soldiers in the area left for the front in Virginia hastened the need to form regiments to defend the islands. When enough volunteers did not come forward, therefore, Hunter resorted to impressment of contrabands by force to fill the regiments.<sup>286</sup> As Rose writes, “squads of soldiers forcibly herded them into the camps” for enlistment.<sup>287</sup> She further argues that the “military authorities treated the islanders as suited their convenience, with utter disregard for the claims of humanity,” especially since the draft occurred right after planting season, leaving only women and children to tend the crop.<sup>288</sup> Officers of the Twenty-Fifth Ohio, for example, repeatedly abused contrabands who resisted impressment and

---

<sup>283</sup> Excerpts from Brig. Gen. R. Saxton to Hon. Edwin M. Stanton, 30 December 1864, in *Freedom: The Lower South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 328.

<sup>284</sup> *Ibid*, 327.

<sup>285</sup> Berlin, ed., *Freedom: The Lower South*, 100.

<sup>286</sup> *Ibid*, 109.

<sup>287</sup> Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction*, 267.

<sup>288</sup> *Ibid*, 266.

even raped women while claiming to search for recruits.<sup>289</sup> Another officer, according to a missionary, was “a terror to the whole black population” due to his harsh tactics of impressment.<sup>290</sup> The soldiers, furthermore, were given monetary rewards for bringing in recruits, and impressed men with little regard for the welfare of families who depended on their wages.<sup>291</sup> When General Saxton “ordered an indiscriminate conscription of every able-bodied colored man in the Department” in late 1864, contrabands tried to run to the woods or swamps but still could not escape the impressment squads, which oftentimes consisted of black soldiers.<sup>292</sup> Military authorities, therefore, indiscriminately drafted contrabands for service regardless of whether they had existing jobs on plantations or families to support. Once the contrabands reached the army, furthermore, the exploitation continued, as military officials failed to provide support to their destitute families.

When soldiers impressed contrabands from their jobs, they gave no regard to making sure the contrabands had received all the pay due them. According to a missionary, a “shameful delay in the payments” to recruits had caused their families “suffering for want of the means to purchase clothing” and other necessities.<sup>293</sup> Such delays, another missionary claims, were caused by bureaucratic slowness at the Quartermaster’s Department, which handled payment for government laborers.<sup>294</sup> Even worse, a drought caused widespread crop failure in 1864, leaving “many black women, children, and old people in desperate straits” since the miniscule wages given to soldiers were not enough to purchase food, especially since soldiers received wages

---

<sup>289</sup> Rev. Abram Mercherson to Maj. Gen. J. G. Foster, 12 August 1864, in *Freedom: The Lower South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 314.

<sup>290</sup> C.P.W. to ---, 23 October 1862, in *Letters from Port Royal*, ed. Pearson, 96.

<sup>291</sup> Brig. Genl. R. Saxton to Hon. Edwin M. Stanton, 30 December 1864, in *Freedom: The Lower South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 327; E. S. P. to ---, 27 December 1863, in *Letters from Port Royal*, ed. Pearson, 239.

<sup>292</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>293</sup> C. P. W. to ---, 23 October 1862, in *Letters from Port Royal*, ed. Pearson, 96, 99.

<sup>294</sup> E. S. P. to ---, 16 November 1862, in *Letters from Port Royal*, ed. Pearson, 111.

irregularly at best.<sup>295</sup> At the same time, commissary officials, trying to reduce expenses and prevent “dependency,” cut off rations to the families of soldiers, resulting in destitution becoming, according to Berlin, “distressingly common” as women and children had little to eat since even the food crops failed to thrive.<sup>296</sup> As the commander of a black regiment stated, the stoppage of rations had rendered the families of his soldiers to a “deplorable condition” without food or clothing, and the seven dollars a month wages for soldiers did not provide nearly enough for purchasing basic necessities.<sup>297</sup> Military authorities, therefore, not only forced contrabands to enlist, but then failed to pay them decent wages and cut off rations to their families despite a devastating crop failure, leaving them destitute with no means of support.

The contrabands forced to enlist, meanwhile, suffered harsh treatment once they reached the army. Quartermasters refused to provide them with tents despite having more than enough for white recruits, refused to provide medical care to sick recruits, and also delayed their payments much more frequently than they did for whites.<sup>298</sup> The white common soldiers, furthermore, exhibited a “degree of hatred really fiendish towards the black regiment” and not only abused the black troops but continued to steal crops and livestock from their families left behind, further worsening the already desperate food situation.<sup>299</sup> The conscription of contrabands, therefore, not only resulted in destitute families, but also in the exploitation and abuse of soldiers drafted into the army but not given even decent treatment by their officers and

---

<sup>295</sup> Berlin, ed., *Freedom: The Lower South*, 110.

<sup>296</sup> Ibid; Capt. R. Saxton to Brig Gen. M.C. Meigs, 2 October 1863, in *Freedom: The Lower South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 265.

<sup>297</sup> Lieut. Col. Aug. G. Bennett to Capt. Wm. L. M. Burger, 30 November 1863, in *Freedom: The Lower South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 274.

<sup>298</sup> E. S. P. to ---, 16 November 1862, in *Letters from Port Royal*, ed. Pearson, 108, 111; H. W. to ---, 17 May 1863, in *Letters from Port Royal*, ed. Pearson, 189.

<sup>299</sup> Ibid, 108; E. S. P. to ---, 10 December 1862, in *Letters from Port Royal*, ed. Pearson, 118-119.

fellow soldiers, and their families were left impoverished and starving. In 1865, the arrival of thousands of refugees from Sherman's March only worsened the situation.

When General William Tecumseh Sherman marched through Georgia in 1864, thousands of slaves fled to his army seeking freedom and protection. By the time he reached Savannah, ten thousand contrabands followed his army, and Sherman wanted to send them somewhere else to increase the mobility of his army for future campaigns. In addition, members of his army "had abused defenseless ex-slaves" and generally held racist views.<sup>300</sup> Sherman sent the contrabands to the Sea Islands, where they arrived destitute and in desperate need of government aid. The commander in the area, meanwhile, focused on the need to "lessen the number of idle and dissolute persons" in the area and sent all contrabands without a job to the poor house, where they would labor on a "chain gang" for no wages.<sup>301</sup> Furthermore, military authorities began destroying boats used by some contrabands to gain their livelihood through fishing, in order to prevent smuggling to the Confederacy but truly to force all of the contrabands onto plantations.<sup>302</sup> The loss of boats, according to plantation superintendent Theodore Holt, "greatly distress[ed] many hundreds of poor men and families, whose dependence for food is chiefly fish" and were physically unable to farm, leaving them dependent on rations from military authorities focused on cutting rations as much as possible.<sup>303</sup> The contrabands, therefore, did find freedom with Sherman's army, but still not decent treatment, as they either had to work on a plantation or face unpaid labor under brutal conditions in a workhouse. Ironically, Sherman stepped in to try

---

<sup>300</sup> Berlin, ed., *Freedom: The Lower South*, 111.

<sup>301</sup> A. S. Hitchcock to Col. Hall, 25 August 1864, in *Freedom: The Lower South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 317.

<sup>302</sup> General Orders No. 130, Head Quarters, Department of the South, 6 September 1864, in *Freedom: The Lower South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 318-319.

<sup>303</sup> Theodore Holt to Brig. Gen. R. Saxton, 12 September 1864, in *Freedom: The Lower South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 320.

to help, but he ultimately failed to provide the contrabands with the land they needed to truly gain independence.

In February 1865, Sherman met with several black leaders to develop a long-term plan for the contrabands. Garrison Frazier, one of the black leaders, stated that the contrabands needed land which they could farm until they earned enough to buy it from the government.<sup>304</sup> In addition, he called for the end of impressment, stating that blacks wanted to be soldiers and that they would enlist voluntarily.<sup>305</sup> Sherman agreed, setting aside the islands from St. John's River in Florida to the South Carolina Sea Islands "for the settlement of the negroes" and even stated that only blacks could live on the islands, allowing them to manage their own affairs.<sup>306</sup> He also banned conscription and impressment and designated forty acres per family, with priority given to families of soldiers. Finally, he ordered military authorities to give contrabands "possessory title" to the land until his plan was approved by higher authorities.<sup>307</sup>

Once the contrabands began to take possession of the land, however, Sherman's ideal quickly disintegrated. Army authorities did not have enough shelter or clothing, and many contrabands died of disease before they could begin to farm.<sup>308</sup> Even worse, Sherman's promissory title to the land did not hold up permanently, as the contrabands lost their land during Reconstruction, either to federal authorities or, more commonly, to former Confederates who had received pardons and the right to their property.<sup>309</sup> Sherman, therefore, not only promised contrabands land when they truly only had temporary title, but then Treasury authorities gave the

---

<sup>304</sup> Clipping from the New York Tribune, "Negroes of Savannah," 13 February 1865, in *Freedom: The Lower South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 334.

