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CONTRABAND CAMPS AND THE FREEDMEN'S BUREAU DURING THE CIVIL WAR  
AND RECONSTRUCTION

A Dissertation  
presented in partial fulfillment of requirements  
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
in the Arch Dalrymple III Department of History  
The University of Mississippi

by

KRISTIN L. BOULDIN

May 2020

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## ABSTRACT

This dissertation discusses the connections between policies developed in the contraband camps and the policies enacted by the Freedmen's Bureau during Reconstruction. It argues that that contraband camp policies created several models for Bureau agents to follow, and that Bureau agents failed to learn from the problematic contraband camps and enacted policies and programs that had already failed in the camps. In addition, it argues that the federal government failed to provide effective oversight for the camps, which allowed individual camp commanders to institute policies that often undermined the ability of the contrabands to gain economic autonomy, and that poor oversight continued under the Bureau despite a structured bureaucracy. To make these arguments, the dissertation analyzes contraband camps in Virginia, North Carolina, Washington, DC, South Carolina, Kentucky, Mississippi, and Louisiana, and also discusses the Bureau across the South. By including multiple camps, it provides a more complete analysis of connections between the camp and the Bureau and also discusses the specific local circumstances of each camp, such as the legality of slavery in Kentucky or the status of Washington as the national capital. Finally, the dissertation concludes by analyzing the long-term legacies of contraband camp failures during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to argue that policies which originated in the contraband camps had consequences that lasted almost a century.

## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of Dr. John R. Neff, who was a wonderful advisor and mentor to me throughout my graduate career. I would also like to thank my committee members, Dr. April Holm, Dr. Anne Twitty, Dr. Paul Polgar, and Dr. Kirk Johnson for their help and feedback throughout the writing process.

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## INTRODUCTION

By December 15, 1864, John Burnside and his family should have had ample reason to celebrate the holiday season. They had escaped slavery in Kentucky and made it to Camp Nelson, a former training center turned contraband camp near Lexington, Kentucky. John enlisted in the United States Colored Troops, and his family therefore gained admission to the camp, which he hoped would promise them safety from roving slave-catchers.<sup>1</sup> His wife found a job and supported herself, and the family did not need any support from the government, aside from John's army salary.<sup>2</sup>

On November 28, 1864, the camp commander, Speed S. Fry, ordered all contrabands out of the camp in freezing weather, and tore down their homes to ensure they vacated the premises.<sup>3</sup> John was away with his regiment when the army forced his wife and children to tear down their hut and leave the camp, and they all became sick from exposure due to a lack of shelter in one of the coldest winters in Kentucky history.<sup>4</sup> The children became two of almost fifty contrabands who died from exposure or disease during or shortly after the expulsion.<sup>5</sup> Christmas 1864 was not a happy occasion for the contrabands in Camp Nelson.

This story, and countless others, demonstrate the ambiguity of military emancipation and the examples it created for the Freedmen's Bureau during Reconstruction, which could result in

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<sup>1</sup> Affidavit of John Burnside, 15 December 1864, in *Camp Nelson, Kentucky: A Civil War History*, ed. Richard D. Sears (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2002): 150.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Report, New York Tribune, 28 November 1864, in *Camp Nelson*, ed. Sears, 138-139.

<sup>4</sup> Burnside, Affidavit, in *Camp Nelson*, ed. Sears, 150.

<sup>5</sup> General Burnett to John Fee, 20 January 1865, in *Camp Nelson*, ed. Sears, 165.

vastly different outcomes, depending on the state, the military command in the area, the exigencies of war, policies formulated in Washington, D.C., and the presence or absence of northern religious and aid societies in the area. The contraband camp policies did not create exact precedents for Bureau policies, but created examples and models for Bureau agents to follow.

These stories and the factors that shaped them provide the basis for this dissertation. Its major unifying argument is that contraband policy formulated in camps across the South contributed to the policies of the Freedmen's Bureau during the beginning stages of Reconstruction, and how the contrabands, termed freedmen once the war ended, negotiated the rapidly changing landscape to secure their freedom. It focuses on how policies formulated during the war created models for policies created by the Freedmen's Bureau and other agencies during Reconstruction. It also provides ample comparative analysis to elucidate how the experiences of contrabands in different locations varied and what factors accounted for these differences. This dissertation uses numerous perspectives to determine how contrabands shaped military emancipation, with an emphasis on their agency and impact on events both locally and on a national scale.

The dissertation makes several claims about the connections between contraband camp and Freedmen's Bureau policy. First, it argues that the federal government failed to come up with a coherent national policy for contraband camps, leaving individual commanders to decide how to administer the camps, which often resulted in negligence and mistreatment of contrabands due to incompetence or a lack of concern for contraband welfare. Second, it argues that Union authorities often mistreated and exploited contrabands due to racism, an overly strict interpretation of federal policies regarding slavery, particularly in the loyal states, military



exigency, economy, concerns of contrabands becoming dependent on the government, and, in the Mississippi Valley, a lack of sufficient troops to guard against Confederate guerrillas. Third, it argues that opposition to emancipation amongst the white Northern public, due to racism and long-term exposure to proslavery ideas, particularly to the idea of sending contrabands north to relieve crowding in the camps, hampered the ability to provide for the contrabands. Few alternatives existed to the overflowing camps. Fourth, it argues that many failings of contraband policy, including labor contracts, employment on plantations, and self-sufficiency, continued into the early stages of Reconstruction, which indicates that the Bureau did not learn from the failures of contraband camp policy, which hampered the ability of the freedmen to gain economic independence after the war.

In addition to discussing the lack of federal oversight, the dissertation makes clear that the failures of the Bureau cannot be explained by a lack of knowledge of the effectiveness of their policies and programs, as agents had four years of examples from the contraband camps. Rather than learning from the failures of the camps, the Bureau introduced the same exact policies that had caused these failures, which led to the same problems undermining the effectiveness of the Bureau. The institution of mandatory labor contracts, ration reductions, low wages, impressment, and the closure of institutions such as hospitals and schools greatly undermined the ability of the Union army to ensure economic autonomy for the contrabands during the war, and they still became the cornerstones of Bureau policy. The argument that the Bureau's failures stemmed from a lack of knowledge is replaced by the clear connection between contraband camp policy failures and the shortcomings of the Bureau.

Finally, the dissertation argues that policies and belief systems that seemed beneficial actually ended up undermining the ability of the Union army and the Bureau to provide for

contrabands. Missionaries and aid workers in particular believed that a focus on avoiding dependency would benefit the contrabands by ensuring they became self-sufficient. The policy ended up leading to insufficient wages, harsh ration reductions even to families of soldiers, the rapid closure of the camps without real plans for where to send the freedmen, and the termination of support for hospitals and schools that still fulfilled the basic needs of the freedmen. In addition, missionaries focused on instituting their ideas of free labor and religion on the contrabands and often regarded the wishes of the contrabands as unacceptable and inferior, which led to friction and undermined the ability of the missionaries to truly help the contrabands. This argument has relevance today in discussions of limiting access to welfare to avoid dependency on the government by instituting restrictions such as work requirements and maximum income limits that clearly reflect policies instituted in the Freedmen's Bureau almost one hundred fifty years ago.

This argument also extends to military officers and Bureau agents, who shared the belief that their policies were beneficial and necessary to ensure the contrabands became self-sufficient. Rather than harming the ability of the contrabands to obtain economic autonomy, they saw these policies as ensuring they would end any dependency on the government as quickly as possible. The overwhelming focus on avoiding dependency and government expenditure that shaped both contraband camp and Bureau policy indicates how policies seen as beneficial actually ended up harming the contrabands and freedmen by limiting their ability to obtain the savings necessary to purchase land and gain true independence. Without the funds to obtain land, the freedmen mostly had to sign contracts as sharecroppers, meaning that they never achieved economic autonomy due to the consequences of misguided policies that claimed to make them independent and self-sufficient. The dissertation makes clear that policies seen as beneficial to the

contrabands and freedmen, which formed the cornerstone of camp and Bureau policy, actually ended up harming the contrabands.

Officers held firm to these policies due to preconceived beliefs about contrabands and African-Americans in general that pervaded nineteenth century America. As will be discussed in more detail in chapter four, racist ideas fell into two main categories. The first level of racist beliefs constituted an outright belief in the inferiority of African-Americans and an unwillingness to do anything to help them. Officers who held these ideas frequently instituted very conservative policies such as banning contrabands from army lines, failing to pay wages, tolerating abuse by soldiers, and impressing laborers. Many Bureau agents also held these beliefs, which led them to sympathize with planters rather than freedmen even when overwhelming evidence supported the freedman's case. Another group of officers, meanwhile, did not hold such strong racist beliefs but instead only supported contraband policy because it would help win the war. They often were more supportive of helping the contrabands because admitting them into Union lines removed their labor from the Confederacy and supported the war effort. These officers still held ideas such as avoiding dependency and government expenditure, which, as outlined above, undermined contraband policy, but still were more supportive than the first group. Outright abolitionist officers and Bureau agents were rare and most officers held racist ideas, as will be demonstrated throughout this dissertation, and the Bureau's failure to weed out racist agents further indicates that it failed to learn anything from the failures of the contraband camps.

## The Geographic Scope of the Dissertation

To make these arguments, the dissertation utilizes a wide thematic, geographic, and temporal focus. It discusses contraband camps in numerous states and regions to provide a comparative analysis that also demonstrates the consequences of a lack of a federal contraband policy, as different policies emerged in each camp. Contraband camps began in the Eastern Theater and often became much more stable than Western Theater camps. The first contraband camps emerged in the Hampton Roads region of Virginia, which remained under Union occupation for the duration of the war. At these camps, army commanders instituted policies on their own that would create examples for future contraband camps. In South Carolina, all the white planters fled the Sea Islands, leaving the contrabands in possession of abandoned cotton plantations, which was the opposite of the situation in all the other contraband camps, where slaves fled their homes to reach Union lines. South Carolina became the testing ground for policies relating to abandoned plantations and the sale of cotton, which often benefited the government more than the contrabands. The question of land distribution became a major issue on the islands, and provides an opportunity to analyze federal land policy, and the lack thereof, during both the Civil War and Reconstruction. The dissertation also discusses camps in North Carolina. This area is distinctive due to the high proportion of white Unionists, who sometimes provided aid to the contrabands, but could also threaten their freedom by claiming the right to re-enslave contrabands due to their loyalty. Camps in North Carolina faced a constant threat from Confederate guerrillas, and the army's failure to protect the camps foreshadowed similar failures under the Bureau. Washington, D.C., meanwhile, contained numerous camps. Especially after emancipation in the District in 1862, contrabands lived in dilapidated and overcrowded housing due to the plentiful government jobs available, which also contributed to high rates of disease.

Washington is just south of the border state of Maryland, which raised the contentious issue of border state fugitives escaping to the District, where they remained subject to the Fugitive Slave Act until its repeal late in the war and often faced return to loyal masters, especially since Maryland remained a slave state for almost the entire war. In addition, Washington provides an opportunity to truly analyze the development of federal contraband policy, especially since Congress had complete control of District government during the Civil War, while the military controlled other regions of the South.

The western theater camps faced much more instability due to nearby military conflict, the vexing guerrilla problem, and the reality of border states that retained slavery. As a border state, Kentucky also provides an opportunity to analyze the vexing issue of loyal slaveholders attempting to reclaim their property, and, early in the war, of handling the contraband issue in a state that claimed neutrality. The dissertation also focuses on the Mississippi Valley. Camps here faced instability due to almost nonstop military campaigns, which frequently resulted in hasty closure of camps. Camps here faced overcrowding and severe shortages of food, clothing, fuel, adequate housing, and medical supplies, which in turn led to high rates of epidemic disease and mortality. The overcrowding led the government to institute a system of plantation leasing, which aimed to alleviate overflow in the camps but which only led to exploitation by lessees, who often faced no consequences for mistreating contrabands. Also, camps in Mississippi faced a pervasive threat from Confederate guerrillas that was even worse than that in North Carolina, which demonstrates the inability of the Union army to protect the contrabands even in a state with a heavy military presence throughout the war.

## The Thematic Scope of the Dissertation

The dissertation also has an extensive thematic scope. The chapters include material on the establishment of the camps, the development of ad hoc contraband policies that often differed widely across various camps, efforts to put the contrabands to work, the treatment of contraband laborers, community life in the camp, and efforts to establish schools, hospitals, and churches for the contrabands. They also discuss the often-rampant mistreatment of contrabands by military authorities.<sup>6</sup> The chapters include extensive material on the efforts of the contrabands and freedmen themselves to protest mistreatment, maintain their families, and establish communities in the camps and on both government-run and leased plantations. The chapters discuss the efforts of missionaries and northern aid societies to help the contrabands. Finally, the chapters include detail on disease in the camps, which often reached epidemic proportions, and the efforts of the army and aid societies to establish sanitation practices and hospitals to address rising mortality rates. The dissertation has an extensive thematic focus that addresses multiple aspects of the contraband experience from numerous perspectives.

The dissertation has a thorough temporal focus. In addition to discussing the war years in extensive detail, the dissertation includes material on the early years of Reconstruction to elucidate what happened to the freedmen when the contraband camps closed and to emphasize how contraband policy often foreshadowed the policies of the Freedmen's Bureau during Reconstruction, particularly in terms of labor and contracts. In particular, it focuses on the years from the end of the war in 1865 until 1868, when the Bureau slowly began to terminate many aid programs, provost courts, and labor centers, and shifted its focus to supporting schools for

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<sup>6</sup> The lack of a coherent contraband policy to guide military commanders is detailed extensively in Chandra Manning, *Troubled Refuge: Struggling for Freedom in the Civil War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2016).

freedmen, which were often run by northern aid societies or supported by the freedmen themselves via tuition charges. The conclusion includes an overall analysis of the connection between contraband camps and the Freedmen's Bureau, and the failure of both to secure the rights of the freedmen, particularly as Reconstruction ended and the federal government abandoned the freedmen to white Southerners, who instituted sharecropping, peonage, convict leasing, and other restrictions that established a system as close to slavery as the Constitution and federal law permitted. The dissertation, while it mostly focuses on the Civil War years of 1861 to 1865, includes additional material after the war to tell the complete story of the contraband camps and the Freedmen's Bureau, and further validates the thesis that policies formulated in the contraband camps created examples for Freedmen's Bureau programs.

To provide such a comprehensive analysis of the contraband experience, the dissertation uses correspondence from army officers, missionaries, aid workers, government officials, local government officials in Washington, DC, plantation lessees, newspaper reporters, Freedmen's Bureau agents, and even masters, both Unionist and Confederate, attempting to recover their slaves. Although the available source base is extremely limited, it includes sources written by the contrabands and freedmen themselves, including letters, petitions to government officials, and testimony before various investigators sent by Congress and other federal agencies to assess conditions in the camps. While most of the sources are from the perspective of whites, there is also ample evidence for the contraband experience and viewpoint, which further supports the arguments made in the dissertation and demonstrates the importance of contraband agency.

### The Historiography of Contraband Camps and the Freedmen's Bureau

The historiography of contraband camps and the Bureau has changed significantly since the 1860s. The literature has advanced from racist works to monographs that emphasize the

importance of African-American agency. Previously ignored topics such as disease, religion, education, and even the camps themselves are now extensively analyzed in a rapidly growing historiography. The burgeoning debate over self-emancipation has led to an even greater emphasis on the role of the contrabands and freedmen in achieving freedom and, if temporarily, economic autonomy. The literature has also recognized that Reconstruction constituted a failure not because of its exploitation of white Southerners, but rather due to its failure to ensure economic autonomy for the freedmen. Finally, the historiography has produced case studies that provide extensive detail on contraband camps and Bureau activity. The literature has made rapid progress since the Dunning school, but is still developing and changing as new evidence and angles of analysis emerge.

The historiography of emancipation and Reconstruction began after the Civil War.<sup>7</sup> Most historians during this time only focus on criticizing African-American contributions to the war, but a very select group presented the African-American perspective. Republican historians blame the war on the southern “slave power” that not only denied rights to slaves, but to northerners as well through the denial of “civil liberties.”<sup>8</sup> Other historians, who foreshadowed the current “self-emancipation” school, focus on “black participation in the conflict,” how African-Americans played a vital role in achieving their own freedom, and that whites did not hand it to them.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Michael B. Boles, ed. *A Companion to the American South* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2002).

<sup>8</sup> Michael Les Benedict, “A Constitutional Crisis,” in *Writing the Civil War: The Quest to Understand* ed. James M. McPherson and William Cooper, Jr. (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1998), 157-158.

<sup>9</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), 4; Jim Downs, *Sick from Freedom: African-American Illness and Suffering during the Civil War and Reconstruction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 6.



In his 1935 work *Black Reconstruction*, historian W.E.B. Du Bois portrays African-Americans not as passive recipients of white largesse, but as active agents in securing their own emancipation and economic independence, and he argues that they had a “central role” in the history of the Civil War and Reconstruction.<sup>10</sup> He directly contradicts the racist Dunning School literature, which portrays Reconstruction and Union efforts to help freedmen in general in a very negative light, and claims that white Southerners constituted the real victims of Reconstruction. He emphasizes the importance of land distribution and argues that freedmen needed their own land to become truly independent of white control.<sup>11</sup> Since they were not granted land, the “struggle over the labor of the emancipated slave” became the most significant and divisive issue during Reconstruction, as freedmen focused on independence faced Bureau agents focused on the fear of dependency and getting the freedmen to sign labor contracts as soon as possible.<sup>12</sup> Du Bois also pioneered the use of comparative methodology in Reconstruction historiography by comparing emancipation in the South to abolition in other slave societies, particularly in the Caribbean.<sup>13</sup> While he does include the traditional Marxist dispute between capital and labor, he mostly focuses on placing freedmen at the center rather than the periphery of Reconstruction history.<sup>14</sup> This initial literature was challenged by Du Bois, but his work failed to make a significant impact during the post-World War II era.<sup>15</sup> His main arguments would be resurrected during the 1960s, when the Civil Rights Movement compelled historians to reassess the role of African Americans in the Civil War and Reconstruction.

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<sup>10</sup> Eric Foner, *Nothing but Freedom: Emancipation and Its Legacy* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1983), 5.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Eric Foner, “Historiography: The Continuing Evolution of Reconstruction Historiography,” *OAH Magazine of History* 4 no. 1 (Winter 1989), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25162634> (accessed November 9, 2012), 11-12.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

By the 1960s, historians of the Revisionist school shifted the focus of the literature away from the racism of the Dunning school to telling the stories of the freedmen themselves. While the Dunning School depicts the freedmen as illegitimately taking over the South and the Bureau as encouraging black idleness and dependency, the Revisionists take a much more inclusive approach. They portray President Andrew Johnson as a racist and praise the Radical Republicans as “reformers genuinely committed to black rights.”<sup>16</sup> In addition, they refute the Dunning School idea of Reconstruction constituting a “tragic era.” Despite these accomplishments, Revisionist literature also emphasizes that Reconstruction did not achieve enough for African-Americans and still left them impoverished and with few rights once the Bureau withdrew beginning in 1868. That, they argue, is the real reason that Reconstruction was a “tragic era.”<sup>17</sup>

The Revisionists also moved from large-scale national histories to local histories that profile one particular state in order to examine how national debates over Bureau policy affected a particular group of whites and freedmen, and one author in particular has written a monograph that is one of the first major works to focus in detail on a contraband camp and the experiences of its inhabitants.

In her work, written in 1964, Willie Lee Rose profiles emancipation and wartime Reconstruction in the Sea Islands of South Carolina. As the title implies, the Sea Islands became a “rehearsal for Reconstruction” because all of the planters fled when the Union Navy conquered the islands in 1861, leaving the freedmen in control of the large plantations. However, encouraged by the army, northern missionaries and teachers soon arrived to help the slaves

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Benedict, “A Constitutional Crisis,” 173, 305 n 13.

transition to freedom, and it is their story that Rose focuses on.<sup>18</sup> While the work does support the actions of the freedmen and criticize southern whites for their attempts to subvert Reconstruction, it has several shortcomings that reflect those of the Revisionist school as a whole. The work focuses on missionaries and portrays African-Americans as passive with an emphasis on what “whites did for blacks” rather than how blacks contributed to their own emancipation.<sup>19</sup> In addition, it also claims that Reconstruction failed, implying that whites failed to give African-Americans their rights, which further portrays the freedmen as passive victims.<sup>20</sup> The work does make critical contributions to the historiography of Reconstruction. It makes a clear attempt to place the freedmen at the center of the analysis rather than only focusing on white men. Secondly, it specifically studies wartime rather than postwar Reconstruction, which breaks with most of the historiography of the period, which states that Reconstruction did not begin until 1865. Finally, it is another example of the local histories that emerged during the Revisionist period.

The dissertation improves on the Revisionist literature by focusing on the agency of the contrabands themselves and how their decisions influenced the creation of policy, rather than portraying them as passive victims of misguided policy. In addition, it illuminates the shortcomings of the missionaries in much more detail, especially how they often patronized the contrabands and failed to acknowledge their needs and desires when they created their own policies for aid. Finally, it discusses multiple camps rather than individual case studies to provide a more nuanced discussion of the camps and their connections to the Bureau.

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<sup>18</sup> C. Vann Woodward, introduction to *Rehearsal for Reconstruction: The Port Royal Experiment*, by Willie Lee Rose (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1999), xi-xiii.

<sup>19</sup> Kolchin, *First Freedom*, xxiv.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, xxv.

In the late twentieth century, the Revisionists gave way to the post-Revisionists, who portrayed Reconstruction in an even more negative light. They argue that contrabands and freedmen gained no substantive rights and could not gain even economic autonomy because the federal government failed to give them access to land.<sup>21</sup> They criticize the army and Bureau's "reform efforts" as inadequate because army commanders and Bureau officials were actually racists who only focused on compelling freedmen to sign labor contracts due to fears of dependency on the government, and worked with the planters rather than trying to protect the rights of freedmen.<sup>22</sup> They directly contradict the earlier historians who saw Reconstruction as a failure due to the federal government's mistreatment of white southerners. In his work on Reconstruction in Louisiana, for example, William F. Messner argues that the army and Bureau established a system of "quasi slavery" intended to gain profits from the labor of the freedmen, which laid the groundwork for further repression by planters once the Bureau left in 1872.<sup>23</sup> In her work on education, Jacqueline Jones criticizes northern teachers as "condescending and self-righteous," and for teaching subjects such as hygiene and punctuality, which indicated their paternalistic attitude towards the freedmen.<sup>24</sup> The post-Revisionist school does not just criticize the actions of whites. It also addresses one of the major shortcomings of the Revisionist school by not only telling the stories of contrabands and freedmen, but by portraying them as active agents in the struggle for freedom and economic independence rather than passive recipients of white largesse or hostility. The post-Revisionist school indicates how far the historiography of emancipation and Reconstruction had come from the racism of the Dunning school and the midcentury works that ignored the role of African-Americans.

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<sup>21</sup> Foner, "Reconstruction," 12.

<sup>22</sup> Kolchin, "Slavery and Freedom," 251.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 242.

Several post-Revisionist works illustrate the new focus on African-American agency that often remained absent from even the Revisionist works, which tended to focus on the actions of whites. In his work, James Brewer argues that African-Americans “contributed a sustaining effort to the War for Southern Independence,” but he does not discuss Reconstruction.<sup>25</sup> The most significant work written during this period that places African-Americans at the center of the narrative is Leon Litwack’s *Been in the Storm So Long*, which tells the story of emancipation from the perspective of the contrabands. As he states, they are the “principal actors” in the book, which describes “the extent to which blacks and whites shaped each other’s lives and destinies and were forced to respond to each other’s presence” during emancipation.<sup>26</sup> He makes a concerted effort to gain the freedmen’s perspective on emancipation even with a limited source base. He describes the “many and varied ways in which the newly freed moved to reorder their lives” from the perspective of the freedmen themselves, which epitomizes the post-Revisionist school and demonstrates the progress made since the Revisionists only ten years earlier.<sup>27</sup>

Another work that places African-Americans at the center of the narrative but also discusses federal policy is Louis S. Gerteis’s *From Contraband to Freedman*, written in 1973. In this work, he directly claims that he is criticizing earlier historians that portrayed African-Americans as “pawns of Radicals” and is solely focused on placing them at the center of the narrative, even though the monograph is an analysis of federal policies related to contrabands and freedmen.<sup>28</sup> He also follows the post-Revisionist script of censuring Reconstruction by stating that emancipation did not constitute a “social revolution” and that it did not destroy all

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 244.

<sup>26</sup> Leon Litwack, *Been in the Storm so Long: The Aftermath of Slavery* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1979), xi-xii.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, xii-xiv.

<sup>28</sup> Louis S. Gerteis, *From Contraband to Freedman: Federal Policy Toward Southern Blacks 1861-1865* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1973), 3.

aspects of the antebellum social system.<sup>29</sup> In addition, he solely blames the federal government for this failure because the policies of contraband camps did not allow the contrabands to achieve economic independence.<sup>30</sup> During the war, he argues, government and military officials focused on preventing a slave revolt and continuing cotton production rather than ensuring that freedmen received basic civil rights. Federal policy, especially the failure to grant land to the contrabands, “precluded the possibility of radical social reconstruction in the South.”<sup>31</sup> The work is mainly concerned with how freedmen reacted to federal policy and fought for their freedom and civil rights despite the intransigency of the federal government. This trend has continued in the recent works of Reconstruction historiography, which continue to tell the stories of freedmen from numerous perspectives, but still have several shortcomings that are partially addressed by this dissertation.

These shortcomings that the dissertation addresses include a clear connection between camp and Bureau policy, as the post-Revisionist works either discuss the Civil War or Reconstruction without connecting the two different policy programs. Also, the dissertation emphasizes the fact that the Bureau did not learn from failed contraband camp policies, which is an angle of analysis neglected by post-Revisionist works. The dissertation, finally, also gives much more attention to the role of missionaries and private aid societies than post-Revisionist works that focuses mostly on the failures of the military and federal government.

The most recent works on Reconstruction, those written in the 1980s and later, also focus on the agency of contrabands and freedmen, but also take numerous new angles and perspectives on contraband camps and the Bureau. First, they focus on the fact that Freedmen’s Bureau

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid, 5.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, 6-7.

agents worked with planters to ensure a steady labor force and to avoid dependency on the government rather than making sure that freedmen were treated fairly. In addition, they call even the Radical Republicans “conservative” and argue that Reconstruction did not go far enough.<sup>32</sup> Another new argument during this period is the concept of Reconstruction as a “revolution.” For example, James L. Roark argues that the South shifted almost instantly from slavery to free labor, but also focuses on the failures of the federal-run free labor system.<sup>33</sup> Others, however, such as Eric Foner, disagree with this argument and state that Reconstruction did not go far enough to constitute a true revolution since freedmen did not achieve civil rights or, in many cases, economic autonomy.<sup>34</sup> While these works echo many aspects of the post-Revisionist school, they differ due to their blame of the Republicans and the argument that Reconstruction constituted a failed revolution. They address numerous aspects of emancipation and Reconstruction overlooked by the post-Revisionist school, including education, health care, gender, and the ongoing debate over whether the slaves freed themselves.

In his 1988 synthesis, *Reconstruction*, Eric Foner synthesizes the recent and post-Revisionist literature. He argues that contrabands and freedmen were “active agents in the making of Reconstruction” and places their actions at the center of the narrative.<sup>35</sup> In addition, he emphasizes their desire for autonomy, which shaped the “economic and political agenda” of the period.<sup>36</sup> In contrast to most previous historians, he argues that Reconstruction began in 1863 rather than 1865, and calls it an “extended historical process” that began with emancipation.<sup>37</sup> His work is one of the first to discuss contraband camps and federal contraband

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<sup>32</sup> Foner, “Historiography,” 12.

<sup>33</sup> Kolchin, “Slavery and Freedom,” 255.

<sup>34</sup> Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America’s Unfinished Revolution* (New York: Perennial Classics, 2002), 609.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

policy in detail, and the first to connect them to later Reconstruction programs. His account is not as critical of the Freedmen's Bureau and other federal officials as some post-Revisionist works. While he acknowledges that they forced freedmen to sign labor contracts and often cut off rations for dependents, he also argues that they did attempt to ensure that freedmen received their rights.<sup>38</sup> The main argument of the book is that the war, and emancipation in particular, constituted an "earthquake" that shattered the Southern social system, but that Reconstruction was ultimately a failure because it did not ensure that African-Americans gained equal citizenship in the South and in the nation.<sup>39</sup> The final contribution of the work is an extensive discussion of the North during Reconstruction and how the actions of Northerners influenced events in the South, which addresses an aspect of Reconstruction that had been almost completely ignored in the previous historiography.

In his 2012 work *Sick from Freedom*, Jim Downs breaks new ground by arguing that the federal government failed to adequately protect the contrabands from disease due to misguided policies. His work addresses disease and health care, mostly the lack thereof, in contraband camps and plantations. He argues that military officials who saw contrabands as only a burden to their campaigns tolerated horrendous conditions, which contributed to the spread of epidemic diseases.<sup>40</sup> He states, "Tens of thousands of freed slaves became sick and died due to the unexpected problems caused by the exigencies of war."<sup>41</sup> In addition, he argues that unemployment caused by the military's refusal to hire women and children only worsened the problem, as they had no way to support themselves.<sup>42</sup> Finally, he states, the military's decision

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid, 609.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid; Kolchin, "Slavery and Freedom," 256.

<sup>40</sup> Downs, 4.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, 7.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, 8-9.



to transfer responsibility for the health of the contrabands to racist state authorities and the Freedmen's Bureau, which was only concerned with maintaining the labor force, exacerbated mortality further.<sup>43</sup> In addition, Downs makes an interesting comparison between disease epidemics in the southern contraband camps and on Native American reservations in the West, making his one of the first works to integrate the West into the historiography of emancipation and Reconstruction. Finally, he blames the federal government for failing to take appropriate measures to improve conditions, which reiterates the main argument of the recent historiography.<sup>44</sup>

Another angle of analysis in the recent literature is education of freedmen and contrabands. Little work was done in this field until recently, and most of it was virulently racist and only focused on criticizing northern teachers and missionaries. For example, works from the Dunning school criticized the teachers as incompetent abolitionists who had come to undermine the South. Revisionists, meanwhile, stated that teachers improved the lives of freedmen, but were still racists who did not accomplish nearly enough for the students. These works often focused on the white teachers rather than the freedmen.<sup>45</sup> Recent works have focused on the students and the efforts of freedmen and contrabands to support schools. Ronald E. Butchart, for example, describes not only northern white teachers, but also freedmen who became teachers, and he focuses on their efforts to establish schools autonomous of white influence and control.<sup>46</sup> He states that his work is about the "educational effort of the freed people to become a free people."<sup>47</sup> Heather Andrea Williams, meanwhile, covers education in the South from slavery to

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Butchart, *Schooling the Freed People*, ix-xi.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, xv-xvi.

the late nineteenth century and also places the African-American teachers and students at the center of the narrative. She emphasizes the frequent disputes between African-American teachers and white northern teachers and missionaries over control of the schools, the curriculum, and access to supplies. In addition, she discusses education in the contraband camps, which had been mostly ignored in the literature, and argues that the rise of African-American schools led to the development of the first public school system in the South.<sup>48</sup> Finally, Christopher Span discusses education in Mississippi during Reconstruction and argues that African-Americans themselves provided educational opportunities for their people, especially in rural areas often isolated from the Bureau and northern missionaries.<sup>49</sup> While he discusses the white backlash and violence against the education of freedmen, he keeps the freedmen themselves at the center of the narrative. Span's work is an example of a local history, and such local, state, and regional studies have flourished in the last thirty years.<sup>50</sup>

The new works of local history provide not only detailed analyses of particular camps, but also valuable perspective on the vast scope of contraband camp and Freedmen's Bureau policy during the war and Reconstruction. In her work, for example, Patricia Click profiles the

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<sup>48</sup> Heather Andrea Williams, *Self-Taught: African-American Education in Slavery and Freedom* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005).

<sup>49</sup> Span, *From Cotton Field to Schoolhouse*, 5.

<sup>50</sup> Consult the bibliography for a more comprehensive list of case studies, but some examples include 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); Michael J. Cobb, "Rehearsing Reconstruction in Occupied Virginia: Life and Emancipation at Fort Monroe," in *Virginia at War*, ed. William C. Davis and James I. Robertson, Jr. (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2009); Allan Johnston, *Surviving Freedom: The Black Community of Washington, D.C. 1860-1880* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1993); 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); Patricia Click, *Time Full of Trial: The Roanoke Island Freedmen's Colony, 1862-1867* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001); Richard D. Sears, *Camp Nelson, Kentucky: A Civil War History* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2002); Michael B. Ballard, "Union Soldiers React to Slaves, Slavery, Freedmen, and Colored United States Troops during the Vicksburg Campaign," in *Of Times and Race: Essays Inspired by John F. Marzalek*, ed. Michael B. Ballard and Mark R. Cheatham (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2013); Timothy B. Smith, *Mississippi in the Civil War: The Home Front* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2010).

Roanoke Island colony in North Carolina. She discusses how missionaries, the army, and other federal authorities set up and ran a system of camps, but also the lives of the freedmen and their efforts to maintain economic, religious, and educational autonomy. She argues that the federal government abandoned the freedmen when they closed down the colony and left them in an area with few economic prospects and no chance to truly gain economic autonomy.<sup>51</sup> She also compares Roanoke Island to other camps across the South, making the work a comparative as well as a local history. In her work, meanwhile, Susan Eva O'Donovan discusses slavery and emancipation in southwest Georgia, and argues that this region is distinctive because the Union army never arrived there during the war. She states, "Reconstruction was a revolution that failed, but it failed with shocking speed in a region where slave society arrived fast, ferociously, and late."<sup>52</sup> She argues that freedmen had no choices but sharecropping, which led to exploitation of the freedmen and even debt peonage, and that they received almost no civil rights during Reconstruction.<sup>53</sup> John C. Rodrigue, finally, profiles Reconstruction in the sugar regions of Louisiana, where wage labor emerged instead of sharecropping, meaning that freedmen had significant control of their work regimen. He also contrasts the free labor system in Louisiana with that of the cotton South to highlight its distinctiveness.<sup>54</sup> These illustrative examples are only a few of the local histories that have emerged in the recent historiography of Reconstruction.

The most recent works on contraband camps and the Bureau approach the topic from numerous perspectives, which makes the field much more comprehensive and wide-ranging than

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<sup>51</sup> Click: *Time Full of Trial: The Roanoke Island Freedmen's Colony 1862-1867*.

<sup>52</sup> Susan Eva O'Donovan, *Becoming Free in the Cotton South* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 3.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> John C. Rodrigue, *Reconstruction in the Cane Fields: From Slavery to Free Labor in Louisiana's Sugar Parishes* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2002), 1-3.

the Revisionist and post-Revisionist literature. In her work, Chandra Manning focuses on the issue of citizenship and how it shaped the relationships of contrabands to the federal government. In particular, she emphasizes how contrabands used their service to the federal government and the Union military to argue for increased citizenship rights and independence.<sup>55</sup> The work uses a wide range of sources and includes the story of contrabands and freedmen themselves, but the central focus on citizenship obscures other issues, such as economic dependency, racism, and the lack of a federal policy, that also contributed to the failure of the camps. In his work, meanwhile, Kristopher Teters focuses on the experiences of officers in the Western Theater, and their often-reluctant participation in ensuring the freedom of contrabands. He argues that they participated in emancipation as a military necessity rather than from any real sympathy for the contrabands, and that many officers had the same racist views that would plague the Bureau after the war.<sup>56</sup>

Amy Murrell Taylor, meanwhile, uses multiple case studies to analyze the contraband experience and demonstrate the low priority of contrabands for the Union military. She argues that the military only truly cared for contrabands due to military necessity. The book also focuses on the contrabands themselves and their efforts to maintain their freedom and economic independence. The work mostly focuses on the Civil War and does not include extensive material on Reconstruction to truly connect camp policy to Bureau policy, but still makes a significant impact as the first true overview of several contraband camps that focuses on the contrabands themselves.<sup>57</sup> Finally, in her newly published work, Thavolia Glymph focuses on

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<sup>55</sup> Manning, *Troubled Refuge*, 1-15.

<sup>56</sup> Kristopher Teters, *Practical Liberators: Union Officers in the Western Theater during the Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018), 2-3.

<sup>57</sup> Hilary Green, *Review of Embattled Freedom: Journeys Through the Civil War's Slave Refugee Camps*, by Amy Murrell Taylor, *The Journal of the Civil War Era* 9, no. 4 (2019): 660-663.

women in the contraband camps and how their experiences differed from those of men, and she overcomes a severely limited source base to understand their agency and role in shaping contraband camp policy. The historiography of emancipation is rapidly diversifying, but still contains a major gap in connecting contraband camp and Bureau policy that will be addressed by this dissertation.<sup>58</sup>

The final trend to emerge in the recent historiography of emancipation and Reconstruction is the debate over “self-emancipation,” or whether slaves achieved their own freedom by fleeing to Union lines. This debate is very relevant to the camps because it analyzes the importance of the contrabands in the creation of federal policy and whether they had significant impact in the army and government’s decision-making process. In his essay, James McPherson argues against the idea of “self-emancipation.” He states that emancipation could not have occurred without Union victory in the Civil War.<sup>59</sup> As evidence, he argues that Lincoln had always opposed slavery, and the fact that freedom for the slaves who did not reach Federal lines depended solely on the outcome of the war. As he states, only Lincoln’s re-election in 1864 precluded the rise to power of proslavery Democrats, who would have likely nullified the Proclamation.<sup>60</sup> He also argues that Union retreats, especially in the Mississippi Valley, led to the re-enslavement or even death of contrabands, further demonstrating that they could not emancipate themselves. As he states, “Slaves did not emancipate themselves; they were liberated by Union armies” commanded by Lincoln.<sup>61</sup> Finally, he argues, since the Union army emancipated so few slaves, abolition did not become official until the Thirteenth Amendment in

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<sup>58</sup> Thavolia Glymph, *The Women’s Fight: The Civil War Battles for Home, Freedom, and Nation* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2019).

<sup>59</sup> James M. McPherson, “Who Freed the Slaves?” in *Drawn With the Sword: Reflections on the American Civil War* by James M. McPherson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 193.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid*, 195, 196-197, 201, 205.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid*, 207.

1865.<sup>62</sup> Allen Guelzo also takes this side of the argument by claiming that Lincoln freed the slaves with the Emancipation Proclamation. He states that even contrabands who did reach Union lines could not have remained free after the war without legal emancipation since the Proclamation only constituted a wartime measure.<sup>63</sup> These historians clearly disagree with the concept of self-emancipation in favor of the more traditional narrative of political and military emancipation. Newer works give much more focus to the role of the contrabands themselves in achieving emancipation.

Ira Berlin is the first example of a clear self-emancipation argument. He argues that the contrabands “rendered untenable every Union policy short of universal emancipation” and focuses on the “evolution of emancipation” rather than only the Proclamation, the Thirteenth Amendment, or other political actions.<sup>64</sup> He further states that the contrabands were the “prime movers in securing their own liberty,” indicating that they, rather than Lincoln or the army, secured their own emancipation.<sup>65</sup> He criticizes the Proclamation and calls it insufficient because it exempted so many areas of the Confederacy and all of the Border States and did not have any real authority to compel Confederate masters to free their slaves.<sup>66</sup> Berlin does acknowledge that emancipation could not have been achieved without the assistance of the Union army. The contrabands themselves forced the army to appreciate the benefits of emancipation by acting as laborers, scouts, guides, and spies, and by providing crucial information about the Confederate army.<sup>67</sup> Glenn David Brasher echoes this argument in his

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Guelzo, *Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation*, 1, 6, 9.

<sup>64</sup> Ira Berlin, et al., *Slaves No More: Three Essays on Emancipation and the Civil War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 4-6.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid, 112-115.

work, which discusses the role of contrabands in the Peninsula Campaign, which he describes as more important than Antietam in influencing Lincoln's decision for emancipation due to the vital assistance they provided to the Union army.<sup>68</sup> In his work, James Oakes includes extensive detail on contrabands and their contributions to emancipation, even though the work focuses on Republican confiscation policy and still ascribes an important role to the federal government and military. He states that policies passed in Washington failed to alleviate atrocious conditions in the camps, as unprepared military officers often made their own decisions without guidance from the federal bureaucracy. He argues that slaves fleeing to Union lines forced the government to create a uniform contraband policy, clearly indicating his focus on the contrabands as active participants in their own freedom.<sup>69</sup> The debate is far from resolved, as new scholarly works continually emerge on both sides, which indicates the amount of work still to be done in the historiography of emancipation and Reconstruction.

This dissertation, meanwhile, takes a moderate position against self-emancipation. It emphasizes the importance of the contrabands and freedmen to shaping federal policy, but also focuses on the importance of government actions and policies. The contrabands could not have achieved or maintained their freedom without the protection of the Union military, as the dissertation demonstrates by emphasizing the devastating and often fatal consequences for contrabands when the Union army abandoned their camps and left them without any protection from slaveholders and Confederate guerrillas. It also analyzes the shortcomings of federal action on emancipation, as the lack of an overarching national policy for contrabands until the formation of the Freedmen's Bureau in 1865 led to mistreatment, neglect, and even the danger of

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<sup>68</sup> Brasher, *The Peninsula Campaign*, 5-7.

<sup>69</sup> James Oakes, *Freedom National: The Destruction of Slavery in the United States, 1861-1865* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2013), 166, 105, 416.

re-enslavement by Confederate guerrillas. Finally, it discusses how the military, the federal government, and even missionaries often ignored the desires of the contrabands and created policies that undermined the ability of the contrabands to gain economic autonomy. The dissertation takes parts of both sides of the debate to emphasize the role of contraband agency in influencing, even in a limited way, the formation of national policy and programs, but also the vital importance of Lincoln, the military, Congress, and the federal bureaucracy to enforcing and protecting emancipation.

Despite the large number of recent works, some gaps remain in the historiography, and the dissertation addresses a few of them. First, the dissertation analyzes how policies and programs developed in the wartime contraband camps shaped Freedmen's Bureau policy during Reconstruction and how the freedmen resisted federal policies they viewed as undermining their economic autonomy both during the Civil War and Reconstruction. Since the literature up to this point has almost completely ignored the importance of often ad-hoc policies enacted in the contraband camps to the development of Freedmen's Bureau policies, the discussion of early Reconstruction will be a major intervention in the historiography. In particular, it argues that the lack of a federal contraband policy during the Civil War led to the emergence of numerous ad-hoc policies across the various camps. It also discusses the difficulties faced by the Bureau in organizing the localized ad-hoc policies into a uniform program, and how the inadequate Bureau staffing made the enforcement of federal policy even more difficult. The dissertation focuses on the contrabands and freedmen and how their actions helped to shape federal policies, and it addresses one of the most significant gaps in the literature on emancipation and Reconstruction.

Second, it provides significant detail about multiple camps, while also including ample comparative analysis to elucidate how the situation at each camp influenced the contraband



experience. Many works exist that examine particular camps or states during the Civil War and Reconstruction, but the dissertation breaks new ground by not only providing comparative analysis of seven regions but also connecting them all to the development of federal policy in the camps and how the disparate policies influenced the Freedmen's Bureau. A comparative analysis allows for the exploration of various contraband experiences, from urban camps in the District of Columbia to plantation leasing in Mississippi to colonies in North Carolina to government plantations in the South Carolina Sea Islands. The inclusion of Kentucky permits analysis of how the federal government focused on maintaining the loyalty of the Border States. A discussion of Washington, D.C., meanwhile, allows a clearly detailed analysis of the development of federal policy. The dissertation addresses significant gaps in the literature by not only providing wide-ranging comparative analysis of numerous camps, but by focusing on how the policies developed across these camps led to the programs and policies of the Freedmen's Bureau during the early years of Reconstruction.

Third, it includes discussion of both the on the ground reality at each camp and the development (and lack thereof) of policy at the national level. While many works exist that address one side of this angle or another, almost none thoroughly address both sides. In particular, the historiography has ignored the connections between policy in the camps and Freedmen's Bureau programs. The impact of the contrabands in the development of both contraband and Bureau policy needs to be examined in more detail and is a focus of this dissertation. In the final chapter, the dissertation discusses the dissonance between policy enacted by the Bureau office in Washington, DC and the actual policies enacted by Bureau agents across the South. In addition to federal policy, meanwhile, the dissertation addresses the role of missionaries in the creation of policy, another aspect of the field that the literature has

largely ignored. The dissertation combines traditional political history and new social history to analyze both high politics and on the ground programs at each camp, and therefore addresses multiple gaps in the existing historiography.

Finally, the dissertation extends the narrative into Reconstruction to examine what happened to the contrabands in each camp after the war as the Bureau took over the camps and plantations. Most works either cover the Civil War or Reconstruction and fail to address the often-difficult transition that the freedmen faced as camps closed and government support slowly dwindled. The dissertation addresses Bureau failures in detail and connects them to labor programs initiated in the contraband camps to clearly delineate the relationship between contraband policy and Bureau programs. The dissertation also discusses the fate of aid society efforts in the contraband camps and the continued efforts of missionaries to assist freedmen during Reconstruction. In addition, the dissertation discusses the impact of Congressional debates over the Bureau and Reconstruction policy on local Bureau agencies, and how local agents attempted to influence debates in Washington. The dissertation makes numerous improvements in the historiography of the Civil War, emancipation, and Reconstruction.

#### Organization of the Dissertation

The first chapter covers the period from the beginning of the war in April 1861 to the issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation in January 1863. It analyzes the development of the first contraband camps in Virginia and, North Carolina, and South Carolina, and the rampant confusion and unpreparedness across the Confederacy as Union military officers, Congress, the President, and missionaries grappled over what to do with the thousands of contrabands streaming into army camps. While the chapter necessarily includes extensive top-down discussion of military and government policy, it elucidates how missionaries and even the

contrabands themselves contributed to the formation of government and military policy by protesting for their definition of freedom, which often differed from that of the army.

Chapters Two, Three, and Four continue the analysis of contraband camps during the war. The second chapter discusses the eastern theater camps during the second half of the Civil War. Chapter Three, meanwhile, continues the analysis from chapter two but also discusses Kentucky, in order to keep the analysis of contraband camps together in one chapter, and also for ease of comparison between Kentucky and eastern theater camps. During this period, most of the contraband camps became more established. The enlistment of black troops into the Union army, sometimes due to impressment, resulted in most of the military-age men leaving the camps, which meant that their families often had no means of support since pay was irregular at best in the United States Colored Troops and few jobs were available for women and children. The military had to find a way to support a dependent population, and their policies, such as home farms, orphanages, and taxes on wages, would create models for the Bureau. Fears of dependency led officers to cut rations and even attempt to close camps, and these fears would continue to shape Bureau policy during Reconstruction. The second through fourth chapters clearly demonstrate how policies formulated during the war created important models for Reconstruction programs.

Chapter Four briefly discusses the problematic contraband camps in Mississippi and Louisiana before moving on to a detailed analysis of plantation leasing and how the leasing program served as a model for Bureau policy after the war. Leasing set an early example for sharecropping, mandatory labor contracts, and the requirement to stay in a job for the entire year that formed Bureau policy beginning in 1866. Discussing leasing directly before the analysis of Reconstruction makes clear the connections between the policies and problems of the leasing

program and the early policies instituted by the Bureau. The second through fourth chapters clearly demonstrate how policies formulated during the war created important models for Reconstruction programs.

The fifth chapter covers the early Reconstruction period to analyze continuities and disjuncture between contraband camp policy and Bureau programs. It discusses the period from May 1865 to 1868, when President Andrew Johnson, the military, and Congress grappled over almost all aspects of Reconstruction, including the Freedmen's Bureau. This chapter focuses on the formation of the Bureau and the development of Bureau programs across the South and Border States, with an emphasis not only on debates in Washington but also on how freedmen shaped the development of Bureau policy. This chapter also discusses the closing of the contraband camps and what happened to the contrabands as the army forced them out of the camps. The chapter also analyzes the violence against freedmen that pervaded the South from 1866 to 1868, and how the Bureau largely failed to protect the freedmen due to a lack of staff, which demonstrates the lack of true federal commitment to the freedmen. The dissertation utilizes evidence from several contraband camps and regions to argue that policies formulated, often haphazardly, in the camps during the war created numerous models for Bureau policies and programs during Reconstruction.

## Conclusion

Overall, the dissertation is a wide-ranging history of contrabands, freedmen, emancipation, and Reconstruction in the South, the Border States, and the national capital. It focuses on the experiences of the contrabands and freedmen themselves and how they attempted to overcome exploitation and mistreatment by the Union army, the federal government, missionaries, and plantation lessees, while also utilizing top-down political analysis to discuss

the development of policy in the contraband camps and the Freedmen's Bureau. The story begins in early 1861, when three slaves who had escaped the Confederate army approached a Union fort in Hampton, Virginia and became the first of thousands to earn the status of contraband of war.

## CHAPTER 1

### CONTRABAND CAMPS IN THE EASTERN THEATER, 1861-1863

In early December 1861, Massachusetts Governor John Andrews faced a dilemma. Soldiers from his state had been ordered to return contrabands who had run to Union lines to their owners. The fugitives had run from Maryland, so General Stone, the military commander in the area, assumed they ran from loyal owners and therefore remained ineligible for contraband status.<sup>1</sup> Andrews, in his letter to Secretary of War Simon Cameron, stated that he “cannot for a moment believe that the War Department will countenance such proceedings” and continue returning fugitive slaves to their owners.<sup>2</sup> In even stronger language, he stated that “Massachusetts does not send her citizens forth to become the hunters of men” in any region of the South, whether border state or not.<sup>3</sup> Andrews’s letter demonstrates the hesitant and often non-existent federal contraband policy at the beginning of the Civil War, and he would be one of many northern voices, including abolitionists, missionaries, and even some military commanders, opposed to the federal government’s inability to adequately protect the freedom of contrabands across the South.

This chapter discusses the formation of contraband camps in Virginia, South Carolina, North Carolina, and Washington, DC, and the contraband programs enacted in each camp during

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<sup>1</sup> John A. Andrew to Hon. Simon Cameron, 7 December 1861, enclosing unsigned excerpt, 28 November 1861, M-1250 1861, Letters Received, Series 12, Record Group 94, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

the first half of the Civil War. Due to the lack of a coherent federal contraband policy, local camp commanders and superintendents created their own policies and programs, which often remained well ahead of federal regulations and would create models for both policies in later camps and the Freedmen's Bureau during the early stages of Reconstruction. Military exigency, racism on the part of federal and local officials, the chaos of war, and bureaucratic infighting all undermined attempts to create a federal contraband policy throughout the Civil War, which gave greater responsibility to local camp commanders to create their own policies. These same problems, meanwhile, plagued the Bureau after the war, as individual agents often created their own regulations despite the national Bureau bureaucracy. The establishment of wage labor, a focus on avoiding dependency, the impressment of contrabands, and the placement of contrabands on government-run farms all started as contraband camp policies and would become the basis of Freedmen's Bureau policy in 1865 and 1866.

In particular, each region created its own models for Bureau policy after the war. In Virginia, the concept of contraband and the initial acceptance of fugitive slaves at Fortress Monroe set the first precedent for contraband policy, and created the legal justification that would be used across the South and Border States to support contraband programs. The employment of contrabands by the military created an example that would be followed in almost every contraband camp, as did the all-too-frequent failure to pay these contrabands the wages due them for their labor. In South Carolina, meanwhile, the first attempt at setting up a farming program for contrabands became the model for several other contraband camps that used abandoned plantations to both provide jobs for contrabands and raise money for the Union war effort. The widespread presence of missionaries in South Carolina created another precedent, as aid societies and missionaries would flock to the contraband camps and impose their own ideas

of uplift, which often contradicted those of the contrabands. North Carolina, meanwhile, saw the first attempt at establishing a freedmen's colony, and also the army's first attempt to fight off guerrillas that constantly harassed the contraband camps. The army's inadequate response would foreshadow the guerrilla problems that plagued western contraband camps throughout the war, and also the Bureau's inability to stop violence against freedmen during Reconstruction.

Washington, DC, meanwhile, was a distinctive case due to its status as the national capital, especially after slavery became illegal there in 1862. The army had to sort out whether fugitives came from loyal Maryland or disloyal Confederate states, and also attempt to find them housing in the already overcrowded capital. The camps in Washington, finally, provide the clearest demonstration possible of inadequate federal oversight, as the camps located within blocks of the War Department still remained overcrowded, disease-ridden, and plagued with abuse throughout the war.

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 support 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 fact that the contrabands clearly were destitute.<sup>4</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>5</sup> Such opinions led to the focus on self-sufficiency, as military officials implemented contract labor programs that required contrabands to work for

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<sup>4</sup> Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction*, 158.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, 140.



wages, and that only those who worked would receive assistance from the government, even though many contrabands were physically unable to work.<sup>6</sup> 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>7</sup> The army and missionaries 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>8</sup> 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. Such attitudes would continue into Reconstruction, as opposition to the Freedmen's Bureau and any aid to freedmen remained a constant problem even in the North.<sup>9</sup>

The story of Reconstruction policy begins not in 1865 but in 1861 at a Union outpost on the coast of the Confederate state of Virginia. Bureau policy is discussed in ample detail in chapter five, but the connections to the contraband camps became clear as early as 1861. The institution of wage labor rather than land ownership, the curtailment of rations and other forms of support, the impressment of laborers, and the institution of labor contracts all began in 1861 in one or more camps in the Eastern Theater, and formed the backbone of Bureau policy during the early phases of Reconstruction. The problems that plagued these camps, such as a failure to pay wages, inadequate protection from violence, the failure to address employer exploitation, and the

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<sup>6</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), 15.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 23.

<sup>9</sup> Gerteis, *From Contraband to Freedman*, 6.

separation of families, would also undermine the Bureau during Reconstruction and inhibit its ability to institute a free labor system across the South. The camps in 1861 set both positive and negative precedents for the Bureau after the war, meaning that an understanding of Bureau policy has to begin with an examination of the contraband camps in 1861, and the true starting point of contraband policy in southeastern Virginia.

### Virginia: The Foundations of Contraband Policy

In the summer of 1861, the Union Army maintained control of Fortress Monroe on the Virginia Peninsula, but the Confederacy held all the territory surrounding the fort, including the nearby city of Hampton. To prevent the Union troops from utilizing food and other resources in Hampton, the Confederate troops burned the city to the ground. The resulting chaos had the unintended consequence of allowing Hampton's slaves to flee their owners and reach the fort, which created the first major fugitive slave crisis for the federal government during the Civil War.<sup>10</sup>

At this early stage of the war, the Union troops in the fort remained unsure of whether government policy permitted them to accept fugitive slaves into their lines, especially since the Fugitive Slave Act remained in force. The fact that Confederate troops in Hampton forced slaves impressed from their owners to work in horrific conditions near the front lines increased Union willingness to accept the fugitives, both for humanitarian reasons and to deny their labor to the Confederacy. When three of the slaves, Frank Baker, James Townsend, and Sheppard Mallory, heard rumors that they would be sent further south to work in even worse conditions, they fled to the fort and offered to work for the Union Army in exchange for protection from the Confederate

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<sup>10</sup> Berlin, ed, *Freedom: The Upper South*, 87.

army.<sup>11</sup> General Benjamin Butler, the commander of the fort, who faced a “great need of labor in [his] quartermaster’s department,” agreed. He justified his actions as taking “property designed, adapted, and about to be used 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>12</sup> Butler argued that since Virginia claimed to be a foreign country, then the Fugitive Slave Act did not apply and Virginia masters could not come to the fort and reclaim their slaves.<sup>13</sup>

While Butler had acted on his own and without any guidance from the federal government, he soon informed Lincoln of his actions and asked if federal policy permitted him to accept fugitive slaves. Lincoln ordered Butler to accept all fugitives without regard to whether their owners were disloyal, which saved the Union Army the nearly impossible task of determining the loyalty of a fugitive slave’s master. Lincoln ordered Butler not to separate families, even when the women and children could not perform any useful labor.<sup>14</sup> These policies might have set a precedent for federal contraband policy, but these policies would not be reflected on the ground. In Washington, DC, Kentucky, and Missouri, Union commanders sent back fugitives who could not prove that their masters were disloyal in order to maintain the loyalty of the Border States of Kentucky, Missouri, and Maryland, and commanders in Virginia, North Carolina, and Mississippi separated families when they impressed men for labor, often

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<sup>11</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.

<sup>12</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>13</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, 2014), 35.

<sup>14</sup> James Oakes, *Freedom National: The Destruction of Slavery in the United States, 1861-1865* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2013), 99-100.

unpaid, away from the contraband camps, due to the desperate need for labor on military fortifications.<sup>15</sup> These failures reflect the difference between federal policy formulated in Washington and on the ground reality, which continued to persist even after the formation of the Bureau in 1865, which further indicates the important role of contraband policy in formulating Bureau programs.

Once the three contrabands successfully gained shelter at Fort Monroe, hundreds more began arriving, which made the question of their treatment more and more important. As contraband John Boston wrote in a letter to his wife, “This day I can address you thank God as a free man... I am with a very nice Man and have all that heart can wish,” except that he had been forced to leave his wife behind when he ran to Union lines.<sup>16</sup> The federal government did not set any guidelines on wages, rations, clothing, or shelter for the contrabands due to the overwhelming task of ramping up the Union war effort after the catastrophic defeat at First Bull Run, which left Butler to formulate policies on his own. Butler ordered missionary Edward Pierce to “organize the contrabands into a labor force” to work in the “engineer, ordinance, quartermaster, commissary, and medical departments.”<sup>17</sup> Pierce divided the contrabands into first and second-class laborers 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 for laborers and their families. The contrabands only received one or two dollars a month, due to deductions for clothing and a fund to support contrabands who could not work in order to avoid dependency on government funds.<sup>18</sup> Any contraband who was sick for six days in a row or more

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<sup>15</sup> Details on all of these locations and incidents will be provided later in this dissertation.

<sup>16</sup> John Boston to Mrs. Elizabeth Boston, 12 January 1862, Enclosed in Maj. Genl. Geo. B. McClellan to Hon. Edwin Stanton, 21 January 1862, Letters Received, Series 12, Adjutant General’s Office, Record Group 94, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC.

<sup>17</sup> General Orders No. 34, in *Freedom: The Upper South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 111.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

than ten in a month lost half wages for the month, regardless of whether they had any family to support.<sup>19</sup> The low wages reflected the desire to reduce government expenditures and also the belief that the contrabands did not require very high wages to support basic subsistence. Pierce and Butler only wanted to pay enough to avoid dependency on the government, especially given the uncertain status of the contrabands. The low wages did not allow the contrabands to accumulate savings, which undermined Butler's own policy of ensuring self-sufficiency. Despite these wage deductions, Pierce, who Butler named 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 no one should be obliged to work beyond his capacity... and that they should be furnished... with full soldiers' rations."<sup>20</sup> His promises would prove unfulfilled, as commanders at Fort Monroe routinely failed to pay wages, impressed contrabands, and did nothing to stop abuse by soldiers, and the lack of a coherent federal policy or oversight mechanism enabled mistreatment and abuse.

As soon as the first contrabands arrived at Fort Monroe, the army required the able-bodied to work for the government, but then failed to pay the contrabands even the low wages stipulated in Butler's orders. General Wool, who succeeded Butler as commander of the fort in late 1861, justified this exploitation by arguing that the money went to the fund for dependents, but then still refused to pay the contrabands the wages due after deductions for the fund due to an overwhelming focus on economy and avoiding dependency.<sup>21</sup> Wool utilized arguments that would become common not only among military officials, but also the federal government and

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</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>21</sup> Berlin, *Freedom: The Upper South*, 88.

later Bureau officials to justify mistreatment of contrabands. Firstly, he argued that contrabands would refuse to work without government compulsion, and that a mandatory wage labor system based on binding contracts would be necessary to compel them to support themselves.<sup>22</sup> Secondly, he argued that charity or any form of government handouts would encourage contrabands to become dependent on the government, so the contrabands should have to work for all material aid, including clothing and rations.<sup>23</sup> In fact, according to historian Ira Berlin, many officers believed that contrabands-once freed, educated in the basics of reading and writing, and converted to Christianity- would profit from freedom alone without the need for wages or any other form of material support.<sup>24</sup> These ideas led officers at Fort Monroe to strictly enforce mandatory wage labor for the army, and they jailed or even whipped contrabands who attempted to protest bad conditions and the lack of wage payments, which many saw as a mark of slavery.<sup>25</sup> These ideas would have devastating consequences not only for the contrabands at Fort Monroe, but also across the South, as they set precedents for both contraband camp and Bureau policy.

In addition to ideological justifications for the failure to pay wages, corruption also emerged as a major factor, as it would across numerous contraband camps. Officers sold rations and clothing meant for contrabands for their own profit, and even pocketed the money designated for contraband wages.<sup>26</sup> The fact that corruption remained unchecked throughout the

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<sup>22</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>23</sup> Gerteis, *From Contraband to Freedman*, 34-35.

<sup>24</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.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid; Robert Engs, *Freedom's First Generation: Black Hampton, Virginia 1861-1890* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004), 19; Lewis C. Lockwood to Hon. Senator Wilson, 29 January 1862, in *Freedom, The Upper South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 113.

<sup>26</sup> Engs, *Freedom's First Generation*, 21-23.

war and Reconstruction indicates the failure of federal oversight of the camps, which persisted even after the formation of the Bureau and would have terrible consequences for the contrabands. For example, Suthey Parker worked for the quartermaster 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 when he petitioned the federal government for redress.<sup>27</sup> Lewis Lockwood, meanwhile, used his capacity as a minister at Fort Monroe to petition the War Department to improve conditions for the contrabands. He described numerous abuses, including contrabands who only received one dollar total and “inadequate” clothing for themselves and none for their families after six months of work despite the seven thousand dollars in the fund for dependents, and they hoped that Lockwood could intervene on their behalf to the federal government.<sup>28</sup> The federal government did not address his complaints, which again reveals the lack of oversight of the camps and the fear of contraband dependency that pervaded the federal bureaucracy. In another revealing letter, Orlando Brown, the superintendent of contrabands in nearby Newport News, stated that one hundred contrabands working in the hospital had never received any wages, and that only thirty out of more than one hundred contrabands working for the quartermaster had received pay, despite the fact that some had worked for almost a year and had families to support, and the fact that the fund for dependents contained ample cash reserves.<sup>29</sup> Major General Dix, the commander of the southeastern Virginia region, wrote his superiors in Washington that payments did not begin until the end of 1861 for contrabands, despite the fact that white workers at the fort always

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<sup>27</sup> Affidavit of Suthey Parker, 2 September 1865, in *Freedom: The Upper South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 110-111. The quartermaster was in charge of obtaining all supplies for the army with the exception of food, and for transporting supplies wherever they were needed. No record exists of whether Parker ever obtained his back wages.

<sup>28</sup> Lockwood to Wilson, in *Freedom: The Upper South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 113.

<sup>29</sup> Contract Surgeon Orlando Brown to Major General Dix, 7 November 1862, in *Freedom: The Upper South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 135.

received full wages on time.<sup>30</sup> In fact, regular wage payments at Fort Monroe did not begin until late 1863, meaning that contrabands labored without pay for almost two years while military commanders more concerned with economy and avoiding dependency failed to take action.<sup>31</sup>

While the lack of wages itself constitutes a glaring failure of federal oversight, other policies at the fort made conditions for contrabands even worse and also remained unchecked by federal policy or oversight. Late in 1862, C.B. Wilder, superintendent of contrabands, wrote, “As the colored people increase in numbers, so [did] the hostility to them,” and this hostility soon began to result in fatalities.<sup>32</sup> In winter 1862, “thousands of blacks were left without food, clothing, or the means to purchase firewood” during the unusually harsh weather, contributing to a mortality rate of four to six a day, which was also worsened by the lack of adequate clothing, rations, and shelter that directly resulted from the failure to pay wages.<sup>33</sup> In addition, army officers not only used corporal punishment, including whipping, on contrabands, but failed to punish soldiers who beat, robbed, and raped contrabands with impunity, which clearly indicates the racism that pervaded the Union army, even among officers charged with caring for contrabands.<sup>34</sup> In a final example of exploitation, Superintendent C.B. Wilder evicted one hundred contrabands, many of them women and children, from their barracks home in Hampton to house a brigade of soldiers, and gave them land, but also denied them any further government support and ordered them to “take care of themselves” in the city, despite the fact that much of it

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<sup>30</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>31</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>32</sup> C.B. Wilder, quoted in Engs, *Freedom’s First Generation*, 23.

<sup>33</sup> Engs, *Freedom’s First Generation*, 22; Gerteis, *From Contraband to Freedman*, 24.

<sup>34</sup> Lockwood to Wilson, in *Freedom: The Upper South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 113.



still lay in ruins and they had no agricultural implements for farming.<sup>35</sup> Conditions in Hampton became so bad in 1861 and 1862, in fact, that some contrabands voluntarily returned to their masters rather than remain in what they, in petitions to the federal government protesting constant mistreatment, termed “government slavery.”<sup>36</sup> The failure of the federal government to lay out a clear contraband policy led to exploitation and mistreatment at Hampton that remained unchecked by federal oversight, a pattern that would repeat itself across the South and Border States, and also manifest itself during the Peninsula Campaign of 1862.

During the Peninsula Campaign, when 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 under General Robert E. Lee, contrabands from Fort Monroe quickly assumed vital roles for the Union Army as laborers, scouts, and guides for both the Army and the Navy, which supported the campaign from the James River.<sup>37</sup> As Berlin writes, “The freedpeople quickly made themselves indispensable to the Northern war effort,” but the Union army failed to properly compensate them, which led to “hardship for workers and their dependents.”<sup>38</sup> Since General McClellan, a Democrat, held decidedly proslavery views and wanted the Union army to refrain from interference in slavery, he did little to stop abuse of 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,” and the offenders almost never faced discipline for even the worst abuses of contrabands, indicating the consequences of the

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<sup>35</sup> C.B. Wilder to Maj. Gen. Wool, 15 April 1862, in *Freedom: The Upper South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 120-121.

<sup>36</sup> Lockwood to Wilson, in *Freedom: The Upper South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 112; Engs, *Freedom’s First Generation*, 86-87.

<sup>37</sup> For a comprehensive military overview of the campaign, see Stephen W. Sears, *To the Gates of Richmond: The Peninsula Campaign* (New York: Ticknor and Fields, 1992).

<sup>38</sup> Berlin, ed., *Freedom: The Upper South*, 91, 93.

lack of federal policy or oversight of the contraband camps.<sup>39</sup> As historian Glenn David Brasher argues in his work on contrabands in the Peninsula Campaign, soldiers “stole from African-Americans, physically abused slave children, and sometimes raped enslaved women” during their march up the Peninsula, and officers did nothing to stop them due to racism and a focus on avoiding dependency on the government.<sup>40</sup> Even worse for the contrabands, despite the fact that Congress recently passed an Article of War prohibiting the Union Army from returning fugitive slaves to their owners, some officers accepted bribes from masters to return their slaves, even if their loyalty the Union remained doubtful at best.<sup>41</sup> The fact that officers could so flagrantly violate federal law without any repercussions clearly indicates that the federal government failed to maintain effective oversight of the camps during 1861 and 1862.

Even the contrabands who achieved safety behind Union lines and avoided slave catching-officers still faced mistreatment during the Peninsula Campaign. Contrabands who farmed abandoned land faced theft or destruction of their crops by Union soldiers, which forced them to resort to government labor that often failed to pay wages. 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 compensation, leaving him destitute with a family to support.<sup>42</sup> When not enough contrabands volunteered for government labor due to the lack of wages and difficult manual labor in the Virginia heat, army authorities resorted to impressment despite earlier promises not to separate families.<sup>43</sup> These workers often did not

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<sup>39</sup> C.B. Wilder to Major General Dix, 27 June 1862, in *Freedom: The Upper South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 127.

<sup>40</sup> Brasher, *The Peninsula Campaign*, 140.

<sup>41</sup> Berlin, ed., *Freedom: The Upper South*, 93-94.

<sup>42</sup> Testimony of Edward Whitehurst before the Southern Claims Commission, 31 July 1877, in *Freedom: The Upper South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 128-130. The Southern Claims Commission took testimony from contrabands who claimed losses in property due to the actions of the Union Army. Due to a very high standard of evidence required to gain compensation, most contrabands received little or no compensation.

<sup>43</sup> Brasher, *The Peninsula Campaign*, 141, 174; Berlin, ed., *Freedom: The Upper South*, 91-94.

receive any wages at all, which left their families back in Hampton destitute with no way to support themselves. When local impressment did not secure enough workers, authorities in Washington, DC impressed contrabands from the camps there, brought them to Hampton, and also failed to pay them wages, which left their families destitute in the squalid and disease-ridden camps of the capital.<sup>44</sup> The Peninsula Campaign, according to historian Robert Engs, “proved devastating for army-black relations,” in a pattern that would repeat itself across the South, as contrabands often faced exploitation directly connected to military campaigns and the movement of the Union Army.<sup>45</sup>

In November 1862, Major General John Dix, commander at Fort Monroe, ordered the contrabands moved to Craney Island to make room for additional soldiers, and the move continued the exploitation of contrabands by removing them from their farms and homes. He did not give any consideration to the fact that many had steady government jobs at the Fort and, according to missionary Lucy Chase, viewed the island as a “slave-pen” where they would face even worse conditions than at the Fort.<sup>46</sup> Army commanders made the move hastily and without any planning, and the contrabands, according to Dix, were “forced to remain all night on the wharf without shelter and... food” while waiting for a ferry to transport them to the island and were “suffering with disease” due to exposure to the unusually harsh winter cold, and several contrabands died from illness.<sup>47</sup> In addition, Union soldiers robbed the contrabands of the very few supplies they owned, including clothing desperately needed in the winter, and faced no

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<sup>44</sup> Berlin, *Freedom: The Upper South*, 246-247.

<sup>45</sup> Engs, *Freedom's First Generation*, 25.

<sup>46</sup> Lucy Chase to “Our Folks at Home,” January 15, 1863, in Henry L. Swint, *Dear Ones at Home, Letters from Contraband Camps* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1966).

<sup>47</sup> Major Genl. John A. Dix to Hon. E. M. Stanton, 22 November 1862, in *Freedom: The Upper South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 136.

discipline from superior officers.<sup>48</sup> Some soldiers even physically beat the contrabands to force them onto the ferries whether they resisted or not despite their weakened state from two days waiting without shelter and little food 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 on Craney Island, especially since neither Dix nor the missionaries at the Fort explained the reasons behind the relocation and that a contraband camp would be established on the island.<sup>49</sup> Dix reported the move and the resultant mistreatment of contrabands to Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton, and neither he nor any other federal official even censured Dix or ordered him to improve conditions, which further indicates the lack of federal oversight or coherent policy during the early stages of the war.

The army continued the mistreatment of contrabands and corruption after the move as well. By January 1863, more than two thousand contrabands lived on the desperately overcrowded island, which contained almost no land suitable for farming.<sup>50</sup> The army continued to expect the contrabands to support themselves but failed to pay wages just as they had done at Fort Monroe. In fact, the paymaster, Lieutenant Sykes, fled the island with the payroll records but without paying any wages in September 1863, and neither Dix nor his subordinate commanders made any effort to pay the contrabands their back wages, and again faced no censure from the federal government.<sup>51</sup> The army failed to issue enough clothing to the contrabands, who had no way to pay for extra clothing because they had not received the wages owed them. Missionary and aid worker Lucy Chase described children who had almost no

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<sup>48</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>49</sup> Gerteis, *From Contraband to Freedman*, 27.

<sup>50</sup> Today the island is used as a landfill for the nearby Norfolk Naval Station, which indicates its unsuitability for agriculture or even residential development.

<sup>51</sup> C. B. Wilder to Miss Chase, 25 September 1863, in *Dear Ones at Home*, ed. Swint, 86.

clothing and a lack of shoes, which forced her to “send sick and shivering women home” without adequate clothing or footwear despite the winter weather and prevented children from attending her school on a regular basis, meaning they did not receive the education they needed to ensure sustainable economic autonomy in freedom.<sup>52</sup> The army also failed to issue adequate food rations to the contrabands, despite the fact that they could not grow their own food on the barren land of Craney Island. 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, which persisted even in the hospitals where arguments of self-sufficiency could not hold up.<sup>53</sup> Even when the army did issue rations, “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 that plagued the island during its entire tenure as a contraband camp.<sup>54</sup> According to Chase, two to three contrabands died a day, and Berlin cites hundreds of deaths during Craney Island’s tenure as a contraband camp.<sup>55</sup>

While many diseases, including tuberculosis, could not be cured even by the best doctors during the Civil War era, the army still could have taken measures to improve the health of the camp, including issuing adequate clothing for the harsh winter weather, wholesome and nutritious rations, and issuing rations closer to the contraband barracks to prevent exposure to the weather. A higher standard of cleanliness could have been maintained, as almost every barrack contained rat infestations, which worsened the spread of diseases, especially given the lack of

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<sup>52</sup> Lucy Chase to “Home-Folks,” 29 January 1863, in *Dear Ones at Home*, ed. Swint, 45-46.

<sup>53</sup> Lucy Chase to “Dear Ones at Home,” 30 September 1863, in *Dear Ones at Home*, ed. Swint, 92.

<sup>54</sup> Lucy Chase to “Home-Folks,” 20 January 1863, in *Dear Ones at Home*, ed. Swint, 29.

<sup>55</sup> Berlin, ed., *Freedom: The Upper South*, 94; Lucy Chase to “Home-Folks,” 20 January 1863, in *Dear Ones at Home*, ed. Swint, 29.

clean clothes and proper hygiene facilities for the contrabands.<sup>56</sup> A focus on economy and avoiding dependency meant that military officers made little to no effort to improve camp conditions, even though disease outbreaks continued, and missionaries in the area also failed to protest on behalf of the contrabands. The fact that the federal government did not intervene despite receiving numerous letters and reports from the army command at Craney Island indicates not only the lack of oversight, but also the consequences of the lack of a clear contraband camp policy from 1861 to 1863.

The ad-hoc contraband policies established in Virginia created several models that would emerge in camps across the country and later as the cornerstones of Freedmen's Bureau policy. These included including mandatory wage labor, acceptance of women and children into contraband camps, and the provisions of rations, clothing, and shelter for contrabands. They also failed to prevent several forms of exploitation, including the lack of wage payments, impressment, violence and theft by soldiers, and even returning contrabands to their masters, and military officials too concerned about economy, avoiding dependency on the government, and the war effort itself failed to intervene. While the federal government provided the initial acceptance of Butler's contraband policy and passed an Article of War prohibiting the return of contrabands to masters, they failed to provide adequate oversight of the camps or to respond to abuses when clearly informed of conditions in the camps. This lack of attention to contrabands characterized the early stages of the Civil War in camps across the South when commanders were left to make their own decisions on almost all aspects of contraband policy.

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<sup>56</sup> Berlin, ed., *Freedom: The Upper South*, 95.

## South Carolina: Abandoned Plantations on the Sea Islands

On the Sea Islands, the labor system was much different than that found in Virginia, which led to a much larger contraband population due to large numbers of slaves on the islands. The land was divided into large plantations, each home to hundreds of slaves, while Virginia planters held much smaller numbers of slaves. Slaves in South Carolina worked based on the task system, where they were assigned a particular task, such as a number of acres to hoe, and were permitted to return to the quarters after completing that task. Slaves in Virginia, on the other hand, worked from sunrise to sunset under the gang labor system. The most significant difference between the two states is that almost all of the whites fled when the Union Army conquered the Sea Islands, leaving thousands of slaves behind.<sup>57</sup> This distinction alone would lead to much different policies in South Carolina than Virginia, including the first significant attempt at federal oversight of contraband camps.

In November 1861, a Union naval flotilla commanded by Admiral Samuel Francis Du Pont arrived and occupied the islands without opposition, as no Confederate troops were stationed in the islands to provide any kind of organized defense, and South Carolina had the distinction of being the only camp to never face a major military threat during the war. The entire white population of the islands fled as soon as the first United States Marines stepped ashore. Du Pont believed that 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, which provides a

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<sup>57</sup> Ira Berlin, Thavolia Glymph, Steven F. Miller, Joseph P. Reidy, Leslie S. Rowland, and Julie Saville, eds., *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* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 87.

stark contrast to officers in Virginia who accepted bribes to return slaves to rebel masters.<sup>58</sup> Du Pont foreshadowed the racism soon demonstrated by Union authorities and even Northern missionaries by stating in a letter to his wife that the slaves “were filthy but friendly, with scarcely any modification of the pure African feature.”<sup>59</sup> He had sympathy for the contrabands, but saw them as alien and inferior to whites.<sup>60</sup> Such racism, along with federal bureaucratic bickering, would hamper the ability of the army and the missionaries to properly provide for the contrabands, which indicates that a constantly changing federal policy was little better than no policy at all.

The military quickly had to come up with a plan for the contrabands with little input from the federal government. DuPont quickly turned over control of the islands to the Army, and General Thomas Sherman (no relation to the more famous General William Tecumseh Sherman) assumed control of the islands. Sherman, in turn, placed General Rufus Saxton in command of contraband camps at Beaufort and Hilton Head.<sup>61</sup> Contrabands who voluntarily came to the camps worked for the army for three to five dollars a month, but had to buy their own rations with the meager wages even though prices remained inflated throughout the occupation. They also never received adequate clothing for themselves and almost none for their families.<sup>62</sup> According to B.K. Lee, the Superintendent of Contrabands at Hilton Head, the contrabands were “very destitute” and had very little clothing during their time in the contraband camp.<sup>63</sup> As missionary Elizabeth Hyde Botume wrote, the lack of clothing undermined the ability of the

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<sup>58</sup> Admiral Samuel Francis Du Pont to Sophie Du Pont, 13 November 1861, in *The First Year*, ed. Simpson, 597-598.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> Berlin, ed., *Freedom: The Lower South*, 88.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 88-89.

<sup>63</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.



contrabands to work, as their attire was not sufficient for heavy manual labor.<sup>64</sup> Despite the presence of superintendents and other subordinate officers at each camp, enlisted soldiers engaged in “plundering the negro houses of everything of any value” and rarely faced military discipline both due to racism and preoccupation with the war effort, which indicates the failure of oversight at the local camp level.<sup>65</sup> In early 1862, meanwhile, a smallpox epidemic hit the Sea Islands, and the six army physicians failed to set up any type of quarantine system to isolate infected patients from the crowded camps, and the disease rampaged through the camps.<sup>66</sup> The camps constituted a failed first step towards organizing the contrabands. They did not provide adequate supplies due to a focus on economy and avoiding dependency on the government, and wages were not sufficient for the contrabands to support themselves. The overcrowded conditions contributed to the spread of disease. By 1862, financial motivations as well as a newfound desire to set up a model contraband camp led the federal government to take charge in the Sea Islands in the first example of direct federal oversight of a camp.

Sherman and Saxton also had to come up with a plan for abandoned cotton, and the plan clearly demonstrates the consequences of inadequate federal oversight. When the whites fled the islands, the 1861 cotton crop had just been harvested, but no cotton crop had been planted since while the contrabands worked for the army in the camps. The army decided to have the contrabands grow cotton, and to use the money from the harvest to obtain supplies and otherwise support the contraband program. The federal government strongly supported this idea, since they wanted to spend as little money as possible on contraband support due to the already

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<sup>64</sup> W.C.G. to Sir, 24 March 1862, in *Letters from Port Royal, Written at the Time of the Civil War*, ed. Elizabeth Pearson Ware (Boston: V.B. Clarke Company, 1906), 12.

<sup>65</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>66</sup> Edward L. Pierce to Hon. S. P. Chase, 2 June 1862, in *Freedom: The Lower South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 193. Pierce had worked in Virginia contraband camps before moving to South Carolina in early 1862.

massive expenditures of the war.<sup>67</sup> The army and Treasury Department officials set up the plantation superintendent system, where contrabands would be placed on plantations run by government superintendents who would be civilians paid by northern aid societies, meaning that the government had to spend almost nothing to establish and maintain the plantations.<sup>68</sup> Neither the army, the Treasury Department, nor the missionaries and aid societies consulted the contrabands as to their wishes for a labor system, mainly due to racism and a belief that the contrabands were only suited for wage labor. The contrabands strongly opposed cotton as the crop of slavery and preferred to grow food crops to support themselves without relying on often irregular government wages.<sup>69</sup> The army ignored their arguments and officers soon began sending them out of the camps and onto government plantations across Hilton Head, Beaufort, and Port Royal.<sup>70</sup> The Treasury plan seemed to be off to a good start, but the lack of continued federal oversight of the superintendents proved to be its downfall.

The army's plan for rations and wages further demonstrates the failure of federal oversight. Sherman issued General Order Number Nine in February 1862, which established regulations for contrabands working on government plantations. He formulated these regulations without any input from the Treasury Department or the high command of the army, which indicates that federal oversight failed before the program even began. The order required superintendents to pay regular and adequate wages, provide rations and clothing for laborers and families, and to ensure the "humane" treatment of contrabands, but did not provide a specific definition of the term.<sup>71</sup> Later in 1862, another order designated wages of six dollars a month for

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<sup>67</sup> Berlin, ed., *Freedom: The Lower South*, 89-95.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 93.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>71</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.

first class laborers and four dollars a month for second class laborers, with equal amounts of rations provided for both groups.<sup>72</sup> Sherman failed to enforce even these basic orders, and superintendents exploited contrabands while neither the army nor the Treasury Department intervened.<sup>73</sup> One major problem for the superintendents was the lack of federal funds provided for contraband wages, which clearly is the fault of the Treasury Department. According to historian Louis Gerteis, the army had no money to give superintendents for contraband 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 in the extreme heat of the Sea Islands.<sup>74</sup> In contrast, contrabands in Virginia (when they received their full wages) 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 Carolina and the priority of economy over contraband welfare. The federal government and the army clearly had the resources for higher wages in other contraband camps but kept wages in South Carolina so low that contrabands could not support themselves, and neither the army nor the Treasury Department ensured that superintendents paid even these low wages to the contrabands. As a missionary stated, “at present they are working upon faith, without even a definite promise as to what that payment might be,” and the situation improved little on the government plantations.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Capt. Hazard Stevens to the Supt. Dept. of Contrabands, 28 March 1862, in *Freedom: The Lower South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 177. A first-class laborer was able to perform larger and more difficult tasks than a second-class laborer, and therefore received higher wages. Contrabands could move back and forth between the classes based on ability to perform heavy labor.

<sup>73</sup> Rose: *Rehearsal for Reconstruction*, 13.

<sup>74</sup> Gerteis, *From Contraband to Freedman*, 54. While the Sea Islands have mild winters, summers bring triple-digit heat, high humidity, and swarms of mosquitoes, which spread malaria and yellow fever during the Civil War.

<sup>75</sup> E.S.P. to Edward Atkinson, 3 June 1862, in *Letters from Port Royal*, ed. Pearson, 63.

At Coffins Point Plantation, Nathaniel Philbrick, the superintendent, failed to pay the contrabands from December 1862 through March 1863, and also failed to issue clothing or provide adequate medical care even though the contrabands had received no wages and could not buy clothing or pay for physicians or medicine. Despite Philbrick's complaints, 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>76</sup> The National Archives contains numerous letters that Philbrick wrote to the Treasury Department about the lack of funds for the contrabands, but the government did nothing, which indicates that federal oversight of the South Carolina contraband program did not extend beyond a written policy during the first half of the war, and the same would be true for contraband camps across the South.

On Phrogmore Plantation, meanwhile, the contrabands also failed to receive adequate rations or wages and left for jobs with the army, clearly showing the degree of mistreatment of plantation laborers since life in the squalid disease-ridden camps constituted an improvement over the government plantations.<sup>77</sup> In fact, according to Pierce, without the intervention of northern aid societies, contrabands at Port Royal would have faced complete destitution.<sup>78</sup> As J. Miller McKim stated in July 1862, "Until this time their pay has been almost wholly in promises," and they lacked adequate food and clothes.<sup>79</sup> Finally, the superintendents, according

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<sup>76</sup> Edw. S. Philbrick to Edw. L. Pierce, Esq., 26 March 1862, in *Freedom: The Lower South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 168-170.

<sup>77</sup> Richard Soule, Jr., to Edward L. Pierce, Esq., 29 March 1862, in *Freedom: The Lower South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 179.

<sup>78</sup> Excerpt from Edward L. Pierce to Hon. S.P. Chase, 2 June 1862, *Freedom: The Lower South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 201-202;

<sup>79</sup> *The Freedmen of South Carolina: An Address Delivered by J. Miller McKim, in Sampson Hall, July 9<sup>th</sup>, 1862, Together with a Letter from the Same, to Stephen Colwell, Esq., Chairman of the Port Royal Relief Committee* (Philadelphia: Willis P. Hazard Printing, 1862), 6.

to McKim, did not know how to grow cotton, meaning that they were totally unqualified for their postings, and could not be relied on to produce a crop sufficient to pay for supplies for the contrabands, which indicates the clear failure of federal oversight of the superintendent program.<sup>80</sup> As a missionary wrote in a letter home, “Saxton and his staff understand little or nothing of the real wants of the plantations,” which indicates that even the army officers charged with supervising the contrabands had little to no knowledge of cotton cultivation, which clearly hampered their ability to adequately administer free labor agriculture.<sup>81</sup>

Even worse for the contrabands, they faced theft of their meager supplies from the army tasked with supporting and guarding them. Soldiers in Port Royal, for example, despite the fact that authorities never enacted a policy for living off the land and provided soldiers with adequate rations, stole not only the corn crop but also all of the livestock from the plantations, leaving the contrabands “miserably bereft” without a way to support themselves by farming, since agriculture on the Sea Islands required work animals.<sup>82</sup> Soldiers often held racist views and saw exploitation of the contrabands as relatively easy since they faced no consequences. Pierce stated that every single plantation on the Sea Islands faced a shortage of supplies due to theft by soldiers, but the military did nothing to stop it and very few soldiers faced discipline.<sup>83</sup> As McKim stated, the contrabands were “badly treated by some of our soldiers, officers, and privates.”<sup>84</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 constituted the only sustenance for the contrabands since rations

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid, 5-6.

<sup>81</sup> W.C.G. to Sir, 2 September 1862, in *Letters from Port Royal*, ed. Pearson, 84.

<sup>82</sup> Edward L. Pierce to Hon. S.P. Chase, 14 March 1862, in *Freedom: The Lower South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 163.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> McKim, *Freedmen of South Carolina*, 10.

were irregular at best.<sup>85</sup> Finally, Pearson states that “several plantations near Beaufort... had been stripped of their corn by the army” and nothing was done to provide the contrabands with additional rations.<sup>86</sup> The fact that soldiers almost never faced discipline for outright theft from the contrabands indicates the failure of the command at Port Royal to effectively administer the contraband camps since it would not be a major expense to enforce strict discipline on soldiers at the local level.

Despite the Union occupation of the Sea Islands, Confederates recaptured Edisto Island in early 1863 and re-enslaved contrabands who could not escape to one of the other islands, which led to a major crisis on Port Royal Island that demonstrates the inability of the army to adequately support the contrabands. The survivors fled to Port Royal Island with only the clothes on their backs, having lost all the crops planted on Edisto Island.<sup>87</sup> As Brigadier General Rufus Saxton, the military governor of the Sea Islands and Union-held territory in mainland South Carolina, wrote, “Two thousand negroes have been thrown out of employment from the lands they were cultivating... and are now destitute upon my hands.”<sup>88</sup> There were no available jobs on the plantations, so Saxton had to send the contrabands to the already overcrowded camps to work for the army, and they unsurprisingly failed to receive regular wages, which only increased their severe destitution. 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 did not receive regular jobs and wages.<sup>89</sup> The fact that Stanton himself knew of the lack of wages and squalid conditions in the camps indicates that the highest levels of the federal bureaucracy

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<sup>85</sup> T. Edwin Ruggles to Edward L. Pierce, Esqr, 11 April 1862, in *Freedom: The Lower South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 181.

<sup>86</sup> E.S.P. to Edward Atkinson, 25 May 1862, in *Letters from Port Royal*, ed. Pearson, 53.

<sup>87</sup> Berlin, ed., *Freedom: The Lower South*, 91, 98.

<sup>88</sup> Brig. Genl. R. Saxton to Hon. E.M. Stanton, 4 August 1862, in *Freedom: The Lower South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 209.

<sup>89</sup> Capt. R. Saxton to Brig. Gen. M.C. Meigs, 2 October 1863, in *Freedom: The Lower South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 262.

knew of the failure of their contraband policy in South Carolina, but failed to come up with an effective solution. The ad hoc measures introduced later in the war did little to improve the situation on the ground in South Carolina, as the contrabands became a pawn in political battles between Radical and moderate Republicans over land distribution and property rights. That is a subject for Chapter 2, which covers the second half of the Civil War in the Eastern Theater.

While the federal government failed to provide adequate resources or oversight for the contrabands, Gideon's Band, or missionaries from the North, mainly Boston and New York, arrived throughout 1861 and 1862 to provide material aid and religious education to the contrabands. They intended to provide the contrabands with the resources they needed to gain economic autonomy and support themselves in freedom as frugal, hardworking Christians.<sup>90</sup> Conflicts with the army and plantation superintendents began almost immediately, as missionaries argued for improved conditions and regular wages but faced constant pushback. 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.<sup>91</sup> Many plantation superintendents evicted the missionaries from their land and accused them of undermining the work schedule and making the contrabands unwilling to abide by the plantation regulations.<sup>92</sup> As Pearson wrote, the cotton agents hated missionaries as threats to their authority who would undermine the cotton program.<sup>93</sup> While the federal government had given the missionaries permission to work at the islands, therefore, they failed to ensure that military authorities and plantation superintendents cooperated with the

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<sup>90</sup> Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction*, 41.

<sup>91</sup> Edw. S. Philbrick to Edw. L. Pierce, Esq., 27 March 1862, in *Freedom: The Lower South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 172-174.

<sup>92</sup> Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction*, 60-61, 66.

<sup>93</sup> W.C.G to Sir, 24 March 1862, in *Letters from Port Royal*, ed. Pearson, 12.

missionaries for the good of the contrabands, which illustrates a further failure of federal oversight in South Carolina.

The missionaries themselves, however, harbored racist beliefs and often enabled mistreatment of the contrabands by the army and superintendents. McKim stated that some missionaries from Philadelphia thought “the blacks were lazy and good for nothing; spoiled by kind treatment and unmanageable without a master,” and they imposed just as harsh conditions on their leased plantations as any government superintendent.<sup>94</sup> Another missionary stated that “I find them to be rather stupid” and not qualified to make their own decisions. Such thinking led the missionaries to make decisions for them without any input from the contrabands.<sup>95</sup> In addition, missionaries ran stores on the government plantations that charged wildly inflated prices for basic necessities, despite the low wages paid to contrabands.<sup>96</sup> As Pearson stated, the missionaries sold clothing even when the destitute contrabands could not afford it in order to raise money, despite the fact that the children “cannot change their clothes, which are of the raggedest.”<sup>97</sup> The missionaries often deviated from their stated Christian benevolence and mistreated the contrabands, and the failure of federal oversight meant that their actions went unchecked.

The free-labor ideology prominent in antebellum America contributed to an emphasis on contraband labor at the expense of humane treatment and remained a key aspect of both the missionaries’ attitude towards contrabands and army contraband policy. According to Eric Foner, the free labor ideology stated that any worker could become economically independent

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<sup>94</sup> McKim, *Freedmen of South Carolina*, 8. Plantation leasing on the Sea Islands will be discussed in detail in Chapter 2 of this dissertation.

<sup>95</sup> E.S.P. to Sir, 5 October 1862, in *Letters from Port Royal*, ed. Pearson, 93.

<sup>96</sup> Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction*, 220, 228.

<sup>97</sup> H.W. to Sir, 29 April 1862, in *Letters from Port Royal*, ed. Pearson, 24-25.



and gain dignity through hard work and wage labor.<sup>98</sup> In reality, the idea of free labor failed to eliminate major inequity in labor relations and employers had complete control.<sup>99</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>100</sup> Contrabands had to either work for the government or 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>101</sup> The free labor ideology drove contraband policy not only in South Carolina but in camps across the South and in Bureau policy during the early years of Reconstruction.

While the federal government took a much more active role in the contraband camps in South Carolina than in Virginia, it still failed to correct the most egregious abuses of contrabands. The army forced contrabands into squalid, overcrowded camps and then failed to pay wages or improve sanitation to mitigate the frequent outbreaks of disease. The Treasury Department saw the plantation superintendent program as an improvement, but it also led to low wages and did not take the wishes of the contrabands into account. As Pearson stated, “the natural impulse to treat the negroes as objects of charity was thus early found to be a mistaken one; by the end of November [1862] the government... had ceased to give them anything” even when they faced destitution due to a lack of regular wage payments and theft of their crops.<sup>102</sup> In addition, another missionary stated that the “general inefficiency, ignorance and indecision of the

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<sup>98</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>99</sup> *Ibid.*, xvi, xxii.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, xxxii.

<sup>101</sup> Berlin, *The Lower South*, 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.

<sup>102</sup> W.C.G. to Sir, 3 May 1863, in *Letters from Port Royal*, ed. Pearson, 33-34.

authorities” greatly undermined the contraband program, especially due to high number of “jealous and hostile” army officers that opposed any support for the contrabands.<sup>103</sup> The lack of a clear and strictly enforced contraband policy led to unchecked exploitation of the contrabands in South Carolina, as is clearly demonstrated by letters detailing conditions received by Chase and Stanton, who knew of the bad conditions but did little to mitigate them.

#### North Carolina: The Establishment of a Contraband Colony

Results were similar in North Carolina, but the events there deserve separate examination for several reasons, even if it discusses similar topics to those addressed in other camps. This separate examination provides crucial details for examining the consequences of a lack of federal policy to govern the contraband camps and to connect the contraband camps to Bureau policy. First, the camps in North Carolina contained an initial attempt at a self-supporting contraband colony at Roanoke Island, which illustrates the military’s attempts to make the contrabands self-supporting while providing minimal economic assistance to the destitute or those unable to work. These attempts at freedmen’s colonies would mark the contraband camps of North Carolina and set an example for the Bureau to follow after the war. Second, the camps provide one of the first clear examples of direct federal intervention in the contraband camps. Lincoln nominated Edward Stanly to be military governor of northeastern North Carolina and also to govern the contraband camps, but he opposed the entire contraband project and instituted numerous policies that directly contravened federal military policy in his attempt to close the camps, and he continued to do so until he resigned. This example of direct intervention by the federal government in the camps was rare during the Civil War and indicates how even federal nominees

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<sup>103</sup> C.D.W. to Sir, 6 September 1862, in *Letters from Port Royal*, ed. Pearson, 85.

did not follow the government's own contraband policies due to inadequate oversight. Third, the contrabands in North Carolina faced by far the most significant guerrilla threat in the Eastern Theater, and the military's inability to protect the contrabands not only resulted in the closure of numerous camps and the re-enslavement of thousands of contrabands, but also set precedents for the army's similar failure to protect the contrabands on leased plantations in the Western Theater. The guerrilla threat also clearly indicates the low priority of the contrabands to Union policy during the first half of the Civil War. Finally, the North Carolina camps witnessed the growth of missionaries in the governance of the camps, as missionaries became superintendents of the contraband camps there from the beginning of the Civil War, but faced resistance from the military when they attempted to institute benevolent policies for the contrabands.

The Union Army had to provide for the contrabands almost immediately after arriving in North Carolina. In late 1861, a Union army under General Ambrose Burnside landed on the coast and conquered New Bern, Elizabeth City, and Edenton on the mainland and Roanoke Island. Soon after, they also occupied Beaufort and Washington, also on the mainland.<sup>104</sup> As soon as the Union army arrived, whites ran away from New Bern and left their slaves behind, which created a situation very similar to that at Port Royal.<sup>105</sup> Slaves from the countryside took advantage of the chaos of war and occupation to flee to New Bern, and 7,500 contrabands arrived in the town by mid-1862, along with one thousand on Roanoke Island and another 1500 in Washington and Beaufort.<sup>106</sup> As C.H. Tubbs, a Union soldier in Burnside's army wrote, his unit was "on the march again with a large train of slaves, bound for freedom at New Bern."<sup>107</sup> In

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<sup>104</sup> Janette Thomas Greenwood, *First Fruits of Freedom: The Migration of Former Slaves and their Search for Equality in Worcester, Massachusetts 1862-1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 32.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid*; *Incidents of a Three Years Trip at Soldiering as Recollected by C.H. Tubbs, Written from Memory*, North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh, North Carolina, 5.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid*, 32-34.

<sup>107</sup> C.H. Tubbs, *Incidents of a Trip*, 9.

addition, Tubbs states that contrabands led the Union army to Confederate sympathizers, who had their property, including slaves, confiscated.<sup>108</sup> As historian Janette Thomas Greenwood writes, the “runaways’ unshakable faith that the Yankees had come to free them far outstripped the official policy of the federal government in the spring of 1862.”<sup>109</sup> The army quickly set up camps to house the contrabands, and Burnside prohibited the army from returning any fugitive slaves even before Congress passed the Article of War making it a national policy, illustrating how policies formulated at particular contraband camps often remained far ahead of federal policies.<sup>110</sup>

The military quickly outlined a plan for the contrabands that focused on avoiding dependency. On March 12, 1862, the post commander at Roanoke Island, Rush Hawkins, outlined the contraband policy for North Carolina as a whole. Contraband men working for the government would receive twelve dollars a month and women would receive four, along with clothing and rations, while children would receive rations and would not be required to work until they reached twelve years of age. A portion of wages would be deducted to support contrabands unable to work in order to make the camps self-sufficient.<sup>111</sup> Contrabands would be housed in camps not only to protect them from Confederate raiders but also to prevent disease from spreading to the Union army camps. As has been demonstrated in Virginia and South Carolina, a vast difference quickly emerged between written orders and the reality for the contrabands of North Carolina.

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid, 34.

<sup>110</sup> Click, *Time Full of Trial*, 33-35.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid, 38.

The contrabands not only faced low wages, but also abuse from the very soldiers assigned to protect them. As Greenwood writes, “Union officers such as Burnside viewed the contrabands as a burden, and some soldiers saw them as cheap labor or a diversion from the monotony of camp life” and faced little discipline for depredations against contrabands, as demonstrated earlier in Virginia and South Carolina.<sup>112</sup> Some soldiers forced contrabands to entertain them by dancing in an often demeaning and racist manner.<sup>113</sup> As Union soldier Charles H. Tubbs wrote in his memoirs, other Union soldiers stole food from the contrabands, despite the fact that they received ample rations and had unlimited access to the coast for fishing.<sup>114</sup> Contrabands who tried to increase their meager earnings by selling confiscated Confederate cotton faced close confinement in the camps, while soldiers who committed the same offense received no punishment at all, which clearly demonstrates the racism of Union officers.<sup>115</sup> The army authorities at New Bern, particularly General Burnside and his subordinate officers, failed to protect the contrabands from the depredations of the army, despite the fact that separate contraband camps were supposed to protect the contrabands from crimes committed by soldiers.

Missionaries also played a vital role in the administration of North Carolina camps, especially to make up for the shortcomings of army policy. On March 30, 1862, Burnside named Vincent Colyer, a Quaker minister and missionary, Superintendent of the Poor for North Carolina, meaning that he would care for both contrabands and white refugees.<sup>116</sup> Under his leadership, missionaries arrived in ever-increasing numbers to educate and assist the contrabands, but, according to historian Patricia Click, faced an “uneasy” relationship with the

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<sup>112</sup> Greenwood, *First Fruits of Freedom*, 39.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> C.H. Tubbs, *Incidents of a Trip*, 9.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid, 15.

<sup>116</sup> Click, *Time Full of Trial*, 27.

army.<sup>117</sup> Burnside and his officers wanted the contrabands to work and support themselves, and opposed anything that resembled charity.<sup>118</sup> A shortage of jobs undermined their free labor program. Both New Bern and Roanoke Island became extremely crowded, and not enough jobs could be created for the contrabands, especially for women and children.<sup>119</sup> As Colyer wrote, “women and children supported themselves with but little aid from the government, by washing and ironing, cooking...to the troops,” indicating that contrabands could support themselves despite the lack of government employment.<sup>120</sup> A supply of captured Confederate uniforms allowed the army to fully clothe the contrabands, and North Carolina did not suffer the shortages of clothing that plagued Virginia and South Carolina.<sup>121</sup> The contrabands in North Carolina found ways to support themselves in the early stages of the Civil War by working for the government, for individual soldiers, or private employers. They received much more regular wages than contrabands in Virginia or South Carolina, which indicates not only more effective administration of contraband labor programs, but also the importance of a clear contraband labor policy established at the outset of Union control of coastal North Carolina.

While contrabands in North Carolina received much better pay than in Virginia or South Carolina, they did not escape the ravages of disease. As Tubbs wrote in his memoir, overcrowding and possibly contaminated water in New Bern rapidly spread disease among the contrabands.<sup>122</sup> In addition, heat that reached one hundred fourteen degrees in summer 1862 caused contrabands to die from exposure, and the army did not reduce the workload despite the

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid, 28.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid, 39-42.

<sup>120</sup> Vincent Colyer, *Brief Report of the Services Rendered by the Freed People to the United States Army in North Carolina, In the Spring of 1862, After the Battle of New Bern*, by Vincent Colyer, Superintendent of the Poor under Major General Burnside, 1864, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., 33.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid, 36.

<sup>122</sup> Tubbs to Sir, 15 June 1862, Charles H. Tubbs Letters, North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh, North Carolina.

intense and dangerous heat.<sup>123</sup> In addition, the fact that the army located the New Bern contraband camp right next to a swamp directly led to the spread of mosquito-borne diseases such as malaria and yellow fever, but the army did not move the camp even as disease rates rapidly rose in summer 1862.<sup>124</sup> In addition, by winter 1863, Tubbs and his unit had moved to Washington, North Carolina, which also faced severe overcrowding in the contraband camps and corresponding high rates of the respiratory diseases common to the winter season.<sup>125</sup> While medical authorities had no way to cure most of these diseases, they did little to alleviate the overcrowding and environmental factors that led to high disease rates, particularly in the swamps of coastal North Carolina. Moving the camp away from the swamp or even utilizing contraband labor to drain the swamp nearest the camp would have drastically reduced disease rates. Contrabands faced particularly high rates of disease in North Carolina due to the failure of the army to take proper corrective measures due to a focus on economy and reducing expenditures. In early 1863, the situation for the contrabands would get much worse, as a new military governor did everything he could to undermine the contraband program, until the very freedom of the contrabands became an uncertainty two years after they fled their owners to reach Union lines and what they believed to be certain freedom.

The administration of Edward Stanly clearly demonstrates the consequences of inadequate federal oversight of the camps. In May 1862, President Lincoln named Edward Stanly the military governor of Union-occupied North Carolina. Lincoln wanted to reestablish Union authority since he believed that large numbers of Unionists lived in the region. He failed to account for the fact that Stanly held strident proslavery beliefs and strongly opposed the

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<sup>123</sup> Tubbs to Sir, 14 June 1862, Charles H. Tubbs Letters.

<sup>124</sup> Tubbs to Sir, 21 September 1862, Charles H. Tubbs Letters.

<sup>125</sup> Tubbs to Sir, 3 January 1863, Charles H. Tubbs Letters.

army's programs to assist contrabands.<sup>126</sup> Lincoln also believed that, as part of the reconstruction and reconciliation process, that he should enforce as many current state laws as possible, including those related to slavery. Citing the law that prohibited slaves from learning how to read or write, Stanly closed all contraband schools and ordered northern teachers to leave the state.<sup>127</sup> As Colyer stated, it was a "criminal offense, under the laws of North Carolina, to teach the blacks to read, which laws he has come from Washington, DC, with instructions to enforce."<sup>128</sup> The schools remained closed despite strong opposition from the North, and contrabands were denied the education that they sorely needed to succeed in freedom for most of 1862.<sup>129</sup> As bad as the school closings were for the contrabands, however, Stanly also began to attack their very freedom.

Stanly also cited the existence of slavery in North Carolina and the Fugitive Slave Act to argue that contrabands should be returned to their owners and ordered the army to begin re-enslaving contrabands despite the Article of War that specifically prohibited the army from returning contrabands to their owners. The fact that Stanly could so blatantly violate federal law for several months without censure or corrective action starkly demonstrates the failure of federal oversight of the contraband camps in North Carolina during 1862. According to Colyer, "Stanly had returned several fugitive slaves to their owners" by fall 1862, often with the compliance of the army.<sup>130</sup> In June 1862, in fact, Captain William Hammill of the Ninth New York Infantry returned two contrabands to a Plymouth owner of questionable loyalty, and

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<sup>126</sup> Joe A. Mobley, *A Black Community in North Carolina 1863-1900* (North Carolina Division of Archives and History Department of Cultural Resources: Raleigh, 1981), 13.

<sup>127</sup> Colyer, *Services Rendered by the Freed People*, 44.

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

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.



punished soldiers who tried to intervene to help the contrabands.<sup>131</sup> Planters could also petition Stanly for the return of their property, and he almost always granted their wishes. Nicholas Bray found one of his slaves at New Bern and “dragged her forth and drove away with her to the plantation” while the army did nothing despite the fact that he was, according to Colyer, a “well-known rebel.”<sup>132</sup> Numerous other planters also gained admission to the contraband camps to recapture their slaves, and contrabands began fleeing the camps to hide in the impenetrable swamps of coastal North Carolina. As Colyer stated, they “would rather die” than face re-enslavement, especially since harsh punishment often awaited them due to their previous escape.<sup>133</sup> The re-enslavement of contrabands, in fact, did not end until Stanly resigned in disgust in early 1863 in response to the Emancipation Proclamation, which he vehemently opposed.<sup>134</sup> The contrabands could return to the camps, but overcrowding and disease continued, and their freedom remained in jeopardy due to continued Confederate raids.