<sup>305</sup> *Ibid*, 336.

<sup>306</sup> Special Field Orders No. 15, Headquarters Military Division of the Mississippi, 16 January 1865, in *Freedom: The Lower South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 338.

<sup>307</sup> *Ibid*, 338-339.

<sup>308</sup> Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction*, 330-332.

<sup>309</sup> Gerteis, *From Contraband to Freedman*, 58.

land back to the very men who had held the contrabands as slaves. Sherman's land program, therefore, ended four years of government mistreatment of the Sea Islands contrabands.

Overall, whether in military labor camps, government plantations, land auctions, leased plantations, or on land supposedly granted to the contrabands, army authorities in South Carolina exploited contrabands during the entire war, and federal authorities not only failed to stop such practices, but approved the leasing programs that directly contributed to exploitation. Army authorities focused on revenue allowed land sales, and speculators who had no regard for the welfare of contrabands leased plantations. Furthermore, an emphasis on dependency caused them to cut off rations even during a crop failure, leaving contrabands to face starvation with nowhere to turn for help. Finally, the free labor ideology contributed to the institution of wage labor rather than land ownership, and even Sherman's attempt to grant the contrabands land came to naught. Therefore, military officials, lessees, and tax agents exploited contrabands for four years without any intervention from federal authorities, clearly indicating the failure of Congress and the President to protect the contrabands. This failure is illustrated most effectively through an analysis of Washington, D.C., where military authorities exploited contrabands in squalid, disease-ridden camps located within sight of the federal Capitol itself.

## CHAPTER III

### WASHINGTON, D.C.

In Washington, before officials could come up with a policy for how to treat contrabands in the capital, they had to decide whether to accept fugitive slaves into Union lines to begin with. While slaves arriving from Virginia clearly were enemy property subject to confiscation, fugitives from Maryland raised the issue of determining whether a master was loyal or disloyal in order to assign the slave the status of contraband.<sup>310</sup> In 1861 and 1862, therefore, Congress passed a law banning the army from enforcing the Fugitive Slave Act and returning even the slaves of loyal masters to relieve officials from having to determine the loyalty of a master.<sup>311</sup> However, since Washington, unlike Virginia and South Carolina, remained under the direct control of Congress for the entire conflict, federal authorities had much more say in policy than in the other two regions, and the federal judiciary stepped in to influence fugitive slave policy.

Despite the passage of the First Confiscation Act, masters from Maryland continually entered the District to reclaim their slave property, helped by guards from the local police who captured fugitives at the Navy Yard Bridge separating Maryland from Washington.<sup>312</sup> Furthermore, even though the army could not return fugitives, the federal government still could enforce the Fugitive Slave Law, especially when Lincoln, concerned about the loyalty of the

---

<sup>310</sup> Berlin, ed., *Freedom: The Upper South*, 245.

<sup>311</sup> Oakes, *Freedom National*, 189; Johnston, *Surviving Freedom*, 115.

<sup>312</sup> Masur, *Example for all the Land*, 28; Winkle, *Lincoln's Citadel*, 237.

Border States and Maryland in particular, called for the return of fugitives from Maryland.<sup>313</sup> In 1862, the federal circuit court appointed fugitive slave commissioners and began to hear rendition cases despite the furious protests of local blacks, and even local military commander James S. Wadsworth, who tried to help the fugitives but often failed.<sup>314</sup> In addition, soldiers did not care where fugitives were from, saw their value as laborers, and accepted them into the lines, while government authorities continued to return Maryland fugitives to slavery.<sup>315</sup> According to historian Kenneth Winkle, “All fugitive slaves who could not prove their state of origin or the disloyalty of their owners were treated as... subject to return under the Fugitive Slave Law,” and federal authorities actively returned fugitives to Maryland throughout the early stages of the war.<sup>316</sup> Even though the army tried to help fugitives, therefore, the federal government, focused on the loyalty of the Border States, returned them to slavery unless they could prove their owner was disloyal, indicating that the government placed the war effort and worries about the Border States ahead of the welfare of fugitive slaves and contrabands.

When fugitive slaves from Maryland were arrested, furthermore, they were turned over to the District police and marshal Ward S. Lamon, who ran the Washington City Jail.<sup>317</sup> As historian Margaret Leech writes, the jail was “a disgrace to the community” and the cells were “dark, unsanitary, and ill-ventilated.”<sup>318</sup> In winter 1861, the jail, designed to hold a maximum of one hundred prisoners, held two hundred, including sixty fugitive slaves, and ten prisoners were held in an eight by ten foot cell.<sup>319</sup> According to William S. Wood, the commissioner of public

---

<sup>313</sup> Winkle, *Lincoln's Citadel*, 241.

<sup>314</sup> Masur, *Example for all the Land*, 28-29.

<sup>315</sup> Winkle, *Lincoln's Citadel*, 239.

<sup>316</sup> *Ibid*, 238.

<sup>317</sup> Masur, *Example for all the Land*, 24.

<sup>318</sup> Leech, *Reveille in Washington*, 296.

<sup>319</sup> *Ibid*, Winkle, *Lincoln's Citadel*, 243.

buildings for the District, “The old jail is now crowded with more than double the number of persons... than can be kept there with any regard to cleanliness or health. ... It is unfit for the purposes of a jail.”<sup>320</sup> Lamson often falsely accused runaway slaves of crimes in order to justify their imprisonment even when no master came to reclaim them, and District police even arrested contrabands who worked for the Union army and falsely claimed that they were fugitives from Maryland.<sup>321</sup>

After an investigation by detective Allan Pinkerton, who saw the value of the contrabands to the Union army as laborers and spies, the jail began to gain overwhelming negative publicity. The *Washington Evening Star* wrote that the “jail of Washington... is miserably constructed, badly lighted, and poorly ventilated, and... it is inhuman to confine even the vilest criminals in its reeking cells.”<sup>322</sup> Congress finally acted in late 1862 and released all fugitive slaves from the jail and ordered Lamson to only hold fugitives one month, and, if no master came to claim them, they were freed. A Senate report stated that “a barbarous system of punishment had been practiced upon colored persons in the jail” including “torture” and that it had to stop immediately.<sup>323</sup> The federal government, therefore, finally acted to end the abusive practices of the District police, but only after untold numbers of fugitives had been arrested and held in deplorable conditions even when no master came to claim them, indicating the low priority given to the rights of contrabands and fugitive slaves early in the war. While federal action does indicate closer federal oversight than Virginia or South Carolina, where local commanders acted almost entirely on their own, it still indicates a preventable lack of initiative since the

---

<sup>320</sup> William S. Wood, quoted in Winkle, *Lincoln's Citadel*, 243.

<sup>321</sup> Winkle, *Lincoln's Citadel*, 243.

<sup>322</sup> *Washington Evening Star*, quoted in Winkle, *Lincoln's Citadel*, 245.

<sup>323</sup> Report of the United States Senate, quoted in Winkle, *Lincoln's Citadel*, 247.

government only acted after hundreds of contrabands had been held as runaways and criminals in horrific conditions.

The behavior of the District police and Maryland slave catchers did sharply reduce public support for the Fugitive Slave Law and made army officers even more willing to protect fugitives from local authorities. Officers of the Seventy-Ninth New York protected ten fugitives from the police, but two were captured and sent back to slavery in Maryland, indicating that even the army could not protect fugitives from the local authorities, especially since the federal government still supported rendition.<sup>324</sup> By this point, however, violent public protests, along with the Second Confiscation Act, which mandated a loyalty oath for reclaiming a slave and freed all slaves of disloyal masters, made the Fugitive Slave Act, according to historian Kate Masur, “unenforceable” in the District.<sup>325</sup> While contrabands who made it to the army no longer had to worry about arrest and rendition, therefore, they still faced squalid camps plagued with disease, hunger, and crushing poverty, while army authorities that had been so eager to protect them from the police did little to improve the appalling conditions.