The brief administration of Edward Stanly demonstrates numerous shortcomings in federal contraband policy during the first half of the Civil War. First, he did not face dismissal or even censure despite blatantly violating an Article of War passed by Congress, and for using the army to violate federal law. Newspaper reports of his actions reached the North, which indicates that the federal government knew of his actions, but still did not dismiss or even censure him. Colyer argues that Lincoln did not instruct Stanly to enforce local laws, especially those that would maintain slavery, which indicates that Stanly violated his presidential instructions but still did not face consequences from the administration.<sup>135</sup> In fact, Lincoln had

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<sup>131</sup> David Silkenat, *Driven from Home: North Carolina's Civil War Refugee Crisis* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2016), 50.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid*, 48.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid*, 51.

<sup>134</sup> Greenwood, *First Fruits of Freedom*, 57.

<sup>135</sup> Colyer, *Services Rendered by the Freed People*, 51.

stated in early 1862 that “no fugitive who once comes within our lines a fugitive from a rebel, shall ever be returned to his master,” but Stanly did just that repeatedly without consequence.<sup>136</sup> The lack of a coherent federal contraband policy allowed Stanly to violate federal law and return contrabands to disloyal masters and close contraband schools without any action taken by the authorities in Washington. While conditions would improve in North Carolina, this inaction set a precedent for inadequate federal response to the clear exploitation of contrabands in other camps across the South.

North Carolina contrabands also began to face a major guerrilla threat late in the war, which the Union Army could not prevent due to major reductions in manpower. By late 1862, only nine thousand Union soldiers remained in North Carolina, as thousands had departed to reinforce Union armies in Virginia.<sup>137</sup> As a result, the contraband camps remained subjected to Confederate raids throughout 1863 and 1864. According to Tubbs, guerrillas captured four hundred contrabands outside of New Bern in July 1863, and also an unspecified number in Tarboro soon after.<sup>138</sup> In February 1864, thirteen thousand Confederates attacked New Bern and captured camps housing 1,800 contrabands. According to historian David Silkenat, “untold numbers were killed and captured” by the Confederates and re-enslaved, but the lack of records means that a precise number will never be known.<sup>139</sup> In summer 1864, the Confederates besieged Plymouth and conquered the city before the Union army could safely evacuate all of the contrabands, and several hundred remained trapped in the city before a Confederate army that offered “no quarter” to African Americans, and perhaps hundreds lost their lives in a city that

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<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

<sup>137</sup> Silkenat, *Driven from Home*, 52.

<sup>138</sup> Tubbs to Sir, 8 July 1863, Charles H. Tubbs Letters.

<sup>139</sup> Silkenat, *Driven from Home*, 70. The Confederates did not maintain records of African-Americans that they re-enslaved, and New Bern camp records do not record a specific number of contrabands missing.

they thought promised freedom.<sup>140</sup> In addition to the contrabands who faced re-enslavement, the Confederate raids led to severe overcrowding in the better-protected camps, as contrabands fled to Beaufort and the central New Bern camp in overwhelming numbers, which led to high mortality rates from disease and exposure. In Beaufort, seventy contrabands died in two weeks in 1864 from exposure due to the lack of shelter after hundreds of contrabands fled from Confederate raids of smaller camps.<sup>141</sup> Despite the continued raids, the Army high command never sent adequate reinforcements to North Carolina due to the ongoing campaigns in Virginia, meaning that the contrabands did not have adequate protection during the entirety of the Civil War. The guerilla raids hampered their ability to obtain secure jobs that would provide economic autonomy.

The army shifted to the creation of a contraband colony to try and concentrate them in a central area that could be better protected, and also created the first contraband bureau. In November 1862, Colyer resigned and Horace James became Superintendent of Blacks for North Carolina.<sup>142</sup> In early 1863, he authorized General Augustus Wild to begin recruiting for the United States Colored Troops, and soon only women, children, and elderly or infirm men remained in the camps.<sup>143</sup> To relieve overcrowding at New Bern, the army established a colony at Roanoke Island, which it hoped would help the contrabands become self-sufficient.<sup>144</sup> The contrabands on the island quickly built homes, and received plots of land for farming and unlimited fishing rights, which meant that the army no longer had to issue rations since the contrabands had ready access to ample supplies of food.<sup>145</sup> After all able-bodied men were

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<sup>140</sup> Ibid, 71.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid, 91.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid, 57.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid, 63-67.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid, 68.

<sup>145</sup> Click, *Time Full of Trial*, 48-49.

required to enlist, the army issued rations to their families to ensure that they never faced starvation if the crops failed or they became too ill to farm.<sup>146</sup> To administer the colony, the army set up a “bureaucratic model that was later emulated in the [Freedmen’s] Bureau” by establishing the Department of Negro Affairs for North Carolina.<sup>147</sup> Led by Colonel Joseph Burnham Kinsman, the Department worked with aid societies to ensure adequate supplies for the contrabands, helped them to find jobs and housing, and also set up schools and churches with the help of northern missionaries.<sup>148</sup> Like the Bureau later in the war, it faced shortages of staff and resources that greatly undermined its ability to administer the camp, and Roanoke Island faced shortages of supplies, horrific sanitary conditions, and a lack of adequate schools for the remainder of the war, but that is also a subject for Chapter 3.

The contraband program in North Carolina during the first half of the Civil War demonstrated the failure of federal policy and oversight of the camps, but also the first attempt to create a centralized bureaucracy for administering the contraband camps. The program began in the same ad-hoc manner as Virginia and South Carolina, as commanders acted with little to no federal guidance, and quickly became overwhelmed by the large numbers of contrabands. Neither the army or the federal government intervened to stop Stanly’s exploitation of contrabands and blatant violations of federal law, which demonstrates more clearly than any other event of the Civil War the consequences of the lack of a federal contraband policy or bureaucracy from 1861 to 1865. While the federal government failed to take appropriate actions, the army acted on its own initiative to establish the Department of Negro Affairs to administer the contraband camps spread across coastal North Carolina. The Department demonstrates how

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<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid, 55.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

the precedents for the Freedmen's Bureau itself emerged from the contraband camps rather than from Congress, the administration, or bureaucrats in Washington, DC. Similar bureaus would emerge in other contraband camps, particularly in Mississippi, which further strengthens the argument of this dissertation that the Freedmen's Bureau and its policies emerged from precedents formulated in the contraband camps, and North Carolina created the first model. The fact that North Carolina constituted the first centralized contraband bureau is even more surprising considering that contraband camps emerged in the very heart of the federal bureaucracy from the first day of the war, and contrabands in the camps in Washington, DC struggled in the face of disorganized leadership and a lack of federal oversight despite their location in the nation's capital.

#### Washington, DC: Inadequate Federal Oversight in the Nation's Capital

In Washington, before the army and government officials could formulate 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 constituted enemy property subject to confiscation, fugitives from the border state of Maryland raised the issue of determining whether a master was loyal or disloyal in order to assign the slave the status of contraband.<sup>149</sup> In 1862, Congress passed a law banning the military 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, which was often an impossible task in the field.<sup>150</sup> Since Washington, unlike Virginia, South Carolina, and North Carolina, remained under the direct control of Congress for the duration of the conflict, federal authorities had much more say in

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<sup>149</sup> Berlin, ed., *Freedom: The Upper South*, 245.

<sup>150</sup> Oakes, *Freedom National*, 189; Johnston, *Surviving Freedom*, 115.

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 that freed slaves held by disloyal owners or who had been forced to work for the Confederate military, Maryland slaveowners continually entered the District to reclaim their slaves, helped by the local police who captured fugitives at the Navy Yard Bridge separating Maryland from Washington.<sup>151</sup> 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 Border States and Maryland in particular due to its proximity to the capital, called for the return of fugitives from Maryland.<sup>152</sup> In 1862, the federal circuit court for Washington DC appointed fugitive slave commissioners and began to hear rendition cases despite the furious protests of local black leaders, including Frederick Douglass, and even local military commander James S. Wadsworth, who tried to help the fugitives but often failed.<sup>153</sup> In addition, enlisted soldiers did not care where fugitives were from, saw their value as laborers who would be willing to perform the hardest and dirtiest jobs, and accepted them into the lines, while the federal government continued to return Maryland fugitives to slavery.<sup>154</sup> The commissioners received ten dollars for remanding a fugitive to slavery but only five dollars for emancipating them, which meant that most cases ended with the fugitive returned to slavery. 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

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<sup>151</sup> Masur, *Example for all the Land*, 28; Winkle, *Lincoln's Citadel*, 237.

<sup>152</sup> Winkle, *Lincoln's Citadel*, 241.

<sup>153</sup> Masur, *Example for all the Land*, 28-29.

<sup>154</sup> Winkle, *Lincoln's Citadel*, 239.

Maryland throughout the early stages of the war.<sup>155</sup> Even though the army tried to help fugitives, the federal government, focused on the loyalty of the Border States, returned them to slavery unless they could prove their owner was disloyal. The government placed the war effort and worries about the Border States ahead of the welfare of fugitive slaves and contrabands. For the contrabands in Maryland and Washington, the consequences of a clear federal policy were worse than the lack of policies early in the war in the southern contraband camps. In fact, the commanders in Virginia, South Carolina, and North Carolina formulated more liberal contraband policies than the federal government in Washington, which indicates the vital role of local camp commanders in formulating federal policy.

Fugitives arrested faced horrid conditions in the local jail, and the federal government took little action, which further indicates poor oversight even in the capital. When the army arrested fugitive slaves from Maryland, they turned them over to the District police and city marshal Ward S. Lamon, who ran the Washington City Jail.<sup>156</sup> As historian Margaret Leech writes, the jail was “a disgrace to the community” and the cells were “dark, unsanitary, and ill-ventilated.”<sup>157</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. Guards locked up contrabands with violent, often racist, criminals despite the fact that they were not accused of a crime themselves.<sup>158</sup> According to William S. Wood, the commissioner of public buildings, “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

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<sup>155</sup> Ibid, 238.

<sup>156</sup> Masur, *Example for all the Land*, 24.

<sup>157</sup> Leech, *Reveille in Washington*, 296.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid, Winkle, *Lincoln's Citadel*, 243.

for the purposes of a jail.”<sup>159</sup> Lamon often falsely accused runaway slaves of crimes in order to justify their imprisonment even when no master came to reclaim them. District police even arrested contrabands who worked for the Union army and falsely claimed that they were fugitives from Maryland in order to justify returning them to slavery. The army failed to intervene to protect them and allowed the District police into their camps to recapture contrabands, which means that officers violated the Article of War prohibiting the army from returning contrabands and still did not face any punishment. The federal government did not enforce its own laws even in the national capital, which clearly demonstrates the inadequate enforcement of contraband policy early in the Civil War.<sup>160</sup>

After an investigation by private detective Allan Pinkerton, who saw the value of the contrabands to the Union army as laborers and spies, abolitionists began to criticize the jail, which led to overwhelming negative publicity. The Washington *Evening Star* newspaper 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>161</sup> Congress finally acted in late 1862 and released all fugitive slaves from the jail and ordered Lamon to only hold fugitives one month, and, if no master came to claim them, to free them no matter the loyalty of their master or where they originally fled from. 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>162</sup> The federal government 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

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<sup>159</sup> William S. Wood, quoted in Winkle, *Lincoln's Citadel*, 243.

<sup>160</sup> Winkle, *Lincoln's Citadel*, 243.

<sup>161</sup> *Washington Evening Star*, quoted in Winkle, *Lincoln's Citadel*, 245.

<sup>162</sup> Report of the United States Senate, quoted in Winkle, *Lincoln's Citadel*, 247.



to the rights of contrabands and fugitive slaves early in the war. While federal action does indicate closer oversight than Virginia, South Carolina, or North Carolina where local commanders acted almost entirely on their own, it still indicates a preventable lack of initiative since the government only acted after hundreds of contrabands had been held as runaways and criminals in horrific conditions. It also indicates the important role of private citizens in exposing the inadequacies of federal contraband policy and the lack of enforcement, which foreshadowed a pattern that would be repeated across the South as aid societies and missionaries constantly appealed to the federal government to improve conditions for contrabands.

The behavior of the police and Maryland slave catchers did sharply reduce public support for the Fugitive Slave Law in the District and made army officers even more willing to protect fugitives. Officers of the Seventy-Ninth New York protected ten fugitives from the police, but the police captured them anyway and sent them back to slavery in Maryland, indicating that even the army could not protect fugitives from the local authorities.<sup>163</sup> By this point, violent protests, along with the Second Confiscation Act, which mandated a loyalty oath to the Union for reclaiming a slave and freed all slaves of disloyal masters whether they worked for the Confederacy or not, and took effect in summer 1862, made the Fugitive Slave Act, according to historian Kate Masur, “unenforceable” in the District.<sup>164</sup> While contrabands who made it to the army no longer had to worry about rendition, they still faced overcrowded, 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, indicating the lack of effective federal oversight even in the nation’s capital.

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<sup>163</sup> Winkle, *Lincoln’s Citadel*, 305.

<sup>164</sup> Masur, *Example for all the Land*, 30; Winkle, *Lincoln’s Citadel*, 305.

Even contrabands who escaped arrest as fugitives faced exploitative labor arrangements. While multiple forms of work, including government farms and leased plantations, provided jobs for contrabands in Virginia, North Carolina, 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>165</sup> In addition, the federal government assumed the responsibility of providing for the families of workers, including housing, clothing, rations, and medical care.<sup>166</sup> In late 1862, Military Governor Wadsworth ordered wages of twenty dollars a month for laborers and twenty five dollars a month for skilled teamsters in addition to rations for workers and their families, which he claimed to be double the wages given to farmhands in the North.<sup>167</sup> In addition, these wages were more than double those paid to contrabands in any of the southern camps, which reflects the high demand for labor in Washington, as the government had to compete with private employers to hire contrabands. Just like in Virginia and North and South Carolina, the contrabands never received full wages, as paymasters deducted five dollars monthly for the support of the hospital as well as destitute women and children.<sup>168</sup> The wage deductions aimed to reduce expenditures and to avoid dependency on the government by making the contrabands totally self-sufficient, which included requiring them to pay for their own medical care. 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>169</sup> The federal

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<sup>165</sup> Berlin, ed., *Freedom: The Upper South*, 244.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid.

<sup>167</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>168</sup> Ibid, 269-270.

<sup>169</sup> Berlin, ed., *Freedom: The Upper South*, 244.

government did not intervene to ensure that paymasters properly paid contrabands, even when the camps were blocks from federal offices, indicating that the lack of a federal policy or oversight program even undermined contraband programs in the national capital.

The army often failed to pay contrabands even their low wages. According to historian 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 did not receive decent treatment or compensation for their difficult labor.<sup>170</sup> Many contrabands only received pay once every three months if that, as military authorities believed that food and freedom constituted adequate compensation. The lack of wages combined with the lack of promised distribution of clothing and regular rations, forced contrabands to buy basic supplies on credit at “exorbitant prices,” placing them in crippling debt, which army authorities ensured they paid back by further deducting their wages.<sup>171</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>172</sup> The tax ended up further impoverishing the contrabands while failing to ensure that those unable to work received adequate support, as supplies of rations and clothing failed to come regularly, and sometimes not at all, which indicates a further failure of contraband policy during the early stages of the war in Washington DC.

A few examples of nonpayment demonstrate the consequences of inadequate federal oversight. G. W. Simms, for example, worked as a military blacksmith for eleven months at a supposed wage of thirty dollars a month, but could not support his family due to the tax and

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<sup>170</sup> Berlin, ed., *Freedom: The Upper South*, 249.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, 250-251.

irregular payments, as he rarely received even close to his promised wage every month and often received no pay at all.<sup>173</sup> Contrabands working for the quartermaster failed to receive any wages for an entire year, leaving them “in great need,” but Quartermaster General Montgomery Meigs refused to grant them any back pay. He stated that their rations constituted the only compensation necessary, without regard to the needs of their families, who did not receive any rations or clothing despite the tax to support dependents.<sup>174</sup> According to a missionary teacher, military authorities also cut off wages and rations to contrabands who became ill and could no longer work, leaving their families unable to purchase food, and only the intervention of aid societies prevented them from starving.<sup>175</sup> The worst example of exploitation 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>176</sup>

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. In addition, the fact that officers could appropriate the tax for themselves clearly indicates a lack of oversight, despite the clear role of the federal government in enforcing tax policy, and the fact that paymasters in contraband camps sent regular reports of wages to the War Department. Contrabands in Washington faced the same exploitation as those in Virginia and the Carolinas, as they performed difficult manual labor without any pay, despite the fact that they

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<sup>173</sup> Excerpts from Testimony of G.W. Simms, 6 March 1878, Southern Claims Commission, in *Freedom: The Upper South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 274.

<sup>174</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>175</sup> H.C. to Educational Commission, 23 July 1864, in *Extracts from Letters of Teachers Fifth Series*, 18.

<sup>176</sup> Berlin, ed., *Freedom: The Upper South*, 252.

had families to support. The fact that the same failures of contraband policy existed in these disparate camps indicates the consequences of the lack of a federal contraband policy or centralized contraband bureaucracy, as clear violations of federal law to abuse and exploit contrabands went unaddressed, which foreshadowed problems that continued throughout the Civil War and even into Reconstruction due to disorganization and a lack of staff at the Freedmen's Bureau. 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.

The lack of military preparedness for the contrabands is clearly demonstrated by the ad-hoc housing arrangements in the District. At the beginning of the war, lacking a clear plan on where to house the contrabands and without any assistance in the matter from the federal government, Wadsworth sent them to the dilapidated and vermin-infested Old Capitol Prison, both as a shelter and as protection from the District police.<sup>177</sup> At the prison, the army housed the contrabands near white prisoners who had been accused of supporting the Confederacy and held racist and proslavery beliefs, causing opposition from many officers in the area who wanted them housed in segregated camps for their own protection.<sup>178</sup> 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 prison.<sup>179</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

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<sup>177</sup> Winkle, *Lincoln's Citadel*, 307.

<sup>178</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.

<sup>179</sup> French to Stanton, 13 February 1862, in *Freedom: The Upper South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 263.

settlement.<sup>180</sup> The move indicates that military officers in Washington assigned contrabands shelters and forced them to move to new quarters to protect nearby whites from disease rather than out of concern for the welfare of the contrabands, and the federal bureaucracy failed to intervene to address the horrific conditions in government contraband camps.

Duff Green's Row quickly became overcrowded, but fears of dependency undermined efforts to mitigate the situation. 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 set up and maintain camps find work for the contrabands. The Union army's military campaigns, particularly the Peninsula Campaign, brought in more contrabands than the army or Nichols had prepared for, and Duff Green's Row quickly proved inadequate for housing the rapidly increasing numbers of contrabands. By summer, twenty contrabands arrived each day, mostly destitute and in desperate need of food, clothing, and shelter that the army simply did not have, despite the fact that the capital constituted a major distribution point for military supplies.<sup>181</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>182</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, and only issued rations to contrabands during their brief stay in the camp before being hired out.<sup>183</sup> Ideas of economy and free labor contributed to the hiring out of contrabands, and employers only had to promise decent treatment to hire contrabands from Duff Green's Row.<sup>184</sup> The employers

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<sup>180</sup> Berlin, ed., *Freedom: The Upper South*, 246.

<sup>181</sup> Berlin, ed., *Freedom: The Upper South*, 246; Johnston, *Surviving Freedom*, 121.

<sup>182</sup> Johnston, *Surviving Freedom*, 121.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid*, 198.

<sup>184</sup> Winkle, *Lincoln's Citadel*, 307-309.

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, leaving the contrabands in hopeless debt.<sup>185</sup>

Along with the irregular wage payments for government workers, such mistreatment by private employers clearly demonstrates the priority of free labor ideology and avoiding dependency rather than ensuring the welfare of the contrabands. In addition, the fact that the army forced contrabands to find housing despite skyrocketing rents that they could not afford on their meager wages indicates both a lack of preparedness for the contrabands and the inability of both the army and the federal government to come up with a new policy for housing the contrabands. The abuses by private employers provide even more evidence of inadequate federal oversight of contraband programs, as the government took little to no action against employers who failed to pay contrabands their wages, which left them destitute and unable to support their families. The contraband program in Washington failed to escape the precedents of mismanagement and lack of oversight that plagued southern camps early in the Civil War.

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, as the new arrivals overwhelmed the hiring out program and contrabands began to stay in the camp for extended periods.<sup>186</sup> According to Harriet Jacobs, an escaped slave working as a nurse in the camp, diphtheria, scarlet fever, and typhoid raged through the camps,

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<sup>185</sup>Danforth Nichols, as quoted in Berlin, ed., *Freedom: The Upper South*, 249.

<sup>186</sup> Berlin, ed., *Freedom: The Upper South*, 247; Winkle, *Lincoln’s Citadel*, 309.

and the contrabands were “in the most pitiable condition.”<sup>187</sup> Nichols and the army, meanwhile, remained occupied with hiring out contrabands and did little to address the worsening conditions at the camp, even though contrabands needed to be healthy to be hired out to private employers.<sup>188</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>189</sup> In addition, the contrabands, even the desperately ill, only had “filthy rags” for beds, and some had no bedding at all.<sup>190</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>191</sup>

As mentioned earlier, physicians could do little to treat infectious diseases during the Civil War, but camp administrators made matters worse in a variety of ways. First they failed to construct more shelters to relieve overcrowding, to ensure that all contrabands had adequate clothing and bedding, and to make sure the camp maintained adequate sanitation and waste removal. The fact that Nichols and the army allowed the camp to deteriorate to the point that epidemics became almost constant indicates a failure of both the army and the federal bureaucracy to formulate and enforce sufficient policies for contraband camps, and the inability of commanders in Washington to improvise their own solutions.

Second, Nichols and the army medical staff failed to take any preventative action.<sup>192</sup>

Most of the contrabands came from rural areas in Virginia and Maryland and had never been

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<sup>187</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>188</sup> *Ibid.*, 383.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>192</sup> Winkle, *Lincoln's Citadel*, 310.



exposed to smallpox, meaning that they would be susceptible to the disease if an epidemic occurred. The medical staff only ordered vaccinations for white soldiers and aid workers at the camp and refused to vaccinate the contrabands, causing completely preventable and devastating mortality rates when the disease arrived in summer 1862.<sup>193</sup> The failure to vaccinate 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. Since the army surgeons had to order vaccination supplies from Medical Department headquarters, the failure to vaccinate contrabands clearly received approval from the highest levels of the military medical establishment, which further indicates the failure of the federal administration to correct abuses of contrabands at the camp level.

Third, 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>194</sup> According to historian James Oakes, twenty contrabands died every day from smallpox, and shortages of medicine, shelter, and clothing only worsened during the epidemic.<sup>195</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>196</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>197</sup> As Jacobs wrote, “Those

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<sup>193</sup> Ibid, 309-311.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid.

<sup>195</sup> Oakes, *Freedom National*, 419-420.

<sup>196</sup> Winkle, *Lincoln’s Citadel*, 312.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid, 311.

fearful eyes often looked up to me with the language, ‘Is this freedom?’.”<sup>198</sup> For the contrabands at Duff Green’s Row, freedom was plagued by poverty, overcrowding, epidemic disease, and the failure of Nichols, the federal government, and military authorities to do anything to stem the rising mortality rates. The situation would not improve when the contrabands moved to a new camp, as poverty, neglect, and the failure of federal oversight would only worsen when the contrabands moved to Camp Barker.

Fourth, by August 1862, the smallpox epidemic had become so widespread that military authorities decided to move the camp to a healthier location.<sup>199</sup> Nichols and the army doctors left the smallpox patients at Duff Green’s Row, which became a smallpox hospital that suffered from a lack of staff and supplies throughout the war, and moved the healthy contrabands to Camp Barker, a set of military-style barracks designed to alleviate overcrowding.<sup>200</sup> The new camp 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 on the government, despite the clear evidence of need. While the federal government eventually gave the army permission to move the camp, they failed to provide any clear policy for administering the camp and also failed to take any action to address the rapidly worsening conditions at the camp for almost a year.

As a result of these failures, the epidemic continued to ravage contrabands at Camp Barker, and overcrowding continued despite the large 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, all with minimal furnishings.<sup>201</sup> In addition, inadequate sanitary facilities

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<sup>198</sup> Jacobs to Garrison, 5 September 1862, in *The Civil War: The Second Year*, ed. Sears, 383.

<sup>199</sup> Berlin, ed., *Freedom: The Upper South*, 247.

<sup>200</sup> Winkle, *Lincoln’s Citadel*, 312.

<sup>201</sup> Berlin, ed., *Freedom: The Upper South*, 248.

contributed to the spread of disease, while army doctors again failed to provide proper medical care or take action to improve sanitary conditions in the camp, which would have prevented a significant portion of the disease and cost little for either the army or the federal government.<sup>202</sup> When smallpox again ravaged the contrabands despite the move from Duff Green's Row, army doctors initially refused to begin vaccination, and then, as the epidemic spread, attempted it without success due to a bad batch of vaccine matter that actually spread rather than prevented smallpox, and the disease ravaged the severely overcrowded camp.<sup>203</sup> By November 1862, twelve to fifteen contrabands died daily of smallpox and other contagious diseases, and the hospital, according to a Quaker missionary, was "ill-ventilated and disgusting in the extreme," which only raised the death rate.<sup>204</sup> Still, the army did nothing to address the severe overcrowding and wretched sanitation of the camp, and the federal government failed to intervene despite the camp's location in downtown Washington. 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>205</sup> Even worse, army doctors delayed the treatment of smallpox victims until they could decide whether to admit them to the local hospital for paupers or the army-run hospital for contrabands, causing many to die without receiving any treatment, and they received no guidance from any federal agency on the matter, which further reflects the consequences of poor federal oversight.<sup>206</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 that went uncorrected by

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<sup>202</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>203</sup> Testimony of James I. Ferree, January 1864, in *Freedom: The Upper South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 326-327.

<sup>204</sup> Winkle, *Lincoln's Citadel*, 314.

<sup>205</sup> *Ibid*, 314-315.

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid*.

the army and by a lack of federal policy or oversight of the contraband camps, which failed to correct much more ineffective camp leadership than existed in Virginia or the Carolinas.<sup>207</sup> Even for contrabands who managed to survive the outbreak, however, another danger loomed that threatened their freedom: re-enslavement.

Despite the fact that District police could no longer detain fugitive slaves and the army could not return them even to loyal masters according to both Article of War and the Second Confiscation Act, contrabands at Camp Barker still were not safe from the threat of re-enslavement. The military banned Fugitives from Maryland from the camp due to continued fears over the loyalty of the Border States and forced them 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>208</sup> Citizens of the District, according to Johnston, held largely racist tendencies even if they opposed slavery and 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, especially if they could not find a steady job due to rampant employment discrimination.<sup>209</sup> Maryland masters unaware of the exclusion policy continuously raided Camp Barker, exposing the contrabands to the threat of re-enslavement.<sup>210</sup> The raids 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. In addition, it provides a stark demonstration of the failures of federal oversight, as the army allowed slaveowners to blatantly violate federal laws and did nothing to address it or protect the contrabands from re-enslavement. The Article of War prohibited the

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<sup>207</sup> Johnston, *Surviving Freedom*, 122.

<sup>208</sup> *Ibid*, 167.

<sup>209</sup> *Ibid*, 141, 163, 167.

<sup>210</sup> *Ibid*, 122.

army from returning fugitives no matter the loyalty of the master, so the fact that they continued to allow Maryland masters into the camp constituted a blatant violation of federal law. Neither Nichols nor the commanders at Camp Barker faced discipline for returning fugitives to their owners or excluding contrabands from the camp entirely, which provides further evidence of the consequences of the lack of a federal contraband policy early in the Civil War.

In addition to failing to protect contrabands from re-enslavement, the army failed to provide adequate wages at Camp Barker. The army set up the camp, according to Berlin, 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>211</sup> According to historian Kenneth Winkle, half of the contrabands found government jobs, either for the army or for various government agencies in the Washington area, and they at least received regular wages and adequate rations for themselves and their families.<sup>212</sup> For the rest, they faced much more tenuous work assignments that did not always permit them to support themselves, much less their families. Nichols, the superintendent of the camp, wanted the facility to be self-sufficient and ordered all contrabands, even children, to work for the camp or find a job elsewhere.<sup>213</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, and the contrabands had no recourse since the army failed to enforce its own regulations on contraband welfare. Some employers even laid off the contrabands without paying any wages, and neither Nichols nor the army authorities did anything

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<sup>211</sup> Berlin, ed., *Freedom: The Upper South*, 248.

<sup>212</sup> Winkle, *Lincoln's Citadel*, 313.

<sup>213</sup> *Ibid.*

to prevent such base exploitation, which further indicates the consequences of ad-hoc contraband programs and inadequate federal oversight.<sup>214</sup>

Even worse, Nichols sent many contrabands, mostly children forcibly separated from their families, to work in Maryland, where slavery remained legal until late 1864. The contrabands protested vociferously, stating their fears of returning to a slave state and the fact that separating families without consent closely resembled slavery, but Nichols continued to allow Marylanders to hire contrabands, including those who clearly had Confederate sympathies.<sup>215</sup> Nichols himself admitted that “some” contrabands were indeed re-enslaved upon arrival in Maryland, but continued the practice anyway, and the army officers who ostensibly ran the camp did nothing to intervene.<sup>216</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. The desire to reduce expenditures and avoid dependency on the government at all costs led to the requirement that all contrabands work, even if that meant bringing in exploitative private employers from a slave state. 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. The federal government failed to intervene to prevent the clear re-enslavement of contrabands and the separation of families, which lucidly reveals the failure of federal oversight of the camps even in the national capital, and the dire need for an overarching federal contraband policy by 1862.

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<sup>214</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>215</sup> Testimony of D.B. Nichols, in *Freedom: The Upper South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 293.

<sup>216</sup> *Ibid.*

The contrabands who remained in the camp faced another form of mistreatment: abuse by Nichols and the military administrators. Nichols himself admitted that a Captain Mackey used “corporal punishment,” including whipping, on the contrabands for relatively minor offenses, and does not describe any attempts to discipline Mackey for such blatant abuse, and the military records for Washington do not show any discipline by the army.<sup>217</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 by his military employer, especially since Nichols required cash for all purchases of even basic supplies, including food and clothing.<sup>218</sup> Kesiah Briggs, meanwhile, testified that Nichols viciously whipped a woman for refusing to go to the smallpox hospital, which would expose her young and unvaccinated child to the disease and almost certainly lead to its death.<sup>219</sup> When Patsy Scott approached Nichols for her housing ticket, Nichols refused to give her housing even though contrabands without employment could live in Camp Barker on a temporary basis until they acquired a job, 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>220</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 and the obvious failures of federal oversight. These contrabands testified to a military court inquiry, but the abuse only continued, demonstrating the clear neglect of contraband welfare by the army and the federal bureaucracy in Washington.

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<sup>217</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>218</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>219</sup> Testimony of Kesiah Briggs, in RG 393, Washington, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC.

<sup>220</sup> Testimony of Patsy Scott, in RG 393, Washington, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC.

Two cases, more than any others, 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 even though they directly contributed to disease during harsh weather.<sup>221</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 any assistance, even though her son, a soldier in the United States Colored Troops, was killed in combat.<sup>222</sup> He beat her and threatened to have the military arrest her if she complained again, indicating the degree of emphasis on self-sufficiency and fears of dependence on the government, which caused Nichols and the army to deny assistance to contrabands who clearly qualified for charity.<sup>223</sup> Most aid societies concentrated their efforts in camps farther south, meaning that contrabands in Washington did not receive as much aid from northerners, which only made the refusal of assistance by Nichols and the army more dire.

Lucy Ellen Johnson fared similarly. When she arrived at camp, Nichols refused to give her rations even though her husband worked for the government and was supposed to receive rations for his family in addition to wages, 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 even though she had not committed any actual crime and had only protested her mistreatment by Nichols.<sup>224</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

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<sup>221</sup> Testimony of Dr. Garland, in RG 393, Washington, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid.

<sup>223</sup> Ibid.

<sup>224</sup> Testimony of Fielding Lewis, in RG 393, Washington, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC.



end the sadistic punishment.<sup>225</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>226</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 the federal government to effectively intervene to prevent such abuse, as the camp was located within blocks of federal offices. Johnson's case led to a lengthy inquiry by the high command of the army but did not lead to any charges or dismissals from the service, which indicates that even the highest levels of military command did nothing to stop abuse by soldiers and officers.<sup>227</sup> 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 from exposure, even though ample supply stores existed across the District. By late 1862, the contraband program in Washington could only be considered a dismal failure.

Contrabands in Washington during the first two years of the Civil War faced the threat of re-enslavement by Maryland masters, incarceration in the city jail, overcrowded, squalid camps, the separation of their families, and mistreatment and abuse by the army and Superintendent Nichols. The federal government failed to intervene to address conditions, despite the fact that many of the problems, including the conditions in the camps, the re-enslavement of contrabands, and the conditions in the jail were well-reported. Conditions in the Washington contraband camps did not lead to a federal contraband policy, which led to dire consequences not only in the

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<sup>225</sup> Ibid.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid.

District but across the South, and the failure of federal contraband policy and oversight continued during the second half of the Civil War across both the eastern and western theaters.

Overall, the contraband camps in Virginia, South Carolina, North Carolina, and Washington, DC suffered from the lack of a clear contraband policy and inadequate federal oversight. Local commanders, left to improvise their own policies, created well-intentioned free labor programs, but failed to provide effective oversight or correct exploitation and abuses, either due to a lack of federal guidance, the low prioritization of contraband welfare, or a lack of adequate resources to provide for the contrabands. The ongoing military campaigns led to the depletion of troops from the contraband camps, causing them to be more vulnerable to Confederate raids. Some policies reflected the fact that local contraband camp commanders remained ahead of the federal government in terms of policy creation, especially the Department of Negro Affairs in North Carolina, the free labor program in South Carolina, and the acceptance of contrabands into Fort Monroe in the first place. Numerous policies instituted in these camps, including the payment of wages for government labor, the use of abandoned land for farming by contrabands, the impressment of contrabands for military labor, the institution of mandated labor for the government, and the attempts to determine whether contrabands had disloyal or loyal masters, created models for Bureau policy after the war, further demonstrating the fact that policies created in the camps created examples for Bureau policy and programs during Reconstruction. In addition, the problems that plagued these camps, including nonpayment of wages, the separation of families by impressment, the failure to address poor sanitation and disease, and the failure to acknowledge the interests and goals of the contrabands, also undermined Bureau efforts during the early years of Reconstruction. During the second half of the Civil War, the federal government continually failed to provide effective contraband policy

or oversight, which led to worsening conditions in camps across the South as the sheer numbers of contrabands overwhelmed local commanders. They still created numerous policies and programs for contrabands that clearly demonstrated the importance of local contraband policies in setting precedents for the Freedmen's Bureau during early Reconstruction.

## CHAPTER 2

### POLICY FAILURES IN THE EASTERN THEATER CAMPS, 1863-1865

During the second half of the Civil War, contrabands in the Eastern Theater faced the consequences of continued failures of federal oversight, as the lack of a uniform contraband policy compelled local commanders and camp superintendents to make decisions on how to support the contrabands, how to institute a free labor program, and how to handle enlistments into the United States Colored Troops. In Virginia, commanders turned to government-run farms due to the ample abandoned land near Fortress Monroe but a failed move to Craney Island set precedents for later relocations of contraband camps in the Western Theater, and the attempts of the Bureau to move freedmen to locations with better job prospects without regard to the freedmen's desires to remain where they were. In South Carolina the federal government attempted to assist the contrabands by selling land at auction, but failed for several reasons, including racism, greed, a focus on self-sufficiency and wage labor as the only acceptable occupation for contrabands, speculation, and bureaucratic infighting among several Cabinet-level departments. The failed land sales in South Carolina clearly foreshadowed the failure of the Bureau to distribute land to the freedmen in South Carolina despite Sherman's designation of land as reserved for the freedmen. Camps in both states faced continued problems that would foreshadow the weaknesses of the Bureau after the war, including a lack of wages, poor sanitation and disease, a failure to take the wishes of contrabands into account when making decisions, and the impressment of men for either labor or enlistment in the military. The second

half of the Civil War provides compelling evidence of the consequences of failed federal oversight, and the importance of policies and programs formulated in the contraband camps to the policies later established by the Freedmen's Bureau.

The discussion of the eastern camps is split into two chapters for several reasons. First, it allows for extensive analysis of the different policies enacted in each camp to highlight both the failure of federal oversight and the impact of different local circumstances on contraband camp policy. Second, it demonstrates how different aspects of each camp, from wage labor in Virginia to attempted land sales in South Carolina to contraband colonies in North Carolina to a model village in Washington all shaped Bureau policy during Reconstruction. Finally, it more clearly demonstrates that the Bureau had examples of obvious policy failures in the contraband camps, but failed to learn from them and instituted the same failed policies for the Bureau.

The reasons that the contraband camps examined in this chapter became such a low priority for the army are numerous. First, the needs of military campaigning always came first, no matter the location of the camp or the condition of the contrabands. Second, as was discussed in the introduction and will also be discussed in more detail in chapter four, many of the Union officers held racist views and disliked assignments in contraband camps, and many low-quality officers became superintendents, leading to incompetent leadership, negligence in addressing exploitation, and even corruption and outright mistreatment of the contrabands. Third, the army and the federal bureaucracy wanted to keep expenditures as low as possible, and contraband camps came low on the budgetary priority list, meaning both that camps constantly faced supply and personnel shortages, and that the army focused on making contrabands self-sufficient above all else, even if it was detrimental to their welfare, and often overlooked failures to pay wages due to the overwhelming focus on reducing expenditures. Finally, the growing presence of

missionaries and aid societies in the camps led the army to rely on them more and more to support the contrabands and even run the camps, which made contraband welfare an even lower priority. The military believed that the missionaries could take care of contrabands with little assistance from the army. All four of these reasons would combine to undermine contraband camp administration in the eastern theater during the second half of the war.

#### Virginia: Farming as a Model for the Bureau

An analysis of the contraband camps in Virginia during the second half of the Civil War provides several insights into the connections between contraband camp and Freedmen's Bureau policies. First, the attempt to move the contrabands onto abandoned farms created a model for the Bureau's policy of emptying the contraband camps and mandating that contrabands instead sign labor contracts on plantations. The failures of the Virginia farming program foreshadowed the numerous difficulties faced by the Bureau in assigning contrabands to employers and then protecting them from abuse and exploitation. Secondly, the neglect of the camps and the failure to address obvious abuse by military personnel indicated the low priority of the contraband camps in the Union war effort, and the lack of resources given to the Bureau after the war that greatly undermined their ability to support the freedmen. Finally, the guerrilla problem that plagued the Virginia contraband camps both foreshadowed later guerrilla problems in the Western Theater, and illustrates the army's inability to protect contrabands from violence that would continue after the war under the Bureau. An analysis of the Virginia contraband camps from 1863-1865 is vital to understanding how contraband camp policy contributed to the policies and programs of the Bureau after the war.

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. Army officers in command of the move banned them from taking any crops and refused to issue rations, meaning that the contrabands went without food for the duration of the move and received no compensation for their farm labor.<sup>1</sup> The army only issued the contrabands half rations for the period prior to the move despite hard labor demolishing the barracks and preparing for the move.<sup>2</sup> The contrabands' tenure on Craney Island was marked by exploitation, abuse, disease, and death from arrival to departure, and federal authorities did nothing to intervene, which indicates the consequences of the lack of federal oversight. 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 dependency on the government and placing them far away from Fort Monroe, in order to have farm superintendents supervise their labor and thus free army officers of the burdensome task.<sup>3</sup> Large amounts of abandoned land remained available since most of the whites in the area had fled in 1861 and no attempt had been made to lease land to private superintendents or lessees.<sup>4</sup> Major General Butler approved this program in early 1864, and began assigning contrabands to farms to begin planting that spring.<sup>5</sup> Rather than helping the contrabands, the army focused on free labor and "self-sufficiency" on the farms due to overwhelming fears of dependency on the government. 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, especially for rations while the

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<sup>1</sup> Lucy Chase to "Dear Ones at Home," 30 September 1863, in *Dear Ones at Home*, ed. Swint, 92.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 93-94.

<sup>3</sup> Gerteis, *From Contraband to Freedman*, 29.

<sup>4</sup> Engs, *Freedom's First Generation*, 19, 29.

<sup>5</sup> Capt. C.B. Wilder to Maj. Gen. B.F. Butler, 24 February 1864, in *Freedom: The Upper South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 187.

crops grew prior to harvest.<sup>6</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>7</sup> In fact, Butler, Dix, and the officers in charge of supervising the farms 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 of the contrabands or their ability to perform difficult agricultural labor.<sup>8</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 and did not wish to move onto a farm.<sup>9</sup> Once the army settled contrabands on the farms, either voluntarily or by force if necessary, the exploitation continued, as military authorities continued to focus on free labor at the expense of supporting the contrabands. In addition, they wanted to maintain a “traditional” economy with as little disruption to the area’s infrastructure and economy as possible, and believed that only contrabands who worked on government farms could become self-sufficient, despite clear evidence to the contrary.<sup>10</sup>

Despite the fact that the army controlled Fort Monroe and most of the surrounding area, and claims by army officials that farms would only be 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 despite the large military presence at Fort Monroe.<sup>11</sup> The

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<sup>6</sup> Gerteis, *From Contraband to Freedman*, 33.

<sup>7</sup> Capt. Orlando Brown to Lt. Col. J. B. Kinsman, 12 May 1864, in *Freedom: The Upper South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 210.

<sup>8</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>9</sup> --- to Lt. Col. Kinsman, 21 March 1864, in RG 105, Virginia, National Archives.

<sup>10</sup> Gerteis, *From Contraband to Freedman*, 32, 39-40.

<sup>11</sup> Engs, *Freedom’s First Generation*, 29-30.



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>12</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>13</sup> The problem became so bad in nearby Norfolk that the commander of the army detachment there had to form a company of contrabands for defense when the army refused to spare any soldiers to protect contraband farms.<sup>14</sup> When the army leased plantations to private businessmen late in the war, the problem only became worse, as superintendents placed contrabands onto plantations but failed to provide any level of protection, despite clear evidence of the guerrilla threat and the high numbers of known rebels in the area. One Confederate sympathizer who had abandoned his land early in the war returned to find it leased by the federal government. He retaliated by viciously assaulting lessees and contrabands while 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 of the army’s focus on free labor at the expense of the welfare of the contrabands.<sup>15</sup> The higher levels of military command failed to intervene and send more troops to protect the contrabands, which further indicates the lack of federal oversight of the contraband camps. For the contrabands who escaped guerrilla attacks, conditions were little better, as

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<sup>12</sup> Berlin, ed., *Freedom: The Upper South*, 97.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, 30.

<sup>14</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.

<sup>15</sup> Capt. C.B. Wilder to Maj. Genl. Butler, 11 November 1863, in *Freedom: The Upper South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 164-165.

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 army clearly set up the system of contraband farms to ensure that the contrabands worked rather than to ensure their welfare. 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, clothing, housing, and agricultural supplies, clearly revealing the importance of ideas of self-sufficiency and free labor.<sup>16</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.<sup>17</sup> A very strong aversion to contraband dependence within the army caused numerous instances of army officials reducing or even cutting rations entirely on the farms, even for women, children, and the elderly and infirm who could not work. Superintendent Brown, for example, decided that the legal ration for contraband farm workers “was considerably greater than... necessary for their actual support” and cut rations in order to reduce expenditures.<sup>18</sup> Even worse, when a drought devastated the 1863 crop, Brown refused to increase 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 and with no way to obtain additional food since the army no longer permitted them to fish in the area’s bountiful waters.<sup>19</sup> While the situation dramatically improved in 1864, as good weather produced a plentiful harvest that easily provided enough subsistence, the army still enforced rent

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<sup>16</sup> Gerteis, *From Contraband to Freedman*, 40; Engs, *Freedom’s First Generation*, 29.

<sup>17</sup> Engs, *Freedom’s First Generation*, 29; Weekly Report, 1864, in RG 105, Virginia, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC.

<sup>18</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>19</sup> Capt. O. Brown to Maj. George J. Carney, 9 December 1864, in *Freedom: The Upper South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 210-211.

charges and even charged for livestock fodder, clearly demonstrating the importance of self-reliance.<sup>20</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>21</sup>

While the contrabands eventually provided their own subsistence, army officials still mistreated and exploited them, and the federal bureaucracy failed to provide any oversight, even when the scale of mistreatment became obvious from the high profits and continued charges for rent and essential supplies. The army also failed to protect the farms and left the contrabands without protection from potential re-enslavement while the higher levels of military bureaucracy failed to send any more soldiers or take any action to protect their freedom. The army officials, on the other hand, took the initiative and established a system of sharecropping that would later become the model for almost identical programs set up by the Freedmen's Bureau during Reconstruction. Bureau agents permitted sharecropping contracts that deducted shares for rent, fodder, rations, supplies, and clothing, and which often left the contrabands with little to no profit at the end of a year's labor.<sup>22</sup> The failure to protect contrabands from guerrillas and white violence also set an unfortunate precedent for Bureau policies. The contraband camps in Virginia set multiple examples for the Bureau to follow, which demonstrates the importance of contraband camps and contraband superintendents in instituting policies later adopted by the Freedmen's Bureau during the early stages of Reconstruction from 1865 to 1868.

For contrabands both on and off the government farms, financial exploitation by the army did not constitute the only worry- Union soldiers and officers routinely abused contrabands and

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<sup>20</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>21</sup> Gerteis, *From Contraband to Freedman*, 41.

<sup>22</sup> Much more detail on sharecropping and the Freedmen's Bureau will be provided in chapter 5 of this dissertation.

suffered almost no punishment 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 in the summer of 1862.<sup>23</sup> Soldiers even attacked contrabands working on farms, stole crops and livestock, and generally hampered the ability of the contrabands to support themselves, especially as ration cuts continued throughout 1863 and 1864.<sup>24</sup> In Newport News, 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, which could not easily be replaced due to the poverty of the contrabands. No record exists of these soldiers being disciplined, which became a common theme in cases of even the worst examples of contraband abuse.<sup>25</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>26</sup> Such abuse, combined with a continued lack of wages and repeated reductions in rations, meant, according to New York missionaries stationed in Hampton Roads, that the contrabands were “worse off than they were in slavery,” and some even wanted to return to their owners despite the horrors of slavery.<sup>27</sup> These ideas came from the fact that contrabands and white officials, both in the army and the higher levels of the federal government, had vastly different ideas of the meaning of freedom. While military and bureaucratic officials, according to Engs, wanted to “control” rather than help contrabands, and therefore focused on self-sufficiency, avoiding

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 33.

<sup>24</sup> Berlin, ed., *Freedom: The Upper South*, 100; Capt E.W. Coffin to Brigr. Genl. B.C. Ludlow, 21 April 1865, in *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>25</sup> Asa Prescott to Maj. Gen. Butler, 22 March 1864, in RG 105, Virginia, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC.

<sup>26</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>27</sup> Ibid.

dependence, and the war effort, contrabands had other ideas.<sup>28</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, insufficient rations, and impressment seemed too similar to the slavery they thought they had escaped, and so did corporal punishment and abuse by Union troops.<sup>29</sup> The fact that the federal government failed to provide any effective oversight or make even minimal attempts to improve the situation of the contrabands in Hampton Roads only further convinced many contrabands that exploitation and mistreatment would only continue, and they would be proven correct by the events of the late Civil War and early Reconstruction period.

Contraband women suffered even more, as the threat of rape by Union soldiers never went away, especially since perpetrators faced minimal to no discipline. In Yorktown, several soldiers raped a young girl, prompting male contrabands to kill the soldiers. The incident established both the sheer depravity soldiers were capable of and the ability of contrabands to fight for their rights and their basic dignity as human beings, even in the face of harsh punishment by the military for the murder of a soldier.<sup>30</sup> According to historian Leon Litwack, such sexual violence against contrabands remained commonplace throughout the war across almost all contraband camps, and he cites two disturbing cases of violent sexual assaults in Hampton.<sup>31</sup> These assaults clearly indicate the scale of army mistreatment and abuse of contrabands and the lack of initiative by the federal government to order court martials or other disciplinary measures against soldiers committing such abuses, as racist soldiers beat and

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<sup>28</sup> Engs, *Freedom's First Generation*, 17.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*, 17-18, 21, 25.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*, 60.

<sup>31</sup> Litwack, *Been in the Storm So Long*, 130.

exploited contrabands with little fear of repercussions.<sup>32</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>33</sup> Most soldiers remained “reluctant liberators” at best and did not see contraband rights as a significant army objective, and many actively resented being stationed at contraband camps rather than at the front, and took their frustrations out on the contrabands.<sup>34</sup> Common soldiers exploited and abused contrabands, and officers, who often shared the same racist views, did little to stop it, while the federal government remained impotent as it had throughout the Civil War , despite clear evidence of the continued abuse of contrabands. 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.

The army made a more purposeful attempt to stem impressment, but poor enforcement undermined the order. In December 1863, Butler issued an order regulating the labor of contrabands, and, in particular, the practice of impressment, or forcing contrabands to perform certain labor tasks. He stated that men aged eighteen to forty five had to enlist in the United States Colored Troops if fit for service, and that government laborers would not be provided rations for themselves or their families and had to become self-reliant, even if some of their family members could not work, which drastically reduced their ability to obtain sufficient food.<sup>35</sup> He also attempted to stop the pervasive 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>36</sup> The order did not specify any

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 125.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 128.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, 127.

<sup>35</sup> General Orders No. 46, 5 December 1863, in *Freedom: The Upper South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 169-170.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, 170.

requirements for rations to be issued to the worker's family, even though they did not receive his income and often had no other way to support themselves. The government had to ensure that impressment only occurred due to "military necessity" and that impressed workers received humane treatment and proper wages and rations.<sup>37</sup> The order 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, especially since women and children could rarely find jobs working for the army.<sup>38</sup>

Numerous instances exist of contrabands being impressed for military labor in the Hampton Roads area, which demonstrates both poor local enforcement and inadequate federal oversight of the camp. 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 without giving the contrabands any chance to contact their families, clearly indicating the base exploitation of contrabands by military authorities and the lack of federal oversight of the camps, especially since the contrabands would be performing labor in Washington, DC.<sup>39</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 and their families faced starvation due to the elimination of rations for families of government workers.<sup>40</sup> John Jordan, for example, received only a total of eighty six cents for a year's labor, while William P. Johnson had not been paid at

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 171-172.

<sup>38</sup> Berlin, ed., *Freedom: The Upper South*, 99.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, 98; Emancipation League, *Facts Concerning the Freedmen*, 6.

<sup>40</sup> Asa Prescott to Hon. E. M. Stanton, 11 July 1863, in *Freedom: The Upper South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 157-158.

all in two years. Soldiers impressed contrabands such as Nelson Sprewell who were clearly unfit for hard labor due to illness, advanced age, or disability.<sup>41</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. The lack of federal oversight meant that such abuses of contrabands could continue with little to no consequence, as military commanders in Virginia never faced discipline from the military or federal bureaucracy for even the basest exploitation of contrabands, including wage fraud, impressment, abuse by soldiers, and failure to address the constant guerrilla threat.

The problem of impressment actually worsened as the war went on, which demonstrates the inability of the camp administration to stop abuses even at the local level. In May 1864, despite the order prohibiting impressment except for urgent military necessity or a significant Confederate threat to the area, Brigadier General Shepley ordered the impressment of contrabands for the fortifications at 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, meaning that families almost certainly faced starvation unless the women could find ad-hoc ways to support themselves.<sup>42</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, and he never faced discipline for such flagrant abuses and violations of regulations.<sup>43</sup> As Captain Wilder, the Superintendent of Contrabands, wrote in

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</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>43</sup> B.L. Parrish to Hon. Mr. Stanton, 16 January 1865, in *Freedom: The Upper South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 219.



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>44</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>45</sup> The fact that the practice continued unchecked throughout the Civil War clearly indicates the lack of federal oversight of the camps and the consequences of the lack of a uniform federal contraband policy. It also demonstrates the initiative of local camp administrators in creating their own policies, especially since the impressment of contrabands and freedmen continued under the Freedmen’s Bureau during Reconstruction, and models for these policies emerged in the Virginia contraband camps. While labor recruiters mistreated contrabands, however, recruiters for the United States Colored Troops practiced the most brutal form of impressment.

Recruiters also used impressment to fill their regiments when contrabands did not volunteer, and the recruits had to leave their families behind with no support. 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>46</sup> As Engs writes, “men were dragged away to army encampments and ordered to enlist” and faced brutal punishments if they resisted, even if they were unfit for military service.<sup>47</sup> Numerous

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<sup>44</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>45</sup> Berlin, ed., *Freedom: The Upper South*, 99.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid*, 104.

<sup>47</sup> Engs, *Freedom’s First Generation*, 30.

contrabands testified to an army court of inquiry describing the harsh tactics used by recruiters. James Holsten, for example, stated that recruiters confined him to the guardhouse, or military jail, when he refused to enlist, despite disabilities that clearly rendered him unfit for service.<sup>48</sup> Mills Burton and James Colden, meanwhile, despite having families that depended on their wages from their government jobs, also faced confinement in the guardhouse until they gave in and enlisted.<sup>49</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, clearly indicating the lack of supervision of the recruiters and the inability of the army court of inquiry to mitigate their abusive tactics.<sup>50</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 who should have been more sympathetic to their plight.<sup>51</sup> The worst cases of military impressment involved punishments sadistic enough to be seen as torture used to force contrabands to give in and enlist, despite regulations that banned all forms of corporal punishment in the Virginia contraband camps. According to Engs, many recruiters placed contrabands in jail with a ball and chain until they enlisted.<sup>52</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

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<sup>48</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 and Records Administration, Washington, DC.