While multiple forms of work, including government farms and leased plantations, provided jobs for contrabands in Virginia and South Carolina, the federal government remained “the largest employer” throughout the war for contrabands in Washington. Private employers ‘had to match or better the terms offered by military employers if they hoped to attract and retain black workers.’<sup>326</sup> In addition, the federal government assumed the responsibility of providing for the families of workers, including housing, clothing, rations, and medical care.<sup>327</sup> In 1862, Military Governor Wadsworth ordered wages of twenty dollars a month for laborers and twenty

---

<sup>324</sup> Winkle, *Lincoln’s Citadel*, 305.

<sup>325</sup> Masur, *Example for all the Land*, 30; Winkle, *Lincoln’s Citadel*, 305.

<sup>326</sup> Berlin, ed., *Freedom: The Upper South*, 244.

<sup>327</sup> *Ibid.*

five dollars a month for skilled teamsters, which he claimed to be double the wages given to farmhands in the North.<sup>328</sup> The contrabands never received full wages, however, as paymasters deducted five dollars monthly for the support of the hospital as well as destitute women and children.<sup>329</sup> Even these reduced wages failed to come regularly, especially early in the war, as military authorities more afraid of “the specter of poverty and dependency” on government charity failed to provide even minimal compensation to military laborers.<sup>330</sup>

According to Ira Berlin, contrabands “were eager to work and willing to perform more grueling tasks, at lower pay, and under stricter supervision, than even the most desperate white workers would tolerate,” but were not rewarded with decent treatment or compensation for their difficult labor.<sup>331</sup> Many contrabands only received pay once every three months if that, as military authorities believed that food and freedom were adequate compensation. The lack of wages, furthermore, forced contrabands to buy basic supplies on credit at “exorbitant prices,” placing them in crippling debt.<sup>332</sup> In addition, the five dollar tax, combined with the failure to pay adequate wages, left the contrabands with “barely enough to make ends meet” and support their family members who could not work.<sup>333</sup>

G. W. Simms, for example, worked as a military blacksmith for eleven months at a supposed wage of thirty dollars a month, but due to the tax and irregular payments was unable to support his family.<sup>334</sup> Contrabands working for the quartermaster, furthermore, failed to receive any wages for an entire year, leaving them “in great need,” but Quartermaster General

---

<sup>328</sup> Brig. Genl. James S. Wadsworth to the Hon. Sec. of War, 25 September 1862, in *Freedom: The Upper South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 269.

<sup>329</sup> *Ibid*, 269-270.

<sup>330</sup> Berlin, ed., *Freedom: The Upper South*, 244.

<sup>331</sup> Berlin, ed., *Freedom: The Upper South*, 249.

<sup>332</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>333</sup> *Ibid*, 250-251.

<sup>334</sup> Excerpts from Testimony of G.W. Simms, 6 March 1878, Southern Claims Commission, in *Freedom: The Upper South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 274.

Montgomery Meigs refused to grant them any back pay, stating that their rations were the only compensation necessary, without regard to the needs of their families.<sup>335</sup> According to a missionary teacher, military authorities also cut off wages and rations to contrabands who became ill, leaving their families unable to purchase food, and only the intervention of aid societies prevented them from starving.<sup>336</sup> The worst example of exploitation, however, is the fact that officers pocketed the five dollar tax rather than using it to support the destitute, indicating the low priority that they gave to contraband welfare and the lengths they would go to exploit the contraband laborers.<sup>337</sup> Furthermore, the failure to provide regular wages and rations demonstrates the fear of dependency on government charity and the desire to make the contrabands support themselves, without regard to the high prices at stores or the needs of their family members unable to perform difficult military labor. These families, along with the workers themselves, also had to live in a series of squalid camps, as unprepared army authorities repeatedly failed to provide even minimally adequate shelter.

At the beginning of the war, lacking a clear plan on where to house the contrabands, Wadsworth sent them to Old Capitol Prison, both as a shelter and as protection from the District police.<sup>338</sup> At the prison, however, the contrabands were housed near white prisoners, causing opposition from many officers in the area who wanted them housed in segregated camps.<sup>339</sup> Furthermore, the prison was so overcrowded that “the negroes by scores, can hardly be provided for with any comfort to themselves or to the whites,” and smallpox broke out in the squalid

---

<sup>335</sup> M.C. Meigs to Maj. Gen. O.O. Howard, 5 April 1866, in *Freedom: The Upper South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 363-364.

<sup>336</sup> H.C. to Educational Commission, 23 July 1864, in *Extracts from Letters of Teachers Fifth Series*, 18.

<sup>337</sup> Berlin, ed., *Freedom: The Upper South*, 252.

<sup>338</sup> Winkle, *Lincoln's Citadel*, 307.

<sup>339</sup> Berlin, ed., *Freedom: The Upper South*, 245; B.B. French to Hon. Edwin M. Stanton, 13 February 1862, in *Freedom: The Upper South*, ed. Berlin et al, 263.

prison.<sup>340</sup> Seeking to stem the epidemic and prevent it from spreading to white prisoners, Wadsworth ordered the contrabands moved to Duff Green's Row, a "cluster of tenements" that was little better than the prison and in fact even worse, as disease and poverty plagued the camp during its entire tenure as a contraband settlement.<sup>341</sup>

In June 1862, the same time that the contrabands moved to Duff Green's Row, command of the camp passed to Danforth B. Nichols, a missionary who worked closely with the army to superintend contraband affairs, set up and maintain camps, and try to find work for the contrabands. However, the Union army's military maneuvers, particularly the Peninsula Campaign, brought in more fugitives than the army had prepared for, and Duff Green's Row quickly proved inadequate for housing the contrabands. By summer, twenty contrabands arrived each day, mostly destitute and in desperate need of food, clothing, and shelter that army authorities simply did not have.<sup>342</sup> The contrabands were given passes and documents verifying their freedom but little else, and Nichols hired them to private employers in order to prevent their dependency on the government.<sup>343</sup> As Johnston writes, the army remained determined to avoid a "welfare mentality" among the contrabands and also to spend as little as possible on supplying them.<sup>344</sup> Ideas of economy and free labor, therefore, contributed to the hiring out of contrabands, and employers only had to promise decent treatment to hire contrabands from Duff Green's Row.<sup>345</sup> The employers, however, quickly violated such promises. According to Nichols, "from the moment the contraband... gets any money he is the victim of fraud and robbery" by private employers who cheated contrabands out of wages and then charged excessive prices at stores,

---

<sup>340</sup> French to Stanton, 13 February 1862, in *Freedom: The Upper South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 263.

<sup>341</sup> Berlin, ed., *Freedom: The Upper South*, 246.

<sup>342</sup> Berlin, ed., *Freedom: The Upper South*, 246; Johnston, *Surviving Freedom*, 121.

<sup>343</sup> Johnston, *Surviving Freedom*, 121.

<sup>344</sup> *Ibid*, 198.

<sup>345</sup> Winkle, *Lincoln's Citadel*, 307-309.

leaving the contrabands in hopeless debt.<sup>346</sup> Along with the irregular wage payments for government workers, such mistreatment by private employers clearly demonstrates the priority of free labor and avoiding dependency rather than ensuring the welfare of the contrabands. The focus on economy, furthermore, would have even more devastating consequences.

The overcrowding at Duff Green's Row quickly contributed to widespread disease, and the army failed to provide adequate shelter or medical care to stem the repeated outbreaks. As Berlin writes, "In the close quarters of Duff Green's Row, sanitary conditions deteriorated and disease spread rapidly," as three hundred sixty contrabands crowded into a camp meant to hold a maximum of fifty.<sup>347</sup> According to Harriet Jacobs, an escaped slave working as a nurse in the camp, diphtheria, scarlet fever, and typhoid raged through the camps, and the contrabands were "in the most pitiable condition."<sup>348</sup> Nichols and the army, meanwhile, remained occupied with hiring out contrabands and did little to address the worsening conditions at the camp.<sup>349</sup> By June 1862, ten contrabands died a day, and nurses had "nothing at hand to administer to the comfort of the sick and dying."<sup>350</sup> In addition, the contrabands, even the desperately ill, only had "filthy rags" for beds, and some had no bedding at all.<sup>351</sup> According to Jacobs, it was "almost impossible to keep the buildings in a healthy condition" due to the shortages and overcrowding, leading to horrific consequences when smallpox began to spread through the camp in the summer of 1862, as army authorities continued to neglect the basic medical needs of the contrabands even during an epidemic.<sup>352</sup>

---

<sup>346</sup>Danforth Nichols, as quoted in Berlin, ed., *Freedom: The Upper South*, 249.