<sup>49</sup> Testimony of Mills Burton, in Testimony of Witnesses, RG 105, Virginia, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC.

<sup>50</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 and Records Administration, Washington, DC.

<sup>51</sup> Testimony of George Colden, in Testimony of Witnesses, RG 105, Virginia, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC.

<sup>52</sup> Engs, *Freedom's First Generation*, 30. This is not the William Carney who won the Medal of Honor.

continuously until he enlisted, and then punished him again for failure to “properly” take the enlistment oath.<sup>53</sup>

Such practices clearly demonstrate how military recruiters exploited and abused 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 for the freedmen or do the job with any degree of goodwill.”<sup>54</sup>

Impressment, whether for military labor or army service, exemplifies military mistreatment of contrabands and federal inability to prevent it. No one in Washington stepped in to stop the brutal practice in Virginia, despite the voluminous testimony gathered by an army court of inquiry, which failed to take any action to end the clear abuse and exploitation of contrabands. The military, in addition to the civilian federal bureaucracy, also failed to correct the abuses of contrabands. The impressment policy in Virginia would be echoed in contraband camps across the South, as labor and army recruiters used increasingly heavy-handed tactics to force contrabands into labor gangs or army regiments, while the federal government continued to ignore the almost constant abuse and exploitation. 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.

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<sup>53</sup> Testimony of William Carney, in Testimony of Witnesses, RG 105, Virginia, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC.

<sup>54</sup> Engs, *Freedom’s First Generation*, 31.

Contrabands who escaped impressment still faced harsh conditions in the camps. By late 1864, no more abandoned land remained available for farming, meaning that contrabands, mostly the dependents of government laborers and soldiers in the United States Colored Troops, had to live in squalid, overcrowded, disease-ridden camps in desperate poverty.<sup>55</sup> In one camp, twelve contrabands lived in a very small one room house, and several homes at a camp near Downey Plantation outside of Hampton were “unfit for human habitation,” but the army refused to replace them with new buildings or even surplus tents, even though this simple measure would have gone a long way towards preventing disease outbreaks.<sup>56</sup> The contrabands, according to unnamed New York missionaries who wrote a detailed report of conditions in the Virginia contraband camps, “presented a miserable appearance” due to a lack of clothing and rations, and the fact that their low wages did not allow them to purchase their own supplies for themselves and their families.<sup>57</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, much of which could have been prevented by improving sanitation and constructing additional barracks or providing tents, neither of which would have resulted in high expenditures.<sup>58</sup> Smallpox and yellow fever, along with numerous other diseases, took a “frightful toll” and medical authorities did little to improve conditions, especially since overcrowding clearly spread diseases.<sup>59</sup> Even in the contraband orphanage in Hampton, a shortage of vegetables caused fifty-one preventable cases of scurvy, indicating the degree of medical neglect of the contrabands, especially since the cause of scurvy, a deficiency of vitamin C, was well-known in the medical profession by the Civil

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<sup>55</sup> Berlin, ed., *Freedom: The Upper South*, 105.

<sup>56</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>57</sup> Report of the Committee of the Representatives, University of Virginia, 16-17.

<sup>58</sup> Engs, *Freedom’s First Generation*, 53.

<sup>59</sup> Berlin, ed., *Freedom: The Upper South*, 106.

War.<sup>60</sup> A school superintendent working for the American Missionary Association, a national organization of missionaries that worked in almost all of the contraband camps, referenced mortality rates of four to five a day in winter 1864 and stated, “With a virulent disease raging in our midst, we find these means insufficient to save them from absolute suffering.”<sup>61</sup> Despite the clear evidence of horrendous conditions in the camps, 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 in ever-increasing numbers. The federal government did little to create a uniform contraband policy or create effective oversight of the camps.<sup>62</sup>

The fear of dependency that pervaded camp policy across the South undermined efforts to improve conditions in the camps. According to Berlin, “attempts to alleviate destitution ran afoul of efforts to conserve scarce resources and reduce expenditures,” indicating that the army emphasized the need to save money, with devastating consequences for the contrabands. This policy also created a model for policies in contraband camps across the South.<sup>63</sup> Authorities focused on avoiding dependence and making the contrabands self-sufficient, leading to wage and ration cuts that resulted in widespread destitution in the camps. Only families of soldiers and those clearly unable to work, even in light-duty jobs, could get government rations. The commissary officer spent over eighty thousand dollars less than permitted on contraband rations, clearly demonstrating the importance of economy rather than contraband welfare, especially

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<sup>60</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.

<sup>61</sup> H.S. Beals to Col. Kinsman, 16 February 1864, in *Freedom: The Upper South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 185.

<sup>62</sup> Brasher, *The Peninsula Campaign*, 142.

<sup>63</sup> Berlin, ed., *Freedom: The Upper South*, 106.

given the ample evidence of destitution and starvation in the camps.<sup>64</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, who already faced starvation due to the small size of the contraband rations.<sup>65</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 they were truly “helpless,” revealing the degree of exploitation of contrabands in the name of self-reliance.<sup>66</sup> The federal government failed to intervene despite promises to the soldiers that their families in the contraband camps would receive sustenance without charge, and army policies stating that the families of soldiers were entitled to rations at no charge, which demonstrates the lack of federal oversight of the camps during the Civil War.

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, while the federal bureaucracy failed to take any action despite continual violations of contraband regulations and the policies established earlier in the war for the Virginia camps. 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, and the quartermaster never faced discipline for his negligence.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Col. O. Brown to Maj. George J. Carney, 9 December 1864, in *Freedom: The Upper South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 209-210.

<sup>65</sup> Orlando Brown to J.B. Kinsman, 23 March 1864, in RG 105, Virginia, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC.

<sup>66</sup> William S. Leonard to C.S. Henry, 30 April 1864, in RG 105, Virginia, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC.

<sup>67</sup> William J. Leonard to General Butler, 18 March 1864, in RG 105, Virginia, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC.

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, which they rarely if ever received by the end of the war.<sup>68</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 received a cent of money and my family is suffering for the support of my labor,” indicating both the degree of army exploitation of contraband labor and the efforts by contrabands to protest for their basic rights by petitioning the federal government, which clearly indicates that the federal bureaucracy knew of the abuses of contrabands but still failed to take any action.<sup>69</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>70</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.

In late 1864, Frank T. White, the provost marshal for southeastern Virginia, issued an order requiring all contrabands to work either for the government or for a private employer with a labor contract, which became the policy at several other contraband camps in addition to the Freedmen’s Bureau, demonstrating the importance of policies created by camp commanders to

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<sup>68</sup> Engs, *Freedom’s First Generation*, 55.

<sup>69</sup> Abraham Cannaday to Sir, 3 May 1863, in *Freedom: The Upper South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 239.

<sup>70</sup> Berlin, ed., *Freedom: The Upper South*, 90, 101.

establishing policies later instituted by the Bureau.<sup>71</sup> He wanted to reduce expenditures and avoid dependency on the government, which both became cornerstones of Bureau policy after the war. 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>72</sup> Contrabands who could not find a government 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, despite clear regulations that specified minimum wages.<sup>73</sup> Peter Hack, for example, hired Sidney Hach for one year but only provided food, clothing, and shelter as compensation, and the army never compelled him to pay wages.<sup>74</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>75</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>76</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>77</sup> The system of labor contracts demonstrates the consequences of the army’s emphasis on 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

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<sup>71</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>72</sup> *Ibid*, 230.

<sup>73</sup> Berlin, ed., *Freedom: The Upper South*, 107.

<sup>74</sup> Labor Contract No. 81, RG 105, Virginia, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC.

<sup>75</sup> Labor Contract No. 107, RG 105, Virginia, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC.

<sup>76</sup> Labor Contract No. 87, RG 105, Virginia, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC.

<sup>77</sup> Berlin, ed., *Freedom: The Upper South*, 107.



vulnerable contrabands. While army officers supervised the 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. Finally, the lack of oversight by the federal government allowed exploitation to continue and foreshadowed the strict contract policies of the Freedmen's Bureau that trapped contrabands in abusive labor relationships and failed to intervene to stop rampant exploitation and mistreatment of contrabands across the South.

The camps in Virginia also provide several examples of the tactics used by contrabands to resist exploitation and to defend what they saw as their rights to economic autonomy and freedom. They wrote petitions to local military commanders and even the federal bureaucracy in Washington, DC, testified to army courts of inquiry, found private employment to earn a living when the army failed to pay wages, and resisted impressment by fleeing in order to keep their families together. These tactics demonstrate that contrabands held different views of their rights and responsibilities than the military, and they would do whatever they believed necessary to defend these rights. The fact that they would push back against the only institution keeping them safe from re-enslavement demonstrates the vast gulf between the army's and the contrabands' ideas of the meaning of freedom. Their initiative foreshadowed freedmen's activism under the Bureau, as they inundated Bureau agents with thousands of complaints of mistreatment and exploitation, even though they faced the very real threat of retaliation by their employers due to the Bureau's inability to protect the freedmen across the South. Contrabands did not simply accept exploitation and mistreatment by the army and Bureau, but, as demonstrated at several points in this section, asserted their rights as free laborers both during the war and during

Reconstruction, meaning that the camps foreshadowed yet another aspect of Bureau administration after the war.

The contraband camps in Virginia effectively demonstrate the consequences of the lack of both federal oversight and a uniform contraband policy during the Civil War. The local military commanders denied contrabands their wages, failed to improve the sanitary conditions of the camps, impressed contrabands even when it led to the separation of families, failed to mitigate abuse by soldiers, and reduced and even eliminated rations despite the fact that the contrabands faced starvation. Missionaries and even the contrabands themselves repeatedly petitioned the federal government to improve conditions, so officials in the military bureaucracy and the War Department knew how bad conditions had become but still failed to act. Local commanders could create their own policies, including strict enforcement of contracts, reduction of rations, and the placement of contrabands on privately owned plantations, that would become the cornerstones of Freedmen's Bureau policies and programs after the war. The contraband camps in Virginia further demonstrate the importance of contraband camps to the establishment of Freedmen's Bureau policy.

#### South Carolina: Hopes for Land for Contrabands Come to an End

The camps in South Carolina provide a unique perspective that is absolutely essential to understanding how contraband camp policy contributed to Bureau policy by discussing attempts to either provide or sell abandoned land to the contrabands rather than just allowing them to farm it. The Bureau's failure to distribute land to contrabands in South Carolina despite Sherman's land policy directly foreshadows the failed attempts at preemption and tax sales during the Civil War. These sales demonstrate the low priority of the contrabands, as speculators rather than the contrabands purchased most of the land. In addition, the introduction of plantation leasing in

South Carolina, and the military's inability to properly oversee the leasing program, demonstrated the shortcomings of a policy of mandatory labor contracts, which would still become Bureau policy despite its failure in leasing programs both in South Carolina and the Western Theater. The camps in South Carolina also demonstrate the importance of missionaries, as both advocates for the contrabands and as adversaries who attempted to impose their own ideas of uplift even if they opposed the wishes of the contrabands. Finally, South Carolina demonstrates the confusion over what to do with the contrabands at the end of the war, and how the short-lived idea of land distribution came to be replaced by mandatory contract labor. A detailed analysis of South Carolina camps is required for connecting the camps to Bureau policy.

Prior to the direct tax sales of abandoned land, missionaries and the federal government engaged in a debate over the private leasing of plantations and who should be responsible for paying and caring for the contrabands. Philbrick claimed that the government system was no better than slavery since the contrabands did not receive wages or clothing, and he advocated leasing plantations to ensure that the contrabands received proper compensation. In particular, he argued that Colonel Nobles, a government superintendent, failed to provide rations or wages to the contraband laborers, and neither the military command on the islands nor the federal government took any action to compel him to provide proper compensation. According to Philbrick, leasing would solve these problems by allowing private enterprise to take over a dysfunctional government system, as the contrabands often received no wages and reduced rations, even though they had families to support.<sup>78</sup> Not all of those at the Sea Islands agreed with him. Missionary Edward L. Pierce hated leasing and argued that lessees only wanted profit

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<sup>78</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.

and would exploit the contrabands, leading to “the worst vices of the slave system.”<sup>79</sup> In June 1862, an act of Congress would prove Pierce 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, self-sufficiency, and avoiding dependency on the government rather than the welfare of the contrabands.

The direct tax sales provide stark evidence of government complicity in allowing lessees to exploit the contrabands, in this case by denying them access to land and selling it instead to northern speculators who mistreated the contrabands to make a profit. The Treasury Department deliberately set up the program to favor white businessmen and make as much as possible from land sales rather than providing the contrabands with the ability to obtain land and become self-sufficient. The Direct Tax Commission formed to regulate the sales and favored wage labor rather than independent land ownership, as they believed that wage labor constituted the only way for the contrabands to avoid dependency on the government. As historian Lawrence N. Powell writes, “Federal authorities were reluctant to lease or sell subdivided plantation tracts to the freedmen.”<sup>80</sup> In addition, he argues, northerners and government officials thought that blacks needed to learn from businessmen before becoming qualified for land ownership, and that they would not be able to farm on their own, which would result in them becoming dependent on the government.<sup>81</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 of taxes and

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<sup>79</sup> Edward L. Pierce to Hon. Salmon P. Chase, 3 February 1862, in *Freedom: The Lower South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 142-143.

<sup>80</sup> Lawrence N. Powell, *New Masters: Northern Planters during the Civil War and Reconstruction* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1998), 4.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid*, 5.

sold it at open land auctions, giving Northern whites a clear advantage over the destitute freedmen, who could only bid for “charity land.”<sup>82</sup>

Many groups working with the contrabands saw the true motives of the sales and criticized the federal government for undermining the ability of the contrabands to gain economic independence and avoid working for the government at low and often unreliable wages. Missionaries called for reforms, allowing the contrabands to preempt small plots of land for later purchase when they had the financial means, 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>83</sup> Most telling, even army officials complained about the sales, including Brigadier General Saxton, the commander of the Sea Islands and the army officer in charge of contrabands, 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>84</sup> Despite these complaints, at the actual auctions, the Commission sold sixty thousand acres, twenty thousand of which went to speculators and reserved for government and military use, leaving very little for contrabands and leaving the path open to exploitation by lessees, who mostly wanted profits and cared little about the welfare of the contrabands.<sup>85</sup> The land sales also indicate how even army officials in the area could not 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, which indicates that military officials

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<sup>82</sup> Berlin, ed., *Freedom: The Lower South*, 107.

<sup>83</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>84</sup> Brigadier General Rufus Saxton to Hon. Edwin M. Stanton, 13 May 1862, in *Freedom: The Lower South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 220.

<sup>85</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.

charged with supervising the contrabands instead pursued profits at the expense of the contrabands. The land sales illuminate the true motives of both military officials and the federal government: making profits to support the larger war even if it meant exploitation of contraband laborers, and these goals would remain in place throughout the Civil War and even during Reconstruction under the Freedmen's Bureau.<sup>86</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, which constituted a sufficient amount of land for them to gain true economic autonomy.<sup>87</sup> Saxton did not consult the federal Direct Tax Commission before announcing his plan and it met stiff opposition from the commissioners and officials in the Department of the Treasury, which oversaw all sales of land for unpaid taxes, further indicating the complicity of the federal government in the exploitation of contrabands, even when military officials, mostly without success, tried to prevent such mistreatment. The preemption debate clearly demonstrates how competing policies from different agencies of the federal government undermined the entire contraband program, especially when abandoned property was concerned. 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, which reflects the belief common among both military and federal officials that contrabands did not have the education or

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<sup>86</sup> Powell, *New Masters*, 35.

<sup>87</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.

the capacity to manage land on their own and should therefore remain as wage laborers.<sup>88</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>89</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. They bought land at low prices and then proceeded to exploit the contrabands as much as possible while military and federal officials did nothing, which distinctly demonstrates the failure of federal contraband policy in South Carolina. Competition between multiple agencies and the racism of federal officials led to the failure of a program that could have provided economic autonomy for the contrabands and allowed them to save enough to easily support themselves.<sup>90</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 administration as would shock the conscience of Christendom.”<sup>91</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, and then failed to mitigate the clear cases of abuse and exploitation.

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 at the lowest wages they could possibly pay. As a missionary in the area lamented, “We are nothing

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<sup>88</sup> William Henry Brisbane to Hon. Joseph J. Lewis, 12 December 1863, in *Freedom: The Lower South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 276.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid*, 285.

<sup>90</sup> Berlin, ed., *Freedom: The Lower South*, 109-110, 288.

<sup>91</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.

now but speculators,” and land sales had done little to help the contrabands.<sup>92</sup> The end of preemption demonstrates the government’s focus on profits at the expense of the 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, and faced little to no discipline from the military or Treasury officials. Such exploitation continued after the establishment of the Freedmen’s Bureau during Reconstruction, as sharecroppers exploited contrabands to the same degree as lessees. 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>93</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 clothing for themselves and their families, despite the low wages and inflated prices charged for even basic goods.<sup>94</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. The army failed to provide back wages or additional rations for contrabands who had been cheated by lessees and left with no money after a year of labor.<sup>95</sup> Lessees also used creative tactics to lower labor costs, including cutting a month “into discrete units of labor-time” to reduce hours worked and

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<sup>92</sup> W.C.G. to Sir, 22 February 1864, in *Letters from Port Royal*, ed. Pearson, 254.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid*, 294.

<sup>94</sup> Berlin, ed., *Freedom: The Lower South*, 49.

<sup>95</sup> *New York Tribune*, as quoted in Powell, *New Masters*, 6.



therefore wages, and also cut wages for illness or days of work missed due to poor weather.<sup>96</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>97</sup> These failures of oversight directly foreshadowed the policies of the Freedmen's Bureau, as overworked agents could do little to stop planters from exploiting the freedmen by failing to pay wages, evicting them from the plantations, and not providing rations or clothing as specified in the labor contracts. 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>98</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 and the Treasury Department stood by and did nothing.

Philbrick's plantation clearly demonstrates the degree of exploitation practiced by lessees. He 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), which was not enough to support themselves, much less their families that depended on their labor.<sup>99</sup> These rates, which compared very poorly to government salaries in Virginia and Washington and even to wages in the South Carolina contraband camps earlier in the war, indicate a focus on profit rather than contraband welfare. Military authorities failed to

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<sup>96</sup> Powell, *New Masters*, 103.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid*, 115-116.

<sup>98</sup> *Extracts from Letters of Teachers Fifth Series*, 4.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid*; Gerteis, *From Contraband to Freedman*, 56.

enforce their own wage regulations, allowing Philbrick to continue to exploit his laborers.<sup>100</sup> His opinion that high wages caused idleness and that blacks had to support themselves only further reveals his true motives, as he expected contrabands to support themselves but then paid wages that left them in near-destitution.<sup>101</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 his focus on profit.<sup>102</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>103</sup>

Both federal and military authorities could have stopped Philbrick’s clear exploitation of contrabands but failed to act, which reflects the continued failures of federal policies and oversight of the South Carolina contraband camps. Philbrick himself acknowledged his low wages in a letter to the Direct Tax Commission, stating that he made his laborers use the crop to feed themselves rather than issuing them rations and took away wages for subpar work and bad weather that prevented work, showing both his clear exploitation of the laborers and the failure of government officials to enforce their own regulations. The Tax Commission did nothing to discipline Philbrick or require him to abide by military regulations and provide proper wages and rations.<sup>104</sup> Several of the contrabands working for Philbrick, having received no assistance from the army or Treasury officials in South Carolina, wrote to President Lincoln in a desperate

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<sup>100</sup> *Extracts from Letters of Teachers Fifth Series*, 4.

<sup>101</sup> Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction*, 223.

<sup>102</sup> Powell, *New Masters*, 88.

<sup>103</sup> Gerteis, *From Contraband to Freedman*, 56; Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction*, 299.

<sup>104</sup> Edward S. Philbrick to Direct Tax Commission, 14 January 1864, in *Freedom: The Lower South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 278-279.

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 though his wages remained extremely low. Even worse, despite the ban on corporal punishment instituted by the military almost as soon as the contraband camps opened, one of Philbrick's agents whipped a freedwoman and never faced punishment.<sup>105</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 and the inability of both the Treasury and War Departments to effectively administer and formulate policies for the contraband camps. 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, which set precedents for continued failures of oversight and regulation not only during the Civil War but also under the Freedmen's Bureau during the early years of Reconstruction, which indicates that the contraband camps established negative precedents for Bureau policy as well. Such neglect, along with the land sales themselves and the failure of the preemption program, effectively demonstrates the federal government's focus on economy, revenue, and the larger war effort rather than protecting the basic rights and welfare of the contrabands. This conclusion agrees with historians such as William C. Harris, who argues that the federal government focused on maintaining the loyalty of the Border States and the war effort before securing emancipation and contraband rights throughout the war, and James M. McPherson, who argues that slaves who ran to Union lines and entered contraband camps did force the federal government to focus more on emancipation,

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<sup>105</sup> South Carolina Freedmen to the President, 1 March 1864, in *Freedom: The Lower South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 297-298.

but that the war effort always remained the central focus, especially since Union victory was necessary to achieve emancipation.<sup>106</sup>

By this point, the continued exploitation of the contrabands caused “widespread distrust of the intentions of the Government” among the freed people. The abuses only continued during the later stages of the war, as the intervention of the Treasury Department into the land sales did little to mitigate the continued exploitation and mistreatment of contrabands.<sup>107</sup> The behavior of common soldiers did little to change this attitude, as soldiers abused, raped, and robbed the contrabands with seeming impunity despite the presence of officers who had the power to curtail such behavior but failed to take any action due to incompetence, racism, or apathy towards the welfare of the contrabands, while higher levels of the military command also failed to intervene.<sup>108</sup> At Saint Helena Island, seven intoxicated sailors beat several contrabands, killed their cows that they relied on for their livelihood, and even attempted to rape several black girls before the contrabands successfully subdued them, and the soldiers did not face any discipline from their superior officers.<sup>109</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, and the officers again failed to intervene even to protect contrabands who had provided vital assistance on military campaigns at risk of capture by the Confederates.<sup>110</sup> In a truly horrific 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

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<sup>106</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>107</sup> Brig Gen. R. Saxton to Hon. Edwin M. Stanton, 30 December 1864, in *Freedom: The Lower South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 327.

<sup>108</sup> Berlin, ed., *Freedom: The Lower South*, 95.

<sup>109</sup> Report of William E. Park, 18 March 1862, in *Freedom: The Lower South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 167-168.

<sup>110</sup> Affidavit of William Mitchell, 21 May 1864, in *Freedom: The Lower South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 314.

contrabands and also never faced any discipline for clear violations of military law and the proper conduct of an officer.<sup>111</sup> According to General Saxton, the soldiers, who generally held racist views, stole crops, livestock, and money 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>112</sup> Even the highest military authority in the area 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, and he never faced any discipline from higher echelons of command for his failures to protect the contrabands living in military-run contraband camps from abuse by their supposed guards and protectors. 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>113</sup>

The impressment of recruits demonstrates the degree of exploitation of contrabands tolerated in South Carolina. In March 1862 General Hunter, commander of the Department of the South, instituted a program of conscription of contrabands for United States Colored Troops regiments.<sup>114</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, which still faced the prospect of a Confederate attack from mainland South Carolina but were very unlikely to receive additional reinforcements from the regular Union army due to the campaigns in Virginia and the Western Theater. When

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<sup>111</sup> Rev. Abram Mercherson to His Excellency Maj. Gen. J. G. Foster, 12 August 1864, in *Freedom: The Lower South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 314-316.

<sup>112</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>113</sup> *Ibid*, 327.

<sup>114</sup> Berlin, ed., *Freedom: The Lower South*, 100.

enough volunteers did not come forward, Hunter resorted to impressment of contrabands by force to fill the regiments, and recruiters quickly began to utilize brutal tactics to force contrabands to enlist in the army.<sup>115</sup> As Rose writes, “squads of soldiers forcibly herded them into the camps” for enlistment.<sup>116</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 elderly and infirm men, women and children to tend the crop, even though the army had cut back rations for workers on government farms.<sup>117</sup>

Even when missionaries and contrabands complained about impressment, it continued unchecked due to the pressing need to fill regiments. A missionary in the area wrote that “They are carrying out the draft with excessive severity, not to say horrible cruelty.”<sup>118</sup> According to contraband minister Abram Mercherson, officers of the Twenty-Fifth Ohio, for example, repeatedly abused contrabands who resisted impressment and even raped women while claiming to search for recruits, and did not face any discipline from superior officers or from higher military authorities in Washington.<sup>119</sup> Another officer, according to a missionary, was “a terror to the whole black population” due to his harsh tactics of impressment, which indicates that the recruiters faced almost no regulation or oversight and could abuse contrabands without discipline.<sup>120</sup> The soldiers received monetary rewards for bringing in recruits, impressed men with little regard for the welfare of families who depended on their wages, and often impressed

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid, 109.

<sup>116</sup> Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction*, 267.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid, 266.

<sup>118</sup> W.C.G. to Sir, 23 September 1864, in *Letters from Port Royal*, ed. Pearson, 283.

<sup>119</sup> Rev. Abram Mercherson to Maj. Gen. J. G. Foster, 12 August 1864, in *Freedom: The Lower South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 314.

<sup>120</sup> C.P.W. to ---, 23 October 1862, in *Letters from Port Royal*, ed. Pearson, 96.

men clearly unfit for service in order to collect bounties.<sup>121</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>122</sup> Military authorities indiscriminately drafted contrabands for service regardless of whether they had existing jobs on plantations or families to support. Once the contrabands reached the army, the exploitation continued, as military officials failed to provide support to their destitute families despite promises made by recruiters.

When soldiers impressed contrabands from their jobs, they gave no regard to making sure the contrabands had received all the pay due them, even though the military owed months or even years of back wages. 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, especially as the army cut rations for workers on government farms and in contraband camps, which left contrabands without the means to purchase sufficient foodstuffs.<sup>123</sup> Such delays, another missionary claims, resulted from bureaucratic slowness at the Quartermaster’s Department, which handled payment for government laborers, indicating that the federal bureaucracy failed to provide effective oversight or correct obvious problems with compensation for contrabands, and such failures would continue under the Freedmen’s Bureau.<sup>124</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

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<sup>121</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>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> C. P. W. to ---, 23 October 1862, in *Letters from Port Royal*, ed. Pearson, 96, 99.

<sup>124</sup> E. S. P. to ---, 16 November 1862, in *Letters from Port Royal*, ed. Pearson, 111.

were not enough to purchase food, especially since soldiers received wages irregularly at best and farm workers also did not receive regular wages.<sup>125</sup> At the same time, commissary officials, trying to reduce expenses and prevent “dependency,” cut off rations completely 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 and they did not have enough money to purchase food.<sup>126</sup> As the commander of a black regiment stated, the curtailment of rations 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>127</sup> Military authorities 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. Neither the Direct Tax Commission nor the Treasury Department nor the military bureaucracy intervened even on behalf of the family members of black soldiers, which clearly demonstrates not only ineffective federal oversight but also apathy towards the welfare of the contrabands, as local and federal authorities allowed contrabands to starve rather than increasing rations.

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, even though black troops received much lower wages than white soldiers.<sup>128</sup> The white common soldiers exhibited a “degree of

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<sup>125</sup> Berlin, ed., *Freedom: The Lower South*, 110.

<sup>126</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>127</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>128</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.



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, and the army command in the area did nothing to discipline them.<sup>129</sup> The conscription of contrabands 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 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, as camps quickly became overwhelmed.

The camps became desperately overcrowded, but fears of dependency overcame efforts to help provide for the contrabands. When General William Tecumseh Sherman marched through Georgia in 1864, thousands of slaves fled to his army. By the time he reached Savannah, ten thousand contrabands followed, and Sherman wanted to send them somewhere else to increase the mobility of his army for future campaigns in the Carolinas. In addition, members of his army “had abused defenseless ex-slaves” and generally held racist views, which led to continued abuses of contrabands, while Sherman failed to intervene or provide any discipline.<sup>130</sup> Sherman sent the contrabands to the Sea Islands, where they arrived destitute and in desperate need of government aid, which quickly strained the available supplies on the Sea Islands, but neither the military nor the federal bureaucracies sent additional supplies for the thousands of new contrabands. The military commander in the Sea Islands, 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, even though many could not find a job through no fault of their own due to the shortage

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid, 108; E. S. P. to ---, 10 December 1862, in *Letters from Port Royal*, ed. Pearson, 118-119.

<sup>130</sup> Berlin, ed., *Freedom: The Lower South*, 111.

of job opportunities on the islands for thousands of new arrivals and that the families of laborers forced onto the chain gang faced starvation.<sup>131</sup> 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, even though many made enough to support themselves and their families by fishing both for subsistence and for profit by selling fish to soldiers and missionaries.<sup>132</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 perform farm labor, leaving them dependent on rations from military authorities focused on cutting rations as much as possible due to overwhelming fears of dependency.<sup>133</sup> The contrabands 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. Neither the Treasury Department nor any level of the military bureaucracy made any attempt to intervene and end the pervasive exploitation of destitute contrabands, which once again demonstrates the consequences of the federal government’s inability to create a uniform contraband policy during the Civil War, which led to policies such as ration cuts and mandatory labor contracts that became hallmarks of the Freedmen’s Bureau. Ironically, Sherman stepped in to try 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 in South Carolina and Georgia, not motivated by moral concern for their welfare but from the pressing need to relieve the desperately overcrowded camps on the Sea

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<sup>131</sup> A. S. Hitchcock to Col. Hall, 25 August 1864, in *Freedom: The Lower South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 317.

<sup>132</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>133</sup> Theodore Holt to Brig. Gen. R. Saxton, 12 September 1864, in *Freedom: The Lower South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 320.

Islands and to keep contrabands away from his army during the campaign through the Carolinas. Garrison Frazier, one of the black leaders, stated that the contrabands needed land which they could farm until they earned enough to purchase it from the government.<sup>134</sup> In addition, he called for the end of impressment, stating that blacks wanted to be soldiers and that they would enlist voluntarily, as long as their families received rations or sufficient wages to ensure an adequate food supply.<sup>135</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 without interference from the federal government, the military, or missionaries.<sup>136</sup> He also banned conscription and impressment and designated forty acres and a mule condemned from the army but still fit for farm labor 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>137</sup> Sherman instituted a policy far ahead of the federal government's contraband policy and did not seek approval from the federal government before implementing it, which clearly demonstrates the importance of local commanders to the development of contraband policy and programs. While Sherman's policy did not become part of the Freedmen's Bureau program, it still indicates the importance of local commanders and contraband superintendents to the formation of federal contraband policy.

Once the contrabands began to take possession of the land, Sherman's ideal policy quickly disintegrated, leaving contrabands on land without permanent title. Army authorities and

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<sup>134</sup> Clipping from the New York Tribune, "Negroes of Savannah," 13 February 1865, in *Freedom: The Lower South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 334.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid, 336.

<sup>136</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>137</sup> Ibid, 338-339.

missionaries did not have enough shelter or clothing to distribute to the contrabands, and many contrabands died of disease before they could begin to farm.<sup>138</sup> Even worse, Sherman's promissory title to the land did not hold up permanently, as the contrabands lost their land during Reconstruction to former Confederates who had received pardons and the right to their property.<sup>139</sup> Sherman not only promised contrabands land when they truly only had temporary title, but then Treasury authorities gave the land back to the very men who had held the contrabands as slaves. Sherman's land program ended four years of government mistreatment of the Sea Islands contrabands.<sup>140</sup> It still reflects the importance of local policies and programs to the formulation of policies for the Freedmen's Bureau in 1865 and 1866, as his land policy created a model for independent land ownership that the Bureau failed to implement despite the presence of a clear-cut example.

The contraband camps in South Carolina during the second half of the Civil War demonstrate the importance of local military commanders, superintendents of contrabands, and missionaries in the formulation of policies and programs that foreshadowed the policies enacted by the Freedmen's Bureau during Reconstruction. The failure to redistribute land to the contrabands, the enactment of mandatory labor contracts, low wages, reductions in rations, and the failure to mitigate abuse by soldiers and officers all remained problematic in South Carolina after the war despite the formation of the Freedmen's Bureau. The Bureau shared the focus on free labor and avoiding dependency on the government that guided contraband policy in the South Carolina camps during the Civil War. In addition, the protests launched by the contrabands against exploitative government policies, and the failure of the federal government

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<sup>138</sup> Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction*, 330-332.

<sup>139</sup> Gerteis, *From Contraband to Freedman*, 58.

<sup>140</sup> More details on land policy in South Carolina during Reconstruction will be provided in Chapter 5.

to address their concerns, also set precedents for the Bureau, as contrabands flooded the Bureau with complaints, but Bureau agents often failed to take substantive action. Finally, the focus on property rights that led to the failure of the land sales during the Civil War continued to guide federal contraband policy during Reconstruction, as the Bureau provided little to no assistance to contrabands who wished to obtain their own land, meaning that most freedmen remained in exploitative wage labor arrangements similar to those found in South Carolina. The camps in South Carolina clearly demonstrate the consequences of ineffective federal oversight of the camps due to the lack of a uniform federal contraband policy, and the importance of the Civil War contraband camps to the establishment of policies for the Freedmen's Bureau after the war. The story would be very similar in North Carolina, as contrabands there remained in exploitative wage labor arrangements that foreshadowed the labor contracts established by the Bureau in 1865 and 1866.

### Conclusion

The story of the camps in Virginia and South Carolina during the second half of the Civil War is vital to understanding how contraband camp policy contributed to policies and programs enacted by the Freedmen's Bureau during Reconstruction. The focus on dependency, racism, and a desire to maintain economy led to policies that undermined the autonomy of the contrabands and contradicted the free labor ideology that was supposed to govern contraband programs. The reduction of rations for families of workers, the failure to pay wages, the impressment of men for labor or enlistment, the imposition of mandatory labor contracts, and the failure to distribute land to the contrabands all prevented them from obtaining economic autonomy and becoming self-sufficient, meaning that contraband policy undermined its own goal of eliminating dependency on the government. The same labor policies would continue under

the Bureau, as agents compelled contrabands to sign labor contracts on plantations, even if they could make a better living elsewhere. The camps in Virginia and South Carolina clearly demonstrate that policies created in the contraband camps set the stage for the development of Bureau policy, and the camps in North Carolina and Washington, DC, provide even more examples of the connection between contraband camps and Bureau.

### CHAPTER 3

#### DEPENDENCY IN EASTERN THEATER CONTRABAND CAMPS, 1863-1865

By the second half of the Civil War, the camps in North Carolina and Washington, DC, became overcrowded and disease-ridden, and army commanders faced dilemmas about how to care for the ever-growing numbers of contrabands. In Washington, DC, the army abandoned Camp Barker and moved the contrabands to Freedmen's Village in Arlington, just south of the District, where they hoped that the abundant land would reduce overcrowding and disease. Failures in oversight, despite the camp's location in the national capital, led to continued exploitation, including a lack of wages, poor sanitation, and high rates of disease. Military commanders who feared dependence on the government compelled contrabands to sign labor contracts and even separated their families. Policies in both of these camps created several models for the Freedmen's Bureau, which lucidly demonstrates the importance of the contraband camps to the establishment of policies and programs of the Bureau during the early years of Reconstruction.

The camps in Kentucky are also essential for understanding contraband camps during the Civil War and how they contributed to the shaping of Bureau policy. Kentucky's status as a border state meant that the contrabands there remained in legal limbo throughout the war, as local military commanders remained unsure of whether they could accept contrabands into the lines, whether the contrabands or their masters should receive wages, whether USCT enlistment could proceed, and how to handle the families of USCT soldiers. The lack of a coherent federal

contraband policy had the most significant consequences in Kentucky, as commanders at Camp Nelson repeatedly advocated the expulsion of all contrabands from the camp due to concerns of confiscating the property of loyal masters, economic efficiency, and fears of dependency, and actually evicted all the contrabands from Camp Nelson in late 1864. A clear federal policy on the status of contrabands in the border states could have made a significant difference in Kentucky, and the lack of such a policy led to unnecessary exploitation. The closure of Camp Nelson immediately after the end of the war established a model for other camps to follow, both immediately after the war and under the Bureau. The camps in Kentucky, while they never introduced leasing, remain vitally important for understanding how policies formulated in the camps contributed to the development of Bureau policies and programs during early Reconstruction.

The discussion of the camps in North Carolina, Washington, DC, and Kentucky during the second half of the Civil War is crucial to understanding the connection between contraband camps and the Bureau. Contrabands in these camps faced involuntary relocation, labor impressment, ration reductions, and inadequate wages, and all of these problems would plague the Bureau after the war. In addition, misguided policies, such as a focus on avoiding dependency, reducing expenditures as much as possible, and closing the camps as quickly as possible, undermined the ability of the army to achieve the self-sufficiency for contrabands that they hoped to obtain. Finally, this chapter indicates the consequences of the lack of a coherent contraband policy, as camp commanders in each location came up with their own policies and programs and faced no federal oversight when these policies failed.

Before analyzing the contraband camps, a brief discussion of the Union Army's treatment of white refugees will provide a useful point of comparison, as they often received more lenient



treatment than the contrabands despite their questionable loyalty. For example, in New Orleans, Union quartermasters provided rations not only for the families of newly enlisted Union soldiers, but also for any widows and destitute persons, regardless of their loyalty, and continued issuing these rations until the recipients could either find work for themselves or left the area.<sup>1</sup> In total, more than six thousand New Orleans residents received rations at some point in 1862. In Vicksburg, meanwhile, the Union army not only provided rations to clearly disloyal residents, but also sold them firewood and other supplies at cost.<sup>2</sup> Finally, the army in Missouri taxed disloyal whites to pay for the care of Union refugees but not for contrabands, which clearly demonstrates the higher priority of the white destitute.<sup>3</sup> The generosity of treatment of white refugees contrasts starkly with the administration of contraband camps, where superintendents often cut off rations even to the destitute and compelled contrabands to move to government farms or leased plantations, where lessees often failed to provide rations at all. The fears of dependency could not totally explain the treatment of contrabands in camps across the South, and even their unquestionable loyalty could not provide them with better treatment than white refugees of quite questionable loyalty to the Union. The racism that plagued the North during the Civil War played a factor in the administration of contraband camps, as the same administrators that cut off rations to contrabands often generously handed them out to white refugees. The first example of ration cutoffs in a contraband camp in the second half of the Civil War, Washington, DC, provides clear evidence of this unequal treatment.

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<sup>1</sup> Aaron Sheehan-Dean, *The Calculus of Violence: How Americans Fought the Civil War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018), 246.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Brooks Blevins, *A History of the Ozarks, Volume 2: The Conflicted Ozarks* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2019), 105-107.

By late 1863, Camp Barker in Washington, DC, became so overcrowded and disease-ridden that the Quartermaster's Department finally acted and began searching for a new location for the contrabands, mainly due to fears that disease would spread from the camp into the city than from any concern for the welfare of the contrabands. Lieutenant Colonel Greene, the chief quartermaster, recommended land in Arlington, Virginia where contrabands could farm and also live in a rural area free of disease outbreaks and the poor sanitation of an urban camp.<sup>4</sup> Accordingly, quartermasters set up a one thousand acre space with five large farms for the contrabands to grow subsistence crops, which the army hoped would allow them to curtail the issue of rations.<sup>5</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>6</sup> When smallpox again hit Camp Barker in December 1863, Nichols and Colonel Greene opened Freedmen's Village and began to transfer the contrabands without consulting them on whether they wanted to leave the camp, hoping that they would be eager to leave Camp Barker for an idyllic life on a farm.<sup>7</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. The closure of the camp in favor of locating the contrabands near farming land foreshadowed Bureau policy after the war, as Bureau agents tried to close camps as quickly as possible and relocate contrabands onto plantations so they could support themselves. The camp in DC set an important example for Bureau policy as early as 1863.

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<sup>4</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>5</sup> Berlin, ed., *Freedom: The Upper South*, 254, 257.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 257.

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>8</sup> One contraband told a missionary that he “would rather starve in Washington” than move to another camp under Nichols.<sup>9</sup> Greene and Nichols ignored their complaints and began to move the contrabands in winter 1863-1864. The failure to account for the wishes of the contrabands set a precedent that would be repeated again and again in camps across the South and during Reconstruction. Camp commanders and Bureau agents often believed that only they truly knew what was best for the contrabands despite constant protests from the contrabands themselves and the missionaries who attempted to advocate for their rights.

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 and inflation-plagued city.<sup>10</sup> Many, according to Winkle, ended up “homeless, helpless, and starving,” and the army did nothing to help them since they refused to move to the new settlement in Arlington.<sup>11</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>12</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>13</sup> Louisa Jane Barker, a missionary, agreed, stating that the move constituted “a tyranny worse than their past experiences of slavery.”<sup>14</sup> Even worse, General Christopher C. Augur, the

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<sup>8</sup> Berlin, ed., *Freedom: The Upper South*, 257.

<sup>9</sup> Testimony of Georgiana Willets, January 1864, in *Freedom: The Upper South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 330.

<sup>10</sup> Berlin, ed., *Freedom: The Upper South*, 257.

<sup>11</sup> Winkle, *Lincoln’s Citadel*, 347.

<sup>12</sup> Testimony of Mrs. Louisa Jane Barker, January 1864, in *Freedom: The Upper South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 312.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, 312.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*.

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 avoid dependency on the government.<sup>15</sup> The forced move followed the precedent set in Virginia and also served as a model for later camp closures after the end of the war.

When the contrabands who remained with the army reached the camp, they found conditions little better than those they had left behind. The military had not yet finished building the cabins due to the hasty transfer of the contrabands, 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>16</sup> 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 and even deaths from exposure.<sup>17</sup> Quartermasters also diverted supplies from the village to contrabands working for the army, further worsening the shortages of basic supplies.<sup>18</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>19</sup>

Contrabands faced exploitative labor practices very similar to those in Virginia and South Carolina. The labor practices, including low wages and impressment, which created yet another model for sharecropping and other exploitative practices that emerged during Reconstruction,

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Berlin, ed., *Freedom: The Upper South*, 257.

<sup>17</sup> Winkle, *Lincoln's Citadel*, 349.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> F.W.P. to ---, 24 June 1864, in *Extracts from Letters of Teachers Fifth Series*, 18.

also, according to Winkle, “emphasized the profitability and military contributions of the camp at the expense of the contrabands’ needs.”<sup>20</sup> Men received ten dollars a month, but the five dollar deduction remained intact, and contrabands also had to pay three dollars in monthly rent for their cabins, leaving them with almost no money to buy supplies, including firewood.<sup>21</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>22</sup> His model for leasing would be followed along with South Carolina’s in the camps of the Mississippi Valley, which will be discussed in chapter four. Nichols 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>23</sup> 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. This example indicates how precedents set in one camp could shape policies in other camps, as commanders in DC saw that forceful impressment had been carried out without federal interference in other camps as the need for manpower overcame moral scruples.<sup>24</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>25</sup> Impressment continued, and Nichols re-emerged at Mason’s Island, where conditions would be much worse for the contrabands sent there from the village.

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<sup>20</sup> Winkle, *Lincoln’s Citadel*, 349.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, 348.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, 348-349.

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

<sup>24</sup> D.B. Nichols to Lt. Col. Greene, 2 April 1864, in *Freedom: The Upper South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 333-334.

<sup>25</sup> Berlin, ed., *Freedom: The Upper South*, 258.

The island became a temporary employment depot, where fears of dependency drove policy decisions. Nichols and Brown also set up Mason's Island as a temporary employment depot in 1864 to find jobs for able-bodied contrabands so they would no longer be dependent on government support. Captain Brown sent contrabands who could work from the village to the island whether they consented or not, which represents another example of camp commanders failing to take the wishes of the contrabands into account. As Berlin states, "He displayed scant sympathy for the freedpeople's desire to control the conditions under which they worked and lived."<sup>26</sup> Nichols hired contrabands out to private employers and even separated children, including Carter Holmes, from their parents and apprenticed them to area farmers, and then failed to intervene when these employers mistreated their contraband laborers.<sup>27</sup> These policies set yet another example not only for plantation leasing in Mississippi but also for the labor contract and apprenticeship policies of the Freedmen's Bureau, which would lead to the separation of hundreds of children from their families after the war. For contrabands waiting to be hired out, conditions on the island were dreadful, and neither Nichols nor the army quartermasters intervened. 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>28</sup> As a result, disease spread quickly, and forty-eight contrabands died in August 1864, followed by sixty in September.<sup>29</sup>

The labor practices and conditions on Mason's Island illustrate the priority of economy and self-reliance by Nichols and the quartermasters. Brown and Nichols focused on hiring the

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 261.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</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>29</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.

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 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. The failure of the federal government to address the exploitation clearly demonstrates the consequences of the lack of federal oversight of the camps, even in the federal capital itself.

While most of this section 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 at the hands of the army, and the federal government also failed to intervene to prevent exploitation. General Samuel P. Heintzelman, the commander in Alexandria, refused to build housing for the contrabands in order to keep them away from the city due to fears that they would spread disease, but more and more kept coming despite his efforts.<sup>30</sup> By December 1862, according to the New York missionary, twelve hundred contrabands lived in twenty-five houses, and the military refused to build any additional houses or provide alternative shelter.<sup>31</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>32</sup> The provost 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

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<sup>30</sup> Berlin, ed., *Freedom: The Upper South*, 251.

<sup>31</sup> *Report of the Yearly Meeting of Friends*, 6.

<sup>32</sup> Masur, *An Example for all the Land*, 15.

health of the city.”<sup>33</sup> As Wyman feared, the lack of shelter contributed to the spread of disease among the contrabands, meaning that the housing policy caused the very problem it was intended to prevent, and led to the avoidable deaths of hundreds of contrabands, and the lack of a federal policy contributed to this clear neglect. 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>34</sup> Smallpox began to spread in the overcrowded city, causing high mortality among the susceptible contrabands, including five hundred deaths in winter 1862. The smallpox patients, according to the New York missionary, an unnamed member of the New York Meeting of Friends, were “very much neglected,” and a lack of firewood in the hospital during the winter only increased mortality rates.<sup>35</sup> 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>36</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>37</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>38</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

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<sup>33</sup> Lewis McKenzie to Hon. E.M. Stanton, 19 September 1862, in *Freedom: The Upper South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 268-269.

<sup>34</sup> Julia A. Wilbur to Abraham Lincoln, 7 November 1862, in *Freedom: The Upper South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 275-276.

<sup>35</sup> *Report of the Yearly Meeting of Friends*, 7.

<sup>36</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>37</sup> Berlin, ed., *Freedom: The Upper South*, 251.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*; Capt. Murray Davis to Col. James A. Hardie, 3 December 1864, in *Freedom: The Upper South*, ed. Berlin, et al, 354.



contrabands working for the government had not received any wages for five to six months. Neither the army nor the federal bureaucracy made any effort to pay the contrabands their back wages, which indicates the consequences of the lack of a clear federal policy.<sup>39</sup> If 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>40</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>41</sup> Gladwin forced those unable to work to relocate to Arlington, even though the move resulted in the separation of families.<sup>42</sup> The contrabands remaining in Alexandria could no longer receive government rations and had to purchase their own food, even if they had not received any wages.<sup>43</sup> Gladwin and the army authorities 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, despite the fact that a few more surgeons and medical supplies could have prevented at least some of the deaths.

In the overcrowded barracks in Alexandria, 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

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<sup>39</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.

<sup>40</sup> Berlin, ed., *Freedom: The Upper South*, 251.

<sup>41</sup> Harriet Jacobs to J. Sella Martin, 13 April 1863, in *The Harriet Jacobs Papers*, ed. Yellin, et al, 478.

<sup>42</sup> Harriet Jacobs to Julia A. Wilbur, 8 August 1863, in *The Harriet Jacobs Papers* ed. Yellin, et al, 499-500.

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

“the complete realization of destitution and misery.”<sup>44</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>45</sup> In addition, soldiers confiscated blankets from contrabands, even the sick, claiming that they constituted government property, and then sold them for their own profit and never faced discipline for such obvious corruption, clearly demonstrating the degree of army exploitation of contrabands in Alexandria.<sup>46</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>47</sup> New York missionaries reported their findings on the dreadful conditions in Alexandria directly to President Lincoln and Secretary of War Stanton, and the federal government still took no action.<sup>48</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>49</sup> The military, specifically camp superintendents, attempted to inculcate self-sufficiency and economic autonomy to the contrabands, but then failed to pay wages, impressed them for labor, and forcibly recruited them into the army, which undermined the very free labor ideas they were trying to promote. Federal authorities not only failed to stop the military from exploiting contrabands, but actually praised them and directly contributed to its continuation,

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<sup>44</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>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 481-482.

<sup>46</sup> Julia A. Wilbur to Anna M.C. Barnes, 8 March 1864, in *The Harriet Jacobs Papers*, ed. Yellin, et al, 544.

<sup>47</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>48</sup> *Report of the Yearly Meeting of Friends*, 9.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

effectively demonstrating the mistreatment of contrabands by both military and federal authorities in the Washington area. These failures also demonstrate both the consequences of the lack of a federal policy and the precedents set for mistreatment of contrabands and freedmen by the Freedmen's Bureau.

The contraband camps in Washington, DC, and Alexandria, Virginia, clearly demonstrate the consequences of the lack of a federal policy and inadequate federal oversight for the contraband camps. Nichols and the camp commanders failed to address the poor sanitary conditions of the camps, forced the contrabands to sign labor contracts, separated their families, and charged high rent for squalid barracks in Alexandria, and neither the federal government nor the military bureaucracy intervened, despite the camp's location in the national capital. The camp created multiple examples for policies and programs enacted by the Freedmen's Bureau, including mandatory labor contracts, failure to address poor sanitary conditions, sending contrabands to private employers, apprenticing children away from their families without parental consent, and failure to provide sufficient medical care. The camps in Washington clearly demonstrate that examples for Freedmen's Bureau policy originated in the contraband camps during the Civil War. These policies would also become models for the western contraband camps that opened during the second half of the Civil War, especially plantation leasing, the separation of families for labor, the failure to provide sanitation, and inadequate oversight of leased plantations. These policies led to failure to pay wages, a lack of sufficient rations, the turning off of contrabands at the end of the year without paying wages, and the forced transport of contrabands from the camps to leased plantations.

## North Carolina: A Failed Colony

To the south in North Carolina, meanwhile, several more precedents for Freedmen's Bureau policy emerged. The settlement at James City became the first independent contraband settlement, where the contrabands supported themselves with little aid or protection from the government, and it became a model for future camps and settlements in the Western Theater and for the Freedmen's Bureau. The failure of the land program in James City provided further precedent for the emphasis on labor contracts rather than land distribution as the governing policy of the Freedmen's Bureau. The colony in Roanoke Island also aspired to independence, but the lack of adequate arable land and overcrowding undermined these lofty objectives. Instead, contrabands at Roanoke Island faced rampant corruption, paternalism from the army and from missionaries, violent abuse by soldiers, and an ongoing lack of wages that persisted throughout the war and into Reconstruction. Roanoke Island demonstrated the failure of free-labor programs and foreshadowed the mismanagement that would plague the camps in the Western Theater during the Civil War and the Freedmen's Bureau programs across the South during Reconstruction. These two camps demonstrate the consequences of the lack of a clear federal policy, as neither the military bureaucracy nor the federal government intervened to address misconduct and corruption by military leaders, or to address the deteriorating conditions in the camps. A discussion of the camps in North Carolina during the second half of the Civil War is essential to understand how the failure of independent contraband settlements led to policies and programs later adopted by the Freedmen's Bureau during Reconstruction. It also further demonstrates the importance of the wartime contraband camps to the formulation of Freedmen's Bureau policy.

In 1863, recruitment began in North Carolina for the United States Colored Troops, which quickly led to impressment. The recruiters resorted to the brutal impressment tactics utilized in Virginia and South Carolina, which indicates ineffective federal oversight of recruiting in camps across the South. As Click states, the recruiters treated “the freedmen worse than they had been treated under slavery” and soldiers often impressed contrabands when they reported to paymasters to receive their wages. The contrabands did not receive their wages and were compelled to enlist in the army, which meant irregular wages at best.<sup>50</sup> The soldiers did not receive their wages on time if at all after they enlisted, which made it impossible for them to support their families back on Roanoke Island. According to Tubbs, a regiment of 1,100 colored soldiers in New Bern did not receive any pay, which made it very difficult to feed their families. Even worse, the paymaster for the regiment used the money for wages to trade cotton illegally, which indicates the lack of effective oversight of the black regiments in addition to the contraband camps.<sup>51</sup> In addition, medical care for the soldiers remained inadequate throughout the war, as incompetent surgeons and a pervasive lack of supplies hampered the ability of the army. As Tubbs states, smallpox spread throughout a regiment in New Bern, and the disease spread to the contraband camp, which indicates the consequences of the failure to take a simple quarantine measure to prevent epidemic disease.<sup>52</sup> Tubbs’s statement in his letter that the disease only affected “n-----rs” reflects the racism pervasive among officers and soldiers in North Carolina, and clearly demonstrates that it played a major role in the mistreatment of contrabands.<sup>53</sup> The contrabands in North Carolina faced the same problems with military impressment as contrabands in Virginia and South Carolina, but the consequences were worse

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<sup>50</sup> Click, *Time Full of Trial*, 130-131.

<sup>51</sup> Charles H. Tubbs to Sir, 4 February 1863, in the Charles H. Tubbs Papers.

<sup>52</sup> Charles H. Tubbs to Sir, 28 June 1863, in the Charles H. Tubbs Papers.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

due to the comparative lack of job opportunities for the contrabands on Roanoke Island. It remained difficult for women and children to support themselves, and the military authorities at the camp did little to address the worsening situation.

Contrabands also faced impressment for labor in addition to military service. In November 1863, several contrabands signed a petition to General Butler complaining that they had been “impressed by the authorities to labor on the Public works without compensation” and that they could not support their families who depended on their wages.<sup>54</sup> The freedmen emphasized their “Willingness to Contribute to the Cause of the union in anyway consistant with there cause as Freemen and the Rights of their Families,” indicating that they were willing to work for the government as long as they received the treatment they believed to be just, such as receiving enough money to support their families.<sup>55</sup> The contrabands recognized their rights and complained to the army when they were mistreated, which foreshadows the extensive volumes of complaints made to Bureau agents after the war as freedmen asserted their newfound rights, indicating that the contraband camps set yet another precedent for Bureau policy. The fact that no response to the petition signed by more than fifty contrabands exists in the record also foreshadows the lack of effective Bureau response to the complaints of freedmen after the war. A lack of staff often prevented agents from enforcing their verdicts against employers, whose exploitation of freedmen differed little from that imposed by the army in the contraband camps.

Contrabands also faced nonpayment of even their very low wages. As Click writes, the army “frequently took advantage of the labor the freedmen provided... but only begrudgingly and infrequently” provided support for the laborers and their families, even though there were

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<sup>54</sup> Ruber Henry et al to Maj. Genl. B.F. Butler, 20 November 1863, Miscellaneous Letters and Reports Received, Series 5076, Department of Virginia and North Carolina and Eighteenth Army Corps, U.S. Army Continental Commands, Record Group 393 Pt. 1, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

few opportunities for outside employment on Roanoke Island.<sup>56</sup> By the end of the war in 1865, the army owed the freedmen in Roanoke Island alone more than eighteen thousand dollars in back wages, and some contrabands had not been paid in over three years.<sup>57</sup> The Department of Negro Affairs, rather than improving the situation, increased the bureaucratic red tape in the colony and hampered the ability of the army to pay contrabands their wages, which demonstrates that excessive organization and bureaucracy can have the same negative consequences as a lack of organization, particularly when two different agencies fail to work together.<sup>58</sup> For example, Superintendent Horace James often did not receive sufficient funds to pay contraband wages due to bureaucratic infighting between the Treasury and War Departments over which agency was responsible for contraband wages, which indicates a trend that would be repeated with even worse consequences in the western contraband camps.<sup>59</sup>

In addition, the army reduced the rations issued to contrabands in order to reduce dependency on the government, but failed to account for the lack of wages, meaning that the contrabands faced starvation if they could not find another way to pay for food. The ration constituted of ten ounces of pork or sixteen ounces of beef, sixteen ounces of bread or sixteen ounces of corn meal, and ten pounds of vegetables, all issued weekly.<sup>60</sup> In late 1864, the army, wanting to, according to historian Chandra Manning, demonstrate the self-sufficiency of the contrabands to disprove racism, “sharply reduced or cut off rations to all island inhabitants who could not pay for them or were not directly laboring for the government,” including the families

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<sup>56</sup> Click, *Time Full of Trial*, 125.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid*, 134.

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

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid*, 133.

<sup>60</sup> Circular No. 8, 20 June 1865, Records of the Field Offices of the State of North Carolina, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands 1865-1872, Record Group 105, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC.

of United States Colored Troops soldiers, who had been promised support by recruiters.<sup>61</sup> These policies anticipated patterns that would be reflected in Freedmen's Bureau policy, as Bureau agents consistently cut rations to freedmen, and eventually issued them only to the absolutely destitute who could not work due to illness, advanced age, or disability.<sup>62</sup> In addition, the lack of wages in North Carolina would continue into Reconstruction, indicating the Bureau's inability to correct wartime deficiencies in providing for the contrabands. The fact that Roanoke Island was set up as a model colony only makes these deficiencies more glaring and indicates the failure of the army's free labor policy in the contraband camps.

As in Virginia and South Carolina, missionaries from the North arrived at Roanoke Island to assist the contrabands. As Click writes, "Although the military authorities were responsible for the official supervision of the freedmen's camps in North Carolina, the real caregivers were the northern missionaries who offered day-to-day assistance to the former slaves," especially given the deficiencies in military support of the contrabands.<sup>63</sup> Most of the missionaries came from the American Missionary Association, which focused on perfecting society through social reform.<sup>64</sup> A debate soon began between the AMA and the National Freedmen's Relief Association, which focused on more practical goals such as self-reliance and education, and these disputes hampered the ability of missionaries to provide for the contrabands.<sup>65</sup> The constant guerrilla attacks greatly undermined the ability of missionaries to keep schools open on the mainland, and led to desperate overcrowding on Roanoke Island, as contrabands fled to the colony to escape the near-constant guerrilla raids. A lack of teachers compounded the problem,

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<sup>61</sup> Chandra Manning, *A Troubled Refuge: Struggling for Freedom in the Civil War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2016), 74-75.

<sup>62</sup> Bureau policies will be discussed in extensive detail in chapter 5, but see Berlin, *Slaves No More*, for an overview of Bureau policies and programs across the South.

<sup>63</sup> Click, *Time Full of Trial*, 73.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid*, 74-75.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid*.



as each teacher had one hundred or more students by 1864. In addition, the army, rather than supporting the schools, sent soldiers to raid the schoolhouses and impress students for work away from the camps without consulting their parents, which led to dramatic declines in attendance as parents kept their children out of school due to fear of impressment.<sup>66</sup> The army could confiscate school buildings at any time for military purposes, and provided no financial support to the schools or the teachers, indicating that the military placed a very low priority on educating the contrabands even though they expected them to learn self-reliance and the skills necessary to survive in a free-labor economy.<sup>67</sup> The federal government also did not establish any policies for supporting or even protecting contraband schools from guerrillas. The contrabands had to rely on missionaries throughout the war for education, and the opinions of the missionaries towards the contrabands made this governmental failure even more problematic.

Ideas of dependency also undermined the ability of aid societies to help contrabands. The missionaries, according to historian David Silkenat, “focused on education rather than the more pressing material needs of black refugees,” even as overcrowding and shortages worsened on Roanoke Island in 1864.<sup>68</sup> The missionaries shared the government’s fear of creating dependency among the contrabands, and refused to provide material aid to contrabands who were able to work, no matter how destitute their families or even if they had just arrived from a camp on the mainland.<sup>69</sup> Missionaries even denied aid to contrabands who were owed back wages from the government and had no way to pay for even basic supplies.<sup>70</sup> According to Greenwood, the missionaries saw the contrabands as “childlike” and unable to care for

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid, 121.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Silkenat, *Driven from Home*, 75.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid, 76.

themselves, which indicates the racism and paternalism pervasive among northern missionaries during the Civil War.<sup>71</sup> In fact, they viewed African-American culture as “primitive and foolish” and tried to replace it with “white, middle-class Protestant values they deemed superior” despite the fact that the contrabands already had a thriving culture.<sup>72</sup> The American Missionary Association maintained segregated schools in Beaufort despite the protests of the contrabands, and the contrabands founded the Colored Freedmen’s Aid Society to free themselves of paternalist and even racist missionaries. The contrabands were not mere dependents on white assistance, but clearly able to help themselves and organize to protest mistreatment and exploitation.<sup>73</sup> In addition, the actions of the missionaries provide even more evidence that policies that they believed would help the contrabands actually ended up undermining their ability to support themselves, but the army and missionaries failed to learn from these failures and did not change their policies. These attitudes had even more severe consequences by late 1864, as the crowding on Roanoke Island and at Beaufort became desperate due to both guerrilla raids and Sherman’s campaign in the Carolinas, and neither the army nor the missionaries could adequately respond to the burgeoning crisis.

The army also failed to sufficiently respond to disease in the camps. In September 1864, smallpox struck the severely overcrowded city of Beaufort, and killed one thousand victims of both races. As Silkenat argues, soldiers and white Unionist refugees had lower mortality rates, vastly better medical care, and more access to vaccination than the contrabands, who faced incompetent surgeons and shortages of medical supplies, both of which could have been easily corrected by the army.<sup>74</sup> At Roanoke Island, meanwhile, the sudden arrival of thousands of

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<sup>71</sup> Greenwood, *First Fruits of Freedom*, 61.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid*, 71.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid*, 64-65, 76.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid*, 88-89.

contrabands from Sherman's army led to "severe overcrowding, malnutrition, and disease" and forty to fifty deaths a day before the camp administration finally began to act.<sup>75</sup> They sent the contrabands to abandoned plantations despite the guerilla threat and the fact that no hospitals existed for these outlying plantations, and the mortality rate remained at thirty a day until the end of the war. The contrabands did not have any choice in whether to go to a plantation, as the army impressed them to hasten the process of emptying the contraband camps.<sup>76</sup> The camp at Roanoke Island set a precedent for the process of closing the camps that began soon after the end of the war in 1865, and would be repeated across the South by the Freedmen's Bureau during the early stages of Reconstruction. Contrabands faced eviction from the camps and transfer to abandoned or leased plantations as sharecroppers or tenants, which denied them any real chance for economic independence and indicates the importance of the camps to the formulation of Reconstruction policy.

A second contraband camp in North Carolina demonstrates the failure of both the attempt to create a model contraband settlement and of attempts to distribute land to the contrabands. In 1863, after Confederate guerrilla raids forced the closure of outlying camps, James set up a new settlement for two thousand seven hundred freedmen, which contained eight hundred houses that would be built by the contrabands, meaning that they could set up their own settlement.<sup>77</sup> By 1865, the settlement contained a school, several churches, a hospital, a blacksmith, and a successful food crop, since the land at James City was much more suitable for cultivation than the land at Roanoke Island.<sup>78</sup> James also remained concerned about dependency on the

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid, 94-95.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid, 95-98.

<sup>77</sup> Joe A. Mobley, *James City: A Black Community in North Carolina, 1863-1900* (Raleigh: North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources, 1981), 24.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid, 25.

government and cut off rations except for contrabands who absolutely could not perform any type of work, and did not resume rations even for families of soldiers. He compelled contrabands to pay for clothing, even if they could not afford it.<sup>79</sup> After the war, meanwhile, the contrabands strenuously argued that they had a right to remain on the land as farmers, and even expressed a willingness to pay the government rent until they could afford to purchase the land.<sup>80</sup> Colonel Eliphalet Whittlesey, the Bureau commissioner for North Carolina, closed the James City settlement and ordered the freedmen to sign labor contracts on local plantations in Pitt County. In fact, Whittlesey owned several plantations himself and hired freedmen to work on them in violation of Bureau policy, and never faced discipline from the Bureau or the federal government, which demonstrates that poor federal oversight continued even after the establishment of the Freedmen's Bureau. On his plantation, freedmen worked for five dollars a month for women and fifteen dollars a month for children along with rations, and had access to a school.<sup>81</sup> While these labor terms were generous, the freedmen truly wanted the right to work their own land and achieve economic autonomy, but contraband superintendents and Bureau agents who followed the precedents set in the South Carolina contraband camps forced them to sign labor contracts instead, which further demonstrates the importance of contraband camps in setting precedents for both policies in later camps and Bureau policy.

The camps in North Carolina further demonstrate the importance of the contraband camps to the establishment of both Bureau policy and problems after the war. The failure to pay adequate wages, the separation of families, the enforcement of mandatory labor contracts, and the failure to provide land for the contrabands all foreshadowed the problems that plagued the

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid, 31.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid, 37.

Bureau after the war, and also clearly demonstrate the lack of federal oversight of the camps during the war, and which would continue after the war as the overwhelmed Bureau could never provide sufficient staffing or supervision to cover the entire South. Also, the racism of several of the officers in North Carolina foreshadowed the racism that would plague the Bureau, as many agents frequently favored white Southerners over freedmen, which will be discussed in much more detail in chapter five. Finally, the camps in North Carolina illustrate the important role of missionary societies in helping to care for the contrabands. They would become much more important after the war as the Bureau began to terminate its support for the freedmen, leaving missionary-run schools as the only tangible source of aid in a region violently hostile to their interests. An analysis of the camps in North Carolina is essential to understanding Bureau policy after the war.

#### Kentucky: First Attempt to Close a Camp

While the army in Louisiana and Mississippi focused on leasing as a way to empty out the contraband camps, the military in Kentucky used an entirely different approach. Unlike any other state discussed so far in this dissertation, slavery remained legal in Kentucky for the duration of the war, which meant that contrabands could not safely venture outside of heavily guarded camps to farm abandoned land. The army and the missionaries who played a major role in camp administration contracted the contrabands out to railroads, despite the fact that slavery remained legal and the contrabands faced the constant danger of re-enslavement or even death if captured by guerrillas or slave patrols. By the latter stages of the war, the number of contrabands quickly began to overwhelm the military, who resorted to an unauthorized sudden closure of the camp in the dead of winter that resulted in numerous deaths. While the military quickly re-opened the camp, the expulsion created a model for later camp closures under the Bureau after

the war. An analysis of Camp Nelson in Kentucky is essential for understanding the operation of contraband camps in a border state where slavery remained legal, the disorganized and haphazard process of camp closures, and the contracting out of contrabands to private companies, all of which set important precedents for later Bureau policy.

One of the major problems with contraband camp administration in Kentucky, and the Western Theater as a whole, was the emancipatory politics of the military commanders in the area. According to historian Kristopher Teters, the officers in the Western Theater fell into four categories: very conservative officers who refused to admit any contrabands to their lines and wanted to maintain the institution of slavery in all respects, moderately conservative officers who only admitted contrabands who worked for the Confederate army while leaving the institution of slavery mostly alone, moderate officers who admitted any slaves owned by rebels, and radical officers who admitted any fugitive slaves no matter what and hoped to dismantle the institution of slavery entirely.<sup>82</sup> In Kentucky, the officers tended towards the very conservative viewpoint, which, combined with Kentucky's status as a border state, made it very difficult for contrabands to seek refuge within Union lines. William Tecumseh Sherman, for example, believed that all slaves "should be returned to their masters" and that he had "no legal right to tamper with slavery" in a loyal state.<sup>83</sup> Don Carlos Buell, meanwhile, owned eight slaves himself and believed in the constitutional right to own slaves. He ordered his commanders to refuse admittance to contrabands no matter the loyalty of their owners, and reprimanded commanders who violated his orders.<sup>84</sup> Henry Wager Halleck, finally, who commanded the entire Western Theater, issued General Order No. 3 which argued that contrabands gave information to the

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<sup>82</sup> Teters, *Practical Liberators*, 8.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid*, 12.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid*, 20.

enemy and therefore should be excluded from Union lines, despite a lack of solid evidence to back up his claims.<sup>85</sup> The officers in command in Kentucky combined personal beliefs, a focus on border state loyalty, and fears of spying to exclude contrabands from Union lines altogether, until the Second Confiscation Act in 1862 required the army to admit fugitive slaves owned by disloyal masters. In addition, Teters argues, the very success of the Union army in the West undermined emancipation, as Halleck and his subordinates believed that emancipation was unnecessary to Union victory due to the army's series of victories in 1862.<sup>86</sup> It would take the Confiscation Act, in addition to the slower pace of Union victory in the West, to change contraband policy in Kentucky from exclusion to admittance to the contraband camps.

In March 1863, Ambrose Burnside became commander of the Department of the Ohio, which included Kentucky, and his mission was to help Unionists who faced constant threats from Confederate guerrillas, but he quickly had to come up with a plan for the burgeoning contraband population as well.<sup>87</sup> Soon after arriving in Kentucky, he named Speed S. Fry, a missionary, to establish a contraband camp near Lexington, as slaves ran to the Union army in large numbers despite the fact that slavery remained legal in Kentucky and the Emancipation Proclamation technically did not apply. The Article of War prohibiting the army from returning fugitives no matter the loyalty of their master permitted Burnside to establish and maintain a contraband camp, as long as his troops did not launch raids to entice slaves to escape.<sup>88</sup> In addition, the camp served as a base for United States Colored Troops recruitment and training in Kentucky, which constituted the only reason that Ulysses S. Grant approved of its establishment and maintenance, since he believed that Union control of east Tennessee negated any need for a large

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid, 13.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid, 25.

<sup>87</sup> Sears, *Camp Nelson*, ix-xx.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

Union garrison in Kentucky. In fact, the camp became the third largest recruiting depot in the nation by the end of the war in 1865.<sup>89</sup> Burnside despised African-American soldiers and only went along with recruitment grudgingly, meaning that the very existence of the camp remained in limbo throughout the war. Another pressing issue right from the beginning was how to employ the contrabands due to the camp's location in a slave state, and Burnside and Fee came up with a unique solution.

Due to the fact that contrabands could not farm abandoned land in Kentucky, Burnside decided to impress the contrabands to work on roads and railroads. He issued General Orders No. 41 on August 10, 1863, which required Fee to impress six thousand slaves to construct and maintain roads near the camp in Lexington.<sup>90</sup> The order did not specify wage scales or even require that the contrabands receive pay. Burnside allowed contrabands from Mississippi to Kentucky to work on the roads, as long as they remained separate from local contrabands, as he did not want abolitionist sentiment to spread amongst the Kentucky slaves, which he feared would make them "demoralized and worthless."<sup>91</sup> Due to fears about hiring contrabands in a slave state, Burnside ordered that the masters of the contrabands be paid fifteen dollars a month, but no wages paid to the laborers, as he remained concerned that the army was illegally hiring contrabands in a loyal state.<sup>92</sup> In fact, one of his aides, Brigadier General Burbridge, paid owners of impressed laborers even if they had not taken the oath of allegiance, meaning that concerns of maintaining border state loyalty overcame those of proper treatment of the contrabands, even as the army was trying to convince them to sign up for service in the army.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid, xxx.

<sup>90</sup> Ambrose E. Burnside, General Orders No. 41, 10 August 1863, in *Camp Nelson*, ed. Sears, 9.

<sup>91</sup> Speed S. Fry to Major General Ambrose Burnside, 24 October 1863, in *Camp Nelson*, ed. Sears, 26-27.

<sup>92</sup> Telegraph from J.H. Simpson to Ambrose Burnside, 28 October 1863, in *Camp Nelson*, ed. Sears, 28-29.

<sup>93</sup> Orders from B.G. Burbridge to Capt. A.E. Hall, 18 May 1864, in *Camp Nelson*, ed. Sears, 57.



Burnside and Fry faced the problem that slavery remained legal in Kentucky, so the very existence of Camp Nelson technically violated Kentucky law, which led to attempts to return contraband to their owners. The Emancipation Proclamation did not apply to Kentucky, so most of the slaves fled from loyal masters, which created numerous legal issues because confiscation constituted a war power that should only apply to disloyal masters. As a result, some soldiers began to return contrabands to their owners, despite the Article of War that prohibited such actions. In June 1864, one colonel tied together several contrabands and forcibly returned them to their owners even though they had successfully reached Camp Nelson, and he faced no discipline, which indicates the impact of Camp Nelson's location in a border state, and the consequences of the lack of any guidance from Washington on how to handle contraband camps in loyal areas.<sup>94</sup> Soldiers allowed slave owners to enter the camp to search for their escaped fugitives, and forced the contrabands to leave with their owners. One cook who had lived in Camp Nelson for six months found herself forced to return to her owner, who was known all over the area for his excessive cruelty.<sup>95</sup> That same month, meanwhile, Colonel A.H. Clark, the post commander, ordered all black women in the camp "without authority" to be arrested, whipped, tied by the thumbs, and forced out of the Union lines, where they faced almost certain re-enslavement.<sup>96</sup> The War Department rescinded this blatant violation of the Article of War banning the military from returning fugitives, but it set a precedent for a later, much harsher expulsion later in the war that no authorities in Washington could stop.

Recruits and their families also faced the specter of expulsion and harsh treatment despite their willingness to enlist in the army, and the lack of a national policy concerning the treatment

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<sup>94</sup> Speed S. Fry to Sen. Henry Wilson, 3 June 1864, in *Camp Nelson*, ed. Sears, 63.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

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

of USCT families allowed the administrators of Camp Nelson to institute any policies they pleased. In May 1864, Clark rejected recruits who had faced constant violence from guerrillas and slave patrols to reach the camp, stating that he had “no authority to accept them,” and the War Department did not intervene to compel him to accept recruits and begin the enlistment process.<sup>97</sup> Once enlistment finally began in June 1864, recruits rejected as unfit were sent away rather than gaining acceptance in the camp, despite the fact that they would almost certainly face harsh reprisals from guerrillas or their owners, as Clark and Burnside never truly accepted the existence of the camp and wanted to empty it as soon as possible, due to Kentucky’s location in a border state and fears of dependency on the government.<sup>98</sup> On July 3, 1864, Fry acted on that mission, and ordered that only recruits and contrabands working for the military could remain in the camp, and that women and children, even if they had family members in the army or working for the government, had to leave the camp. Owners did not even have to take the oath of allegiance to obtain their slaves, meaning that the overwhelming desire to empty the camp overcame concerns over the loyalty of the masters and that the Union army was willing to help Confederate slave owners rather than loyal contrabands.<sup>99</sup> Due to the sheer number of contrabands in the camp, the need to enlist a sufficient number of recruits, and bureaucratic difficulties, the expulsion did not take place until winter, meaning that the contrabands were sent out of the camp during one of Kentucky’s harshest winters in history.

On November 23, 1864, Fry ordered all women and children evicted from the camp, despite the fact that most of them had husbands or fathers serving in the army. According to Captain Theron E. Hall, “all were suffering with cold and hunger” and even starving and

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<sup>97</sup> Report of Mr. Butler of the Sanitary Commission, 23 May 1864, in *Camp Nelson*, ed. Sears, 58.

<sup>98</sup> General Orders No. 45, 2 June 1864, in *Camp Nelson*, ed. Sears, 63.

<sup>99</sup> S.S. Fry to Lt. Geo. A. Hanaford, 6 July 1864; Telegraph from J. Dates Dixon to Speed S. Fry, 11 July 1864; Speed S. Fry, General Orders No. 4, 12 July 1864, in *Camp Nelson*, ed. Sears, 93-98.

freezing to death.<sup>100</sup> One soldier who enlisted in the USCT stated that the recruiter promised him that his wife and children could remain in the camp for the duration of his service. The military compelled his wife and children to leave the camp even though his child was severely ill, and the child later died of exposure during the desperate search for shelter after leaving the camp.<sup>101</sup> The military took no action to assist the contrabands, even though they expelled them from a camp located in a slave state and they faced the very real threat of re-enslavement or even death at the hands of Confederate guerillas.<sup>102</sup> News of the expulsion quickly reached the North, as the New York Tribune reported that “armed soldiers attack humble huts inhabited by poor negroes” and that “slavery or even death itself would be a positive blessing” to the contrabands expelled from the contraband camps, as the Union military did not promise protection for the contrabands even in a slave state.<sup>103</sup>

The expulsion from Camp Nelson demonstrates multiple important points. First, it established a model for how to close a camp, which became the policy that several camp commanders followed across the nation when the war ended, as the government hoped to rid itself of the burden of caring for contrabands, especially after the Thirteenth Amendment ended slavery in 1865. The expulsion further demonstrates that policies developed in the contraband camps shaped the policies pursued by the Freedmen’s Bureau during early Reconstruction. Secondly, the expulsion elucidates the consequences of inadequate federal supervision of the camps, as federal officials failed to act until days afterwards, by which time several contrabands, almost all women and children, had died from exposure to below-freezing temperatures with no shelter. The lack of timely federal intervention is especially galling considering that Fry and

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<sup>100</sup> Captain Theron B. Hall’s Report, 23 November 1864, in *Camp Nelson*, ed. Sears, 134.

<sup>101</sup> Affidavit of Joseph Miller, 26 November 1864, in *Camp Nelson*, ed. Sears, 135-136.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>103</sup> New York Tribune, 28 November 1864, in *Camp Nelson*, ed. Sears, 138-139.

other officials at Camp Nelson had repeatedly threatened to evict women and children from the camp, so the actual expulsion did not come as a surprise to the federal bureaucracy, but they had failed to take action on these earlier threats. The expulsion at Camp Nelson both established a precedent for later Bureau policy and clearly illustrated the effects of inadequate federal oversight of the camps, even when the War Department had advance knowledge of what was about to happen at Camp Nelson.

In December 1865, reacting to the negative press on the expulsion, Adjutant General Lorenzo Thomas ordered Fry to accept all women and children in to the camp and to “take back all you have sent out” from the camp.<sup>104</sup> Thomas intervened to free missionary T. E. Hall, who had been arrested by Fry for helping contrabands enter the camp, even though the War Department ordered Fry to permit women and children.<sup>105</sup> The conditions in the camp, meanwhile, had greatly worsened since the expulsion. Soldiers tore down the homes built by the contrabands, meaning that they had to live in large communal barracks that worsened outbreaks of epidemic diseases, particularly during the harsh winter.<sup>106</sup> According to missionary Abisha Scofield, the contrabands were “very destitute and most all complaining of being unwell” due to the conditions in the barracks and the harsh weather.<sup>107</sup> Another missionary, John Fee, reported that “much distress and mortality” prevailed in the camp, as pneumonia spread easily through barracks that housed up to one hundred and fifty contrabands per building.<sup>108</sup> Conditions worsened throughout the winter as more and more contrabands arrived at the camp and overwhelmed the available shelter. As the commissioners of investigation of colored refugees

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<sup>104</sup>Lorenzo Thomas to Speed S. Fry, 29 November 1864, in *Camp Nelson*, ed. Sears, 142.

<sup>105</sup> T.E. Hall to Elnathan Davis, 14 December 1864, in *Camp Nelson*, ed. Sears, 147.

<sup>106</sup> T.E. Hall to Captain E.B.W. Reslieaux, 16 December 1864, in *Camp Nelson*, ed. Sears, 152-153.

<sup>107</sup> Affidavit of Abisha Scofield, 16 December 1864, in *Camp Nelson*, ed. Sears, 154.

<sup>108</sup> John C. Fee to Brother Tappan, 21 February 1865, in *Camp Nelson*, ed. Sears, 175-176.

for Kentucky, who represented a missionary organization, reported, the contrabands “have the right to some kind of assistance, and the government alone has the means and ability to furnish it,” meaning that the camp now had to provide for the women and children, especially when they were the families of USCT soldiers.<sup>109</sup> Conditions continued to deteriorate, and the looming end of the war raised fears that the camp would close again and throw the contrabands out into a state where slavery still remained legal right up until the end of the war.

The army tried to improve conditions by reopening the camp late in the war. On March 3, 1865, General Orders Number Ten freed all families of USCT soldiers and ordered camp commanders to provide “benevolence and charity” to them in order to increase enlistments.<sup>110</sup> This order resolved the question of whether these families were free given the camp’s location in a border state, and removed the major justification for evicting them from the camp. Even though slavery remained legal in Kentucky, USCT families could not be evicted from the camp or mistreated, and slave owners would be expressly prohibited from entering the camp to reclaim their former property. Soon after the issuance of the order, the war came to an end, calling into question the need for the contraband camps to remain open across the South, not just in Kentucky. Inspector General Jas. A. Hardie inspected the camp on May 13, 1865, and reported that the “establishment is in excellent condition” with cottages being built to replace the barracks, with rent of twenty-five dollars a month to teach the contrabands self-sufficiency.<sup>111</sup> He still stated that slave owners should be responsible for caring for ill and elderly slaves, who had no business coming to the camp, even though the camp constituted the only means in Kentucky to ensure freedom from slavery. Finally, he argued that “Camp Nelson is apparently

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<sup>109</sup> Report of the Commissioners of Investigation of Colored Refugees in Kentucky, Tennessee, and Alabama, 28 December 1864, in *Camp Nelson*, ed. Sears, 160.

<sup>110</sup> Major General Palmer, General Orders No. 10, 3 March 1865, in *Camp Nelson*, ed. Sears, 183-184.

<sup>111</sup> Report by Brigadier General Jas. A. Hardie, 13 May 1865, in *Camp Nelson*, ed. Sears, 202.

an extravagant experiment and the necessity for its maintenance is not clear,” meaning that the government should shut it down as soon as practical, despite its location in a border state.<sup>112</sup>

Missionary John Fee, meanwhile, echoed the arguments of missionaries in South Carolina and stated that the military should confiscate the land of disloyal planters and distribute it to the contrabands so they could farm it and become self-sufficient, while additional land could be sold to pay for schools.<sup>113</sup> His plan received no support, however, as the government continued to focus on closing the camps to reduce expenditures and ensure that the contrabands achieved self-sufficiency and avoided any dependency on the government. The process of closing Camp Nelson set precedents that would be followed across the South in 1865 and 1866.

After the end of the war, the military wanted to shut down the camp, but the process did not progress quickly. In June 1865, the Assistant Adjutant General for the Department of Kentucky, Captain E.B. Harlon, argued that the hospital at Camp Nelson was too large and could be cut without significant consequence in order to reduce government expenditures on the camp.<sup>114</sup> The hospital, however, was very necessary for the camp, and mortality only increased after cuts in medical care, as almost two hundred contrabands died of disease in June 1865 alone, according to Fee.<sup>115</sup> Another problem facing the army was the fact that few white men would hire the contrabands, making it difficult to find them jobs outside of the camp and extending the life of Camp Nelson well into the fall of 1865, as the army had great difficulty finding alternative arrangements for the contrabands.<sup>116</sup> By July 1865, the camp still contained almost 1,500 women and nearly as many children, and only seventy one women had found employment

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid, 205.

<sup>113</sup> John Fee to Charles Sumner, 6 June 1865, in *Camp Nelson*, ed. Sears, 209-210.

<sup>114</sup> Report of Capt. E. B. Harlon, 10 June 1865, in *Camp Nelson*, ed. Sears, 213-214.

<sup>115</sup> John Fee to Whipple, 27 June 1865, in *Camp Nelson*, ed. Sears, 221.

<sup>116</sup> Fee to General Fisk, 17 July 1865, in *Camp Nelson*, ed. Sears, 228-230.

outside the camp, meaning that the military and the Freedmen's Bureau would have to come up with a new plan for dismantling the camp.<sup>117</sup> Their solution would set a precedent for both Freedmen's Bureau policy during Reconstruction and the closure of the camps across the South and Border States.

On October 13, 1865, the Department of Kentucky, commanded by General Farwell, ordered the closure of Camp Nelson, even though slavery remained legal and an investigation by General Scofield revealed that masters abused USCT families.<sup>118</sup> Fisk was to "begin in earnest the work of closing the camp" and ensure that contrabands found jobs elsewhere, preferably with their old masters. Masters still tried to reclaim freedmen as their property, refused to release the children of USCT soldiers, and even tried to claim the wages earned by freedmen, which made it very difficult to find jobs for the contrabands outside of the camp.<sup>119</sup> General Farwell, who was charged with organizing the closure of the camp, feared that evictions from the camp would "drive free women and children into cruel bondage" by compelling them to work for their old masters, who would try to replicate slavery as closely as possible.<sup>120</sup> Fisk, representing the government's position, argued that it would be "far better that there be some suffering than to continue Camp Nelson Refugee Home" at government expense, which indicates the single-minded focus on closing the camps and ending government support of the freedmen that shaped Bureau policy in 1865 and early 1866.<sup>121</sup> The closure of the camp proceeded despite his protests, however, and schools closed in October 1865. To expedite the transportation of freedmen, the army took over the Kentucky Central Railroad, which had refused to transport contrabands due

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<sup>117</sup> Lester Williams to Fisk, 31 July 1865, in *Camp Nelson*, ed. Sears, 255.

<sup>118</sup> Farwell to Fisk, 13 October 1865, and Scofield, Facts for the People, 14 October 1865, in *Camp Nelson*, ed. Sears, 274-277.

<sup>119</sup> Farwell to Fisk, 16 October 1865, in *Camp Nelson*, ed. Sears, 278.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>121</sup> Fisk to Farrell, 17 October 1865, in *Camp Nelson*, ed. Sears, 279-280.

to fears of transporting fugitive slaves out of the state. While the army sent USCT regiments to protect the railroad, the contrabands still faced the very real threat of their masters trying to reclaim them, as slave owners flooded the rapidly emptying camp to attempt to find their slave property.<sup>122</sup> The closure of the camp constituted a dire threat to the very freedom of the contrabands, as they faced being expelled into a state where slavery remained legal and the army was strongly compelling them to work for the very masters they had fled. The policies established during the closure of Camp Nelson would shape the procedures for the closure of contraband camps across the South and for the establishment of early labor policies for the Bureau.

By late October 1865, the military began to cut rations at Camp Nelson, and only those unable to perform any type of labor could still receive rations, which the army hoped would compel the remaining contrabands to leave the camp.<sup>123</sup> By November, over sixteen hundred contrabands remained in the camp, and Fisk began to send large numbers of them north to work in Ohio, but faced great difficulty finding employers who would accept the contrabands. Northern fears of a massive influx of freedmen who would take their jobs limited the willingness of northern employers, particularly in the Midwest, to accept freedmen laborers.<sup>124</sup> With the North closed off, Fisk turned to the South, particularly Mississippi, as a destination for the contrabands, despite very real fears that the freedmen would be exploited and mistreated in Mississippi, as the leasing system provided ample evidence for exploitation of contrabands in Mississippi.<sup>125</sup> Fisk proposed sending children to Vicksburg to be apprenticed to planters,

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<sup>122</sup> Farwell to Fisk, 19 October 1865, in *Camp Nelson*, ed. Sears, 283; Fisk to Farwell, 23 October 1865, in *Camp Nelson*, ed. Sears, 283-286.

<sup>123</sup> Farwell to Fisk, 24 October 1865, in *Camp Nelson*, ed. Sears, 289.

<sup>124</sup> Farwell to Fisk, 1 November 1865, in *Camp Nelson*, ed. Sears, 293-295.

<sup>125</sup> Farwell to Fisk, 22 December 1865, in *Camp Nelson*, ed. Sears, 307-308.



meaning that he was so desperate to close the camp that he was willing to forcibly separate families just to get the freedmen out of the camp.<sup>126</sup> Very few freedmen volunteered to go to Mississippi, as they knew that going to the Deep South cotton plantations could only bring exploitation and abuse due to the institution of the leasing program, which will be discussed in detail in the next chapter. By the end of 1865, the attempt to rapidly close Camp Nelson had largely failed, and over a thousand freedmen still remained at the camp, leaving the Bureau to decide what to do with the remaining freedmen, and the numbers only grew as USCT soldiers mustered out and returned to their families in the camp.

The camps in Washington, DC, North Carolina, and Kentucky, further demonstrate the importance of the contraband camps to the formulation of Freedmen's Bureau policy. The refusal to allow the contrabands to obtain land, the enforcement of mandatory labor contracts, the failure to address poor sanitation that led to disease outbreaks and high mortality, the curtailing of rations and clothing, and the failure to pay wages on time if at all began as problems in the camps of Washington, DC, North Carolina, and Kentucky, but continued to plague the Bureau after the Civil War. In addition, the failure of federal oversight allowed these problems to remain unchecked throughout the war due to the lack of a national contraband policy, and the situation would improve little under the Bureau, as corrupt agents faced little to no discipline for the exploitation of contrabands. In the camps in the states of Mississippi and Louisiana, meanwhile, the lack of oversight would be even more acute and conditions would become even worse than those in the eastern camps, especially after the army hastily implemented plantation leasing but provided little to no supervision of lessees, which led to rampant mistreatment and exploitation which previewed the realities of labor contracts under the Bureau during

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<sup>126</sup> Fisk to Farwell, 25 December 1865, in *Camp Nelson*, ed. Sears, 307.

Reconstruction. The story of the plantation leasing program in the Western Theater of the Civil War is also vital to understanding why the contraband camps and contraband labor programs remained vital to the formulation of Bureau policy. It is to their story that this dissertation turns to complete its analysis of the contraband experience during the Civil War.

## CHAPTER 4

### PREVIEWING THE BUREAU: LEASING IN MISSISSIPPI AND LOUISIANA, 1863-65

In contrast to the camps in the eastern theater of the Civil War, camps in Mississippi and Louisiana did not remain populated for extended periods, as the military and Treasury Departments shifted to large-scale plantation leasing to empty the camps and make the contrabands self-sufficient. Leasing suffered from a severe lack of federal oversight, as local military commanders, burdened by a lack of adequate staff, constant campaigning, the ongoing guerrilla threat, and the vast distances between plantations, failed to adequately enforce the leasing regulations. Lessees driven by a desire for profits also exploited the contrabands with little consequence. An in-depth examination of the leasing programs in the two states allows for a discussion of the role of the Treasury Department in federal contraband policy, and how bickering between the Treasury and War Departments greatly undermined the effectiveness of the plantation leasing programs. Discussing both Louisiana and Mississippi gives two different case studies of leasing programs and the reasons behind the failures of both, from guerrilla raids and constant campaigning in Mississippi to bureaucratic bickering and excessively harsh regulations in Louisiana.

Finally, these two leasing programs created several models for Freedmen's Bureau policy, including the hiring of contrabands to private employers, the institution of sharecropping, the preference of former masters in finding employment for contrabands, and the attempt to set minimum wages or shares. The leasing programs also foreshadowed several failures of the

Bureau, including inadequate supervision of employers, compelling contrabands and freedmen to work for abusive former owners, not permitting freedmen to leave abusive employers, and failure to protect freedmen from guerillas and other violence from southern whites. An examination of the camps in Louisiana and Mississippi is vital to understanding how the contraband camps shaped Bureau policy during Reconstruction, and it also highlights the differences between eastern and western contraband camps.

This chapter is organized geographically for several reasons, all of which strengthen the analysis and provide clear connections to Bureau policy after the war. First, it demonstrates the ad-hoc nature of wartime contraband policy, as the Army in the two states instituted very different leasing programs, despite similar overall goals for leasing policy as a whole. Second, it illustrates how very different military situations, from a relatively stable Union occupation in Louisiana to constant military movements and guerrilla warfare in Mississippi, greatly affected the institution and effectiveness of leasing policy. Third, it elucidates how varying levels of federal oversight, and particularly bickering between the War and Treasury Departments over control of the leasing programs in the two states, undermined the effectiveness of contraband policy in both regions. Finally, it highlights the difficulties faced by the Bureau in establishing its programs and policies at the beginning of Reconstruction, as agents faced two very different precedents for leasing that had their own strengths and weaknesses. A geographic organization works best to understand how the two different leasing programs both shaped and created challenges for the establishment of Bureau policy after the war. This analysis starts with Mississippi before shifting to Louisiana.

## Contraband Camps and Leasing in Mississippi

In 1862, as the Union army moved into Mississippi, slaves began running to the camps, forcing army commanders to create a policy on whether to admit them to the camps and how to care for the rapidly growing numbers of contrabands. However, due to “ongoing warfare” and military movements, many commanders saw caring for contrabands as an unnecessary burden, and did little to formulate a coherent policy for contraband camps in the state, leading to vastly different conditions across the numerous camps.<sup>1</sup> For example, in 1863, a Colonel McDearmont gave two locals near Vicksburg permission to convince their escaped slaves to return. According to observer J.H. Denver, McDearmont stated, “If any of them want to go away yet, let them go for we have enough to do to take care of our soldiers without feeding and taking care of worthless” fugitives, and advocated forcing the contrabands out of Union lines despite the threat of re-enslavement.<sup>2</sup> Navy Commander Craven, meanwhile, evicted forty contrabands from an island off Vicksburg “to be returned to their owners,” even though the owners clearly supported the Confederacy.<sup>3</sup> Both of these actions violated a July 1862 Article of War passed by Congress prohibiting the return of fugitive slaves, indicating commanders in the field ignored policies enacted by the federal government due to concern with military campaigns, to the detriment of the contrabands who thought that Union lines meant freedom and safety from re-enslavement.<sup>4</sup> Such inaction by the federal government would be repeated under the Freedmen’s Bureau, which failed to address forced apprenticeship and even the impressment of freedmen by former owners

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<sup>1</sup> Berlin, *Freedom*, 621-622.

<sup>2</sup> J.H. Denver to John Eaton, 15 May 1863, in the Records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, Mississippi, Pre-Bureau Records, RG 105, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C.

<sup>3</sup> Acting Lt. Cmdr. Selim E. Woodworth to Cmdr. D. D. Porter, 1 July 1862, in *Freedom*, ed. Berlin, et al, 656-657.

<sup>4</sup> Oakes, *Freedom National*, 248.

throughout the Reconstruction period, which further indicates the importance of contraband camp policy to the programs and failures of the Freedmen's Bureau.

Even contrabands who entered Union lines faced mistreatment. In July 1862, commanders in Mississippi received orders from the army command for the Department of Mississippi not to pay any wages to contrabands and to charge them for clothing costs, in order to provide compensation to masters at the end of the war.<sup>5</sup> Early in the war, the army remained unsure of how to handle contrabands, and, with little guidance from Washington, failed to pay contrabands and even excluded them from the lines. The federal government did little or nothing to stop even clear violations of the 1862 Article of War, further indicating the failure of federal oversight of the camps. The constant influx of fugitives forced a change in this policy, which provides further evidence that the contrabands themselves often drove federal policy. The change is clearly explained in a letter from Henry Halleck, the Union commander in the Western Theater, to Grant, where he declared that "the policy of the government [is] to withdraw from the enemy as much productive labor as possible."<sup>6</sup> In addition, he cited reports that officers in Grant's army "not only discourage the Negroes from coming under our protection but, by ill treatment, force them to return to their masters."<sup>7</sup> Halleck, and the high command in Washington, ordered Grant to accept and properly treat the contrabands, but did not give any additional guidance. The lack of a coherent policy, combined with the exigencies of a continuing military campaign, led to disastrous consequences for the contrabands, and followed precedents set in the eastern theater camps that also faced a continual lack of federal oversight or

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<sup>5</sup> General Orders No. 60, Head Quarters Fifth Division, 22 July 1862, in *Freedom*, ed. Berlin, et al, 658-659.

<sup>6</sup> Henry Halleck to Ulysses S. Grant, 31 March 1863, in *Free at Last: A Documentary History of Slavery, Freedom, and the Civil War*, ed. Ira Berlin, Barbara J. Fields, Steven F. Miller, Joseph P. Reidy, and Leslie S. Rowland (New York: New Press, 1992), 101.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, 102.

guidance that permitted commanders to exploit contrabands with impunity, and such inaction would continue under the Bureau during Reconstruction.

In summer 1862, Grant's army occupied Corinth, Mississippi and quickly faced a massive influx of fugitives that he had to find a way to care for. Grant, according to historian Cam Walker, "had no particular love for the freedmen," but needed to find a way to house the contrabands without impeding the movements of his army, which was beginning to advance towards Vicksburg.<sup>8</sup> He appointed John Eaton, an army chaplain, as Superintendent of Contrabands and ordered him to "take charge of the contrabands... see that they are properly cared for, and set them to work picking... all cotton" on abandoned plantations, but failed to ensure that the plantations would be protected from Confederate guerrillas, and also did not provide any oversight mechanism to ensure that contrabands received humane treatment in the camp.<sup>9</sup> When Eaton took office, he stated, "I hope I may never be called on again to witness the horrible scenes I saw" in Grant's camps, as the army was unable to provide for such a large number of fugitives.<sup>10</sup> Eaton appointed Grenville Dodge, one of Grant's aides, to set up a contraband camp near Corinth by November 1862.<sup>11</sup> The camp would quickly be seen as a model for other camps, but it was also plagued with racism, mistreatment, and exploitation due to efforts to save government expenditures and failure to address racism by common soldiers and officers assigned to the camp. Corinth demonstrates the failure of oversight at both the local and federal levels, as the contrabands remained a very low priority for the army due to military

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<sup>8</sup> Walker, "Corinth: The Story," 7.

<sup>9</sup> John Eaton, *Grant, Lincoln, and the Freedmen: Reminiscences of the Civil War with Special Reference to the Work for the Contrabands and Freedmen of the Mississippi Valley* (New York: Longmans, Green, and Company, 1907), 5.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, 19.

<sup>11</sup> Smith, *Corinth 1862*, 289.

campaigning, and the federal government failed to intervene to ensure that contrabands received wages, rations, and housing in compensation for valuable labor for the army.

While the contrabands at Corinth lived in tents at first, they quickly built their own homes, and established schools and churches with the help of aid workers from the American Missionary Association.<sup>12</sup> In addition, Chaplain J.M. Alexander, a missionary who replaced Dodge in 1863, set up “working parties” to pick cotton on abandoned plantations, and also grow foodstuffs for subsistence.<sup>13</sup> In addition, Alexander recruited a regiment of United States Colored Troops to guard the camp, who not only prevented Confederate guerrillas from threatening the residents but also raided nearby plantations to free additional slaves, which reflected examples established in North Carolina and Virginia earlier in the war.<sup>14</sup> By the end of the growing season in fall 1863, the camp had produced a profit of four to five thousand dollars a month for the government, indicating the value of contraband labor to the Union war effort. It did not lead to any improvements in federal contraband administration or a more defined policy.<sup>15</sup> Eaton called the camp “admirably organized” and the best-run camp in the state in an 1863 report.<sup>16</sup> The characterization of the camp as a “model camp” and an exemplar for all other superintendents to follow is depressing.<sup>17</sup> For while the camp had vastly better conditions than those at Vicksburg or Natchez, the contrabands there still suffered a lack of wages, epidemic disease, abuse from racist soldiers, and even the threat of re-enslavement despite their location in a camp securely behind Union lines. Corinth, despite its characterization as a superior camp, still

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<sup>12</sup> Walker, “Corinth: The Story,” 7-11.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 11, 17.

<sup>14</sup> John Eaton, Jr. to Lt. Col. Jno. A. Rawlins, 29 April 1863, in *Freedom*, ed. Berlin, et al, 689; Dennis J. Mitchell, *A New History of Mississippi* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2014), 170.

<sup>15</sup> Walker, “Corinth: The Story,” 18.

<sup>16</sup> Eaton, *Grant, Lincoln, and the Freedmen*, 31.

<sup>17</sup> Smith, *Corinth 1862*, 290.



indicates the degree of mistreatment and exploitation of contrabands by the Union army, especially due to concerns of economy and avoiding dependency on government resources.

One of the major problems at Corinth was a lack of supplies. Eaton described a shortage of clothing, food, and shelter, especially for women and children, and stated that it resulted in “great suffering” amongst the contrabands as winter approached.<sup>18</sup> Partly due to the shortages, epidemic diseases, including pneumonia, typhoid fever, and measles ravaged the camp, especially during the winter of 1862-1863, indicating that at least some of the mortality could have been prevented by improved access to supplies.<sup>19</sup> Even the contrabands who escaped disease still faced mistreatment. Contrabands who worked for the government received no pay, and camp officials sometimes fell a year behind in wage payments, leaving the contrabands unable to provide for their families, especially since they had to turn all personal property over to the quartermaster upon arrival.<sup>20</sup> The lack of pay illustrates the emphasis on economy rather than contraband welfare, as the profit made by the camp was only possible due to unpaid contraband labor, confiscation of contraband property, and a failure to purchase adequate supplies, and the superintendents of the camp faced no discipline from the military or federal bureaucracy for obvious exploitation of laborers.

Even worse, the contrabands also faced racism from the soldiers and superintendents supervising the camp, which reflects a problem that plagued not only the camps but also the Freedmen’s Bureau during early Reconstruction. Common soldiers, according to Smith, saw it as “a matter of curiosity to see the intense prejudice against the blacks,” and even Dodge

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<sup>18</sup> John Eaton to Rev. C.B. Boynton, 1863, RG 105, Mississippi, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC.

<sup>19</sup> John Eaton to General Ulysses S. Grant, 29 April 1863, in *Free at Last*, ed. Berlin, et al, 188.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 191; John Eaton, Jr. to Lt. Col. Jno. A. Rawlins, 29 April 1863, in *Freedom*, ed. Berlin, et al, 688.

frequently used racial slurs to refer to the contrabands.<sup>21</sup> Racism moved beyond simple language and sentinels shot two contrabands while guarding the camp, leading to their replacement with United States Colored Troops.<sup>22</sup> Even worse was the failure to protect contrabands sent out on raids of nearby plantations. The army often sent small groups of USCT soldiers, often assisted by civilian contraband scouts familiar with the area, on raids of nearby plantations. Their small numbers and lack of available backup if they ran into trouble often meant recapture or worse for the soldiers and contrabands in the raiding parties. These raids were a common practice throughout the South, especially in the South Carolina Sea Islands, but the soldiers and contrabands always faced the very real threat of re-enslavement or death if the raids went wrong, since regular troops would rarely back up the raiding parties. Secessionist planter C.R. Berteau captured a contraband from Corinth who was raiding plantations for military recruits and remanded him to the state courts for sale into slavery, indicating the devastating consequences of the failure to provide military protection to contraband raiding parties, especially since only a few soldiers would be needed for each expedition.<sup>23</sup> The contrabands at Corinth, while better treated than others in the state, still faced racism, a lack of wages, shortages of basic supplies, epidemic disease, and even a lack of protection and the threat of re-enslavement, indicating the emphasis on economy rather than contraband welfare. The poor conditions at Corinth demonstrate the lack of federal oversight, which became even more of a problem for Mississippi due both to the distance from Washington and the focus on the Eastern Theater that remained constant in both the military and federal bureaucracy for the duration of the war. For the contrabands, their situation was about to become much worse.

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<sup>21</sup> Smith, *Corinth 1862*, 288.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, 291.

<sup>23</sup> C.R. Barteau to Pleas. Smith, 8 January 1863, in *Free at Last*, ed. Berlin, et al, 96-97.

In the winter of 1863-1864, General William Tecumseh Sherman set out on the Meridian Campaign, and he needed the men in the Corinth garrison to reinforce his army, which led to the closure of the Corinth camp. The contraband camp suddenly closed without any advance notice, which indicates the impact of constant military campaigns on contraband camps across Mississippi and the low priority of the contraband camps in Union policy in Mississippi. Throughout the war, contraband camps would be little more than temporary due to the constant movement of the army, and contrabands constantly faced the prospect of abandoning crops and settlements with little notice, which hampered the ability of the military to administer a free-labor program that would teach the contrabands self-reliance and the skills needed for economic autonomy. The constant military campaigning was one major difference that sets Mississippi apart from the eastern contraband camps, which were located in regions securely occupied by the Union Army. As Walker writes, the “exigencies of military victory rendered futile any hope of long-term stability for the camp.”<sup>24</sup> Sherman did not care about the contrabands and only focused on military necessity, and the sudden move in the harsh winter caused devastating consequences.<sup>25</sup> In particular, the move came during the harvest, forcing the contrabands to leave their crops, including foodstuffs, behind after a year of hard work.<sup>26</sup> Once the camp was evacuated, the contrabands faced a move sixty miles north to Memphis in temperatures that reached eleven degrees below zero with only tents as shelter, and many died of exposure during a march that Walker termed “terrible days of suffering.”<sup>27</sup> The evacuation clearly demonstrates the emphasis on military necessity, especially since Sherman’s sudden move caused a hasty evacuation in horrendous weather. Since the weather caused significant delays in the Meridian

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<sup>24</sup> Walker, *Corinth: The Story*,” 18.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, 19.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, 19.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, 20.

campaign, the contraband camp closed much faster than necessary, which exacerbated the suffering of contrabands even more, as even a week of delay could have allowed them to gather the harvest and ensure sufficient food for the winter. As Walker writes, the Corinth camp itself became a “casualty of the war,” as the camp that, despite its flaws, provided the best conditions for the contrabands closed due to the exigencies of military campaigns, beginning a winter of suffering for the contrabands that only became worse upon their arrival in Memphis.<sup>28</sup>

The contrabands from the Holly Springs camps, also located in northern Mississippi, joined the Corinth contrabands in Memphis, which led to severe overcrowding and the scale of the guerrilla problem in Mississippi. In December 1862, Confederate raiders attacked the camp, left poorly defended due to the need for reinforcements in the ongoing military campaigns, capturing several contrabands and selling them into slavery.<sup>29</sup> The guerrillas hoped to both capture contrabands to re-enslave them in order to replace the slaves that had fled local plantations, and to undermine Union control of Mississippi by forcing the Union Army to use men and resources to fight guerrillas instead of the regular Confederate Army. In addition, they also hoped to undermine emancipation in the region by deterring slaves from fleeing to Union lines, as the fact that those who sought shelter with Union troops still ended up re-enslaved could scare some would-be runaways into staying on the plantations and working for the Confederate war effort.<sup>30</sup> The remainder who managed to elude the guerrillas faced a rapid evacuation to Memphis that became even worse than the conditions faced by the Corinth contrabands, which indicates a lack of preparedness and the consequences of the lack of a uniform federal policy that would lay out guidelines for evacuation and camp transfers. A rare blizzard hit the area,

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 22.