<sup>347</sup> Berlin, ed., *Freedom: The Upper South*, 247; Winkle, *Lincoln's Citadel*, 309.

<sup>348</sup>Harriet Jacobs to William Lloyd Garrison, 5 September 1862, in *The Civil War: The Second Year Told by Those Who Lived It*, ed. Stephen W. Sears (New York: Penguin Publishers, 2012), 382.

<sup>349</sup> *Ibid.*, 383.

<sup>350</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>351</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>352</sup> *Ibid.*

According to historian Kenneth Winkle, the overcrowding and inadequate sanitation at Duff Green's Row made a smallpox epidemic "inevitable," but Nichols and the army medical staff failed to take any preventative action.<sup>353</sup> Furthermore, most of the contrabands came from rural areas and had never been exposed to smallpox, meaning that they would be susceptible to the disease if an epidemic occurred. The medical staff, however, only ordered vaccinations for white soldiers and aid workers at the camp and refused to vaccinate the contrabands, causing devastating mortality rates when the disease arrived in summer 1862.<sup>354</sup> The failure to vaccinate, therefore, provides clear evidence of army mistreatment of contrabands in Washington, as they failed to use a simple procedure that could have prevented the epidemic, but chose to only vaccinate white workers, indicating both a focus on economy and sheer medical neglect of the contrabands. Furthermore, doctors failed to quarantine contrabands afflicted with smallpox, allowing the disease to spread rapidly through the camp, further indicating the neglect of even basic medical care for the contrabands.<sup>355</sup> According to Oakes, twenty contrabands died every day from smallpox, and shortages of medicine, shelter, and clothing only worsened during the epidemic.<sup>356</sup> Winkle cites one seventy year old contraband dying of smallpox "found lying in a pile of manure" and left to die by army doctors without even minimally decent shelter or medical care.<sup>357</sup> The epidemic became so horrific that even white Washingtonians, often indifferent to the contrabands at best, were "aghast" at the death toll and appalling neglect in the camp, indicating the scale of mistreatment and abuse at Duff Green's Row.<sup>358</sup> As Jacobs wrote, "Those

---

<sup>353</sup> Winkle, *Lincoln's Citadel*, 310.

<sup>354</sup> *Ibid*, 309-311.

<sup>355</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>356</sup> Oakes, *Freedom National*, 419-420.

<sup>357</sup> Winkle, *Lincoln's Citadel*, 312.

<sup>358</sup> *Ibid*, 311.

fearful eyes often looked up to me with the language, ‘Is this freedom?’.”<sup>359</sup> For the contrabands at Duff Green’s Row, freedom was plagued by poverty, overcrowding, epidemic disease, and the failure of Nichols and military authorities to do anything to stem the rising mortality rates.

By August 1862, the smallpox epidemic had become so widespread in the camp that military authorities decided to move the camp to another location away from the pestilence.<sup>360</sup> Nichols and the army doctors left the smallpox patients at Duff Green’s Row, which became a smallpox hospital, and moved the healthy contrabands to Camp Barker, a set of military-style barracks designed to alleviate the overcrowding that pervaded the Row.<sup>361</sup> The new camp, however, did not prove to be an effective solution, as disease, poverty, and overcrowding continued, while Nichols and the army officers who staffed the camp focused on helping the contrabands as little as possible to avoid dependency, despite the clear evidence of need.

At Camp Barker, overcrowding continued despite the new barracks. According to Berlin, two to three families lived in every ten by twelve foot barracks room, and twenty six people lived in one small cabin.<sup>362</sup> In addition, inadequate sanitary facilities and privies contributed to the spread of disease, while army doctors again failed to provide proper medical care.<sup>363</sup> When smallpox again ravaged the contrabands despite the move from Duff Green’s Row, army doctors initially failed to vaccinate the contrabands, and then, as the epidemic spread, attempted vaccination without success due to a bad batch of vaccine matter, and the disease ravaged the camp.<sup>364</sup> By November 1862, twelve to fifteen contrabands died every day of smallpox and

---

<sup>359</sup> Jacobs to Garrison, 5 September 1862, in *The Civil War: The Second Year*, ed. Sears, 383.

<sup>360</sup> Berlin, ed., *Freedom: The Upper South*, 247.

<sup>361</sup> Winkle, *Lincoln’s Citadel*, 312.

<sup>362</sup> Berlin, ed., *Freedom: The Upper South*, 248.

<sup>363</sup> Testimony of D.B. Nichols before the American Freedmen’s Inquiry Commission, April 1863, in *Freedom: The Upper South*, ed., Berlin, et al, 290.

<sup>364</sup> Testimony of James I. Ferree, January 1864, in *Freedom: The Upper South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 326-327.

other diseases, and the hospital, according to a Quaker missionary, was “ill-ventilated and disgusting in the extreme,” which only raised the death rate.<sup>365</sup> The outbreak worsened in summer 1863, as twenty five contrabands perished every week from disease, and reached its nadir in January 1864, when one hundred fifty died in one month.<sup>366</sup> Even worse, army doctors delayed the treatment of smallpox victims until they could decide whether to admit them to the hospital for paupers or contrabands, causing many to die without receiving any treatment.<sup>367</sup> By April 1863, according to historian Allan Johnston, seven hundred contrabands had died of disease, revealing the horrific consequences of overcrowding and medical neglect of the contrabands and the low priority given contraband welfare by army medical authorities, even during repeated smallpox epidemics.<sup>368</sup> Even for contrabands who managed to survive the outbreak, however, another danger loomed that threatened their freedom.

Despite the fact that District police could no longer detain fugitive slaves and the army could not return them even to loyal masters, contrabands at Camp Barker still were not safe from the threat of re-enslavement. Fugitives from Maryland were banned from the camp and forced to find housing in the District, where they had to live in the “worst areas of Washington,” which were plagued by “disease, crime, and destitution.”<sup>369</sup> Citizens of the District, according to Johnston, were “unwilling to accept their presence and foster their well-being,” leaving them to settle in the most dangerous parts of town with often inadequate shelter and barely enough to live on.<sup>370</sup> Even the contrabands in Camp Barker were not safe, as Maryland masters unaware of the exclusion policy continuously raided the camp, exposing the contrabands to the threat of

---

<sup>365</sup> Winkle, *Lincoln's Citadel*, 314.

<sup>366</sup> *Ibid*, 314-315.

<sup>367</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>368</sup> Johnston, *Surviving Freedom*, 122.

<sup>369</sup> *Ibid*, 167.

<sup>370</sup> *Ibid*, 141, 163, 167.

kidnapping and re-enslavement.<sup>371</sup> The raids, therefore, demonstrate the inability of the army to protect contrabands from small raiding parties even in the military headquarters of the Union, clearly demonstrating a lack of concern for the basic rights of the contrabands. Furthermore, the exclusion policy, which was enacted to prevent the confiscation of Unionist property to appease Maryland slaveholders, indicates a continued focus on the loyalty of the Border States even into 1862 and 1863. Furthermore, it demonstrates the subordination of contraband welfare to the need to ensure the loyalty of Maryland.

Another priority of the Union army and federal government, free labor and the requirement for contrabands to avoid dependency and become self-sufficient, also negatively affected contraband welfare. This policy was common in all three regions throughout the war. The army evicted Virginia contrabands who would not work on government farms, and forced South Carolina contrabands to grow cotton for either the government or lessees. While little farmland existed in Washington, the army still forced contrabands to work for the government or to a private employer approved by the government, or leave the camps and survive on their own with no assistance. The idea of self-sufficiency, therefore, directed contraband policy in all three regions to the detriment of contraband welfare. In particular, Camp Barker, according to Berlin, was set up as a temporary employment depot, and contrabands working at the camp only received six dollars a month along with rations in order to entice them to find work elsewhere.<sup>372</sup> According to Winkle, half of the contrabands found government jobs, either for the army or for various government agencies in the Washington area.<sup>373</sup> For the rest, however, they faced much more tenuous work assignments. Nichols, the superintendent of the camp, wanted the facility to

---

<sup>371</sup> Ibid, 122.