<sup>29</sup> Berlin, *Freedom*, 628. For information on military campaigns in Mississippi, see Michael B. Ballard, *The Civil War in Mississippi: Major Campaigns and Battles* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2011).

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

resulting in forty “miserable deaths” from exposure, and white soldiers stole supplies from the already vulnerable contrabands and did not face any discipline, which indicates that the Mississippi camps faced the same failures of local oversight as the Eastern Theater camps.<sup>31</sup> Once the contrabands arrived in Memphis, they found a camp plagued by horrendous conditions, epidemic disease, and rising mortality rates that grew to shocking levels throughout 1862 and 1863, indicating the devastating consequences of an emphasis on military necessity rather than contraband welfare, and also the lack of effective oversight at either the federal or local levels.

The contrabands at Memphis faced much worse conditions than they had experienced at Holly Springs or Corinth. The hospital was “wretched in the extreme,” and had almost no supplies of medicines or vaccines.<sup>32</sup> The negligent surgeon refused to address the conditions, worsening the outbreaks of disease and causing horrendous consequences.<sup>33</sup> A smallpox epidemic ravaged the camp, and one thousand contrabands died during the winter of 1863. The casualty rates indicate the scale of medical neglect, especially preventable problems such as supply shortages and incompetent physicians.<sup>34</sup> Incompetent surgeons plagued camps across the South, as the lack of any oversight of their abilities led to incompetent and racist surgeons obtaining and keeping posts at contraband camps, and also later to obtain positions as Bureau surgeons, indicating that the Freedmen’s Bureau failed to solve obvious problems that plagued the camps. A lack of clothing and shelter also contributed to disease, as the contrabands lived in

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<sup>31</sup> *Report of the Proceedings of a Meeting Held at Concert Hall, Philadelphia, on Tuesday Evening, November 3, 1863, to take into Consideration the Condition of the Freed People of the South* (Philadelphia: Merrihew and Thompson, 1863), McGregor Library Collection, Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Virginia.

<sup>32</sup> Eaton to Rawlins, 29 April 1863, in *Freedom*, ed. Berlin, et al, 689.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*; J.A. Butch to Sir, 31 January 1864, RG 105, Mississippi, National Archives.

<sup>34</sup> *Contraband Slaves: Captured, Fugitive, and Emancipated Slaves Regarded as Contraband During the Civil War: A Collection of Articles from the Richmond Daily Dispatch 1860-1865* (2013), 243.

tents without fuel supplies in harsh winter weather.<sup>35</sup> In addition, the administrators of the camp had “only bitterness and contempt, resulting in the violence and abuse of these helpless people,” and often failed to pay the contrabands and even stole their minimal property.<sup>36</sup> The work regimes instituted by these administrators also proved abusive. For example, one groups of contrabands had to work in bitterly cold water from sunup to sunset, and then return to tents with no fire or blankets, causing them to “die by scores,” and the survivors did not receive any wages for their toil.<sup>37</sup> The contrabands in Memphis faced squalid conditions, rampant disease, and abusive administrators, indicating the emphasis on economy and military necessity, as the army sent refugees from the closed Corinth and Holly Springs camps to a camp already plagued with neglect and abuse so that Union military objectives could be met. The camp indicates the glaring failure of federal oversight and the consequences of the failure to establish a uniform contraband policy, as clear violations of Halleck’s own policies occurred with no consequences for the camp administrators. The hasty evacuation of Corinth and Holly Springs created examples that would be repeated later in the war in Kentucky, with even worse consequences, and at the end of the war during the expedited closure of the contraband camps. The story would be the same in Vicksburg, as considerations of economy, avoiding dependency, and military necessity consistently trumped contraband welfare.

General Grant and his army arrived in the area surrounding Vicksburg in early 1863, intent on capturing the city and taking control of the Mississippi River, but fugitive slaves began running to his lines almost immediately, forcing him to decide how to care for them while not hindering the movements of his army. As historian Martha Bigelow writes, “Grant’s very army

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<sup>35</sup> *Concert Hall Meeting*, University of Virginia, 7-8.

<sup>36</sup> Eaton to Rawlins, 29 April 1863, in *Freedom*, ed. Berlin, et al, 690.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*, 691.

was threatened with demoralization and disease if these homeless, starving... people were not cared for.”<sup>38</sup> As in Corinth, he directed Eaton to set up camps for the contrabands to provide housing and to keep them away from his army, which needed to move freely during the ongoing campaign.<sup>39</sup> The camps would be temporary until the contrabands could find jobs elsewhere and no longer require government expense, indicating the emphasis on economy and avoiding dependence, especially since the sheer numbers of contrabands quickly overwhelmed the ability of the army to find jobs and housing for them, especially the large numbers of women and children.<sup>40</sup> This attitude towards the camps led to neglect, squalid conditions, and mistreatment, especially when the program of plantation leasing, the epitome of avoiding government expenditures, became policy in 1863.

Prior to leasing, the contrabands faced horrendous conditions in the sprawling network of camps surrounding Vicksburg. Union soldiers guarding the camps resented the duty and harbored virulently racist attitudes, and their officers did little or nothing to discipline them, a problem that became even worse due to the constant changes of personnel from military campaigning. As Ballard writes, most “cared little for blacks, for they had clearly come south to restore the Union,” indicating how military necessity and racism could combine to the detriment of the contrabands.<sup>41</sup> Such attitudes led to violent abuse of the contrabands, especially women. As historian Nancy Bercaw writes, “soldiers and officers sexually abused them, allowed them to starve, threw them out of camp, and denied them access to... wages or rations,” all because they

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<sup>38</sup> Martha Mitchell Bigelow, “Vicksburg: Experiment in Freedom,” *Journal of Mississippi History* XXVI No. 1 (February 1964): 33.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid*, 38; Frankel, *Freedom's Women*, 36.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid*; Chaplain John Eaton to Col., 14 February 1863, in *Freedom*, ed. Berlin, et al, 677-679.

<sup>41</sup> Ballard, *Vicksburg*, 108.

saw them as “loose” or immoral, despite clear family structures among the contrabands.<sup>42</sup> These attitudes reflect the racist attitudes that predominated across American society during the nineteenth century, even among northerners, reduced the urgency of addressing the abuse of contrabands among military officers, and also contributed to inadequate federal oversight of the contraband camps. Racism would also plague the Freedmen’s Bureau after the war, as racist agents flagrantly mistreated freedmen with little to no consequence. This abuse not only illuminates the scale of racism, but also the failure to address such flagrant mistreatment, as officers not only ignored the perpetrators but participated themselves in the violence, which clearly demonstrates the low priority of contraband welfare.<sup>43</sup> The most telling example of such callous exploitation occurred at Milliken’s Bend, across the river from Vicksburg.

At the camp, according to Ballard, “soldiers had little use for... slaves other than finding ways to take advantage of them,” which led to rampant depravity.<sup>44</sup> For example, Private John O’Brien beat a young boy until he was unconscious and blinded, and “fellow soldiers cheered him on” rather than intervening.<sup>45</sup> Officers did not punish the soldier for the attack or refer him to a court-martial, indicating indifference to even the most brutal forms of mistreatment.<sup>46</sup> Rape and beatings became “commonplace” at the camp, and officers who shared the racism of their soldiers did nothing to punish the perpetrators, despite their orders to protect the welfare of the contrabands.<sup>47</sup> Even worse, the abuse increased after smallpox broke out in the camp.<sup>48</sup> As

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<sup>42</sup> Nancy P. Bercaw, *Gendered Freedoms: Race, Rights, and the Politics of Household in the Delta 1861-1875* (Gainesville, University Press of Florida, 2003).

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

<sup>44</sup> Michael B. Ballard, “Union Soldiers React to Slaves, Slavery, Freedmen, and Colored U.S. Troops During the Vicksburg Campaign,” in *Of Times and Race: Essays Inspired by John F. Marzalek*, ed. Michael B. Ballard and Mark R. Cheatham (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2013), 77.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*



Ballard writes, “interactions between federal soldiers and freedmen... foretold that many of them would go from one type of slavery to another,” and the abuses only stopped when contrabands left the camp for leased plantations.<sup>49</sup> The contrabands across the Vicksburg area not only faced racist soldiers and camp superintendents, but also squalid camps, epidemic disease, and a lack of basic supplies and medical care due to a focus on economy and the continuing view that the contraband camps should only be temporary until the contrabands could be placed on plantations, which created an example that would be followed across the camps in the Western Theater and during the early years of Reconstruction across the South.

The wide-ranging network of camps on both sides of the river surrounding Vicksburg was constantly plagued by squalid conditions and rampant epidemic disease. James Yeatman, an agent for the Western Sanitary Commission, stated that “this negligence and failure to comply with obligations have greatly disheartened the poor slave,” many of whom died in the camps before having a chance to truly experience freedom.<sup>50</sup> At President’s Island, the camp flooded repeatedly and remained constantly damp, leading to poor health, which was worsened by a severe lack of clothing and proper shelter, and the military failed to move the camp to a more sanitary location or to issue sufficient supplies.<sup>51</sup> At the camp at Young’s Point, meanwhile, “sickness and death were frightful,” thirty to fifty contrabands a day died of disease, and during the winter the mortality rate rose to seventy-five a day.<sup>52</sup> According to Brigadier General Joseph Wadsworth, “nearly all the suffering and mortality incident to this great social change has existed and is still to be found” due to a lack of shelter, clothing, food, and even mediocre medical care, resulting in rising mortality rates, and neither the local military bureaucracy or the

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid, 86.

<sup>50</sup> Yeatman, *Report*, 4.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, 2-3.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, 12.

federal government did anything to intervene, which indicates the consequences of the lack of a clear, uniform contraband policy.<sup>53</sup> The hospitals, in particular, clearly demonstrate the emphasis on economy rather than the health of the contrabands. The War Department cut off all medical supplies to contraband hospitals in 1863, forcing all supplies to come from already overwhelmed aid societies, which inevitably led to desperate shortages, especially in the western camps since aid societies tended to focus most of their missionaries and donations on camps in the eastern theater.<sup>54</sup> The lack of medicines, combined with the squalid conditions, led to rising mortality rates, especially during winter. According to Bigelow, for example, the Young's Point camp was "a charnel house, with thousands of people dying without well ones enough to intern the dead" or to care for the sick, and surgeons struggled mightily to obtain supplies without any help from the government.<sup>55</sup> As the Richmond Daily Dispatch reported, the contrabands "perish as if swept off by pestilence" due to the lack of food, shelter, and medical care.<sup>56</sup>

The squalid conditions and high mortality clearly reflect the devastating consequences of the emphasis on economy and the idea of the camps as temporary on contraband welfare. The denial of medical supplies to contraband hospitals and the failure to provide sufficient food, shelter, and clothing indicate a focus on economy and avoiding dependence on the government rather than contraband welfare, even when the need was desperate and obvious. Army officials saw the camps as temporary and hesitated to expend vast efforts in improving conditions, especially when plantation leasing began in 1863. The view of camps as temporary would guide federal policy during 1865 and 1866, as the rapid closure of the camps often left contrabands

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<sup>53</sup> Brig. Genl. Joseph A. Wadsworth to Adj. Gen. U.S. Army, 16 December 1863, in *Freedom*, ed. Berlin, et al, 757-758.

<sup>54</sup> L.I. Wright to Sir, 19 September 1864, RG 105, Mississippi, National Archives.

<sup>55</sup> Bigelow, "Freedmen of the Mississippi Valley," 45.

<sup>56</sup> Richmond Daily Dispatch, *Contraband Slaves*, 293.

homeless in areas with few jobs available, forcing many to return to their former owners for employment. Even before leasing, officials did little to address conditions in the camps, leading to high mortality rates that could have been prevented with proper medical care and supplies, indicating the low priority of contraband welfare in the Vicksburg area.

Even the contrabands who escaped epidemic disease still faced mistreatment and exploitation. Many contrabands who worked for the government did not receive any wages for difficult labor in a harsh climate. Some at Milliken's Bend and Goodrich's Landing, for example, had not received any wages for over a year, and also did not receive rations, making it very difficult to feed their families.<sup>57</sup> Some army paymasters even gave contrabands counterfeit money and never faced discipline for their actions, clearly demonstrating the degree of callous exploitation of contrabands in Vicksburg and the lack of oversight by local military command and the federal government.<sup>58</sup> As Frankel writes, "many had worked for two to twelve months, and never received a cent or rag yet as reward," and "complaints about nonpayment of wages became a constant theme during the war," indicating that army high command never made an effort to address the problem, due both to ideas of economy and fears of dependency, and the inability of the federal government to oversee the payment of wages.<sup>59</sup> In addition to failure to pay wages, officials in Vicksburg, fearing idleness and dependency, charged contrabands a fee to obtain a permit to remain in the city which had to be renewed every month, even if they had a job and could support themselves.<sup>60</sup> In 1863, the rule was amended to require contrabands to work for the government, even if private employers paid much higher wages, and that any

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<sup>57</sup> Lt. Ben F. Cheney to Lt. Stuart Eldridge, 21 April 1865, in *Freedom*, ed. Berlin, et al, 885.

<sup>58</sup> Samuel Sawyer to Genl, 29 December 1862, in *Free at Last*, ed. Berlin, et al, 181.

<sup>59</sup> Frankel, *Freedom's Women*, 37.

<sup>60</sup> Sir to Genl. Saml. Thomas, 1 February 1865, RG 105, Mississippi, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC.

contraband without a permit would have to leave the city and return to the squalid camps.<sup>61</sup> The tax and lack of pay clearly demonstrate the focus on economy and avoiding dependence at the expense of contraband welfare, and also the degree of exploitation permitted by negligent commanders. The permit system defeated the very idea behind the concept of free labor, as the free labor ideology argued for the right to choose your employer freely based on pay and work conditions, and that the laborer should be able to improve economically by choosing employers that pay sufficient wages. Fear of dependency on the government undermined the very ideology behind the contraband labor program, and contributed to the introduction of an even more exploitative system in plantation leasing.

An even more blatant form of mistreatment that undermined the very freedom of the contrabands, impressment, also became prevalent in Vicksburg, reflecting precedents set in Virginia and the Carolinas. Camp superintendents forced men to work for the army, even if they had found better paying jobs elsewhere.<sup>62</sup> For example, superintendents compelled contrabands to work for the army at promised wages of twelve dollars a month if they wanted to stay in the camp, which they rarely received, when private employers paid as much as forty-five dollars a month, and many went months or even years without any pay, leaving them with no way to support their families.<sup>63</sup> In addition, army recruiters impressed men “by force” and separated them from their families, leaving women and children to suffer in the camps or on leased plantations with no means of support, especially since paymasters also failed to pay black soldiers regularly.<sup>64</sup> Impressment demonstrates the consequences of fears of dependency, as only work for the military could be legitimate, despite the fact that many contrabands preferred

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<sup>61</sup> A. Severance Fiske to Maj. Gen. S.A. Hurlbut, 11 June 1863, in *Freedom*, ed. Berlin, et al, 710.

<sup>62</sup> Berlin, ed., *Freedom*, 629.

<sup>63</sup> Yeatman, *Report*, 4.

<sup>64</sup> S. Duke et al., to Hon. W.P. Mellon, Esq., 4 November 1864, in *Freedom*, ed. Berlin, et al, 848.

to work in the city for higher wages. In addition, the failure to pay impressed contrabands illuminates the degree of exploitation, as army commanders forced contrabands into unpaid labor that seemed to resemble slavery. As Yeatman writes, “Under such treatment he feels that he has exchanged one master for many masters,” and not received actual freedom at all.<sup>65</sup> For the contrabands, the situation would only get worse, as plantation leasing introduced a whole new form of exploitation.

In response to the horrific situation in Mississippi, Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton sent Adjutant General Lorenzo Thomas to the region to set up a new system of contraband labor, which indicated significantly increased federal involvement in the contraband program in order to bring down expenditures from the contraband camps. Federal oversight would soon deteriorate into bickering between different bureaucratic departments, which could sometimes be worse than no oversight at all, meaning that federal supervision of the camps still remained ineffective. By the time he arrived, the situation in the camps had deteriorated even further as the capture of Vicksburg brought thousands of new contrabands into the already overcrowded camps.<sup>66</sup> Thomas saw these camps as temporary employment depots and wanted the contrabands to only stay there until they could find work outside the camp, preferably back on the plantations.<sup>67</sup> Other army officials also shared this view. In a letter to Thomas, General Wadsworth argued that leasing would provide jobs for twelve thousand contrabands and end the high mortality in the camps. He stated that “leasing would be the most conducive to the welfare of the freedmen” and the government, which would no longer have to support contrabands.<sup>68</sup> In

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<sup>65</sup> Yeatman, *Report*, 4-5.

<sup>66</sup> Berlin, *Freedom*, 631.

<sup>67</sup> Gerteis, *From Contraband to Freedman*, 121-123, 125. Lincoln also gave Thomas a directive to get the contrabands out of the camps, but not to send them North due to pervasive Northern racism. Lincoln’s ideal solution would have been colonization, but by this time the Emancipation Proclamation made that impossible (123).

<sup>68</sup> Brig. Genl. Jas. S. Wadsworth to Adj Gen Thomas, 16 Dec 1863, in *Freedom*, ed. Berlin et al, 758-760.

addition, military necessity played a significant role in the development of leasing, as Grant wanted a “loyal population,” preferably Northerners, on the west side of the Mississippi River to protect his supplies during the Vicksburg Campaign.<sup>69</sup> Finally, Thomas believed, lessees would also support those unable to work and relieve the government of the burden of supporting the destitute, meaning that the army would only have to support the new arrivals in the camps for short periods.<sup>70</sup> Persuaded by these arguments, Thomas and the army officials instituted plantation leasing in Mississippi, but the reality, hampered by ineffective federal oversight, proved far different from the ideal laid out in the regulations, and Thomas also failed to consult the contrabands prior to instituting leasing.

The army nominated three commissioners to lease plantations to “persons of ‘proper’ character and qualification” and allowed the lessees to find laborers in the contraband camps, meaning that they did at least attempt to judge the fitness of applicants.<sup>71</sup> Thomas also specified wages of seven dollars a month for men and five dollars for women along with rations and housing, but also allowed lessees to deduct clothing costs.<sup>72</sup> In his order, he echoed the above arguments, stating that he wanted contrabands supported by private enterprise rather than government welfare and that a Unionist population would help to secure the area against both the regular Confederate army and guerrilla raids. His statements that the system would “secure, as far as possible the just rights of employer and employed” and that lessees would feel obligated to “elevate this unfortunate race” proved far from true, as they focused more on profits than the rights of black laborers.<sup>73</sup> The lessees, rather than being benevolent employers who wanted to

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<sup>69</sup> Gerteis, *From Contraband to Freedman*, 123.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid*, 124.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid*, 123.

<sup>72</sup> Berlin, *Freedom*, 632.

<sup>73</sup> Gen Lorenzo Thomas to Edwin M. Stanton, 12 April 1863, in *Freedom*, ed. Berlin et al, 700-701; Adj Gen Lorenzo Thomas to Edwin M. Stanton, 15 October 1863, in *Freedom*, ed. Berlin et al, 740.

protect the contrabands, became “greedy adventurers” who “treat the Negroes brutally, and chastise them worse than their former masters did,” according to Navy Admiral David D. Porter.<sup>74</sup> The lessees mistreated the contrabands, denied them wages, rations, clothing, and access to schools, and ran away after Confederate raids and left the contrabands to fend for themselves in areas unprotected by Union soldiers. Even worse, the army tolerated such practices and contributed to the problem by leasing plantations in areas vulnerable to Confederate attack, indicating that the lessees, with military and government approval, exploited the contrabands to gain profits, which provided a preview of the labor conditions freedmen would face under the Bureau after the war, where ineffective federal oversight allowed planters to exploit sharecroppers and tenants with little consequence.

When lessees acquired land in areas not protected by the Union army, their laborers faced the possibility of capture and enslavement by Confederate guerrillas. As Gerteis argues, the lessees absconded when guerrillas attacked their plantations, leaving the contrabands to “fend for themselves.”<sup>75</sup> In Natchez, only 115 out of four hundred lessees remained after several guerrilla raids, the rebels re-enslaved one thousand contrabands, and the military did not send any additional troops to the plantations. Near the Mississippi River, meanwhile, guerrillas captured and re-enslaved 1200 contrabands, indicating the scale of the guerrilla problem and the fact that the lessees cared so little for their laborers that they ran to safety while leaving the contrabands to face re-enslavement or worse at the hands of the rebels.<sup>76</sup> In addition, some lessees lost all chance for profit when guerrillas destroyed the cotton crop, but still chose to remain on the plantations and overcharged for goods, “cut off rations, and failed to pay wages” in order to try

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<sup>74</sup> Rear Admiral David D. Porter to General Lorenzo Thomas, 21 October 1863, in *Freedom*, ed. Berlin, et al, 747.

<sup>75</sup> Gerteis, *From Contraband to Freedman*, 145.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid*, 158.

and salvage some economic benefit, indicating that they remained focused on profits at the expense of the contrabands. Neither the army nor the Treasury Department intervened to address such blatant violations of the leasing regulations, demonstrating that federal oversight rarely went beyond written regulations.<sup>77</sup> The government also failed to protect either the lessees or the contrabands and allowed leasing of plantations in areas they knew were not protected by Union troops, which, as Eaton wrote, resulted in a “massacre of negroes” as profit-minded lessees cared so little for the contrabands that they would knowingly expose them to the danger of guerrillas in order to make money and government authorities stood by and did nothing to stop it.<sup>78</sup> While guerillas are partially to blame for these depredations, army authorities knew they were a problem and still not only leased plantations in insecure areas but also failed to provide protection, indicating the degree of government complicity in lessee exploitation, as the army remained focused on finding work for the contrabands and clearing out the camps, even at the expense of the safety of the contrabands, and these same objectives would guide the closure of camps across the South at the end of the war, demonstrating once again the importance of the camps to the establishment of Bureau policy.

Even when lessees avoided the problem of guerrilla raids, they still exploited the contrabands by failing to provide proper food, wages, and clothing while making large profits for themselves, and neither the army or any federal agency intervened and compelled them to abide by the federal government’s own leasing regulations. As Gerteis writes, “Even the best planters admitted that there was nothing to prevent them from defrauding their hands,” and lessees found numerous ways to do just that.<sup>79</sup> Half of lessees made fifteen to twenty-five percent profit while

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<sup>77</sup> Berlin, *Freedom*, 635.

<sup>78</sup> Col. John Eaton, Jr. to Hon. W.P. Fessenden, 31 January 1865, in *Freedom*, ed. Berlin et al, 872.

<sup>79</sup> Gerteis, *From Contraband to Freedman*, 162.



paying the contrabands in scrip rather than wages and overcharging for goods at plantation stores, which resulted in the contrabands accumulating large debts with little hope of paying them off, and foreshadowed one of the most common methods for the exploitation of freedmen during Reconstruction. One lessee even made a profit of eighty thousand dollars but never paid a single cent in wages and never faced discipline from the military or the federal bureaucracy.<sup>80</sup> In addition to nonpayment of wages, lessees denied healthcare and refused to provide rations for the ill or those who could not work, and according to Gerteis, fifty percent even used corporal punishment on the contrabands despite regulations prohibiting the practice.<sup>81</sup> The lessees blatantly violated federal labor regulations and faced little to no consequence, which demonstrates the failure of federal oversight and foreshadowed the failures of the Bureau.

Examples abound of such lessee mistreatment of contrabands in the Mississippi Valley. Lessees on the Raleigh Plantation, for example, denied rations to the family members of workers and also refused to issue clothing, even to the workers. Lessees Alexander and Smith, meanwhile, refused to provide medical care or clothing and charged “exorbitant prices” at the plantation store.<sup>82</sup> Lessee J.W. Green refused to provide any rations at all and forced the contrabands to survive by hunting for their own subsistence, indicating the degree to which lessees would exploit contrabands to make a profit, and the consequences of ineffective federal oversight, as neither the army nor the federal bureaucracy intervened to compel him to issue rations.<sup>83</sup> An army officer inspecting plantations reported no lessees fully obeying labor contracts. He stated that many had “an utter disregard of even the commonest principles of humanity” and saw the contraband as a “mere brute, from whom the greatest amount of labor

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<sup>80</sup> Powell, *New Masters*, 90-92.

<sup>81</sup> Gerteis, *From Contraband to Freedman*, 162-164; Berlin, *Freedom*, 635.

<sup>82</sup> Maj. Julian E. Bryant to Captain, 10 October 1863, in *Freedom*, ed. Berlin et al, 729-734.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid*, 732-733.

should be gained at the least possible expense,” and argued that the leasing system was worse than slavery.<sup>84</sup> Brigadier General John P. Hawkins agreed, stating that contrabands were “working by the day for the merest pittance” and that the slave “master’s treatment of them was parental compared to what we now permit.”<sup>85</sup> Despite these reports, the army failed to intervene to mitigate clear examples of lessee exploitation, despite the presence of regulations from the federal government. James E. Yeatman, a Sanitary Commission agent and abolitionist, also argued that lessees treated contrabands worse than slaveholders had and that they were more interested in profit than decent treatment.<sup>86</sup> These testimonies and examples clearly indicate that lessees would do anything, from refusing to provide clothing and rations to even denying basic medical care, in order to turn a profit. Rather than helping the contrabands learn how to achieve economic autonomy, they treated them worse than the slaveholders, and the contract system meant that the contrabands had no way to escape, which undermines the very idea of free labor and rising economically through work. Whether under the control of the Treasury or the Army, government authorities remained focused on preserving order and did little or nothing to prevent the base exploitation and abuse of contrabands by lessees focused solely on profits, and such neglect foreshadowed the inadequate response to planter abuse of freedmen under the Bureau.

In March 1863, the Treasury Department took over control of abandoned lands from the War Department and the Army, but failed to truly improve conditions for the contrabands. One Treasury agent stated that lessees “were not... unprincipled persons eager to enrich themselves at the expense of the Negro,” but the reality was far different, and the agents did little to remedy the situation, and in fact even contributed to it by failing to address clear cases of abuse.<sup>87</sup> As

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid, 734.

<sup>85</sup> Brig. Gen. John P. Hawkins to Hon. Gerritt Smith, 21 October 1863, in *Freedom*, ed. Berlin et al, 742-745.

<sup>86</sup> Berlin, *Freedom*, 781.

<sup>87</sup> A. McFarland to Wm. P. Mellen, 11 March 1864, in *Freedom*, ed. Berlin et al, 794-795.

Gerteis argues, the system “created ample room for exploitation” as both the agents and the lessees focused on crop yields and making profits for the government rather than the welfare of the contrabands. William P. Mellen, the Treasury agent, voided all leases, but simply rented the land out to new white lessees rather than allowing contrabands to rent it, as Yeatman and Chase had desired, which follows the precedent set in the land disputes in South Carolina.<sup>88</sup> In addition, he created home farms with no wages in order to coerce contrabands onto leased plantations and to empty the remaining contraband camps.<sup>89</sup> As Gerteis states, Mellen “sought more coercive means to force freedmen onto plantations,” but without real regard for the actual conditions they faced, and the fact that many contrabands could not physically perform difficult agricultural labor in the harsh Mississippi climate.<sup>90</sup> The Treasury agents did try to prevent abuse by requiring payment of monthly wages and controlling prices at plantation stores, but they did not have enough staff to adequately enforce even these basic measures, which foreshadowed the woeful understaffing of the Bureau. The higher wages under the Treasury system did not significantly improve conditions for the contrabands since they only received half each month, had to buy their own food and clothing, and still faced exploitative prices at the stores.<sup>91</sup> Even worse, Treasury agents leased plantations in areas not secured by the army, leading to lessees abandoning their laborers to face the wrath of Confederate guerrillas, which indicates that they did not learn from the earlier guerrilla raids on lands leased by the army.<sup>92</sup> This last policy, in fact, contributed to Lincoln’s decision to return control of the plantations to

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<sup>88</sup> Gerteis, *From Contraband to Freedman*, 138-141; Eaton, *Grant, Lincoln, and the Freedmen*, 163; Salmon P. Chase to Wm. P. Mellen, 27 December 1863, in *Freedom*, ed Berlin et al, 763-764.

<sup>89</sup> Gerteis, *From Contraband to Freedman*, 140.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid*, 146.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid*, 141; Berlin, *Freedom*, 641. The Treasury system mandated payment of \$25 for a first-class male and \$18 for a first-class female. Lessees often designated hands as second or third class in order to pay lower wages (Gerteis 141).

<sup>92</sup> Berlin, *Freedom*, 642.

the Army, who he believed could better protect the contrabands.<sup>93</sup> The decision failed to improve conditions, as exploitation and guerilla raids continued under army administration.

General Thomas and the army retook control in March 1864, lowered wages, and only required payments at the end of the year in order to compel contrabands to remain on the plantations the entire year. They also required the lessees to provide food, clothing, and healthcare.<sup>94</sup> Thomas focused on the war effort and ignored the need to protect lessees from guerillas and failed to enforce wage payments and other regulations, meaning that the army did no better than the Treasury Department in supervising the lessees despite the presence of more officers on the ground. Neither the higher levels of military bureaucracy nor the War Department intervened to uphold their own regulations. As Gerteis argues, Thomas wanted a system as close to slavery as possible, and such attitudes allowed lessees to exploit contrabands with little fear of consequences.<sup>95</sup> In fact, the army directly contributed by cutting off rations to all contrabands not on a plantation, which forced them to remain with lessees despite terrible conditions, and fails to account for contrabands physically unable to work on plantations.<sup>96</sup> This policy foreshadowed the Bureau's policy of reducing and then completely cutting off rations to all freedmen, in order to force them to find a job on a plantation and end government expenditures on the welfare of the freedmen. The army's failure to provide protection also caused devastating consequences, as lessees fled and forced contrabands to fend for themselves despite the continued presence of rebel guerrillas.<sup>97</sup> More commonly, lessees failed to abide by the labor contracts and denied contrabands basic necessities while army authorities stood by and

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<sup>93</sup> William P. Mellen, to Hon. S. P. Chase, 29 March 1864, in *Freedom*, ed. Berlin et al, 861.

<sup>94</sup> General Orders Number Nine, 11 March 1864, in *Freedom*, ed. Berlin et al, 804.

<sup>95</sup> Gerteis, *From Contraband to Freedman*, 150.

<sup>96</sup> Circular of the Office of General Superintendent of Freedmen, in *Freedom*, ed. Berlin et al, 813.

<sup>97</sup> Colonel Samuel Thomas to Brigadier General Lorenzo Thomas, 15 June 1864, in *Freedom*, ed. Berlin et al, 835.

did nothing. One lessee forced his contrabands to buy their own food and clothing while still paying the lower wages, despite making \$450,000 in profits.<sup>98</sup> George Howard, another lessee, beat contraband Clinton Hamilton two hundred times with a stick when he claimed illness and had not paid him any wages for over a year. Army authorities fined him one hundred dollars for using corporal punishment, but did not force him to provide back pay or even to direct the fine to Hamilton's wages, clearly indicating the government's complicity in lessee exploitation.<sup>99</sup> Army control failed to improve conditions for the contrabands, as lessees continued to exploit and abuse them while authorities more focused on winning the war did little or nothing to prevent it, and even actively contributed by failing to provide military protection.

Overall, profit-minded lessees in Mississippi exploited, abused, and mistreated their contrabands in order to make money. Both Treasury and Army authorities not only tolerated but also actively encouraged such abuses by failing to provide protection from guerillas, requiring contrabands to remain on plantations run by abusive lessees, not intervening when lessees clearly violated labor contracts, and by forcing contrabands to leave the camps and work on leased plantations, even when they could find jobs elsewhere. As Powell states, "To men bent on making a fortune in a hurry, it was almost irresistible" to exploit contrabands, and many did just that and suffered no consequences for their basic violations of human rights.<sup>100</sup> Government authorities, meanwhile, wanted "the system of free labor... to approximate... the usages of slavery" to maintain order so that they could focus on winning the war with as few distractions as possible.<sup>101</sup> This policy of compelling contrabands to work on leased plantations set a direct precedent for Bureau policy after the war, as Bureau agents enforced mandatory labor contracts

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<sup>98</sup> M.D. Landon to William P. Mellon, 12 May 1864, in *Freedom*, ed. Berlin et al, 827-829.

<sup>99</sup> Affidavit of Clinton Hamilton, 31 July 1865, in *Freedom*, ed. Berlin et al, 819.

<sup>100</sup> Powell, *New Masters*, 90.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid*, 49.

for labor on plantations as sharecroppers or tenants, and very few freedmen escaped this exploitative labor system. In addition, the failure of the army and Treasury agents to effectively supervise the leased plantations foreshadowed the same failures of the Bureau, as overwhelmed agents proved unable to mitigate the rampant exploitation and abuse of freedmen on plantations across the South. In Mississippi, lessees, with the support of both the Treasury and the army, exploited and mistreated contrabands in order to make a profit while the authorities remained too focused on the war and avoiding dependency on the government to intervene and stood by in the creation of a system, that as Armstead Robinson writes, was “worsen dan Jeff Davis.”<sup>102</sup>

### Contraband Camps and Leasing in Louisiana

In Louisiana the Union Army arrived in 1862 hoping to begin the process of reconstruction and viewed emancipation and the welfare of contrabands as a decidedly secondary concern. According to Louis Gerteis, a “successful occupation seemed to require the goodwill of slaveholders,” especially since many of the slaveholders who remained claimed loyalty to the Union.<sup>103</sup> Some planters remained so determined to keep slavery intact that they refused to grow any crops and sent their slaves to the government rather than institute free labor, even though it meant a significant loss of profits.<sup>104</sup> At first, army policy favored such actions by the planters due to the unstable military situation. General Benjamin Butler, the commander in the area, ordered the army to return all fugitives who physically could not work on plantations, even to slaveowners who had not taken a loyalty oath, despite a ban on returning fugitives passed by

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<sup>102</sup> Armstead Robinson, “Worsen dan Jeff Davis: The Coming of Free Labor during the Civil War,” in *Essays on the Postbellum Southern Economy*, ed. Thavolia Glymph and John J. Kushma (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1985).

<sup>103</sup> Gerteis, *From Contraband to Freedman*, 68; Oakes, *Freedom National*, 220; Berlin, *Freedom*, 18.

<sup>104</sup> Maj Genl. Benjamin Butler to the President, in *Freedom*, ed. Berlin, et al, 394.

Congress earlier in 1862 and even the Second Confiscation Act.<sup>105</sup> Such a policy “alienated Louisiana blacks from their would-be liberators” and temporarily delayed emancipation in the state. It also foreshadowed the Bureau’s efforts to compel freedmen to sign contracts with their former masters after the war, no matter how badly those masters had mistreated them as slaves, which provides yet more evidence that contraband policy shaped Bureau programs and policies during Reconstruction.<sup>106</sup> The slaves did not give up their hopes for freedom, and eventually the sheer numbers of slaves running to Union lines, especially those unable to work, compelled the government to enact a series of policy changes that led to the exploitative leasing system.

When the army initially occupied Louisiana, masters who remained loyal to the Confederacy often ran to Texas with their most valuable slaves, leaving only women, children, the elderly, and the unfit, and many of these slaves ran to the Union Army, creating a question of how the government should handle the constant influx of fugitives.<sup>107</sup> The military did not have nearly enough jobs for them, and to make matters worse, loyal masters demanded the return of their slave property.<sup>108</sup> Once the Second Confiscation Act passed, the army had no choice but to accept all fugitives into the lines no matter the loyalty of their masters, and large contraband camps began to emerge to provide temporary housing until the government and the army could find a more permanent solution.<sup>109</sup> The camps quickly became overcrowded and lacked sufficient supplies of shelter or clothing, leading to rampant disease and high mortality rates.<sup>110</sup> Butler had not learned from the overcrowded camps in Virginia and set up similar camps in

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<sup>105</sup> Gerteis, *From Contraband to Freedman*, 68, 71-72.

<sup>106</sup> C. Peter Ripley, *Slaves and Freedmen in Civil War Louisiana* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1976), 28.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid*, 16-19.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid*, 26.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid*, 37.

<sup>110</sup> Lieut. Geo. H. Hanks to Brig. Genl. T.V. Sherman, 1 Dec 1862, in *Freedom*, ed. Berlin, et al, 397-398.

Louisiana, indicating that failures often plagued multiple contraband camps due to the lack of a national policy that could have properly addressed the initial shortcomings of contraband policy early in the war. The contrabands “were living on the verge of starvation,” and clearly the government needed to try another system.<sup>111</sup> Ironically, the slaves “had forced the issue” by running away, but their actions contributed to the development of leasing and its devastating consequences.<sup>112</sup>

As in Mississippi, the army turned to leasing in Louisiana due to economic considerations. According to William F. Messner, the military had to set up a system where “black men would play a central role while “a sizable number of white people... doubted the capacity of blacks to function as freedmen.”<sup>113</sup> The presence of abandoned sugar plantations with large potential for revenue for the government to fund the both war effort and the local contraband camps also contributed to the development of leasing, as the revenue from leased plantations would pay for supporting contrabands unable to work.<sup>114</sup> In addition, for reconstruction to occur, the economy had to recover, meaning that plantations needed to be cultivated, either by the government or private enterprise. Accordingly, in January 1863, General Butler issued General Order 91, which confiscated plantations abandoned by disloyal masters in an “attempt to revive the plantation economy, to harvest the crops for the profit of the government, and to deal with unemployed blacks.”<sup>115</sup> Soon afterwards, the army hired the Charles A. Weed Factoring Company, a northern business enterprise, to harvest sugarcane for the government by using contraband labor. No record exists of any effort to ensure that the

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<sup>111</sup> Berlin, *Freedom*, 55.

<sup>112</sup> Ripley, *Slaves and Freedmen*, 38-39.

<sup>113</sup> William F. Messner, *Freedmen and the Ideology of Free Labor: Louisiana 1862-1865* (Lafayette, University of Southwestern Louisiana Press, 1981), xi.

<sup>114</sup> Ripley, *Slaves and Freedmen*, 37.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid*, 37, 44.



company would properly compensate contrabands and treat them humanely, indicating that the overwhelming desire to restart the economy and raise money trumped concern for the welfare of the contrabands. The northerners only paid one dollar a day for the backbreaking labor and imposed “strict controls” to keep the contrabands from leaving before completion of the harvest.<sup>116</sup> Despite the clearly exploitative nature of this program, army officials deemed it a success because it removed contrabands from the camps and from government payrolls and also made them self-sufficient, and the system of leasing began to take shape soon after.<sup>117</sup>

In January 1863, the army set up the Sequestration Commission to decide on the loyalty of plantation owners and confiscate the property of rebels, which led to the development of a leasing system.<sup>118</sup> If plantations did not make a profit under government control, the Commission leased them to Northern businessmen, who had little concern for the basic rights of black laborers. As Ripley argues, “profit took precedence over consideration for laborers” in the leasing process.<sup>119</sup> The lessees turned out to be speculators who exploited and mistreated their laborers to make higher profits, and the government authorities did little or nothing to stop it, which foreshadowed the inability of the Bureau to enforce labor contracts after the war.<sup>120</sup> For example, when the lessees arrived at the plantations, they evicted blacks who had already begun cultivating crops and forced them to either sign labor contracts or leave the property, and the army did nothing to prevent such blatant exploitation.<sup>121</sup> The Sequestration Commission also standardized the labor contracts that all lessees had to sign in order to hire contraband laborers.

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid, 45-46.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> Gerteis, *From Contraband to Freedman*, 72; General Orders No. 12, Department of the Gulf, 29 January 1863, in *Freedom*, ed. Berlin et al, 413-414.

<sup>119</sup> Ripley, *Slaves and Freedmen*, 53.

<sup>120</sup> Messner, *Freedmen and the Ideology of Free Labor*, 39, 64.

<sup>121</sup> Bradish Johnson to Col. Clarke, December 1862, in *Freedom*, ed. Berlin, et al, 399.

The contracts promised either wages or a one-twentieth share of the crop, decent food, clothing, and treatment, but also required the contrabands to remain on the plantation or face forced labor on the public works, and stated that simply working on the plantation constituted agreement to the contract, giving the contrabands no real chance to accumulate capital and also prohibiting from leaving even the most abusive employers.<sup>122</sup> By the end of the war, two-thirds of the contrabands in Louisiana worked under these conditions on one thousand leased plantations.<sup>123</sup> However, according to Messner, “few of the black workers... profited at all” and only changed from “exploited slave... to exploited wage earner.”<sup>124</sup> As John Eaton stated, by instituting leasing the government “placed unconsidered thousands in danger of oppression and in actual and present want.”<sup>125</sup> By tolerating abuses such as corporal punishment, the leasing of plantations in areas plagued by guerrillas, nonpayment of wages, and even by actively favoring the lessees, the government contributed to the rampant exploitation of contraband labor.

The first example of lessee mistreatment, and government complicity, is the use of corporal punishment to discipline the contrabands, meaning that the discipline on the plantations closely resembled that enforced under slavery. According to Powell, the lessees attempted to “perpetuate” the plantation order, which meant retaining as many aspects of the old system as possible in order to maximize profits, as many believed that contrabands would not work without physical coercion and nearly military-style discipline.<sup>126</sup> Despite labor contracts that prohibited whipping, beatings, and other forms of corporal punishment, lessees violently abused their slaves

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<sup>122</sup> Circular by the Sequestration Commission, 6 February 1863, in *Freedom*, ed. Berlin, et al, 419-420; Gerteis, *From Contraband to Freedman*, 75-76.

<sup>123</sup> Gerteis, *From Contraband to Freedman*, 84-85.

<sup>124</sup> Messner, *Freedmen and the Ideology of Free Labor*, 40-41.

<sup>125</sup> Eaton, *Grant, Lincoln, and the Freedmen*, 151. Eaton was the Superintendent of Contrabands in Mississippi but also an astute observer of events in nearby Louisiana.

<sup>126</sup> Powell, *New Masters*, xiii; Testimony of J.B. Roudanez before the American Freedmen’s Inquiry Commission, 8 February 1864, in *Freedom*, ed. Berlin, et al, 524.

and army and Treasury authorities either stood by or even actively participated in the abuse. The lack of federal oversight of the leasing program meant that they faced no discipline for failing to enforce their own regulations, which demonstrates the consequences of the lack of a federal contraband policy.<sup>127</sup> Lessee George Benham, for example, used chains and beatings in order to discipline contrabands who did not work hard enough, and received no punishment from military authorities.<sup>128</sup> The contrabands working on the plantation of a Mr. Mandra, meanwhile, complained that he treated them “with great cruelty” in a complaint to army authorities. General Hanks, the commander of the Bureau of Negro Labor, ordered the practice to stop but never followed up to ensure that the abuse had truly ended.<sup>129</sup> Such attitudes on the part of the army indicated an emphasis on control of the contrabands and the idea that only whipping would suffice to keep the contrabands at work.<sup>130</sup> In addition, the continued use of corporal punishment by lessees clearly demonstrates their lack of regard for black rights and sole focus on profits, and the government’s tolerance of their violations of labor regulations that prohibited any form of physical abuse. Finally, it foreshadows the failure of the Bureau to adequately supervise plantations and prevent physical abuse of the freedmen, as agents overwhelmed with complaints could not adequately enforce Bureau regulations and received little assistance from the bureaucracy in Washington.

Another example of army neglect of contraband laborers is the fact that military authorities prohibited contrabands from leaving the plantations to escape abuse and exploitation,

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<sup>127</sup> Gerteis, *From Contraband to Freedman*, 80; Powell, *New Masters*, 117; Order by the Commander of the Department of the Gulf, 3 February 1864, in *Freedom*, ed. Berlin et al, 513.

<sup>128</sup> Powell, *New Masters*, 117.

<sup>129</sup> Lieut. Gen. Hanks to Mr. Mandra, 8 March 1863, in Register of Complaints, Provost Marshal General of Freedmen, Records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands for Louisiana, RG 105, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC.

<sup>130</sup> Gerteis, *From Contraband to Freedman*, 90-91. In addition, Gerteis cites army officials allowing lessees to put contrabands in stocks as an example to others in order to prevent insubordination (96).

which clearly contradicts the idea of free labor that was supposed to define the contraband labor system. The system of yearly contracts meant that contrabands had to remain on the same plantation for the duration of the contract or face punishment and loss of wages, even for the time already worked.<sup>131</sup> As Gerteis writes, “On occasion, provost marshals adopted the brutal methods of slavery to enforce discipline.”<sup>132</sup> For example, a contraband only known as Gabel left the plantation without a pass to enlist in the army, which violated regulations requiring a pass for any contraband leaving his or her employer. The provost marshal, Captain Sawyer, beat him viciously and sent him back to his employer, a lessee, who beat him again and placed him in the stocks for eighteen hours, and then tied him to a tree during the evening so mosquitoes could bite him.<sup>133</sup> While this example may be extreme, it indicates the emphasis on controlling the contrabands and tolerating abusive lessees to preserve law and order, even to the point of undermining recruitment into the United States Colored Troops. As Ripley writes, “corporal punishment bordering on the sadistic became common,” especially for those caught off the plantation.<sup>134</sup> Government patrols also routinely forced blacks back onto the plantations or to forced labor on the levees, no matter how badly they had been mistreated by their employers.<sup>135</sup> The slave patrols, therefore, had simply been replaced by military patrols, meaning the contrabands had not escaped all aspects of slavery, especially since many saw the right to travel as a vital aspect of freedom. For the contrabands, this system meant that they did not have true freedom, as they had no way to escape abusive lessees who exploited them to gain profits, particularly by failing to provide proper wages, clothing, and rations, despite government

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<sup>131</sup> Gerteis, *From Contraband to Freedman*, 79-81.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, 92-93.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, 79, 93; Order by the Commander of the Department of the Gulf, 3 February 1864, in *Freedom*, ed. Berlin, et al, 513.

<sup>134</sup> Ripley, *Slaves and Freedmen*, 94.

<sup>135</sup> Messner, *Freedmen and the Ideology of Free Labor*, 50; Testimony of General Wadsworth before the American Freedmen’s Inquiry Commission, January 1864, in *Freedom*, ed. Berlin, et al, 495.

regulations to the contrary, and the Treasury Department and army both failed to enforce their own regulations and faced little to no supervision from higher federal authorities.

The most common form of exploitation in Louisiana, cheating contrabands out of their wages and failing to provide rations and clothing, remained prevalent during the entirety of the system of leasing despite clear regulations prohibiting the practice. As a New England aid society wrote, “In consequence of the... ill-will of their employers, they were often treated in bad faith... swindled out of their earnings, or defrauded in the matter of food and clothing.”<sup>136</sup> A lessee named Charles Ward refused to pay wages and only provided food, clothing, and shelter to his laborers, and his behavior remained far from atypical.<sup>137</sup> As Ripley states, lessees “violated contracts by charging blacks for... medical supplies... or by charging them for rations” on days when weather or other factors prevented work.<sup>138</sup> A contraband named Sam complained to the provost marshal that he never received wages for months of work at Camille Plantation, and, although no record exists of whether the provost marshal took action, the incident clearly reveals how far lessees would go to make profits off their workers.<sup>139</sup> Too often, overwhelmed provost marshals would be unable to respond to complaints due to a lack of adequate protection, as Confederate guerrillas continued to plague the area and made visits to the plantations perilous. A revenue collector inspecting leased plantations reported that “Negroes employed on these plantations were generally cheated out of their pay” and that conditions on government plantations remained vastly better than those on leased plantations, clearly indicating that lessees had little regard for black rights and that the government did not act to prevent such abuses since

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<sup>136</sup> *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), 47.

<sup>137</sup> Messner, *Freedmen and the Ideology of Free Labor*, 39.

<sup>138</sup> Ripley, *Slaves and Freedmen*, 61.

<sup>139</sup> Register of Complaints, RG 105, Louisiana, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC.

their plantation managers did not mistreat blacks to the same degree.<sup>140</sup> As Messner wrote, “The emphasis of most Northern speculators” remained “profits, often to the disregard of their workers’ welfare.”<sup>141</sup>

Military authorities often supported the lessees and overlooked such abuses despite the consequences for the contrabands due to a focus on economy and ensuring the contrabands had consistent employment so the contraband camps would no longer be needed. As Messner argues, the army actively worked with lessees and therefore contributed to rather than prevented exploitation of laborers, which all too often foreshadowed the actions and attitudes of Bureau agents, who often supported planters due to concerns about vagrancy and outright racism, including the idea that freedmen were naturally lazy and would not work without coercion and constant supervision, despite ample evidence to the contrary.<sup>142</sup> Such attitudes were often due to the fact that army officials remained more concerned about crop yields and maintaining order than ensuring the rights of contrabands.<sup>143</sup> As Ripley writes, “Contrabands were primarily considered as laborers essential to the Federal policy of reviving the plantation economy,” and high yields took precedence over decent treatment.<sup>144</sup> The army tried to enforce wage payments by banning crop sales until all laborers received wages, but many lessees still sold their crops and fled without paying any wages at all and did not face any discipline, which indicates the ineffectiveness of military oversight of the lessees. In fact, the Sequestration Commission often took such a large portion of the crop for rent and taxes that lessees could not afford to provide their workers with food and wages, which clearly indicates that the army shared the lessees’ sole

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<sup>140</sup> Collector of United States Internal Revenue in Louisiana to the Secretary of the Treasury, 23 November 1862, in *Freedom*, ed. Berlin, et al, 472.

<sup>141</sup> Messner, *Freedmen and the Ideology of Free Labor*, 94.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid*, 64.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid*, 65.

<sup>144</sup> Ripley, *Slaves and Freedmen*, 2.

focus on profits at the expense of laborers.<sup>145</sup> Provost marshals also favored lessees in labor disputes and even stole wages and crop shares from the contrabands, further contributing to mistreatment and abuse.<sup>146</sup> Another example is the refusal of lessees to support those unable to work, which meant that the government had to support them. Rather than forcing lessees to comply, the government placed these contrabands in overcrowded camps, which not only meant bad living conditions but also split up families., and undermined the goal of utilizing the leased plantations to close the contraband camps and reduce government expenditures on the contrabands.<sup>147</sup> This failure foreshadowed another shortcoming of Bureau policy, when the Bureau had difficulty finding jobs for elderly or infirm contrabands, and often had to maintain home farms or labor camps much longer than they preferred to. These examples clearly indicate that military officials actively contributed to the exploitation of contrabands by Northern lessees. When the Treasury took over in late 1863, little changed, as lessee and government exploitation continued unabated.

In October 1863, the Treasury Department took control of abandoned and leased plantations from the army and instituted their own regulations, as the army was eager to rid itself of the complexities of supervising leased plantations when they needed these resources for military campaigns. The Treasury rules called for wages of fifteen to twenty five dollars a month, but withheld half until the end of the year and also required the contrabands to buy their own food and clothing, even though they only received partial wages and prices were high due to wartime shortages.<sup>148</sup> In addition, lessees had to provide housing and one acre garden plots for

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<sup>145</sup> Ibid, 57-58.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid, 93.

<sup>147</sup> Eaton, *Grant, Lincoln, and the Freedmen*, 150.

<sup>148</sup> Berlin, *Freedom*, 371; Major General N. P. Banks to Maj. Gen. W.H. Halleck, 16 October 1863, in *Freedom*, ed. Berlin et al, 469.

growing food and could not sell crops until they had paid wages.<sup>149</sup> The regulations did not require the lessees to provide access to schools, meaning that contrabands who desired an education often had to traverse several miles of guerrilla-infested territory to reach an often overcrowded missionary school. Enforcement remained lax and lessees continued to exploit the contrabands. A Mr. Pierce, for example, refused to pay wages and only provided food and clothing, and what he did provide was substandard and not enough to support family members who did not work. Treasury authorities ordered him to pay wages, but never followed up to ensure compliance or attempted to correct the deficiencies in rations and clothing.<sup>150</sup> In addition, the Treasury permitted lessees with insufficient capital to lease plantations, causing nonpayment of wages and poor plantation management.<sup>151</sup> Such lessees also continued the practice of evicting those unable to work and even gave up and left without paying wages when the army worm destroyed the 1864 cotton crop.<sup>152</sup> The Treasury takeover did nothing to stop the exploitation of contrabands and only perpetuated the abusive practices of the old system, especially due to the lack of adequate agents to ensure supervision of the plantations and to protect the contrabands from abuse, both at the local and federal levels, indicating the consequences of poor federal oversight and the lack of a national contraband policy. As Eaton wrote, the lessees remained focused on profit, but even more so under the Treasury system when they no longer had to provide food and clothing and could further exploit the contrabands by charging high prices for such essential goods.<sup>153</sup> The Treasury relinquished control to the army in early 1865, and the original system returned along with its lower wages, and mistreatment of

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<sup>149</sup> Plantation Regulations by the Secretary of the Treasury, 29 July 1864, in *Freedom*, ed. Berlin et al, 541-542.

<sup>150</sup> Statement of Two Louisiana Freedmen, 19 December 1863, in *Freedom*, ed. Berlin et al, 482; W.H. Wilder to S.W. Cozzens, 1 January 1864, in *Freedom*, ed. Berlin, et al, 484-486.