<sup>372</sup> Berlin, ed., *Freedom: The Upper South*, 248.

<sup>373</sup> Winkle, *Lincoln's Citadel*, 313.

be self-sufficient and ordered all contrabands, even children, to work for the camp or find a job elsewhere.<sup>374</sup> He maintained the practice of hiring contrabands out to private employers, who continued to exploit the contrabands with low wages, high prices, and failure to provide essentials such as food and clothing. Some employers even laid off the contrabands without paying any wages, and neither Nichols nor the army authorities did anything to prevent such base exploitation.<sup>375</sup>

Even worse, Nichols sent many contrabands, mostly children forcibly separated from their families, to work in Maryland, where slavery remained legal. The contrabands protested vociferously, stating their fears of returning to a slave state, but Nichols continued to allow Marylanders to hire contrabands, including one man who clearly had Confederate sympathies.<sup>376</sup> Nichols himself admitted that “some” contrabands were indeed re-enslaved upon arrival in Maryland, but continued the practice anyway.<sup>377</sup> These labor practices, especially sending contrabands to a slave state, indicate the degree of emphasis on free labor and self-sufficiency, even risking the freedom of the contrabands to compel them to work. Furthermore, the desire to reduce expenditures led to the requirement that all contrabands work, even if that meant bringing in exploitative private employers. Finally, the raids at Camp Barker had clearly demonstrated the real motives of Marylanders, but rather than driving them away, Nichols and the army allowed them to hire contrabands, bringing to light the true consequences of free labor and self-reliance for the contrabands who thought that Camp Barker would ensure their freedom.

---

<sup>374</sup> Ibid.

<sup>375</sup> Berlin, ed., *Freedom: The Upper South*, 249; Testimony of D.B. Nichols before the American Freedmen’s Inquiry Commission, April 1863, in *Freedom: The Upper South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 293.

<sup>376</sup> Testimony of D.B. Nichols, in *Freedom: The Upper South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 293.

<sup>377</sup> Ibid.

The contrabands who remained in the camp, furthermore, faced another form of mistreatment: abuse by Nichols and the military administrators. Nichols himself admitted that Captain Mackey used “corporal punishment” on the contrabands for relatively minor offenses, and does not describe any attempts to discipline Mackey for such blatant abuse.<sup>378</sup> Lewis Johnson, meanwhile, testified that Nichols “was not very kind” and stated that Johnson “may as well be dead” when he tried to get the wages he was justly owed, especially since Nichols required cash for all purchases of even basic supplies.<sup>379</sup> Kesiah Briggs, meanwhile, testified that Nichols viciously whipped a woman for refusing to go to the smallpox hospital, which would expose her young child to the disease.<sup>380</sup> When Patsy Scott approached Nichols for her housing ticket, Nichols refused to give her housing and not only berated her but also beat her despite her pregnancy, and she had a miscarriage soon after. According to Scott, Nichols treated her worse “than my old master would do.”<sup>381</sup> These cases not only indicate abuse by Nichols, but also the failure of military authorities both at the camp and around Washington to stop it. These contrabands testified to a military court inquiry, but the abuse only continued, demonstrating the clear neglect of contraband welfare by the army in Washington.

Two cases more than any other exemplify the direct participation of Nichols and soldiers in the mistreatment of contrabands. Betsey Brown, a washerwoman for the commissary, became ill and needed blankets and warm clothing. She lived in a tent that was “full of holes” since Nichols refused to replace worn-out tents due to an emphasis on economy, even though they

---

<sup>378</sup> Testimony of D. B. Nichols before the American Freedmen’s Inquiry Commission, April 1863, in *Freedom: The Upper South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 290.

<sup>379</sup> Testimony of Lewis Johnson, in Records of U.S. Army Continental Commands, Department of Washington 1862-1869, RG 393, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC.

<sup>380</sup> Testimony of Kesiah Briggs, in RG 393, Washington, National Archives.

<sup>381</sup> Testimony of Patsy Scott, in RG 393, Washington, National Archives.

directly contributed to disease during harsh weather.<sup>382</sup> When she went to Nichols to get the basic supplies she desperately needed, Nichols claimed that she did not work hard enough despite her government job and long-term illness and did not deserve anything, even though her son, a soldier in the United States Colored Troops, was killed in combat.<sup>383</sup> Furthermore, he beat her and threatened to have the military arrest her if she complained again, indicating the degree of emphasis on self-sufficiency and the terrible consequences for the contrabands.<sup>384</sup>

When Lucy Ellen Johnson arrived at camp, Nichols refused to give her rations even though her husband worked for the government, ordering her to work as well. When she protested, Nichols ordered the guards, soldiers from the Eleventh New York Volunteers, to arrest her and take her to the guardhouse.<sup>385</sup> The guards kicked and hit her repeatedly, before whipping her and tying her up by the thumbs for half an hour before officers finally intervened to end the sadistic punishment.<sup>386</sup> Even worse, Captain W. L. Frisbie had not only failed to stop the torture but actually ordered his soldiers to use the increasingly harsh measures, and continued in this manner until stopped by superiors.<sup>387</sup> Such behavior by soldiers, and especially officers, clearly illuminates the degree of exploitation and abuse of contrabands at Camp Barker, and the failure of higher authorities to effectively intervene to prevent such abuse, as the camp was located within blocks of federal offices. While federal authorities did step in occasionally, they provided little oversight and failed to stop the repeated abuse of contrabands. Furthermore, the abuse also demonstrates the preference of economy and self-reliance over contraband rights, as army quartermasters and Nichols refused to provide even basic supplies, leading to preventable deaths

---

<sup>382</sup> Testimony of Dr. Garland, in RG 393, Washington, National Archives.

<sup>383</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>384</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>385</sup> Testimony of Fielding Lewis, in RG 393, Washington, National Archives.

<sup>386</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>387</sup> *Ibid.*

from exposure, and the War Department and other federal agencies refused to intervene, demonstrating the low priority given to contraband welfare.

In Washington, in contrast to the other two regions, federal authorities and the army attempted to help alleviate horrendous conditions in the camps, even if their intervention was often belated. The federal government abolished slavery in the District in April 1862, but never created a clear policy for contrabands, leading to delays that cost the lives of large numbers of contrabands.<sup>388</sup> Furthermore, authorities did not want disease-ridden contraband camps to spread epidemics to the city at large, which would undermine the Union headquarters, leading to frequent moves farther from the city center.<sup>389</sup> While the federal government intervened much more in contraband policy in Washington than in Virginia or South Carolina, therefore, delays and the continued focus on self-sufficiency prevented significant improvement, and contrabands continued to face mistreatment and exploitation throughout the war.

By late 1863, Camp Barker became so overcrowded and disease-ridden that the Quartermaster's Department finally acted and began searching for a new location for the contrabands. Lieutenant Colonel Greene, the chief quartermaster, recommended land in Arlington where contrabands could farm and also live in a rural area free of disease outbreaks.<sup>390</sup> Accordingly, quartermasters set up a one thousand acre space with five large farms for the contrabands to grow subsistence crops.<sup>391</sup> In addition, quartermasters promised schools, job training, and ample housing for the contrabands, in addition to wages of ten dollars a month for work at the village.<sup>392</sup> When smallpox again hit Camp Barker in December 1863, therefore,

---

<sup>388</sup> Masur, *An Example for all the Land*, 25.

<sup>389</sup> Winkle, *Lincoln's Citadel*, 233.

<sup>390</sup> Lt. Col. Elias M. Greene to Maj. Genl. S. P. Heintzelman, 5 May 1863, in *Freedom: The Upper South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 298.

<sup>391</sup> Berlin, ed., *Freedom: The Upper South*, 254, 257.

<sup>392</sup> *Ibid.*

Nichols and Colonel Greene opened Freedmen's Village and began to transfer the contrabands, hoping that they would be eager to leave Camp Barker for an idyllic life on a farm.<sup>393</sup> The reality would prove to be quite different, as, after a move marked by brutality and wanton physical abuse, contrabands arrived to find a half-finished complex with inadequate shelter, leading to further outbreaks of disease the village was designed to prevent.

When Greene announced the move to the contrabands at Camp Barker, many resisted the planned relocation. They feared separation of their families and also hated Nichols, who many saw as abusive.<sup>394</sup> One contraband told a missionary that he "would rather starve in Washington" than move to another camp under Nichols.<sup>395</sup> Greene and Nichols ignored their complaints, however, and began to move the contrabands in winter 1863-1864. Most of the contrabands fled Camp Barker to avoid having to move, and had to find housing and food on their own in the already overcrowded city.<sup>396</sup> Many, according to Winkle, ended up "homeless, helpless, and starving," and the army did nothing to help them.<sup>397</sup> In addition, soldiers cleared contraband settlements in the District and surrounding areas and forced the inhabitants to move to the Village. For example, soldiers cleared a well-appointed camp on General Robert E. Lee's property at Arlington that was located near the village, and ordered all contrabands to leave, even "a dying child."<sup>398</sup> Reacting to the move, one contraband stated that he would return to his "old master" and that he had been treated worse by the Union army than by his owner.<sup>399</sup> Louisa Jane Barker, a missionary, agreed, stating that the move constituted "a tyranny worse than their past

---

<sup>393</sup> Ibid, 257.

<sup>394</sup> Berlin, ed., *Freedom: The Upper South*, 257.

<sup>395</sup> Testimony of Georgiana Willets, January 1864, in *Freedom: The Upper South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 330.

<sup>396</sup> Berlin, ed., *Freedom: The Upper South*, 257.

<sup>397</sup> Winkle, *Lincoln's Citadel*, 347.

<sup>398</sup> Testimony of Mrs. Louisa Jane Barker, January 1864, in *Freedom: The Upper South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 312.

<sup>399</sup> Ibid, 312.

experiences of slavery.”<sup>400</sup> Even worse, General Christopher C. Augur, the commander of the Department of Washington, ordered the move because the settlement “injured the look of the Estate which the government intended to sell at the best advantage,” which demonstrates perhaps more than anything else the neglect of contraband welfare by military authorities and the degree of exploitation they accepted in order to achieve economy and revenue.<sup>401</sup>

When the contrabands reached the camp, meanwhile, they found conditions little better than those they had left behind. The cabins were unfinished, forcing contrabands to sleep in tents, “shivering against the cold wind and damp ground,” and the exposure led to yet another outbreak of smallpox, even though they had been moved out of Camp Barker to avoid smallpox.<sup>402</sup> Furthermore, Nichols and Greene, continuing the emphasis on economy, forced the contrabands to buy firewood in the winter and banned them from cutting their own supply, causing many to suffer without heat during a bitter winter.<sup>403</sup> Quartermasters also diverted supplies from the village to contrabands working for the army, further worsening the shortages of basic supplies.<sup>404</sup> As a missionary stated, shortages of food, clothing, and medicine caused “much suffering,” and a lack of doctors only worsened the misery of the sick.<sup>405</sup>

The labor practices, which seem to anticipate sharecropping and other exploitative practices that emerged during Reconstruction, also, according to Winkle, “emphasized the profitability and military contributions of the camp at the expense of the contrabands’ needs.”<sup>406</sup> Men received ten dollars a month, but the five dollar deduction remained intact, and contrabands

---

<sup>400</sup> Ibid.

<sup>401</sup> Ibid.

<sup>402</sup> Berlin, ed., *Freedom: The Upper South*, 257.

<sup>403</sup> Winkle, *Lincoln’s Citadel*, 349.

<sup>404</sup> Ibid.

<sup>405</sup> F.W.P. to ---, 24 June 1864, in *Extracts from Letters of Teachers Fifth Series*, 18.

<sup>406</sup> Winkle, *Lincoln’s Citadel*, 349.

also had to pay three dollars in monthly rent for their cabins, leaving them with almost no money to buy supplies, including firewood.<sup>407</sup> In addition, in a system similar to leasing in South Carolina, Nichols continued to hire the contrabands out to private employers, and would not let them quit their jobs and return to the village even if their employers abused them.<sup>408</sup> Nichols, however, primarily viewed the camp as a source of military labor and government revenue, and began to impress contrabands for work on the fortifications and other military jobs despite their protests and the separation of families that ensued.<sup>409</sup> Furthermore, just as in Virginia and South Carolina, recruiters for the United States Colored Troops impressed contrabands and forced them to enlist, even interrupting a church service to search for recruits.<sup>410</sup> When Greene replaced Nichols with Captain Joseph M. Brown in 1864, conditions slowly improved within the village, and many contrabands who remained there and managed to avoid impressment began to see it as home rather than a temporary camp.<sup>411</sup> However, impressment continued, and Nichols re-emerged at Mason's Island, where conditions would be much worse for the contrabands sent there from the village.

Mason's Island was set up as a temporary employment depot in 1864 to find jobs for able-bodied contrabands so they would no longer be dependent on government support. Brown sent contrabands who could work from the village to the island whether they consented or not. As Berlin states, "He displayed scant sympathy for the freedpeople's desire to control the conditions under which they worked and lived."<sup>412</sup> Nichols hired contrabands out to private employers and even separated children, including Carter Holmes, from their parents and

---

<sup>407</sup> Ibid, 348.

<sup>408</sup> Ibid, 348-349.

<sup>409</sup> Ibid.

<sup>410</sup> D.B. Nichols to Lt. Col. Greene, 2 April 1864, in *Freedom: The Upper South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 333-334.

<sup>411</sup> Berlin, ed., *Freedom: The Upper South*, 258.

<sup>412</sup> Ibid, 261.

apprenticed them to area farmers, and then failed to intervene when these employers mistreated their contraband laborers.<sup>413</sup> For contrabands waiting to be hired out, furthermore, conditions on the island were dreadful. The barracks had no beds, forcing contrabands to sleep on the floor, and they quickly became overcrowded as Brown sent contrabands faster than Nichols could hire them out.<sup>414</sup> As a result, disease spread quickly, and forty-eight contrabands died in August 1864, followed by sixty in September.<sup>415</sup> The labor practices and conditions on Mason's Island, therefore, illustrate the priority of economy and self-reliance by Nichols and the quartermasters, as Brown and Nichols focused on hiring the contrabands out and removing them from government support, without regard to the consequences for the contrabands, including disease and horrid conditions on the island, separation of families, forced hiring of children, and abusive employers. For the contrabands on Mason's Island, therefore, freedom did mean an escape from slavery, but it did not mean an end to separation of families, impressment and forced labor, indicating the degree of army mistreatment of contrabands in Washington, D.C.

While most of this chapter covers the District of Columbia, a brief analysis of the experiences of contrabands in Alexandria, just south of the Potomac in Virginia, is warranted here since they also experienced mistreatment and exploitation at the hands of the army. General Samuel P. Heintzelman, the commander in Alexandria, refused to build housing for the contrabands in order to keep them away from the city, but more and more kept coming despite his efforts.<sup>416</sup> For the contrabands, Union lines meant freedom, and they kept arriving in order to gain "freedom, safety, and employment" despite the horrendous conditions.<sup>417</sup> The provost

---

<sup>413</sup> Ibid.

<sup>414</sup> Maj. E. H. Ludington and Maj. C. E. Compton to Col. James A. Hardie, 30 July 1864, in *Freedom: The Upper South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 340-342.

<sup>415</sup> 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. Kilburn Knox to Col. James A. Hardie, 13 October 1864, in *Freedom: The Upper South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 350.

<sup>416</sup> Berlin, *Freedom: The Upper South*, 251.