<sup>151</sup> Testimony of General Wadsworth before the American Freedmen's Inquiry Commission, January 1864, in *Freedom*, ed. Berlin, et al, 492.

<sup>152</sup> Major General N.P. Banks to Maj. Gen. W. H. Halleck, 16 Oct 1863, in *Freedom*, ed. Berlin et al, 470.

<sup>153</sup> Eaton, *Grant, Lincoln, and the Freedmen*, 150.



the contrabands only continued, clearly indicating government complicity in the exploitation of contrabands by profit-minded lessees.<sup>154</sup>

Overall, whether under Treasury or Army control, lessees in Louisiana abused, exploited, defrauded, and cheated their contraband laborers in order to make a profit, and government authorities either stood by without intervening or actively took part in the abuse, and faced no discipline or supervision from Army or Treasury authorities in Washington. As one contraband testified in April 1865 after army authorities regained control, his master treated him better than the lessee, who refused to pay even the lower wages mandated under the military system, and the military failed to intervene to compel him to uphold the contract. He argued that lessees “only care for money” and could care less about the welfare of their workers as long as profits remained high.<sup>155</sup> Lessees treated their contrabands no better than southern planters, and, as Ripley argues, “Lessees... were the most flagrant offenders because... they were less vulnerable to recourse if the initial deception succeeded” since they could easily return North and escape punishment.<sup>156</sup> Louisiana lessees, with the help of the government, remained focused on profits at the expense of their laborers and routinely mistreated them to improve crop yields, and the failure of the army and federal government to address such clear exploitation of the contrabands set precedents for the failure of the Freedmen’s Bureau to adequately supervise planters to ensure they upheld the labor contracts that the Bureau itself required the freedmen to sign.

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<sup>154</sup> Berlin, *Freedom*, 374.

<sup>155</sup> Testimony of Tobias Gibson, 25 April 1865, in *Freedom*, ed. Berlin, et al, 608.

<sup>156</sup> Ripley, *Slaves and Freedmen*, 62.

## Conclusion

By the end of the Civil War, the camps in the western theater remained in flux, as leased plantations in Mississippi and Louisiana faced the uncertainty of transition from the War Department to the Bureau. Contrabands in Kentucky faced a dire situation with few available jobs, attempted transfers to Mississippi, the possibility of separation of their families, and a military command desperate to close the camp that constituted their only refuge in a state still very hostile to freedmen. Understanding the story of these camps during the Civil War is essential to developing a clear picture of Bureau policies across the western theater during Reconstruction, as policies developed in all three camps created models for the Bureau, including sharecropping, the attempted rapid closure of the camps, compelling contrabands to work for their old masters, and the mandatory signing of annual labor contracts with no provisions for escaping abusive employers prior to the end of the contract. These camps also provide a clear demonstration of the consequences of inadequate federal oversight, as the War and Treasury Departments bickered over leased plantations to the detriment of the contrabands, and neither department took the necessary steps to ensure that its agents on the ground enforced their own regulations, meaning that employers often abused and exploited contrabands with impunity. The War Department's oversight of the Kentucky camps was so inadequate that commanders there could blatantly violate federal policy with little consequence. These shortcomings of oversight would continue under the Bureau, especially in late 1865 and early 1866 when multiple agencies of the federal government struggled over how to close the camps and transition the freedmen to self-sufficiency independent from any government support, and that story is the subject of the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 5

### THE BUREAU IMPLEMENTS CONTRABAND CAMP POLICIES

After the Civil War, the Freedmen's Bureau, founded in 1865, began to close down the camps and hire the contrabands out to local whites through contract labor. The Bureau indentured children to whites, often their former owners, to try and make them self-sufficient. These programs directly reflect policies developed in the contraband camps, including contracts on leased plantations, requirements that all contrabands work, and avoiding economic dependency. Southern states passed Black Codes that directly undermined the Bureau's labor program, and President Johnson quickly began to issue pardons that eliminated any chance for the freedmen to obtain land. The Bureau also remained understaffed and plagued with incompetent and racist agents who cared little for the freedmen, which reflected a model set in the contraband camps. In addition, the lack of staff reflected a continuation of the shortcomings of plantation leasing in Mississippi and Louisiana, where inadequate personnel could not hope to monitor the widely scattered plantations. Finally, the Bureau faced consistent violence from guerrillas and the Ku Klux Klan, and the failure of the Bureau and the Army to adequately protect the freedmen followed the example of contraband camps. This chapter further demonstrates that both the policies and the shortcomings of the Freedmen's Bureau originated in the contraband camps during the Civil War.

The Bureau did operate under a single set of uniform guidelines set at headquarters in Washington, meaning that a federal policy for freedmen finally emerged, but only after the

conclusion of the Civil War. The Bureau clearly demonstrates the differences between a written policy at the federal level and execution of the policy on the ground, as a lack of staff, constant white violence, and the desire of freedmen to obtain land rather than work for wages all undermined the ability of Bureau agents to uniformly enforce these federal regulations, so enforcement remained uneven at best. Especially by 1868, as the Bureau began to wind down operations, agents became less and less willing to investigate outrages and intervene in labor disputes, which directly undermined the ability of freedmen to obtain economic autonomy. On the other hand, the rigid policies for the Freedmen's Bureau sometimes hampered the ability of agents to make decisions based on local circumstances, especially since each state tended to have its own particular labor system based on the local economy and predominant crop. The Bureau finally had a national policy to work with and supposedly adequate federal oversight, but this did not always lead to positive consequences for the freedmen.

The Bureau's policies directly reflected those instituted in the contraband camps for several reasons. First, many agents began their careers in the contraband camps and thus had familiarity with these policies. Second, even if agents had not worked in a contraband camp at all, they faced very similar circumstances, and instituted the same policies as contraband camp commanders. Examples included labor contracts, reductions of rations, indentures and impressment, and a focus on closing the camps as soon as possible. The Bureau also faced the same shortcomings as contraband camps due not only to similar policies but similar philosophies, including an overwhelming focus on avoiding dependency, the reduction of government expenditures as much as possible, and an emphasis on labor contracts rather than independent land ownership or working in other fields even when such jobs paid higher wages

than contracted plantation labor. As this chapter demonstrates, the contraband camp policies discussed in chapters one through four created models for Bureau policy for numerous reasons.

The Bureau also had to take into account the goals of planters and other employers, who had their own ideas for how to manage labor, and those of freedmen, who pursued land ownership and attempted to avoid wage labor on plantations as much as possible. The agents, without adequate policy guidance from Washington, had to find a compromise between two vastly different ideas of labor management and also resolve labor disputes, help freedmen find available wage labor, and manage the support of destitute freedmen who could not work on plantations. The divide between Bureau agents and planters over whether to implement wage labor or sharecropping also undermined Bureau operations early in Reconstruction, as agents had to decide which labor system to implement based on the needs of both planters and freedmen. Sharecropping did not emerge all at once across the South, but gradually emerged as the most prevalent replacement for slavery mainly as a compromise between planter desire for labor control and the desire of the freedmen for economic autonomy.

The Bureau failed to meet its own standards, not just current moral standards. The Bureau claimed to focus on helping the freedmen adjust to freedom and gain economic autonomy so they could become self-sufficient. Instead, agents instituted mandatory labor contracts, did not allow freedmen to leave abusive employers prior to the termination of the contract, and did not provide nearly enough enforcement to ensure that planters complied with the terms of even Bureau-approved contracts. The Bureau also did not redistribute land to the freedmen or allow them to take jobs off of plantations, which undermined their own goal of helping the freedmen become self-supporting. The Bureau's policy of apprenticeship removed the labor of children from families who badly needed every family member to work to make a

living, and also continued the forcible separation of families that freedmen had faced under slavery. Even worse for freedmen, the Bureau focused so much on avoiding dependency that they cut rations and closed camps as quickly as possible, even in areas where freedmen faced dire job prospects and often had to return to their former masters for work, which clearly undermined the idea of free labor that supposedly guided Bureau policy. The fact that the Bureau could not sufficiently protect the freedmen from white violence further undermined its own policies, especially after Bureau courts closed and freedmen had to resort to the civil courts for justice, even though these courts rarely provided equal justice if they tried cases involving freedmen at all. The Bureau could not uphold its own policy objectives, and each of these failures, and the causes behind them, are the focus of this chapter.

This chapter will be organized thematically rather than by state as in previous chapters for several reasons. First, the Bureau was a national organization that deployed agents across the South, so freedmen across the South fell under the control of the same agency that, at least on paper, would follow the same rules no matter their location. The reality would be far different, as agents often instituted their own policies due to inadequate enforcement from the Bureau and differing circumstances in each locality. Second, the policies of Reconstruction affected every state in the same way, so their impact would be similar across all of the former Confederate states. Finally, a topical analysis of the Bureau and Reconstruction, discussing the closure of the camps, Presidential Reconstruction and the Black Codes, sharecropping and contract labor, apprenticeship and indenture, white violence and terrorism, and the end of the Bureau, would better elucidate the shortcomings of Bureau policies, and how these policies originated in the contraband camps during the Civil War. This analysis would also more clearly demonstrate the continued inadequacy of federal oversight even under the Bureau.

The analysis of Reconstruction will consist of four major parts. The first part will be a discussion of the closure of the camps and Bureau efforts to compel the contrabands to leave the camps and find jobs on plantations or other under private employers. This section will discuss why the Bureau wanted to close the camps so hastily and how the process played out in several contraband camps. The second part will focus on national policies related to the Bureau during Presidential Reconstruction, as well as provide a discussion of the impact of the Black Codes. A discussion of national policy provides essential context for understanding Bureau actions on the local level, and also the shortcomings of the first attempt at creating a uniform policy for freedmen. The third part will shift the focus to the local level to discuss several Bureau policies, including contract labor and apprenticeship, and shortcomings of the Bureau at the local level, including lack of staff, racism, and the inability to prevent white violence against freedmen. The fourth part, finally, will discuss the end of major Bureau operations in 1868, when the agency began to gradually shift towards an exclusive focus on education. The analysis discusses policy at the local and national level, and clearly demonstrates that Bureau policies originated in the contraband camps during the Civil War.

### Closing the Contraband Camps

During late 1865 and early 1866, the Bureau began to close down contraband camps across the South for several reasons. First, they believed that closing the camps would actually improve conditions for freedmen by limiting the spread of disease. For example, Horace James, the commander of the James City camp in North Carolina, argued that hiring freedmen out to white farmers would prevent overcrowding and disease as well as “assist native whites who would treat the freedmen fairly,” reflecting an often-misplaced optimism in the treatment of

freedmen by white employers.<sup>1</sup> While closing the camps would help prevent epidemics, it did not insure that employers provided freedmen with adequate medical care, so closing the camps did not prevent the spread of disease.

Another reason was the desire to preserve private property, as camps often stood on land confiscated from Confederate owners, who now stood to regain their land under Johnson's pardon programs. The overwhelming concern for preserving private property, even for Confederates, trumped the ability to keep the camps open and to provide land for the contrabands. James attempted to persuade the federal government to allow the freedmen to purchase land near the camp so they could become independent farmers, but Johnson and Congress rebuffed him by stating that private property was more important than the economic autonomy of freedmen.<sup>2</sup> In South Carolina, meanwhile, freedmen evicted from the contraband camps had no chance of gaining their own land, despite Sherman's famous Field Order Fifteen. As early as November 1865, freedmen had to leave land they had been cultivating while living in the contraband camps so it could be returned to its previous owners. The freedmen could remain on the land until the current crop was harvested and obtain the full profit from the crop, but had to leave the land immediately after that and contract with a white employer.<sup>3</sup>

The freedmen protested the loss of their right to obtain land in South Carolina by sending numerous petitions to the Bureau, by holding protest meetings and advocating their cause with local military officials, and by refusing to sign contracts with employers for as long as possible. The Bureau, they argued, abandoned its wartime allies and removed "all right to the soil they

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<sup>1</sup> Mobley, *James City*, 43-45.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, 31.

<sup>3</sup> Order, Headquarters Assistant Commissioner, Charleston, SC, 25 November 1865, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina Special Collections, Chapel Hill, North Carolina.



stand upon save such as they can get by again working for your late and their all-time enemies” as contract laborers.<sup>4</sup> They could not truly be free, they stated, if they had to work for an employer rather than farm their own land as independent land owners. They also argued that they did not want to work for their former masters who had abused them as slaves and would likely continue to do so without a constant military presence, which the freedmen knew would not last very long.<sup>5</sup> They requested that the Bureau should “Help us to reach land where we shall not be slaves nor compelled to work for those who would treat us as such” by allowing them to purchase land and become self-sufficient, especially since the idea of self-sufficiency dictated the course of Bureau policy.<sup>6</sup> Their pleas went unanswered, as federal Reconstruction policy focused on restoring property to its previous owners rather than ensuring that freedmen had a right to land. The Bureau only viewed wage labor as an acceptable way to obtain self-sufficiency and therefore compelled freedmen to sign contracts, even though ownership of land created complete economic autonomy. The restoration of private property combined with fears of dependency to create the major impetus for closing camps across the South and transitioning the freedmen to plantation labor.

While these two reasons certainly played a significant role in motivating the Bureau to close the camps, the major justification was avoiding dependence on the government and compelling the contrabands to become self-sufficient by working for white employers, usually on plantations. The Bureau believed that the contrabands had to become self-supporting as soon as possible so that the agency itself could disband and relief efforts in the South could cease.

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<sup>4</sup> Henry Bram, et al to Major General O.O. Howard, 21 October 1865, B-53 1865, Letters Received, Series 15, Washington Headquarters, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, Record Group 105, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

Bureau agents wanted to instill the free-labor ideology across the South, since they firmly believed it to be the best solution to revive the southern economy and ensure that the freedmen worked and did not become dependent on charity. Finally, many agents believed that freedmen did not have the capability to work for themselves due to inherent laziness and a lack of knowledge of proper farming techniques, and had to work as wage laborers as preparation for eventual landownership, but never specified how long this preparatory period had to last or what qualities the freedmen had to demonstrate to prove their readiness for land ownership. The focus on dependency came from several factors and, as it had in the contraband camps, remained the driver of Bureau policy throughout Reconstruction.

Camp commanders cut rations in order to compel the contrabands to leave the camps and find work on their own, even in areas that faced a lack of available jobs. On Roanoke Island, for example, General Schofield cut off rations for all families of USCT soldiers, even though the soldiers had not been paid in eight to ten months, and their families faced starvation without rations since little of the island could be cultivated.<sup>7</sup> By July 1865, all rations to freedmen had been cut off and they had no way to support themselves, since jobs were almost nonexistent on the island and the army continued to cut off rations, meaning the freedmen had to agree to labor contracts with employers on the mainland just to survive, which satisfied the government's desire that they become self-sufficient.<sup>8</sup> By 1867, therefore, the camp had completely disappeared, as all of the freedmen moved to the mainland during the severe winter of 1866-1867. As historian Patricia Click writes, the "Bureau officers focused their energies on removing

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<sup>7</sup> Click, *Time Full of Trial*, 139-140.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 149, 150, 191.

the colonists rather than helping them through the winter” or ensuring that they signed fair contracts on the mainland.<sup>9</sup>

The freedmen protested in a petition to the Bureau commissioner in which they argued that their service in the army justified much better treatment by the military. They stated that the recruiters promised them that their families would receive full rations if they enlisted, but they only received half rations and could only eat on seven out of ten days. Even worse, they accused a Mr. Streeter, the superintendent of the camp, of stealing rations.<sup>10</sup> They stated that Streeter “takes no notice of their actual suffering and sells their rations and allows it to be sold,” indicating the degree of corruption that often came with the closures of camps.<sup>11</sup> James did nothing to address the concerns of the freedmen and actually ordered the ration cuts despite the fact that he had not paid the freedmen the wages due them. The petition reached the highest level of the Bureau bureaucracy, and General Howard ordered rations to resume to the families of soldiers, but also for the process of closing the camps to continue, meaning that fear of dependency still drove Bureau policy, even in the face of obvious evidence of exploitation of freedmen in an area with few job opportunities.<sup>12</sup> The North Carolina camps provide a clear example of the emphasis on avoiding dependency at all costs even when it clearly undermined the ability of the freedmen to obtain economic autonomy.

Camp Nelson in Kentucky provides another example of the fear of dependency as a motivation for closing down the camps. Commanders there had been trying to expel the

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 188.

<sup>10</sup> Sgt. William Etheredge and Wm. Benson to Genl. Howard, June 1865, Unregistered Letters Received, Series 2453, North Carolina Assistant Commissioner, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, Record Group 105, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

contrabands since 1864, and had made a short-lived attempt to empty the camp in the winter of 1864, as described in detail in chapter three. By early 1866, the Bureau decided to send the freedmen to Mississippi to work on plantations, despite their protests that they had no desire to go to the Deep South where they knew conditions would be harsh. Even the missionaries at Camp Nelson feared the freedmen would be mistreated and exploited in Mississippi, but they had no power to stop the army and Bureau's determined efforts to shut down the camp no matter what the cost to the freedmen.<sup>13</sup> By January 1866, the difficulty in obtaining transportation meant that 1500 women and children remained in the camp "in every conceivable condition of wretchedness and sorrow" as the Bureau cut rations to compel the contrabands to accept transportation to either Mississippi or the North, despite the fact that transport delays left the contrabands with no way to support themselves.<sup>14</sup> The Bureau resolved the delays by February and compelled freedmen to leave the camp either for transportation or to contract with local white laborers. The Bureau turned over the buildings at Camp Nelson to the quartermaster for sale, meaning that the closure of the camp would directly benefit the federal government.<sup>15</sup> The camp closed entirely on March 20, 1866, after the last freedmen had left.<sup>16</sup> The question of how to support destitute freedmen would continue to plague the Bureau in Kentucky for several months after the closure, meaning that the problems that faced the contraband camps did not simply disappear after they closed, but rather continued to hamper Bureau efforts to ensure economic autonomy for the freedmen. Not only the policies but also the problems faced by the Bureau originated in the contraband camps during the Civil War.

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<sup>13</sup> Farwell to Fisk, 22 December 1865, in *Camp Nelson*, ed. Sears, 308.

<sup>14</sup> Gen. Scofield to Whipple, 15 January 1866, in *Camp Nelson*, ed. Sears, 314.

<sup>15</sup> Fisk to Chief Quartermaster Major General J.C. Donaldson, 1 February 1866, *Camp Nelson*, ed. Sears, 322.

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

On April 21, 1866, General Scofield reported that paupers, including the “blind, sick, halt, and lame” continued to live near the site of the former camp, and he did not know how to handle them. Bureau policy called for him to refuse to provide any more subsistence for the freedmen, and the local county authorities at Nicholasville refused to take any action to assist the destitute freedmen.<sup>17</sup> Scofield did not even have the resources to follow Bureau orders that compelled him to send the freedmen back to their home counties to find work on plantations. He began to pay for rations out of his own pocket until transportation could be obtained, which led to him running afoul of Bureau authorities for undermining the goal of complete self-sufficiency for freedmen.<sup>18</sup> On May 23, 1866, Scofield received orders to leave the camp and stop providing any type of support to the freedmen, and to evict any freedmen living in buildings on or near the site of the former camp.<sup>19</sup> The situation worsened in September, when a mob attacked freedmen on plantations near the former camp, and Scofield could do little to nothing to stop it due to a lack of troops. Freedmen faced the threat of death for complying with Bureau policies that required them to find work on plantations but then failed to provide adequate protection, which directly reflects the shortcomings of the plantation leasing programs in Mississippi and Louisiana during the Civil War.<sup>20</sup> Even worse, another mob drove the remaining missionaries out of the camp in December 1866, meaning that the only school in the area for the freedmen had to close due to a lack of teachers, as the Bureau did not provide teachers but only supported schools run entirely by missionaries. The freedmen in Kentucky did not have access to a school until 1868,

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<sup>17</sup> Gen. Scofield to Fisk, 21 April 1866, in *Camp Nelson*, ed. Sears, 332-333.

<sup>18</sup> Scofield to Streiby, 22 April 1866, in *Camp Nelson*, ed. Sears, 333-334.

<sup>19</sup> Scofield to Smith, 23 May 1866, and W.F. Rice to Lieutenant Burnett, 6 June 1866, in *Camp Nelson*, ed. Sears, 339-342.

<sup>20</sup> Scofield to Col. Johnson, 10 September 1866, in *Camp Nelson*, ed. Sears, 344.

when another group of missionaries obtained land from the Bureau to start a school, but they also quickly lost support as the Bureau withdrew from Kentucky entirely.<sup>21</sup>

The closure of Camp Nelson lucidly demonstrates the consequences of the Bureau's emphasis on avoiding dependence and quickly closing the camps rather than ensuring that all freedmen, especially those who could not work due to disability or illness, received adequate support. The Bureau reflected the emphasis on mandating self-sufficiency by reducing rations and evicting freedmen from camp housing that had begun at Camp Nelson during the Civil War, which demonstrates yet again the importance of policies formulated in the contraband camps to shaping Bureau strategy during Reconstruction. The closure of Camp Nelson demonstrates the continued inadequacy of federal oversight, as the same problems that plagued the camps, such as the failure to prevent white violence, the failure to protect plantations, and the over-emphasis on labor contracts and the subsequent failure to ensure that planters did not exploit the freedmen at harvest time continued to plague the Bureau, despite supposedly increased federal oversight and resources. The closure of Camp Nelson clearly demonstrates the continuity between contraband camps and the Bureau, especially in terms of labor policy and inadequate military protection.

The closure of the camps directly led to later Bureau policies of mandatory labor contracts and apprenticeship and also reflected policies enacted in the contraband camps. National policies also made a significant impact on Bureau policies on the ground. Johnson's reconstruction program, with its emphasis on private property rights and reconciliation, directly hampered the Bureau, as it limited the ability of the freedmen to farm their own land. These policies, which will be examined in depth below, led to reduced support for the Bureau

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<sup>21</sup> William H. Merrell to Ely, 20 December 1866, and John Fee to Mr. Smith, 9 April 1868, in *Camp Nelson*, ed. Sears, 359-361, 373.

throughout the Reconstruction period, as many blamed it for undermining the effort to restore order and economic prosperity to the South by hampering the ability of planters to manage their own economic affairs. The problems of short staffing and a lack of funds for the Bureau throughout its short existence can be traced to the problems of Presidential Reconstruction, demonstrating that national policy worked in tandem with policies created in the contraband camps to hamper the ability of the Bureau to assist the freedmen on the journey to economic autonomy.

The restoration of land became the first policy enacted during Presidential Reconstruction. President Andrew Johnson wanted to end Reconstruction as quickly as possible and also ensure the restoration of property to Southerners, even if they had fought for the Confederacy. He stated that the former Confederate states only had to ratify the Thirteenth Amendment, which prohibited slavery, nullify secession, and repudiate Confederate debt to regain admission.<sup>22</sup> He stated that the distribution of land to freedmen would “disrupt the national economy” and undermine the restoration of cotton production, in addition to violating the Constitution by confiscating private property without due process of law.<sup>23</sup> Johnson’s policy shut the freedmen out of any access to land of their own, as the Bureau returned even the land in the South Carolina Sea Islands that Sherman had promised to the freedmen to its owners by the end of Presidential Reconstruction.

Special Field Orders from Savannah, Georgia, reflected the situation across the South, as it stated that former owners could return to their lands and evict any freedmen currently residing on their plantations. All freedmen without land had to sign a labor contract with a white

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<sup>22</sup> Heather Cox Richardson, *The Reconstruction Era Official National Park Service Handbook* (Washington DC: Eastern National, 2017), 48.

<sup>23</sup> Steven Hahn, “From Slavery to Free Labor in the South,” in *The Reconstruction Era*, 61.

employer or leave the area. As the order stated, “Freedmen, if left to work for themselves, and control their own labor, will not obtain any considerable success.”<sup>24</sup> The context of the order makes it even more draconian, as a crop failure in 1865 caused “widespread destitution,” and the state only gave aid to whites while providing nothing to aid the freedmen who faced starvation since they did not receive adequate crop shares.<sup>25</sup> The order clearly demonstrates the consequences of the Bureau’s refusal to provide land to the freedmen, as it quickly led to destitution and locked the freedmen into exploitative sharecropping arrangements. In fact, the Bureau returned over nine hundred thousand acres of land that could have been distributed to the freedmen, which meant that the Bureau lost a major chance to provide economic autonomy for the freedmen, which remained their basis for the true definition of freedom. As historian Steven Hahn writes, freedmen saw their freedom as incomplete “unless it brought access to land,” which clearly demonstrates that the Bureau and the freedmen had vastly different ideas of the definition of freedom and that these conflicts between national policies and the goals of the freedmen would clash throughout Reconstruction.<sup>26</sup> The vast resources of the Bureau and the federal government would often lead to their definitions of freedom dominating Bureau policies and programs, which continued the general trend of policy set during the Civil War.

Johnson’s lenient policies during Presidential Reconstruction led Southern state legislatures to pass laws known as Black Codes, which imposed draconian restrictions on the freedmen to attempt to create conditions as close to slavery as possible without violating the Thirteenth Amendment. Freedmen who could not prove that they had signed a labor contract for a white employer faced arrest for vagrancy, which meant that the very act of searching for a job

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<sup>24</sup> Special Field Orders No. 3, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, Savannah, GA, 14 February 1866, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina Special Collections, Chapel Hill, North Carolina.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Hahn, “Slavery to Free Labor,” 61.



had become illegal. The South Carolina Black Code, for example, mandated apprenticeship, labor contracts, required that freedmen work from sunrise to sunset every day except Sunday, prohibited freedmen from leaving their employer without permission, and only permitted freedmen to work on farms or other agricultural jobs.<sup>27</sup> Local courts could declare African-American parents unfit and apprentice their children to whites, usually former owners, without their consent.<sup>28</sup> Children would be removed from families “who easily satisfied the basic requirements of the child’s welfare” in order to secure cheap labor for white employers. The understaffed Bureau not only failed to stop these apprenticeships but instituted the policy itself later in Reconstruction, indicating that even racist and unjust practices could be maintained by the Bureau in the name of ensuring self-sufficiency for the freedmen.<sup>29</sup> In Memphis, the local police arrested freedmen and confined them in jail for so long that they lost their jobs, and then charged them with vagrancy, which came with heavy fines. When the freedmen could not pay the fines, the police sold them to white employers to cover the fines, which meant that slavery had been instituted in all but name.<sup>30</sup> A representative labor contract signed under the Black Codes from North Carolina demonstrates the harsh restrictions on freedmen during this period. It required freedmen to work during all daylight hours, to eat all meals in the field, to provide their own clothing and medical care, to attend to the plantation livestock while not keeping any stock of their own, to work under an overseer, and to not leave the employer for any reason prior

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<sup>27</sup> Heather Andrea Williams, “Black Mobilization After the Civil War,” in *The Reconstruction Era*, 73.

<sup>28</sup> Eric Foner, *Forever Free: The Story of Emancipation and Reconstruction* (New York: Vintage Books, 2005), 96-98.

<sup>29</sup> Erik Mathisen, “It Looks Much Like Abandoned Land, Property and the Politics of Loyalty in Reconstruction Mississippi,” in *After Slavery: Race, Labor, and Citizenship in the Reconstruction South*, ed. Bruce E. Baker and Brian Kelly (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2013), 88.

<sup>30</sup> David Williams, *I Freed Myself: African-American Self-Emancipation in the Civil War Era* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 219.

to the end of the contract.<sup>31</sup> This labor contract attempted to replicate slavery as closely as possible, but these harsh restrictions would reappear in Bureau contracts that also strictly restricted the economic mobility of freedmen, meaning that the Bureau remained so focused on avoiding dependency that it would replicate contracts created under the Black Codes to ensure that freedmen worked regularly.

Freedmen protested the Black Codes by petitioning all levels of the Bureau and federal bureaucracy, which gave Radical Republicans even more evidence to criticize Presidential Reconstruction. One freedman in Fayette, Mississippi argued that the state laws prohibiting freedmen from leasing land undermined their ability to obtain economic autonomy, and that he wanted to “show to the world that we would work and that we was willing to work” on their own land without the repressive system of contract labor, meaning that the harsh Black Codes prevented the freedmen from becoming self-sufficient.<sup>32</sup> As he stated, “We are shut out from of all the rights of freedmen and freemen” due to the requirement to sign labor contracts with planters, often their old masters, even though they gave their lives for the Union in the war.<sup>33</sup> In fact, he argued, the 1857 slave codes remained largely in effect in Fayette, which clearly indicated that whites did not accept emancipation and hoped to re-institute slavery.<sup>34</sup> Another group of Mississippi freedmen petitioned the governor for redress, hoping that he could rescind the oppressive Black Codes. They argued that “honest, truthful, and industrious” freedmen deserved the right to make a living as they pleased rather than be compelled to sign yearlong

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<sup>31</sup> Labor Contract, 2 December 1865, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina Special Collections, Chapel Hill, North Carolina.

<sup>32</sup> M. Howard to Col. Thomas, 25 January 1866, H-14 1866, Registered Letters Received, Series 2052, Mississippi Assistant Commissioner, Record Group 105, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC.

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

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

labor contracts.<sup>35</sup> They also stated that the state's economy could not survive without their labor so they should be treated humanely by state and local authorities. The freedmen asked for the right to choose their own employer and to leave abusive employers without facing arrest for vagrancy and to rent land if they could afford it so that they could support themselves as tenant farmers rather than sharecroppers.<sup>36</sup>

In Florida, meanwhile, freedmen who wanted to set up their own businesses rather than work as plantation laborers faced high taxes intended to compel them to return to the plantations, even if they could make a living off of their enterprise. Several grocers in Tallahassee signed a petition to the Bureau arguing that the "unbearable" taxes prevented them from continuing their business that charged fair prices to the freedmen so they could avoid exploitative prices at white-run stores.<sup>37</sup> The freedmen not only avoided dependency, but helped other local freedmen support themselves, but still faced local laws intended to drive them out of business. These petitions demonstrate that the freedmen recognized the injustice of the Black Codes and saw the federal government as an ally who would defend their rights, especially given their loyalty and sacrifice for the Union during the war. They hoped that the Bureau would give them a true opportunity for economic autonomy, but its policies instead focused on avoiding dependency through the very contract labor that the freedmen hoped to avoid.

The Black Codes directly undermined the ability of freedmen to achieve economic autonomy. As historian Erik Mathisen states, "White Mississippians had reconstituted a base of

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<sup>35</sup> We the Colored People to the Governor of Mississippi, 3 December 1865, F-41 1865, Registered Letters Received, Series 2052, Mississippi Assistant Commissioner, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, Record Group 105, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Robert Williams, et al to Col. T.W. Osborn, 5 April 1866, W-30 1866, Letters Received, Series 586, Florida Assistant Commissioner, Record Group 105, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC.

power in state and local governments that increasingly sought to legislate freedpeople back into slavery in all but name,” indicating the inadequacy of Presidential Reconstruction for protecting the freedmen, as the lenient terms of readmission allowed many former Confederates bent on restoring slavery to re-establish political power.<sup>38</sup> The stark injustices of the Black Codes would contribute to a dramatic shift in federal policy, as Radical Republicans realized that much stronger federal action would be required to protect the freedmen from white southern intransigence.

The Black Codes, along with 1866 riots in Memphis and New Orleans that specifically targeted freedmen, led to much greater public support for the Radicals as it became obvious that white southerners would not treat freedmen justly unless forced to by federal regulations or occupation. In Memphis, white residents murdered at least forty-six freedmen, and possibly more as the total is not certain due to inadequate records, along with at least one hundred thousand dollars of property damage.<sup>39</sup> As Eric Foner writes, the riots and Black Codes “led many northern Republicans to doubt whether the white South was genuinely prepared to accept the reality of emancipation.”<sup>40</sup> Congress passed the Civil Rights Act of 1866 over Johnson’s veto which guaranteed freedmen the right to sign contracts, to sue in court, and to the “equal protection... of person and property.”<sup>41</sup> Johnson’s opposition to the bill foreshadowed his continued opposition to the Freedmen’s Bureau, which he claimed would only result in dependency, especially since he believed that the freedmen would not work without coercion.<sup>42</sup> As Hahn writes, Johnson supported a vision of the South “run by and for white people with

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<sup>38</sup> Mathisen, “It Looks Much Like Abandoned Land,” 88.

<sup>39</sup> Richardson, “Political Reconstruction,” in *The Reconstruction Era*, 48.

<sup>40</sup> Foner, *Forever Free*, 109.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid*, 115.

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

blacks in a subordinate laboring class” with few rights or chances for economic advancement.<sup>43</sup> Johnson’s intransigence would lead the Radicals, with the assistance of freedmen who quickly rallied to the Radical cause and organized political organizations for the first time, to institute much stricter Reconstruction policies. Radical Reconstruction clearly demonstrates the importance of the freedmen themselves to influencing Bureau policy, which continues a precedent set in the contraband camps during the Civil War.

The federal law establishing the Bureau, passed in 1866, demonstrates several aspects of Radical Reconstruction policy and also effectively elucidates how policies and programs began in the contraband camps influenced Bureau policies during Reconstruction. The act called for the establishment of a contract labor system, with wages of twenty-five dollars a month for first class hands, twenty dollars for second class hands, fifteen dollars for third class hands, and wages ranging from eighteen to ten dollars a month for women.<sup>44</sup> Written contracts would be required, and planters would have to provide housing, medical care, fuel, access to a school, and one acre per family for a garden plot.<sup>45</sup> To ensure that freedmen received their wages, a lien would be placed on the crops until the planter proved to the Bureau that all wages had been paid in full. The act instructed the Bureau to nullify contracts when planters abused or otherwise mistreated their employees, which the supporters of the bill hoped would ensure that the freedmen received fair compensation and would not face the threat of abuse.<sup>46</sup> Freedmen who could not work would live on home farms run by aid societies, where they would perform as

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<sup>43</sup> Steven Hahn, *A Nation Without Borders: The United States and the World in an Age of Civil Wars, 1830-1910* (New York: Penguin, 2016), 306-307.

<sup>44</sup> Acts of Congress and Rules and Regulations Prescribed by the Secretary of the Treasury, in Pursuance Thereto, with the Approval of the President (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1866), 89, Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, Ohio.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid*, 90.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid*, 90-92.

much work as physically possible in return for housing and rations along with access to a school for their children. The government would spend no money on these farms and rely completely on aid societies, which became problematic since aid societies often ran into financial difficulties and also had no way to defend the farms from white violence.<sup>47</sup> Only the elderly and orphans would be allowed to live on the home farm, meaning that freedmen who could perform even minimal amounts of agricultural labor would have to sign labor contracts for very low wages and they would still have difficulty supporting themselves and their families.<sup>48</sup> Finally, the bill failed to provide any oversight mechanism for the home farms, meaning that the Bureau had no way to ensure that aid societies were properly treating the freedmen and that the freedmen remained secure from white incursions and violence.<sup>49</sup>

The initial Bureau bill, which Congress passed over President Johnson's veto, clearly contains numerous shortcomings that reflected the failings of contraband policies in camps across the South. The designation of minimum wages without an effective oversight mechanism outside of the crop lien, which would be very difficult for a short-staffed agency to enforce, reflects the failures to pay wages on time or at all that plagued almost every contraband camp at some time or another, and plagued some camps, particularly those that relied on plantation leasing, throughout the duration of the war. In addition, the requirement for mandatory labor contracts reflects the policies in Louisiana and Mississippi, where contrabands were required to work on leased plantations even when better, higher-paying jobs were available in cities such as New Orleans, Vicksburg, and Natchez. Working under any arrangement other than a military or Treasury Department-approved contract became seen as vagrancy, despite the fact that these jobs

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

often paid much more than plantation labor. The aversion to freedmen working in cities would continue under the Bureau, which consistently pushed freedmen to work on plantations and then refused to allow freedmen to leave abusive employers, which also continued a shortcoming of contraband policy. The failure to support home farms, meanwhile, reflects the inadequate support of contraband camps during the Civil War across the South, as the camps faced constant shortages of food, shelter, clothing, and other basic supplies that often had to be filled by aid societies and missionaries, demonstrating that the Bureau's reliance on these societies did not constitute a new policy but rather continued a failed precedent from the contraband camps. The failure to ensure any mechanism of protection for the home farms, finally, continues the precedent set in the contraband camps of failing to protect the contrabands from guerrilla attacks, which particularly plagued camps that relied on farming either abandoned land or leased plantations, including North Carolina, Mississippi, and Louisiana. Contrabands in these camps faced the constant threat of re-enslavement despite their presence in a camp ostensibly run by the Union Army, and freedmen on plantations across the South faced the same threats from white vigilantes, including the Ku Klux Klan during the later phases of Reconstruction. Bureau policy was problematic from the outset, and would work even less effectively on the ground, as the institution of these policies remained inconsistent throughout the Reconstruction era.

The following section will discuss the shortcomings of Bureau policy at the local level by focusing on labor contracts, apprenticeship and indentures, the racism that plagued the agency throughout Reconstruction, and the inability to protect freedmen from white violence, especially after the formation of the Ku Klux Klan. By focusing on these shortcomings on the local level, a clearer picture of the shortcomings of national Bureau policy can begin to emerge. It can also indicate the inadequacies of these national policies, as agents often used their discretion to

enforce policies in a manner they thought to be appropriate, even when it contradicted federal Bureau policies. Despite the presence of a supposedly uniform set of policies and guidelines, the Bureau faced the same problem as the contraband camps in that local agents often created their own policies or enforced existing federal policies in a way they thought appropriate, meaning that the shortcomings of the Bureau also originated in the contraband camps. Bureau agents often came up with their own solutions to local problems rather than utilizing the national policy created in Washington, which directly reflects the model created in the contraband camps. In addition, agents often did not have the military protection necessary to follow all of the policies implemented in Washington, and cutbacks to the Bureau in 1868 only exacerbated the problem. Finally, Bureau agents failed to learn from the failures of contraband camp policy and continued to implement the same policies, which indicates that they had clear examples of failure but did not use these examples to change their policies.

The first policy created by the Bureau was the system of labor contracts that often prevented the freedmen from achieving self-sufficiency. The policy reflected a model created in the contraband camps, particularly Louisiana and Mississippi, where freedmen had been required to sign contracts with lessees that were ostensibly examined and then enforced by military officers. A lack of staff, apathy and racism among the officers, a lack of sufficient troops to protect the contrabands from violence, and widespread abuse and exploitation of the contrabands by the lessees made it clear that the system could not protect the freedmen or provide them with a path to economic autonomy. As Steven Hahn states, the “contraband policy at Fort Monroe... established a framework that army officers would follow in other areas of the occupied South” throughout the Reconstruction period, indicating yet again the importance of contraband camp



policies to shaping the policies and programs of the Freedmen's Bureau.<sup>50</sup> The failure of the Bureau to distribute land to the freedmen meant that the freedmen could not support themselves on land plots and needed to find some sort of regular work in an economically devastated South, and the Bureau saw mandatory labor contracts as the best solution to ensure the freedmen achieved self-sufficiency as quickly as possible.<sup>51</sup> The system of labor contracts followed the free labor ideology prevalent in the North, where the "free exercise of individual rights of contract" without interference from the government constituted the central tenet, along with the idea of rising up the economic ladder through saving and working hard, rather than constantly changing jobs in search of higher wages.<sup>52</sup> The Bureau, according to Steven Hahn, "focused chiefly on supervising and enforcing labor contracts" that mostly consisted of sharecropping arrangements due to the pervasive lack of cash in the South, and which led to rampant exploitation of the contrabands despite ostensible Bureau supervision.<sup>53</sup>

Sharecropping quickly led to the exploitation of the freedmen, indicating that Bureau policies intending to help the freedmen actually ended up undermining their ability to advance economically. The system of sharecropping consisted of a contract relationship where the planter agreed to compensate the freedmen by providing a share of the crop rather than wages due to the fact that most planters desperately lacked any form of cash, at least in 1865 and 1866 when they had not yet accumulated profits from the sales of cotton.<sup>54</sup> The Bureau ostensibly required the planters to pay the freedmen before they sold the cotton for profit, but the lack of adequate staff often meant that planters could avoid this caveat.<sup>55</sup> In addition, the freedmen had

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<sup>50</sup> Hahn, "From Slavery to Free Labor," in *the Reconstruction Era*, 55.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> Steven Kantrowitz, "Reconstruction in the North," in *The Reconstruction Era*, 139-140.

<sup>53</sup> Hahn, *A Nation Without Borders*, 326.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 328.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

to buy their supplies in advance on credit, meaning that these debts would be deducted from their shares. The deductions often ended up being more than the shares, leaving the freedmen in debt, which could never be made up from the meager crop shares and left the freedmen in perpetual obligation to the planter. Sharecropping made it even more difficult for them to leave exploitative employers, even though the free labor system supposedly meant the right for employees to change jobs.<sup>56</sup> The system of sharecropping set up by the Bureau reflected the shortcomings of contraband policy and also failed to reflect the tenets of the free labor system that supposedly guided Bureau policy.

Sharecropping evolved gradually throughout the South as a compromise between planters and freedmen. According to historian Edward Royce, planters wanted to maintain the strictest possible control over the labor of freedmen, and attempted to maintain gang labor during the early stages of Reconstruction in order to ensure that freedmen remained a “subordinate agricultural labor force.”<sup>57</sup> In fact, argues Royce, “federal policy toward black labor during the war... did not seek to alter the status of blacks as a dependent plantation labor force” due to fears of dependency and racism among Bureau agents.<sup>58</sup> As Royce states, the Bureau, “while not the agent of planters, did in fact serve the interests of planters as against those of former slaves” in the institution of labor policy, and attempted to use contracts to compel freedmen to work for planters under gang labor systems.<sup>59</sup> The planters could not maintain a system of gang labor due to resistance by the freedmen, who wanted to avoid a labor system that seemed very similar to slavery, due to its utilization of overseers, slave quarters, and even corporal punishment that

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Edward Royce, *The Origins of Southern Sharecropping* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993), 10, 34.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, 40.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid, 82.

persisted despite official bans of the practice in Bureau policy.<sup>60</sup> The freedmen played a vital role in the shift from gang labor to sharecropping in the Reconstruction South.

At first, freedmen believed that they would receive land through a Bureau-operated land redistribution program. As one freedman in South Carolina stated, “It’s de white man’s turn ter labor now. He ain’t got nuthin lef’ but his lan’, an’ de lan’ won’t be his n’ long, fur de Government is gwine ter gie ter ev’ry Nigger forty acres of lan’ an a mule.”<sup>61</sup> When the Bureau decided not to distribute land to the freedmen, they still asserted their independence due to the fact that they had a monopoly on labor and could force the planters to accept their conditions for signing contracts.<sup>62</sup> The system of sharecropping represented a compromise where planters maintained ownership of the land and could withhold compensation until the harvest, which compelled freedmen to remain on the plantation for the year, and where freedmen maintained the autonomy to set their own work schedule and live on a small plot of land away from the former slave quarters. As one disgruntled planter stated, “The Negro practically decides the system applied to farming” by insisting on sharecropping rather than gang labor.<sup>63</sup> Planters also feared that crop shares would not be a strong enough incentive to ensure that the freedmen worked for the entire year, which echoes the Bureau’s opinion that only contracts with strict regulations could ensure the regular labor of the freedmen.<sup>64</sup>

A couple of examples will demonstrate the positions taken by the planters in the evolution of sharecropping, and the inability of the Bureau to stop their exploitation of freedmen.

F. G. Secrest, a planter in Sugar Land, Texas, stated that his freedmen “do nothing at all” and

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid, 101.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid, 183.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid, 210.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid, 201.

refused to perform their assigned tasks.<sup>65</sup> He further argued that they “think they are all to fare alike in the devission of the crop work or no work,” and he refused to continue issuing them rations until they improved their work habits.<sup>66</sup> He used racist arguments in his letter, arguing that “African” laborers “could not understand any-thing” and had to be strictly controlled to ensure that they would work.<sup>67</sup> A Georgia planter, meanwhile, utilized similar arguments in his petition to the Bureau. He stated that freedwomen refused to sign contracts if their husbands worked, and that their husbands had to purchase clothing because the women did not make any themselves.<sup>68</sup> He argued that it “would be far better for them to go to work for reasonable wages and their rations” rather than remain idle on the plantation.<sup>69</sup> He argued that the husband’s wage of twelve dollars a month was not enough to support an entire family, so the women should work to earn extra money to properly support the family.<sup>70</sup> He asked the Bureau to compel married women to sign contracts for the year, both in order to avoid idleness among the freedmen but also to reduce crime, as he believed that these women would have to steal for a living if they did not work.<sup>71</sup> These two planters demonstrate the overwhelming desire for strict control of labor that contributed to the development of sharecropping and the continuation of the policy of mandatory labor contracts, as planters feared that freedmen would not work unless compelled to sign such contracts, even though they did not provide an avenue for freedmen to escape abusive employers or a sufficient mechanism of enforcement.

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<sup>65</sup> F.G. Secrest to Capt. Sloan, 30 July 1866, Letters Received, Series 3758, Richmond TX Subassistant Commissioner, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, Record Group 105, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> M.C. Fulton to Brig Gen. Davis Tilson, 17 April 1866, Unregistered Letters Received, Series 632, Georgia Assistant Commissioner, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, Record Group 105, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

An examination of representative labor contracts will illuminate these shortcomings of Bureau policy and their similarity to contracts signed in contraband camps. A contract signed on December 15, 1868 between D.H. Middleton and several freedmen required the freedmen to live in the plantation's old slave quarters, which had to reduce the perception of free labor since the freedmen did not get to construct their own houses but had to live in structures clearly associated with slavery.<sup>72</sup> They also had to provide their own fuel, meaning firewood, and perform any necessary repairs on their houses, despite the fact the freedmen possessed almost no cash to pay for these repairs.<sup>73</sup> These conditions reflect the army's insistence on deciding where contrabands would live in the contraband camps, including the construction of barracks in Alexandria, the housing of contrabands in slave quarters on leased plantations, and the housing of contrabands in tents in several camps that faced overcrowding and a lack of available shelter. The contract's provisions for housing clearly reflected shortcomings in contraband camp policy that remained permissible under Bureau policy, since all contracts had to be approved by Bureau agents, but the inability to effectively supervise the plantations due to a lack of staff reduced the effectiveness of Bureau oversight of contracts.

The contract specified that the freedmen would grow cotton for wages, which remained the exception in an economy largely defined by sharecropping, and directly reflects the plantation leasing models discussed earlier. It divided freedmen into full, one quarter, and one-half hands based on their ability to perform agricultural labor, and their classification specified the wages they would earn.<sup>74</sup> They would not receive their wages until the end of the year, in order to compel them to remain on the plantation for the duration of the contract. The planter

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<sup>72</sup> Labor Contract, 15 December 1868, in the Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina Special Collections, Chapel Hill, North Carolina.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

reserved the right to evict the freedmen from the plantation at any time without paying any wages if they violated any provision of the contract, including missing too much work, even if they suffered from a prolonged illness or had other reasonable causes for missing work.<sup>75</sup>

Finally, freedmen who could furnish their own provisions, meaning food, clothing, and farm implements, would receive higher wages, and the planter allowed them to grow corn and potatoes on private plots to feed their families.<sup>76</sup>

These aspects of the contract also reflected the shortcomings of Bureau policy and its connection to the contraband camps. The payment of all wages at the end of the year reflected the military and the Bureau's concerns that freedmen would not remain at one plantation for a year and would instead leave and become vagrants requiring public support, so the Bureau encouraged planters to withhold wages until the end of the contract year. In addition, the fact that freedmen would receive higher wages if they provided their own provisions reflects the concern over issuing rations that pervaded both contraband camp and Bureau policy. Army officers and Bureau agents feared that providing rations to freedmen would only promote dependency and make the freedmen unwilling to work, so contracts that incentivized freedmen to provide their own rations were strongly encouraged by the Bureau. The provision that freedmen could be evicted without wages reflects the Bureau's fear that freedmen would not uphold their ends of the contract due to a perceived inability to work without coercion, especially after the ban on corporal punishment. As discussed in a later section of this chapter, most freedmen who were evicted without wages faced difficulty in persuading the Bureau to restore their wages, as the Bureau tended to side with planters during labor disputes either due to racism or to fears of

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

vagrancy and dependency, as will be discussed in more detail below. This labor contract demonstrates several aspects of Bureau policy that originated in contraband camps and tended to work against freedmen in labor disputes with planters, indicating that fears of dependency often dictated the formation of policy both in contraband camps and under the Bureau.

Another contract, written earlier in 1866, also demonstrates the shortcomings of the Bureau's oversight of contract labor. Planters George McDuile and E.W. Hubard signed a contract with several freedmen to work on his plantation during the 1867 season. The contract required the freedmen to work from sunrise to sunset either growing crops or tending the livestock. They also had to "perform their work well and cheerfully" at all times and always obey their employer or overseer.<sup>77</sup> This system of labor very closely resembled slavery and indicates that the Bureau would tolerate harsh labor conditions in order to guarantee that the contrabands remained self-sufficient and off of government support, even though, according to Hahn, the contrabands saw their "freedom as incomplete unless it brought access to land" and a way to obtain economic autonomy where they could choose their employer and terms of labor.<sup>78</sup> The contract clearly demonstrates that the Bureau placed fears of dependency and the desire to reduce government expenditures above the freedmen's desire for economic autonomy and access to land, and willingly imposed harsh and restrictive labor regimes that directly contradicted the free labor ideology in order to ensure that the contrabands worked. These restrictions began in the contraband camps during the Civil War, which gives even more evidence that the shortcomings of Bureau policy originated in the contraband camps, and also that the Bureau

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<sup>77</sup> Labor Contract, 1866, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina Special Collections, Chapel Hill, North Carolina.

<sup>78</sup> Hahn, "From Slavery to Free Labor," in *The Reconstruction Era*, 57.

failed to learn from very similar failures in the contraband camps when implementing their own policies.

Other provisions of the contract further demonstrate the restrictions of Bureau contract policy by restricting the mobility of freedmen, who wanted to move to reunite families or find better economic opportunity. The freedmen working for McDuire and Hubbard could not have any visitors except family members, mainly due to fears of labor agents attempting to entice the freedmen to leave the plantation early.<sup>79</sup> As will be discussed in much more detail below, the Bureau remained concerned throughout Reconstruction that freedmen would not remain on a plantation for the entire year without coercion, and especially feared labor recruiters from the North coming onto plantations and enticing the freedmen away from plantations before the harvest. The restrictions on visitors reflect an ongoing fear of vagrancy that pervaded policies from the earliest contraband camp regulations throughout Reconstruction, despite ample evidence that freedmen were willing to obey their labor contracts and stay on plantations for the entire year, as will be discussed in the section on contract enforcement, and the lack thereof, below.

The other provisions of this contract constituted typical aspects of labor contracts and reflected the shortcomings of Bureau policy along with its connection to the regulations established in contraband camps. The freedmen had to provide their own firewood and medical care, despite the fact that they would not receive any wages until the end of the year. They would lose all wages if they violated the contract in any way, not just by leaving the plantation early. Their wages would also be deducted for missed days of work, even for factors out of the

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<sup>79</sup> Labor Contract, 1866, UNC Special Collections.



freedmen's control such as weather and illness. Finally, the value of their rations would be deducted from their wages at the end of the year, but these freedmen did not have the option of providing their own rations to avoid the wage deduction or even access to a garden plot to grow provisions to supplement or even replace their rations.<sup>80</sup>

These provisions of the contract demonstrate how Bureau policy originated in the contraband camps. The fact that freedmen had to provide their own firewood and medical care and had rations deducted from their wages reflects the constant effort in the contraband camps to cut the issuance of supplies and rations to the contrabands due to both fears of dependency and the desire to reduce government expenditures, especially as the camps began to close at the end of the war. The provision that wages would be deducted for missed days reflects the continued lack of proper wage payments in the contraband camps, as the government often owed contrabands months or years of back pay that they often never received, while deducting wages for factors such as weather reflects the same attitude towards denying the freedmen the wages they needed to obtain economic autonomy, and then complaining that they could not achieve self-sufficiency. The Bureau's contract provisions demonstrate the overwhelming focus on avoiding dependency, even to the degree of undermining the free labor system that the Republicans supposedly wanted to institute in the South. In addition, it demonstrates that the same problems that plagued the contraband camps continued to undermine Bureau policy. Fears of dependency led to contracts with harsh terms that quickly reduced the freedmen to debt relationships with planters that led to a cycle of poverty which became nearly impossible to escape. The hesitancy of the Bureau to intervene on behalf of the freedmen in the thousands of contract disputes that emerged across the South further undermined the freedmen as planters

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

tried every tactic they could to exploit the freedmen even further than the already harsh contract terms permitted.

While the Bureau required agents to approve contracts and carried out this task relatively effectively, they faced significant difficulty in enforcing the terms of these contracts. Due to a lack of adequate staff across the South, Bureau agents quickly became overwhelmed with cases, and were hamstrung by a near complete lack of cooperation by the local judicial system. Local courts remained hesitant to accept black testimony or to hear cases brought by freedmen, meaning that the overwhelmed Bureau courts became the only recourse for freedmen. When Bureau courts began to close as the civil courts resumed operating across the South, they rarely tried cases involving freedmen fairly if they addressed them at all. The rapid closure of the Bureau courts greatly undermined the agency's ability to protect freedmen and to institute a free labor system, and illustrates how failures of Bureau policy on a national level had significant implications on the ground. In addition, it demonstrates how the Bureau's desire to return control of the South to local authorities directly undercut its ability to institute its own policies and programs, as free labor initiatives had little chance to succeed when planters could exploit freedmen with no consequence.