<sup>417</sup> Masur, *An Example for all the Land*, 15.

marshal, John C. Wyman, stated that the lack of housing required “the crowding of them to such a degree as must prove exceedingly dangerous to their own, and perhaps to the health of the city.”<sup>418</sup> As Wyman feared, the lack of shelter contributed to the spread of disease among the contrabands. A missionary with the Rochester Anti-Slavery Society stated, that “women and children are sick and dying, not for want of necessary food, but for want of suitable shelter from this cold storm.”<sup>419</sup> Furthermore, smallpox began to spread in the overcrowded city, causing high mortality among the susceptible contrabands, including five hundred deaths in winter 1862. Heintzelman still refused to build barracks, stating that contrabands would be dependent on government support and not work if they received free housing, indicating the emphasis on self-reliance rather than the welfare of the contrabands.<sup>420</sup> The numbers of contrabands in the city, however, finally forced him to build barracks to alleviate the overcrowding and disease that pervaded the city, but, while the contrabands received shelter, they also faced another form of exploitation.<sup>421</sup>

In an effort to “reduce expenses and foster self-reliance,” Heintzelman and Albert Gladwin, the superintendent, charged rent for barracks rooms, even though contrabands working for the government rarely received regular wages.<sup>422</sup> Gladwin charged the contrabands four to five dollars a month for space in a room that held twelve to sixteen people, even though many contrabands working for the government had not received any wages for five to six months.<sup>423</sup> If

---

<sup>418</sup> Lewis McKenzie to Hon. E.M. Stanton, 19 September 1862, in *Freedom: The Upper South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 268-269.

<sup>419</sup> Julia A. Wilbur to Abraham Lincoln, 7 November 1862, in *Freedom: The Upper South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 275-276.

<sup>420</sup> Ibid, 277; Julia A. Wilbur to Hon. E.M. Stanton, 24 March 1863, in *Freedom: The Upper South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 281.

<sup>421</sup> Berlin, ed., *Freedom: The Upper South*, 251.

<sup>422</sup> Ibid; Capt. Murray Davis to Col. James A. Hardie, 3 December 1864, in *Freedom: The Upper South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 354.

<sup>423</sup> Julia A. Wilbur to Peter H. Watson, 1 April 1863, in *The Harriet Jacobs Papers: Volume 2*, ed. Jean Fagan Yellin, Joseph P. Thomas, Kate Culkin, and Scott Corb (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 473-475.

contrabands could not pay the rent on time, even due to illness or the lack of wages, Gladwin evicted them and forced them to survive on their own in the city with no help from the government.<sup>424</sup> These contrabands, reported Harriet Jacobs, were “packed together in the most miserable quarters, dying without the commonest necessities of life,” and could only receive help from overwhelmed aid societies.<sup>425</sup> Furthermore, Gladwin forced those unable to work to relocate to Arlington, even though the move resulted in the separation of families.<sup>426</sup> The contrabands remaining in Alexandria, furthermore, could no longer receive government rations and had to purchase their own food, even if they had not received any wages.<sup>427</sup> Gladwin and the army authorities, therefore, focused on self-reliance and reduction of government expenses rather than the welfare of the contrabands to the degree of evicting those unable to pay rent through no fault of their own to die on the streets with no access to rations or medical care. Medical care, in fact, remained lacking even for the contrabands able to remain in the barracks.

In the overcrowded barracks, smallpox continued to spread and army medical authorities did nothing to stop it. The only nurses were contrabands themselves, and conditions in the hospital continued to deteriorate. According to missionary Ulysses B. Ward, the contrabands received “little if any medical attendance,” and the decaying hospital became “the complete realization of destitution and misery.”<sup>428</sup> As a result, mortality rates rose to a peak of seven hundred deaths in two months, and the medical neglect continued, as a surgeon only came to the hospital every two days if that.<sup>429</sup> In addition, soldiers confiscated blankets from contrabands,

---

<sup>424</sup> Berlin, ed., *Freedom: The Upper South*, 251.

<sup>425</sup> Harriet Jacobs to J. Sella Martin, 13 April 1863, in *The Harriet Jacobs Papers*, ed. Yellin, et al, 478.

<sup>426</sup> Harriet Jacobs to Julia A. Wilbur, 8 August 1863, in *The Harriet Jacobs Papers* ed. Yellin, et al, 499-500.

<sup>427</sup> Ibid.

<sup>428</sup> Ulysses B. Ward to the Editor of the New York Evening Post, 29 April 1863, in *The Harriet Jacobs Papers*, ed. Yellin, et al, 482.

<sup>429</sup> Ibid, 481-482.

even the sick, claiming that they constituted government property, and then sold them for their own profit, clearly demonstrating the degree of army exploitation of contrabands in Alexandria.<sup>430</sup> As Captain William McLean Gwynne, an army inspector sent to investigate conditions in the city, stated, their “condition is made much worse by being made free,” as a lack of wages, exorbitant rents, ration cutoffs, and the lack of medical care combined to create terrible conditions for the contrabands.<sup>431</sup> The fact that the War Department did nothing in response to his report and actually praised the army for teaching self-reliance exemplifies the low priority given to contraband welfare, and the focus on reducing expenses no matter how bad the conditions.<sup>432</sup> Federal authorities, therefore, not only failed to stop the military from exploiting contrabands, but actually praised them and directly contributed to its continuation, efficaciously demonstrating the mistreatment of contrabands by both military and federal authorities in the Washington area.

Overall, whether in the Washington city jail, Duff Green’s Row, Camp Barker, the Freedmen’s Village, or Alexandria, army authorities exploited, impressed, and abused contrabands in order to reduce expenditures, foster self-reliance, and support the larger war effort. Local commanders failed to pay workers, housed them in squalid, disease-ridden camps, forcibly relocated them, and separated their families through apprenticeship and impressment. Furthermore, the contrabands performed vital military labor, and received only mistreatment in return. As Allan Johnston writes, the contrabands “found themselves firmly entrenched at the bottom of Washington’s social and economic scale, frequently destitute, and abandoned by

---

<sup>430</sup> Julia A. Wilbur to Anna M.C. Barnes, 8 March 1864, in *The Harriet Jacobs Papers*, ed. Yellin, et al, 544.

<sup>431</sup> Capt. William McLean Gwynne to Brig. Gen. John Potts Slough, 1 October 1863, in *The Harriet Jacobs Papers*, ed. Yellin, et al, 503.

<sup>432</sup> *Ibid.*

all.”<sup>433</sup> Despite these obstacles, however, the fact that contrabands worked for the government in the national capital “reinforced the claims of all black people to the rights of citizens.”<sup>434</sup> Army and federal authorities, therefore, while they could exploit contrabands, impress them, and even arrest them, could not deny them the ability to fight for the basic right of citizenship, and the freedmen would claim this right in another battle after the guns of the Civil War fell silent.

---

<sup>433</sup> Johnston, *Surviving Freedom*, 141.

<sup>434</sup> Berlin, ed., *Freedom: The Upper South*, 262.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, military authorities in all three regions abused and exploited contrabands in order to enforce self-sufficiency, reduce government expenditures, and focus resources on the war effort, while the federal government in Washington not only failed to stop it but, on some occasions, even supported the military's contraband programs. There are some differences among the regions, however, that further nuance the behavior of the military.

While Virginia and South Carolina contained ample land for government farms, Washington did not until the Freedmen's Village was established in Arlington, making the military the largest employer and leaving the contrabands with few choices to escape exploitative jobs with the army. South Carolina not only contained available land, but much of it was abandoned and available for the government. The army and Treasury Department briefly considered giving land to contrabands before inviting lessees to purchase land at auction, leading to the exploitative leasing system unique to South Carolina and indicating clearly the focus on profits and revenue rather than the welfare of the contrabands. Virginia, meanwhile, became the only region to experience an extended military campaign, and the presence of McClellan's soldiers only increased opportunities for abuse, as the army placed contraband welfare well behind military objectives and exploited contrabands in the name of military necessity, demonstrating the focus on the war effort at the expense of contraband welfare. While contrabands in Washington and South Carolina never faced a military presence like that in

Virginia, they were still exploited and abused in the name of military necessity, but not to the same degree as those in Virginia during the Peninsula Campaign. Finally, since Washington was the only region of the three analyzed here to be adjacent to a border slave state, contrabands there faced the unique possibility of being arrested as fugitives by the local police, held in deplorable conditions, and returned to slavery while the military stood by and did nothing. In all three regions, however, the military exploited and abused contrabands while the federal government did nothing to stop it, no matter the particular military situation or location of the region.

There are also similarities common across all three areas. First, the army controlled contraband programs, including hiring laborers, setting up camps, regulating supplies of rations, clothing, and other essentials, and providing medical care. Army authorities fell short of these objectives, as they failed to pay wages, cut off rations, tolerated squalid, disease-ridden camps, and refused to provide medical care even during epidemics. Federal authorities did little or nothing to improve the situation for the contrabands. In particular, military authorities who came to all three areas to fight rebels were unprepared for the massive influx of contrabands. The large numbers of fugitives forced them to create haphazard policies including ramshackle camps and government plantations, leading to massive relief expenditures, which led to the emphasis on economy and self-reliance that worsened conditions. In addition, army recruiters and quartermasters used often brutal impressment measures to force contrabands either to enlist or work for the army, without regard to separation of families, and often failed to pay proper wages, leaving the families of these workers destitute, clearly indicating the emphasis on the war effort and self-reliance rather than contraband welfare. Finally, private soldiers in all three regions exploited, stole from, and abused contrabands, and their officers failed to stop it. The army,

therefore, focused on economy, self-reliance, and the war effort, and exploited and abused contrabands, and the federal government did nothing to curtail it.

Overall, the army authorities in Virginia, South Carolina, and Washington, D.C. exploited and abused contrabands in order to reduce relief expenditures and save money for the war, foster self-reliance among the contrabands and avoid dependency on government support, and use available resources for the larger war effort rather than programs for the contrabands. Furthermore, the federal government never created a unified policy outlining the proper treatment of contrabands, forcing unprepared army officers more interested in fighting rebels to come up with programs of their own, directly contributing to exploitation and neglect. As James Oakes writes, “Tens of thousands were ripped from their communities, families were physically separated, the contrabands- sometimes frozen- often starving, got sick and died in the very process that was supposed to free them,” and both the army and the federal government failed to substantially improve conditions.<sup>435</sup> Such neglect foreshadowed the reality after the war, as the Freedmen’s Bureau briefly enforced the rights of freedmen and tried to protect them from abuse, but disappeared at the end of Reconstruction, abandoning the freedmen to the control of the very white southerners who had enslaved them. Sharecropping, tenancy, convict leasing, and other practices that aimed to replicate slavery as closely as possible quickly arose and persisted until the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. One hundred years earlier, the policies of the United States Army, combined with the neglect of the federal government, caused many contrabands to ask, “Is this freedom?” For Carter Holmes and the rest of the contrabands in Virginia, South Carolina, and Washington, D.C., the answer was nothing but freedom.

---

<sup>435</sup> Oakes, *Freedom National*, 428.

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### Manuscript Collections

- Pamphlets in American History Collection, Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library, University of Virginia.
- Records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, Virginia 1865-1872. RG 105, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C.
- Records of the United States Army Continental Commands, Department of Washington 1862-1869. RG 393, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C.

### Published Primary Sources

- Berlin, Ira, Thavolia Glymph, Steven F. Miller, Joseph P. Reidy, Leslie S. Rowland, and Julie Saville, editors. *Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation 1861-1867, Selected from the Holdings of the National Archives of the United States, Series I, Volume III, The Wartime Genesis of Free Labor: The Lower South*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.
- Berlin, Ira. Steven F. Miller, Joseph P. Reidy, and Leslie S. Rowland, editors. *Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation 1861-1867, Selected from the Holdings of the National Archives of the United States, Series I, Volume II, The Wartime Genesis of Free Labor: The Upper South*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.
- Commager, Henry Steele and Rev. Erik Brown, editors. *The Civil War Archive: The History of the Civil War in Documents*. New York: Black Dog and Leventhal Publishers, 2000.
- Emancipation League. *Facts Concerning the Freedmen. Their Capacity and Their Destiny. Collected and Published by the Emancipation League*. Boston: Press of Commercial Printing House, 1863.
- Extracts From Letters of Teachers and Superintendents of the New England Educational Commission for Freedmen, Fifth Series October 15, 1864*. Boston: David Clapp, Printer, 1864.
- Pearson, Elizabeth Ware, editor. *Letters from Port Royal: Written at the Time of the Civil War*. Boston, V.B. Clarke Company, 1906.
- Sears, Stephen W., editor. *The Civil War: The Second Year Told by Those Who Lived It*. New York: Penguin, 2012.
- Second Annual Report of the New England Freedmen's Aid Society, Educational Commission*. Boston: New England Freedmen's Aid Society, 1864.
- Simpson, Brooks D., Stephen W. Sears, and Aaron Sheehan-Dean, editors. *The Civil War: The First Year Told by Those Who Lived It*. New York: Penguin, 2011.

Swint, Henry L. *Dear Ones at Home, Letters from Contraband Camps*. Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1966.

Yellin, Jean Fagan, Joseph P. Thomas, Kate Culkin, and Scott Corb, editors. *The Harriet Jacobs Papers: Volume 2*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008.

#### Secondary Sources

Brasher, Glenn David. *The Peninsula Campaign and the Necessity of Emancipation: African-Americans and the Fight for Freedom*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012.

Butchart, Ronald E. *Schooling the Freed People: Teaching, Learning, and the Struggle for Black Freedom, 1861-1876*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010.

Cobb, J. Michael. "Rehearsing Reconstruction in Occupied Virginia: Life and Emancipation at Fort Monroe," in *Virginia at War: 1864*. Edited by William C. Davis and James I. Robertson, Jr. Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2009.

Dattel, Gene. *Cotton and Race in the Making of America: The Human Costs of Economic Power*. Lanham, MD: Ivan R. Dee, 2009.

Downs, Jim. *Sick from Freedom: African-American Illness and Suffering during the Civil War and Reconstruction*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2012.

Engs, Robert F. *Freedom's First Generation: Black Hampton, Virginia, 1861-1890*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2004.

Foner, Eric. *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party Before the Civil War*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1995.

Gerteis, Louis S. *From Contraband to Freedman: Federal Policy toward Southern Blacks, 1861-1865*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1973.

Harris, William C. *With Charity for All: Lincoln and the Restoration of the Union*. Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1997.

Johnston, Allan. *Surviving Freedom: The Black Community of Washington, D.C. 1860-1880*. New York: Garland Publishing, 1993.

Leech, Margaret. *Reveille in Washington: 1860-1865*. New York: New York Review of Books, 1941.

Litwack, Leon F. *Been in the Storm so Long: The Aftermath of Slavery*. New York: Random House, 1978.

Masur, Kate. *An Example for All the Land: Emancipation and the Struggle Over Equality in Washington, D.C.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010.

McPherson, James M. "Who Freed the Slaves?" in *Drawn With the Sword: Reflections on the American Civil War*. Edited by James M. McPherson. New York: Oxford University Press, 1996.

- Oakes, James. *Freedom National: The Destruction of Slavery in the United States, 1861-1865*. New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2013.
- Poole, Robert M. *On Hallowed Ground: The Story of Arlington National Cemetery*. New York: Walker and Company, 2009.
- Powell, Lawrence N. *New Masters: Northern Planters during the Civil War and Reconstruction*. New York: Fordham University Press, 1998.
- Rose, Willie Lee. *Rehearsal for Reconstruction: The Port Royal Experiment*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1999.
- The Smithsonian Anacostia Museum and Center for African-American History and Culture, *The Black Washingtonians: The Anacostia Museum Illustrated Chronology*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons, 2005.
- Stout, Harry S. *Upon the Altar of the Nation: A Moral History of the Civil War*. New York: Viking Publishers, 2006.
- Winkle, Kenneth J. *Lincoln's Citadel: The Civil War in Washington, D.C.* New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2013.

## VITA

KRISTIN LEIGH BOULDIN

---

2000 Lexington Pointe Drive Apt 6i Oxford MS 38655 (757)570-6111 [klbouldi@go.olemiss.edu](mailto:klbouldi@go.olemiss.edu)

### EDUCATION

M.A. History, University of Mississippi, May 2014

Thesis: "IS THIS FREEDOM?" GOVERNMENT  
EXPLOITATION OF CONTRABAND LABORERS IN  
VIRGINIA, SOUTH CAROLINA, AND WASHINGTON, D.C.  
DURING THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR

B.A. History and Biology, University of Virginia, May 2011

### TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Teaching Assistant, 2012-2014

University of Mississippi

Courses: European History to 1648, United States History to 1865, United States

History since 1877