A couple of examples will demonstrate the consequences of the Bureau's failure to ensure equal justice for the freedmen in judicial proceedings. Freedmen in Kentucky petitioned the military to maintain martial law to protect them from white violence. They argued that "were the Strong arm of Military Power no longer to curb her- Her jails and workhouses would Groan with the Numbers of our people immured within their walls" due to unfair verdicts from local

courts.<sup>81</sup> Laws “too barbarous Even for a community of savages” that discriminated against freedmen remained in force and would be strictly upheld under local jurisdiction, meaning that the freedmen would have little chance of redress against abusive employers.<sup>82</sup> In fact, it remained illegal for freedmen in Kentucky to enter a free state, and that “crime” carried a penalty of one year in the penitentiary, which clearly demonstrates the restrictions on freedmen upheld by the local courts.<sup>83</sup> A similar petition by freedmen in Tennessee also demonstrates that the same discriminatory justice system remained in place in a state that had ended slavery. The freedmen argued that the courts, which did not accept black testimony, provided no chance for equal justice and that only the Bureau courts could protect their rights. As evidence, they cited several freedmen who had been turned off of plantations without any wages or crop shares for a year of labor, numerous instances of corporal punishment, including “as many as four or five hundred lashes,” and arrests for trivial offenses that carried harsh sentences.<sup>84</sup> By citing their loyalty and service to the Union during the war, they requested the Bureau to ensure that they would be “secured as others, in the just fruits of our toil, protected from unjust, and illegal punishments” and allowed to pursue economic autonomy without facing exploitation by planters and unjust local courts and law enforcement.<sup>85</sup> These two petitions clearly demonstrate the importance of Bureau courts to the protection of the freedmen and their ability to succeed in the new free labor system. Local courts could not be relied on to prevent exploitation and abuse by

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<sup>81</sup> Cha. A. Roxborough, et al. To Mr. President, June 1865, Letters Received from the President and Executive Departments, Office of the Secretary of War, Record Group 107, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Rev. Lewis Bright, et al to General Fisk, 27 July 1865, B-36 1865, Registered Letters Received, Series 3379, Tennessee Assistant Commissioner, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, Record Group 105, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

employers, a fact well-known to the Bureau when the agency dismantled its own courts, which indicates yet another failure of Bureau policy during Reconstruction.

In Kentucky, where slavery remained legal until late 1865, the situation was even worse, as masters often refused to relinquish control over their slaves and the Bureau agents, operating with a vastly reduced military, faced severe difficulties in compelling the masters to release their slaves. One example from Louisville illustrates the problems faced by the Bureau in Kentucky. Flora Ewing, of Oldham County, complained that her employer, Dorsey Young, refused to pay her any wages and beat her severely for asking for the wages that she was entitled to as a free laborer. The state courts rejected black testimony, and the “case did not constitute a sufficiently serious offense for federal prosecution in the overburdened United States District Court in Louisville,” meaning that Ewing could not even gain justice in the federal court that would supposedly be impartial.<sup>86</sup> The Bureau imposed a twenty-dollar fine and required Young to pay for Ewing’s medical care, but no record exists of whether he complied with these terms, indicating that the Bureau most likely failed to enforce its own punishment.<sup>87</sup>

Ewing’s case was far from unique, as freedmen across the South constantly filed complaints with the Bureau in hopes of gaining relief from abusive employers and exploitative contracts, and overwhelmed Bureau agents struggled to help even when they truly wanted to protect the freedmen. The most common punishment for mistreatment of freedmen consisted of a fine, which encouraged the planters to keep mistreating the freedmen as the Bureau would do little to stop it, and the litany of complaints of exploitation that did not have a clear resolution fills thousands of pages of Bureau correspondence. These examples clearly indicate that Bureau

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<sup>86</sup> J. Michael Rhyne, “Conflict Inexcusable and Unjustifiable- Bound Children, Battered Freedwomen, and the Limits of Emancipation in Kentucky’s Bluegrass Region,” *Journal of Social History*, 42, 2 (Winter 2008), 319.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*

agents, hamstrung by a lack of staff, inadequate military support, and a near total lack of cooperation from the civil courts faced severe difficulties in enforcing their own contract terms, to the detriment of freedmen who often lost the chance to gain economic autonomy due to unaddressed exploitation by employers who quickly realized that the Bureau could not effectively prevent them from taking advantage of freedmen.

A few examples will demonstrate the difficulties facing the Bureau. In 1866, freedmen owed over one hundred twenty-six dollars in wages by Alf White complained to the Bureau agent at Memphis, who ordered him to pay the freedmen. When White failed to pay, the Bureau re-issued the order, but then the case disappears from Bureau correspondence, indicating that agents did not ensure that White ever paid the wages due.<sup>88</sup> In April 1866, meanwhile, Mary Moore complained that her employer owed her one hundred dollars for ten months of labor. The Bureau ordered her employer to pay her only ninety-eight dollars and gave no reason for the deduction. Bureau agents were not supposed to charge freedmen for filing a complaint, so the agent should not have deducted a fee from the freedmen's wages. There is no record of the Bureau ensuring that the wages were actually paid, which again illustrates the inability of the Bureau to enforce even its own court verdicts and the terms of contracts that they had approved, and also raises the possibility of corrupt agents deducting illegal fees from monetary awards granted to freedmen.<sup>89</sup> In May 1866, the Memphis agent only awarded a freedman owed twenty-five dollars in wages eighteen dollars, and again gave no reason for such a large deduction,

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<sup>88</sup> Register of Complaints, Volume 1, January-May 1866, Records of the Field Offices of the State of Tennessee, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1865-1872, M1911, RG 105, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

which again points to the possibility of corruption in the Memphis agency, which went unaddressed by the similarly overwhelmed Bureau headquarters in Washington.<sup>90</sup>

In a final example, a freedman in Weldon, North Carolina, persisted in his attempts to gain back wages owed by his employer despite the refusal of both local courts and the Bureau to adjudicate his case. In his petition to the Bureau Assistant Commissioner for the Subdistrict of Weldon, he argued that Thomas Bolden failed to pay him and his two sons either crop shares or wages for their labor in 1866. At the end of the harvest, Bolden drove them off of the plantation with no compensation even though they “made a good crop for him and have never received even a stitch of clothes for their work.”<sup>91</sup> The Bureau agent, Captain Foot, referred his case to the civil authorities due to the fact that Bureau courts no longer operated in eastern North Carolina. The local courts refused to adjudicate the case and Maggett persisted in asking the Bureau to take up the case since the civil authorities refused to provide fair and equal justice. By November 1867, the Bureau succeeded in convincing a local judge to order Bolden to pay the wages due.<sup>92</sup> Maggett’s case is a rare example of the Bureau intervening to compel a local court to treat a freedman fairly. Most freedmen would not be so lucky, as their cases languished in civil courts who had little interest in addressing their claims.

The failure to properly address complaints also extended to freedmen who complained of physical abuse by their employers, which often went unpunished by Bureau agents who knew that the civil courts would offer the freedmen little chance of justice and also that Bureau courts

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Wilson Maggett to Capt. Foot, 16 May 1867, Letters Received, Series 2666, Halifax North Carolina Assistant Superintendent, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, Record Group 105, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC.

<sup>92</sup> Hahn et al, ed. *Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation, 1861-1867, Series 3, Vol. 1 Land and Labor 1865* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 794-795.

simply faced too many cases to effectively investigate cases and enforce their verdicts, and it also reflects the inability of the army to stop violence against contrabands on leased plantations. A Mr. Keith beat a small girl with a stick and only faced a ten-dollar fine and no jail time and also no prosecution in the civil courts for such a senseless act of abuse.<sup>93</sup> A.M. Smith shot freedman Willis Hays “without provocation” over a contract dispute and only faced a fifty dollar fine and also no jail time, and the record does not indicate whether he even paid this small fine or whether Hays survived his wounds.<sup>94</sup> Freedman S. Robinson’s employer whipped him fifty times with a switch despite a contract that prohibited corporal punishment, and Robinson even drew a gun on him at one point. His employer only faced a nominal fine, and the Bureau did not release Robinson from the contract despite clear evidence of abuse, and the record again fails to indicate whether the employer paid this nominal fine.<sup>95</sup> These examples from Memphis are very typical of the Bureau across the South, as freedmen faced difficulties obtaining justice from the one resource that they hoped would take their side in labor disputes and protect them from abusive employers, but often failed due to a lack of staff, inadequate or even non-existent support from the army, and a total lack of cooperation from the civil courts. The failure to properly enforce contracts clearly demonstrates the shortcomings of the Bureau’s labor policies and their origins in the contraband camps of the Civil War.

Another aspect of Bureau policy that restricted the economic autonomy and even the very freedom of the freedmen and that originated in the contraband camps was the apprenticeship, also termed indenture by the Bureau, of children to white employers, often their former owners.

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<sup>93</sup> Register of Complaints, Volume 1, January-May 1866, Records of the Field Offices of the State of Tennessee, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1865-1872, M1911, RG 105, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

The Bureau, according to historian J. Michael Rhyne, viewed apprenticeships as a way to inculcate Victorian values of free labor and hard work in freedmen, and often refused to intervene when local courts apprenticed children without parental consent.<sup>96</sup> Local county courts across the South apprenticed children, and the Bureau would not intervene even in cases of obvious abuse. For example, in Kentucky, Josephine Bedford was beaten repeatedly by her new master after being apprenticed by the county court, and the Bureau would not intervene since they viewed the apprenticeship as the best guarantee of self-sufficiency.<sup>97</sup> The Bureau would not grant custody of orphans to grandparents or other kin, and instead indentured them to whites, most often their former owners. Children of single mothers also faced forced indenture without parental consent, as the Bureau viewed all single mothers as incapable of raising children and teaching them the values of free labor.<sup>98</sup> The system of indenture and apprenticeship became illegal under the Civil Rights Act of 1866, but the Bureau continued it anyway due to the overwhelming desire to achieve self-sufficiency among the freedmen, even if it meant forcibly separating children from parents. Indenture and apprenticeship, according to historian Lynda Morgan, constituted a “new and pernicious semi-slavery” instituted by a Bureau ostensibly intended to secure the very freedom of the freedpeople and protect them from re-enslavement or forced family separation.<sup>99</sup>

The policy of apprenticeship originated in the impressment of labor that took place in contraband camps across the South, as men, women, and children faced separation from their families to work on fortifications or other military projects far from the camps. They often

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<sup>96</sup> Rhyne, “Conduct Inexcusable,” 329.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Lynda J. Morgan, *Emancipation in Virginia's Tobacco Belt, 1850-1870* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1992), 173-175.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid, 173.



received no wages to support their families back in the camps who depended on their incomes for survival. Impressment has been discussed in ample detail, but a couple more examples here will demonstrate the concept and its similarity to forced indenture and apprenticeship. In Beaufort, North Carolina, contrabands faced impressment to work on the local public works without compensation, which kept them close to their families but still left them with no way to pay rent or even to feed their families, who had difficulty finding jobs in the vastly overcrowded camp.<sup>100</sup> Finally, in the most striking example, camp superintendents in Baltimore bound contraband children to white employers as apprentices, and the army failed to provide oversight, as masters whipped their apprentices and denied them wages while the army failed to intervene.<sup>101</sup> The policy of apprenticeship directly reflected the policies of impressment and indenture that developed in the contraband camps during the Civil War, and demonstrates that the focus on self-sufficiency that dominated the policies of the contraband camps continued to dictate Bureau policy, even when it led to virtual re-enslavement of freed children and the separation of families. This family separation had constituted one of the worst aspects of slavery and freedmen believed would no longer happen. An examination of indenture contracts will further demonstrate the connections between Bureau indenture policy, the near complete lack of oversight that allowed abuses of both impressed contrabands and indentured freedmen, and the free-labor ideology that dictated policy both during the Civil War and Reconstruction to the detriment of the economic autonomy of the freedmen.

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<sup>100</sup> Robert Henry, et al to Maj. Gen. B. F. Butler, 20 November 1863, Miscellaneous Letters and Reports Received, Series 5076, Department of Virginia and North Carolina, Eighteenth Army Corps, United States Army Continental Commands, RG 393, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC.

<sup>101</sup> Thos. A. Davis to Hon. J. Lanox Bond, 6 November 1864, Letters Received, Series 12, Adjutant General's Office, RG 94, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC.

In July 1866, for example, the Bureau in Kentucky, led by John Ely, issued a circular outlining the indenture program and its harsh restrictions on freedmen. Boys could be apprenticed until they reached the age of twenty-one, while girls would only be apprenticed until age eighteen. The Bureau would only apprentice children whose “relations are unable or unwilling to provide,” although no specific guidelines were provided to determine whether parents or guardians could provide for their children or what constituted the definition of a fit parent. Finally, the circular compelled masters to educate their apprentices free of charge.<sup>102</sup> The circular did not include any mechanism of enforcement, meaning that the Bureau did not create a way to ensure masters treated apprentices decently, or a way to remove freedmen from abusive masters. The apprenticeship system created the same problems of enforcement and opportunity for exploitation as the contract system, as masters quickly realized that the Bureau would not frequently investigate their treatment of freedmen, so they often cut corners on the conditions of the indenture despite specific regulations laid out in indenture contracts, which also reflects the shortcomings of plantation leasing and impressment policies formulated in the contraband camps.

A sample apprenticeship document comes from Kentucky, where the indenture system constituted a major component of the Bureau’s self-sufficiency policy. The Bureau apprenticed Flora Taylor, age eleven, to William Howell due to the fact that her mother, Amanda Hite, could not support her adequately in the eyes of the local Bureau agents. Per the indenture contract, Howell had to teach Taylor the trade of housewifery, provide her with food, clothing, medical

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<sup>102</sup> John Ely, Circular No. 3, 26 June 1866, in Records of the Field Offices for the State of Kentucky, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1865-1872, M1904, RG 105, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC; Circular No. 8, War Department, 10 October 1865, in Records of the Field Offices for the State of Kentucky, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1865-1872, M1904, RG 105, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC.

care, and teach reading and writing or provide Taylor with access to a school, and treat her “with humanity.”<sup>103</sup> Another apprenticeship document from Kentucky, signed in January 1868, during the very end of Bureau control of freedmen’s labor in Kentucky, had even stricter conditions for Nancy Martin, who the Bureau apprenticed to Douglas Zimmerman until she turned eighteen. Martin would be trained in housework, provided with housing, food, clothing, and access to a church and a school, and treated “humanely and kindly,” according to the contract. However, she would not marry, visit “disreputable places,” gamble, or damage any property belonging to Zimmerman.<sup>104</sup>

Finally, the example of Carter Holmes provides the most striking evidence of the inadequacies of the Bureau’s apprenticeship program and the failure of agents to enforce the indenture contracts that had promised seemingly good conditions for apprentices, including decent treatment, education, and adequate food, clothing, and shelter. Without adequate enforcement, these promises often failed to materialize. Carter Holmes was only one of many apprentices who suffered from the Bureau’s inability to enforce its own contracts, and he provided a rare first-hand account of mistreatment in his petition to the Bureau for redress. Holmes, aged twelve, lived in Washington, DC, and was indentured by Nicholls, the agent in charge of Mason’s Island, during the Civil War in 1864, which provides stark evidence that Bureau policies and shortcomings both emerged from the contraband camps.<sup>105</sup> Holmes’s new

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<sup>103</sup> Indenture Contract, 9 November 1867, Records of the Field Offices for the State of Kentucky, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1865-1872, M1904, RG 105, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC.

<sup>104</sup> Indenture Contract, 1 January 1868, Records of the Field Offices for the State of Kentucky, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1865-1872, M1904, RG 105, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC.

<sup>105</sup> Carter Holmes to Lieut. Col, Wm. M. Beebe, 22 April 1867, Letters Received, Series 456, District of Columbia Assistant Commissioner, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, RG 105, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC.

master, James Suit, promised to treat him humanely and otherwise abide by the contract approved first by the army and then by the Bureau. Suit failed to provide adequate clothing and also did not provide Holmes with any education or access to a school.<sup>106</sup> Suit whipped Holmes repeatedly despite the ban on corporal punishment, and also struck him in the head with a shovel, which caused severe injury. Holmes fled from Suit and sought recompense from the Bureau, who sent him to the Orphans Home, meaning that he still faced the threat of future indenture to a new master, and the Bureau did not discipline Suit or declare him ineligible to obtain future apprentices. The Bureau failed to solve the problem and Suit would be free to abuse freedmen in the future since he received no punishment for such a blatant violation of Bureau policy.<sup>107</sup> Holmes's petition demonstrates the inadequacies of the Bureau's legal and approved apprenticeship program, but the problems of exploitation and abuse became even worse when local courts began to approve apprenticeships without Bureau approval, and children often faced removal from their families without consent and faced horribly abusive apprenticeships that the Bureau struggled to eliminate throughout Reconstruction.

In addition to apprenticeships approved by the Bureau, local courts often apprenticed children, usually to their former owners, without any Bureau intervention and often without parental consent. These apprenticeships often separated families rather than apprenticed orphans or other children who came from unstable households, and removed children that families desperately needed to perform the farm labor necessary for the family's survival. The Bureau struggled throughout Reconstruction to undo these apprenticeships, as overwhelmed agents faced stiff opposition from civil authorities, white masters, and the local populace as a whole. Many

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

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*

freedmen faced retaliatory violence when they attempted to regain their children, which the Bureau often could not prevent due to the infinitesimal military detachments in many rural areas of the South. Without any Bureau supervision to ensure decent and humane treatment of the freedmen, apprentices also faced the prospect of virtually limitless exploitation and abuse without any regulation unless they could escape and reach a Bureau agent to lodge a complaint. The persistence of local indentures clearly demonstrates the shortcomings of Bureau policy and its origins in the contraband camps, as families often faced separation in plantation leasing and impressment programs, often also without the consent of the parents and with inadequate oversight to prevent abuse or exploitation of the contrabands, as local authorities remained disinterested in protecting the freedmen both during the Civil War and Reconstruction.

A few examples will demonstrate the scale of the local apprenticeship problem and the desperate efforts of the freedmen to recover their children. In Duplin County, near Wilmington in North Carolina, Joe Bright, a mason, leased forty acres from Joe Beason for two-thirds of the crop, and he needed his six children to perform agricultural labor to cultivate a sufficient crop. The county court removed his children and apprenticed them to their former owners without Bright's consent, and he managed to reach a Bureau agent to complain and request the agent's help in reclaiming his children.<sup>108</sup> The former owner, W.A. Mathis, argued that Bright "was not a proper person to have charge of children" and the Bureau ordered the children to remain with Mathis while the case was adjudicated, indicating bias in favor of white employers over freed children.<sup>109</sup> Polly, Joe's wife, also testified before the Bureau, arguing that no "other person has

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<sup>108</sup> Joe Bright to Worthy Cornell, 26 April 1866, Letters Received, Series 2892, Wilmington, North Carolina Superintendent, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, RG 105, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC.

<sup>109</sup> H.H. Foster to Col. A. Rutherford, 30 April 1866, Letters Received, Series 2892, Wilmington, North Carolina Superintendent, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, RG 105, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC.

a better right to them than him or me we are able to support and keep them,” and both Brights also tried to argue their case before the same civil courts that had apprenticed the children.<sup>110</sup> The Bureau finally ruled that the apprenticeship was illegal since Bright had not given his consent and ordered that Mathis return all of the children immediately, but no further record exists as to the fate of the children, which likely indicates that the Bureau failed to enforce its own orders.<sup>111</sup>

The case of Bright’s children illustrates the problems the Bureau faced in dealing with discriminatory state and local laws that often hampered their efforts to end the practice of local apprenticeships, especially those without parental consent, and also connects to the inability of the army to prevent separation of families in the camps. In North Carolina, an 1866 law declared “all persons of color entitled to the same privileges and subject to the same burthen and disabilities as by the laws of the State were conferred on, or were attached to, free persons of color, prior to the ordinance of emancipation,” which seems to indicate progress in ensuring the rights of freedmen.<sup>112</sup> This law meant that the old apprenticeship law remained in force, and it gave broad justifications for apprenticing freed children without parental consent. The law stated that children whose parents were unmarried or who “do not habitually employ their time in some honest, industrious occupation” could be apprenticed by the local courts with preference given to former owners, and the local courts seized on this law to apprentice children across the state.<sup>113</sup> In response, the Bureau superintendent, Colonel Eliphalet Whittlesey, ordered agents to

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<sup>110</sup> Affidavit of Joe Brite and Polley Matthews, 4 May 1866, Letters Received, Series 2892, Wilmington, North Carolina Superintendent, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, RG 105, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC.

<sup>111</sup> Endorsement, 26 April 1866, Letters Received, Series 2892, Wilmington, North Carolina Superintendent, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, RG 105, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC.

<sup>112</sup> An Act Concerning Negroes and Persons of Color or of Mixed Blood, 10 March 1866, *Public Laws of the State of North Carolina, Passed by the General Assembly at the Session of 1866* (Raleigh: 1866), 99-105.

<sup>113</sup> *Revised Code of North Carolina*, 1855, North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh, North Carolina, 77-78.

“exercise the utmost care that none except orphans, or children whose parents give their consent, be bound out as apprentices” and prohibited the separation of families without consent.<sup>114</sup> The Bureau struggled to apply these instructions due to the intransigence of civil courts and a shortage of agents across the South, as the below examples will further demonstrate. Illegal apprenticeships plagued the Bureau in states across the South and not just North Carolina.

In Maryland, Rindy M. Allen complained to the Bureau that the orphans’ court confiscated the children she hired to work for pay along with food and clothing and returned them to Ira Young, their former owner, even though they clearly had a job and were self-sufficient without any governmental assistance. A local justice of the peace certified the apprenticeship without any intervention by the Bureau, and according to Joseph Hall, who represented the boy in court, Young treated the child “worse than a dog” and refused to provide food or clothing, both of which would have been stipulated in a Bureau- approved contract.<sup>115</sup> The boy managed to escape but his master recaptured and whipped him despite Bureau regulations prohibiting corporal punishment of freedmen no matter what the labor arrangement.<sup>116</sup> The local police arrested white Unionists who helped him escape his abusive master and held them in jail without bond, which indicates the degree to which state authorities undermined Bureau efforts to ensure freedmen were fairly treated in apprenticeship arrangements.<sup>117</sup> In fact, as Hall states, the freedmen needed to be able to hire their children out for wages to become self-sufficient, so forced apprenticeships directly undermined the ability of

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<sup>114</sup> Circular No. 1, 16 February 1866, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, Headquarters Assistant Commissioner, State of North Carolina, vol. 28, General Orders and Circulars Issued, Series 2457, North Carolina Assistant Commissioner, RG 105, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC; Berlin, et al, *Land and Labor*, 911-913.

<sup>115</sup> Joseph Hall to General Howard, 14 September 1865, Letters Received, Series 456, District of Columbia Assistant Commissioner, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, RG 105, National Archives.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*

the freedmen to escape dependence on the Bureau. He wrote, “The Colored people in this county, Can and would do very well if they Can have what they ought to have... to get their children un bound or restored to them... in order that they can help now to support their parents in order that they may not become a burthen upon the government.”<sup>118</sup> The Bureau lacked adequate staff to address the sheer number of local apprenticeships in Maryland even though it was so close to the national headquarters in Washington. Masters continued to abuse apprentices without much intervention by the Bureau, which again followed the example set in impressment arrangements in the contraband camps during the Civil War, indicating that the Bureau did not learn from the failures of contraband camp policy when establishing its own responses to state policies that directly hampered Bureau programs.

The final example of apprenticeships comes from Kentucky, another state that only abolished slavery after the passage of the Thirteenth Amendment, meaning that owners remained very reluctant to let go of their former slaves, which only worsened the problem of illegal apprenticeships. In 1867, a Bureau circular cited a statewide trend of local courts apprenticing children by force and without parental consent. The circular placed the burden of gaining Bureau intervention on the parents, who faced the great risk of retaliatory violence for complaining to the Bureau or to the federal courts.<sup>119</sup> To recover their children, parents had to request a writ of habeas corpus in the federal district court, which could be very difficult for freedmen living in rural areas far from a major city. The Bureau promised to return children to their parents following the issuance of a court order, and also to attempt to change Kentucky law

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Circular No. 8, 1 November 1867, in Records of the Field Offices for the State of Kentucky, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1865-1872, RG 105, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC.



to make the apprenticeship of children much more difficult.<sup>120</sup> The lack of adequate agents and the continued intransigence of the citizenry and the state and local courts made such action almost impossible and Kentucky freedmen continued to face the threat of illegal indentures throughout Reconstruction.

One year later in 1867, Sam Wilmington complained to the Bureau in Louisville that the local courts bound his children without consent, and the Bureau ordered them returned immediately or their master, John Neal, would face immediate arrest. No record exists of whether Wilmington ever received his children back.<sup>121</sup> In one of the most shocking cases of illegal apprenticeship coupled with wanton violence against freedmen, local courts illegally apprenticed Jerry Bird's brother to Berel Howell without parental consent, and Howell refused to release the twelve-year-old boy when the rest of the family wanted to move to Illinois. When Bird confronted Howell to request the return of his brother, Howell shot and killed the young boy, and he never faced any criminal punishment for his horrific act of violence.<sup>122</sup> While most apprenticeships did not end in murder, the Bureau's records, especially registers of complaints, are packed with cases of children apprenticed without consent, but not nearly as much detail on Bureau actions to recover those children. In addition, masters often defied Bureau orders to return children to their parents, and agents faced difficulty in enforcing their orders without sufficient military support. For example, Celia Hill's children were apprenticed to Jesse Evans against her will, and Evans refused to return them even after receiving a direct order from the

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> James S. Bolton to John Neal, 16 July 1867, in Records of the Field Offices for the State of Kentucky, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1865-1872, RG 105, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC.

<sup>122</sup> Affidavit of Jerry Bird, Columbus, Kentucky, 11 October 1866, in Records of the Field Offices for the State of Kentucky, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1865-1872, RG 105, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC.

Bureau, and the agent referred the case to higher levels of the Bureau for investigation, which could take extended amounts of time, and no record exists of whether the children ever returned to their mother.<sup>123</sup>

Apprenticeships reflect several shortcomings of Bureau policy that originated in contraband camps. The separation of families originated with impressment and plantation leasing, even though the freedmen believed that emancipation would guarantee the integrity of their families. Apprenticeship indicates the limitations of Bureau enforcement of its own regulations, which also followed the precedent set by the army's poor oversight of impressed laborers and leased plantations. Apprenticeships also reflect the overwhelming fear of dependency on the government that shaped both contraband camp and Bureau policy, even when it directly undermined the ability of the freedmen to obtain economic autonomy by removing the labor of children from families who desperately needed to make ends meet. Finally, apprenticeships reflected the gender ideals of the Bureau, as single mothers often found themselves deemed unfit parents and therefore faced the loss of their children, no matter what their income or the ability to support their children. Apprenticeships clearly demonstrate that both Bureau policy and its shortcomings originated in the contraband camps, and the next aspect of the Bureau to be discussed in this chapter, the inability to prevent violence against freedmen, further demonstrates the connection between contraband camps and the Bureau.

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<sup>123</sup> Register of Complaints, 1866, in Records of the Field Offices for the State of Kentucky, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1865-1872, RG 105, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC.

## The Bureau's Inability to Stop Violence against Freedmen

The problem of violence against freedmen plagued the South both during the Civil War and Reconstruction, and neither the army nor the Bureau could effectively address it due to the lack of staff, racist agents, and an insufficient military presence. Bureau agents were swamped with complaints of violence, termed "outrages," and also a near-complete lack of cooperation from the civil courts in the arrest and prosecution of perpetrators. The lack of adequate response to violence under the Bureau reflects the guerrilla warfare that plagued contraband camps across the South, especially in camps that sent contrabands to leased plantations or to farm abandoned land. Freedmen who lived in rural areas faced the worst violence, as they had great difficulty reaching agents who were based in large cities, and also the fact that small army garrisons could not protect rural plantations due to the distance from large cities. The failure to stop violence further demonstrates the connection between the problems that plagued contraband camp administration and the problems that plagued Bureau administration throughout Reconstruction. An examination of the Bureau's outrage reports clearly demonstrates the Bureau's inability to protect freedmen from attacks that undermined their ability to obtain economic autonomy and the self-sufficiency that the Bureau so desperately wanted for the freedmen.

The outrage reports to be examined come from Kentucky, a state plagued with near-constant violence against freedmen, especially since slavery did not end there until late 1865 and many masters tried to retain control of their former slaves by force. The Bureau undermined its own ability to protect freedmen by imposing maximum sentences of a one-hundred dollar fine or thirty days in jail with hard labor, no matter the severity of the offense. These light sentences did little to deter whites determined to restore as system as close to slavery as possible through

violent intimidation of freedmen.<sup>124</sup> The situation worsened when white “Regulators,” or violent para-military groups formed to attack freedmen, formed across the state in 1867 and 1868. These groups repeatedly perpetrated heinous offenses against freedmen, and faced light sentences if the local courts prosecuted them at all, and the Bureau struggled badly to mount even a minimal response to their violent acts.

A report from Louisville written in 1867 demonstrates the scale of the Regulator problem facing the Bureau in Kentucky. The agent wrote that many wealthy and so-called “respectable people” joined the mobs, and that hardly anyone dared oppose the actions of the Regulators, indicating how strongly the white population of Kentucky opposed the Bureau and the difficulty the Bureau faced in arresting or prosecuting Regulators, which was very similar to the problems the army faced in trying to track down guerrillas who attacked contraband camps during the Civil War.<sup>125</sup> The Regulators targeted freedmen across the state, and severely beat freedmen who dared report their actions to the Bureau. They also attacked Union veterans and any whites suspected of helping freedmen obtain economic autonomy, including Bureau agents who left their headquarters without adequate military guard.<sup>126</sup> Regulators lynched one freedman for hosting a party at his house, whipped the guests, and threatened them with lynching if they attended any more social gatherings.<sup>127</sup> In nearby Georgetown, meanwhile, Regulators shot two freedmen and stole their wages that they had just received for the previous year’s labor, and the

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<sup>124</sup> Circular No. 7, 25 September 1866, in Records of the Field Offices for the State of Kentucky, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1865-1872, RG 105, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC.

<sup>125</sup> June 1867-October 1868 Inspection Report for Louisville, Inspection Reports Concerning Freedmen Conditions and the Operations of the Bureau in Kentucky, Records of the Field Offices for the State of Kentucky, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1865-1872, RG 105, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

same occurred in Henry County at the same time.<sup>128</sup> The civil authorities, meanwhile, supported the Regulators and did little to nothing to arrest or prosecute the perpetrators, which greatly undermined the ability of the Bureau to protect freedmen when they could not receive any help from local law enforcement and had to rely on small army detachments to protect freedmen spread over large rural areas.<sup>129</sup> The agent in Louisville admitted that the Bureau had largely failed to prevent most acts of violence against freedmen, and could do little to prevent retaliation against freedmen who dared to report the attacks to the Bureau.<sup>130</sup> The same story would emerge from outrage reports both from Kentucky and across the South, clearly revealing the scale of the violence against freedmen and the Bureau's woefully inadequate response throughout the Reconstruction period, demonstrating that the Bureau learned little from the failures to protect contraband camps and leased plantations from Confederate guerrillas during the Civil War.

Freedmen also faced violence from their employers, who often attacked them for attempting to obtain their wages, rations, medical care, or other terms specified in the very contracts the planters had signed. The freedmen could report these offenses to the Bureau, but they faced the threat of retaliation from whites plus the inability of the Bureau to adequately respond to such outrages, arrest the perpetrators, and protect the freedmen from future violence. Freedmen faced severe violence from whites when they reported outrages to the Bureau, and the undermanned military garrison could do little or nothing to prevent it, which reflects the inability of the army to protect contraband camps during the Civil War. The outrages they reported were

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<sup>128</sup> Georgetown, Kentucky Inspection Report, January 1868, in Records of the Field Offices for the State of Kentucky, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1865-1872, RG 105, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC.

<sup>129</sup> Louisville Inspection Report, Records of the Field Offices for the State of Kentucky, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1865-1872, RG 105, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*

near-constant and overwhelmed Bureau agents who could not rely on the military or the local and state courts for support, to the detriment of the freedmen who desperately needed protection from vengeful whites.<sup>131</sup>

A few examples from outrage reports, written for Bureau agents in Washington, DC, demonstrate the scale of the violence problem facing the Bureau in the Reconstruction South. First, some more examples from Kentucky, and then the discussion will be extended to the rest of the South. In May 1865, soon after the end of the Civil War, Andy Ramsey beat Richard with a hand spike when he demanded fifty-five days of unpaid wages, and Richard remained senseless for days and also lost his job at Ramsey's plantation. As is too often the case, no record exists of any Bureau action against Ramsey.<sup>132</sup> One year later, in November 1866, Thomas Dedmore testified to a Bureau agent that his employer tied him up to a tree by his hands so his feet did not touch the ground, and then whipped him so severely that "blood ran down to his shoes" because he went to church on a Sunday morning before starting work.<sup>133</sup> In May 1868, as Bureau operations began to wind down, a freedman only identified as Hewing was shot by his employer when he asked for his wages at the end of the month, and Hewing later died from his injuries. The Bureau agent promised to investigate the case and arrest the murderers, but local law enforcement and courts refused to cooperate and no record exists of any Bureau action.<sup>134</sup> Finally, in October 1866, several whites attacked George Chambers with an axe while he

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> F.S. Lands from Sir, 2 May 1865, in Records of the Field Offices for the State of Kentucky, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1865-1872, RG 105, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC.

<sup>133</sup> Affidavit of Thomas Dedmore, 20 November 1866, in Records of the Field Offices for the State of Kentucky, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1865-1872, RG 105, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC.

<sup>134</sup> R. Slocum to Sir, 5 May 1868, in Records of the Field Offices for the State of Kentucky, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1865-1872, RG 105, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC.

collected driftwood to use as fuel. The local courts threw out the case because they refused to accept black testimony despite the Civil Rights Act of 1866, and the perpetrators fled before the Bureau could track them down.<sup>135</sup> These cases from Kentucky demonstrate the Bureau's inability to protect freedmen from white violence, especially given the lack of cooperation from the civil courts and law enforcement, and the continual reductions of military garrisons across the South, especially in 1868. Violence against freedmen was far from a particular Kentucky problem. An analysis of outrage reports from across the South will demonstrate that the Bureau as a whole could not stop violence, demonstrating again the connections between the shortcomings of Bureau policy and the failures of contraband camp administration.

In Memphis, Tennessee, freedman John Hardy risked his life to name his attackers to the local Bureau agent after they shot and severely beat him, and pistol-whipped his son, in Hardy's own home. The Bureau records do not indicate if the perpetrators were arrested, but this case demonstrates the scale of violence in the South when freedmen faced violence in their own homes, and the sheer inability of the army and the Bureau to protect freedmen from constant white violence.<sup>136</sup> In May 1866, a perpetrator identified in the record only as Mr. Keith, assaulted a little girl named Francis Pullman, and Keith only had to pay a ten-dollar fine and did not serve any jail time.<sup>137</sup> Such minimal sentences did little to deter violence against freedmen, and indicated that even the Bureau courts did not fulfill their duty to protect freedmen when the

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<sup>135</sup> John Graham to John Ely, 19 December 1866, in Records of the Field Offices for the State of Kentucky, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1865-1872, RG 105, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC.

<sup>136</sup> Statement of John Hardy, 3 May 1866, in Records of the Field Offices of the State of Tennessee, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1865-1872, RG 105, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC.

<sup>137</sup> Register of Complaints, 23 October 1865, in Records of the Field Offices of the State of Tennessee, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1865-1872, RG 105, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC.

civil courts would not cooperate. In September 1865, A.M. Smith shot freedman Willis Hays with “no provocation,” according to the Bureau agent, and only had to pay a fifty-dollar fine for attempted murder.<sup>138</sup> The record does not indicate if Hays survived or even if the fine was paid, but the case still clearly demonstrates that light sentences constituted a major reason why the Bureau could never put a dent in the constant attacks on freedmen. The light sentences were not only a problem in Memphis, as agents imposed similar small fines across the South.

In Louisiana, freedman Green Jones testified that night riders, similar to the Kentucky Regulators, shot into his house, whipped him three hundred times, and fled into the night without receiving any punishment. The Bureau listened to his complaint but did not manage to arrest the perpetrators, and local courts would not cooperate so they escaped to attack more freedmen. This attack demonstrates the problem the Bureau faced with organized paramilitary groups, as attackers could blend back into society during the day and then attack at night when military garrisons were unlikely to operate, making it nearly impossible for the Bureau to stop these attacks, especially after the formation of the Ku Klux Klan during the later years of Reconstruction.<sup>139</sup> Regulators in Tennessee posted broadsides warning freedmen of violence if they did not submit to white control, and the “negroes are held in such a state of terror that they dare not tell” the Bureau about violence, according to an army officer posted to the area.<sup>140</sup> The inability of the Bureau to arrest these regulators, despite several orders to do so from higher military commands, demonstrates clearly both the complete inability of the Bureau to rein in

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<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> Statement of Green Jones, 18 August 1866, Enclosed in Capt. N.B. Blanton to Capt. A.F. Hayden, 31 August 1866, B-55 1866, Letters Received, Series 1756, Department of the Gulf, United States Army Continental Commands, RG 593 Part 1, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC.

<sup>140</sup> Lieutenant Chas. B. Grady to Lt. Col. A.L. Hough, 29 January 1867, B-10 1867, Letters Received, Series 4720, Department of the Tennessee, United States Army Continental Commands, RG 593 Part 1, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC.



white violence, and the connections between the inability to stop Regulator attacks during Reconstruction and the repeated failures of the army to prevent guerrilla attacks on the contraband camps during the Civil War.<sup>141</sup>

The problem of violence against freedmen indicates how shortcomings of Bureau policy originated in contraband camps, as Bureau agents and the army learned little from the constant failure to protect contraband camps and leased plantations from guerrillas, and continued to post inadequate military garrisons that could not reach isolated rural areas, to impose sentences that were so light that they were almost meaningless, and to continue to refer cases to civil courts that clearly discriminated against freedmen. They often failed to ensure that those found guilty of violence against freedmen did not participate in future attacks, as they often could retain their positions as employers of freedmen despite clear evidence of violent behavior. Freedmen under contracts also could not leave those contracts due to white violence, which starkly demonstrates the exploitative nature of the mandatory labor contract system, which also originated in the contraband camps as demonstrated above. Freedmen would face an even worse threat from violence starting in 1868, as the Bureau began to close down operations in most southern states to focus on education, leaving freedmen with almost no protection against white exploitation and violence, and often repeating the problems that plagued the process of closing down camps. Even the end of the Bureau contained policies and problems that emerged in the contraband camps of the Civil War.

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<sup>141</sup> Ulysses S. Grant, General Order 44, 6 July 1866, in Headquarters of the Army, Adjutant General's Office, Orders and Circulars, Series 44, RG 94, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC.

## Abandoning the Freedmen: The Bureau Leaves the South

By 1868, the Bureau's commitment to helping the freedmen began to wane dramatically, as Bureau agents believed that freedmen should now be able to support themselves without any help from the government. The Bureau believed that the freedmen had now secured jobs and no longer needed economic assistance, especially due to the system of mandatory labor contracts. The federal government also wanted to avoid encouraging dependency, and believed that withdrawing the Bureau would compel the freedmen to maintain employment and self-sufficiency. According to historian David Williams, northerners never really committed to the Bureau, and focused more on restoring business ties to the South, primarily cotton production.<sup>142</sup> In addition, the racism that plagued the North during the Civil War continued during Reconstruction, as northerners resented job competition from free blacks and maintained segregation in schools, transportation, and also often restricted blacks to the most menial jobs, which also reduced support for using federal funds to prop up freedmen in the South who, according to Northerners, should have been able to support themselves much more quickly after the war.<sup>143</sup> While the Bureau did not permanently shut down all operations until 1872, most services began to wind down in 1868 as the Bureau began to focus almost entirely on supporting freedmen's schools rather than intervening in labor disputes or prosecuting cases of violence against individual freedmen.<sup>144</sup>

Right as the Bureau began to cease operations, the Ku Klux Klan began a "reign of terror" across the South, and the rapidly shrinking Bureau could do nothing to protect

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<sup>142</sup> Williams, *I Freed Myself*, 229; Richard D. Sears, "Freedmen's Bureau," in *The Kentucky African-American Encyclopedia*, ed. Gerald L. Smith, Karen Cotton McDaniel, John A. Hardin (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2015), 192.

<sup>143</sup> Stephen Kantrowitz, "Reconstruction in the North," in National Park Service, *The Reconstruction Era*, 143-145.

<sup>144</sup> National Park Service, *The Reconstruction Era*, 13.

freedmen.<sup>145</sup> In Virginia, for example, “some planters killed their workers so they would not have to honor the labor contracts” that had been approved by the Bureau, and the Klan also attacked the schools that the Bureau had supposedly invested most of its limited resources in protecting.<sup>146</sup> The Bureau, with only nine hundred agents across the South in 1868 and only one hundred fifty eight employees across the whole region at the beginning of 1869, had no chance of reining in the Klan and other violent groups. The contracts that the Bureau formulated for the 1868 contract year could not be enforced, leaving the freedmen trapped in labor arrangements with employers free to exploit or abuse them with absolutely no fear of consequences from the Bureau.<sup>147</sup> When the Bureau restored all pending cases to the civil courts, freedmen lost all hope of justice for acts of white violence, and whites knew that attacks on freedmen would often go unpunished by racist state and local courts that often refused to even prosecute whites for exploiting or abusing freedmen.<sup>148</sup> Finally, the parents of children caught in illegal apprenticeships could no longer use Bureau courts to regain custody of their children, meaning that the practice of apprenticeship flourished after the Bureau’s demise and even became more prominent as a means for local and state courts to control the freedmen.

The end of the Bureau allowed white southerners to institute any means they wished to exploit the freedmen and prevent them from gaining the economic autonomy that they had sought since gaining their freedom at the end of the Civil War. Vagrancy laws, lynching, sharecropping, debt peonage, convict leasing, and disenfranchisement all emerged as ways to

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<sup>145</sup> Susan Campbell Bartoletti, *They Called Themselves the KKK: The Birth of an American Terrorist Group* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2010), 69.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, 80,103.

<sup>147</sup> Delano Greenidge-Copptue, “Freedmen’s Bureau,” in *the Encyclopedia of African-American History, 1619-1895 From the Colonial Period to the Age of Frederick Douglass*, ed. Paul Finkelman, Volume 1 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 67.

<sup>148</sup> Mark L. Bradley, *Bluecoats and Tar Heels: Soldiers and Civilians in Reconstruction North Carolina* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2009), 192-195.

keep freedmen impoverished, prevent them from participating in politics, and to ensure a captive labor force for white southern planters.<sup>149</sup> While the details of these policies of individual states and localities are beyond the scope of this dissertation since the narrative ends with the closure of the Bureau in 1868, they do clearly demonstrate the consequences of shortcomings in Bureau policy that prevented the establishment of true economic autonomy for the freedmen and trapped them in a system very close to slavery that would last until the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, which demonstrates the very long-term consequences of policies that emerged in the contraband camps of the Civil War a century before.

### Conclusion

The various policies of the Bureau, including the closure of contraband camps, mandatory labor contracts, enforced apprenticeships and the failure to adequately address illegal apprenticeships, inadequate responses to violence, and the abrupt end of Bureau assistance that left the freedmen without protection, demonstrate the connections between the shortcomings of Bureau policy and the shortcomings of contraband camp administration. The army instituted labor contracts, especially on leased plantations, separated families through indentures, and did little to nothing to prevent guerilla attacks on the camps and leased plantations, resulting in the death or re-enslavement of thousands of contrabands. The Bureau, meanwhile, learned little from these failures of contraband camp policy and instituted many of the exact same policies, and then did not adequately address the consequences of these failures, including freedmen trapped in abusive contracts, children apprenticed without parental consent, and freedmen attacked or even killed by white mobs. The end of the Bureau faced many of the same problems

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<sup>149</sup> Foner, *Forever Free*, 202-209.

that faced the closure of contraband camps, including the abrupt withdrawal of agents with little notice to freedmen, the abrupt closure of remaining home farms without any housing or job placement assistance, and a failure to address pending cases of illegal apprenticeships or employer abuse. Once the Bureau left most areas of the South in 1868 and disbanded for good in 1872, freedmen faced a century of poverty, convict leasing, sharecropping, and lynching that erased almost all of the gains made during Reconstruction and even undermined their very freedom, as convict leasing and exploitative contracts created a system very close to slavery, leading to the same question that contrabands in Mississippi had asked only five years before: Is this freedom? Due to the failures of contraband camp and Freedmen's Bureau policy, the answer to this question during the years after Reconstruction was, at best, maybe.

## CONCLUSION

The connection between the contraband camps and Freedmen's Bureau policies during the Civil War and Reconstruction are clear. Policies implemented in the camps, such as mandatory labor contracts, the impressment of contrabands for labor, curtailment of rations, and the rapid closure of the camps late in the war all foreshadowed policies instituted by the Bureau during Reconstruction. The failures of contraband camp policy, such as the failure to permit the contrabands to find their own employment, the lack of adequate wages, the forced relocations of contrabands to other camps or leased plantations, and the inability to protect contrabands from violence committed by soldiers also clearly predicted the failures of the Bureau. Even more significant, the argument that the Bureau did not know the problems inherent in their policies and cannot be blamed for their failures is definitively disproven by this dissertation. It distinctly demonstrates that the Bureau had numerous models to follow from the failures of contraband camp policies but learned little from them.

In addition, the dissertation illustrates the failures of contraband camp administration itself, as the lack of a coherent and uniform federal policy permitted local camp commanders to institute whatever policies and programs they saw fit. As a result, policy failures such as the sudden closure of Camp Nelson, the problematic institution of leasing in Mississippi and Louisiana, and the denial of land to contrabands on Roanoke Island often went unaddressed by the federal government until it was too late, if they were addressed at all. In addition, many blatant violations of federal law, especially returning fugitives to their owners in violation of an

Article of War, went unpunished by both the army bureaucracy and the federal government, which demonstrates the low priority of the contrabands to the military and the government. The Bureau, meanwhile, did institute a national policy for its agents, but an ineffective enforcement mechanism and a lack of personnel meant that it was little better than no policy at all. The dissertation lucidly indicates that policy failures plagued both contraband camps and the Bureau and restricted the opportunities of contrabands and freedmen to gain the economic autonomy that they truly needed.

The dissertation also indicates the importance of studying multiple camps and regions to gain a truly complete perspective on the implementation of contraband camp policy. Especially due to the lack of a coherent federal policy, each camp had its own policies and programs, all of which provide their own insights into the connections between contraband camps and Bureau policy. Leasing in Mississippi and Louisiana, contraband colonies in North Carolina, land preemption in South Carolina, and urban contraband settlements in Washington, DC, are all vital to understanding the implementation and failures of camp policy and its connections to the Bureau. Discussing each camp geographically as this dissertation does provides the best analysis of the nuances of these policy connections and their long-term consequences after Reconstruction.

By making these arguments, the dissertation makes several interventions in the historiography of the Civil War and Reconstruction. It mainly addresses a major gap in the literature that treats the contraband camps and the Bureau as separate entities rather than analyzing their connections in policy. It also discusses numerous contraband camps in extensive detail, rather than focusing on a case study of one or two particular camps. In addition, the dissertation analyzes the difference between national policy implemented in Washington and the

on the ground reality in the camps to a degree not before reached in the literature, particularly for the contraband camps before the establishment of the Bureau. The dissertation fills significant gaps in the literature of the Civil War and Reconstruction that still exist more than one hundred fifty years after the conclusion of the conflict.

The arguments made in the dissertation can also extend later in history than its official ending point of 1868. The inadequacy of Bureau policy only intensified as agents pulled out of the South until only Bureau schools remained. The freedmen now had no recourse to protect them from exploitation by planters, violence by southern whites, and separation of their families by the apprenticeship system. Planters began to institute even stricter sharecropping contracts, which almost always led to massive debt for the freedmen. Since they had to pay for farm implements, rations, clothing, and seed on credit, they always ended up owing more to the planter than they made from the proceeds of the crop. The freedmen ended up in debt peonage, meaning that they could never escape the exploitative sharecropping arrangements.<sup>1</sup> These sharecropping arrangements continued until the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, which indicates how the Bureau's implementation of mandatory labor contracts, which began in the contraband camps, undermined the ability of African-Americans to gain economic autonomy for almost a century.

In addition, another long-term consequence of the failure of Bureau and contraband camp policy was the failure of the Bureau to implement equality under the law in southern courts. As discussed in chapter five, when the Bureau courts closed and civil courts resumed in the southern states, freedmen quickly faced discriminatory verdicts and prohibitions from sitting on juries or

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<sup>1</sup> For more detail here, consult Foner, *Reconstruction*.



testifying against whites, both of which the Bureau had attempted to enforce in its own courts. Police officers across the South quickly began to arrest African-Americans for petty and often fabricated crimes such as vagrancy, disrespecting a white person, loitering, or petty theft. The defendants would be brought before all-white juries, which imposed heavy fines that they could not pay, and then they would be leased to private businesses who would pay their fines in exchange for the convict's labor for a lengthy period of time that far outstripped the seriousness of the crime. This system, known as convict leasing, provided hefty profits for the businesses, but led to the constant threat of arrest for African-Americans and the forceful separation of convicts from their families who often depended on their support. The Bureau's failure to ensure equality in southern courts led to unequal justice for African-Americans that also continued until the Civil Rights Movement, which highlights the importance of understanding the connections between contraband camp and Bureau policy during Reconstruction.<sup>2</sup>

Another long-term consequence of the Bureau's policy failure was continued violence across the South during the later phase of Reconstruction and after 1877. The Bureau and the army never had enough personnel to stop the rampant violence against freedmen. The Ku Klux Klan and other racist paramilitary organizations terrorized freedmen across the South, and the northern public quickly became tired of spending federal resources on protecting African-Americans, especially during the Panic of 1873. As a result, the military left the South after 1877, and freedmen faced a constant threat of violence even after the Klan faded away in the late 1870s. In particular, lynching rapidly spread across the South, as African-Americans who obtained economic autonomy, especially land ownership, faced the threat of violent mob

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<sup>2</sup> For more detail here, see Douglas Blackmon, *Slavery by Another Name: The Re-Enslavement of Black Americans from the Civil War to World War Two* (New York: Vintage Books, 2008).

retaliation or worse, and no law enforcement agency did anything to stop it. Also, massive race riots erupted across the South in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, with Atlanta, New Orleans, Washington, DC, and Norfolk as only a few examples. The perpetrators of these violent acts almost never faced arrest due to the unequal judicial system described above, which only encouraged further violent intimidation of the freedmen. The problem not only lasted for a century but became even worse during the Civil Rights Movement, when a revitalized Klan attacked both black and white civil rights activists in a desperate attempt to stem the tide of racial equality. The Bureau's failure to stop violence also had long-term consequences that not only greatly undermined the ability of freedmen to gain economic autonomy and basic civil rights, but also put their very lives in peril.<sup>3</sup>

In contrast to the Bureau's inaction, the federal government did attempt to stop violence committed by the Klan after the Bureau's departure in 1868. The Enforcement Acts made it illegal to hinder freedmen from voting or registering to vote or to "band or conspire together, or go in disguise upon the public highway, or upon the premises of another, with intent to... injure, oppress, threaten, or intimidate any citizen" from using their Constitutional rights.<sup>4</sup> Across the South, federal marshals arrested suspected Klansmen and others suspected of violating the freedmen's rights, and achieved a relatively high conviction rate of fifty five percent in Mississippi and twenty eight percent across the South as a whole.<sup>5</sup> The fact that the federal government utilized large numbers of personnel and even suspended habeas corpus in some

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<sup>3</sup> For more details here, see Foner, *Reconstruction*, Rebecca Burns, *Rage in the Gate City: The Story of the 1906 Atlanta Race Riot* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2009); Elaine Frantz Parsons: *Ku-Klux: The Birth of the Klan during Reconstruction* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2019); W. Fitzhugh Brundage: *Under Sentence of Death: Lynching in the South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017).

<sup>4</sup> Act of May 31, 1870, quoted in Stephen Cresswell, Enforcing the Enforcement Acts: The Department of Justice in Northern Mississippi, 1870-1890." *Journal of Southern History* 54, no. 3 (1987): 422.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, 423.

areas to ensure the accused faced a jury trial indicates a much higher level of commitment to stopping Klan violence than the Bureau had ever shown to protect the freedmen during early Reconstruction, even though violence pervaded the South to a similar degree and the Bureau could utilize the services of an occupying army. The relative success of the Enforcement Acts even further highlights the Bureau's failure to protect the freedmen, and the continued lack of support from the army for the protection of freedmen that reflects the ongoing inability of the army to protect contraband camps from guerrillas. The federal government could have made more of a commitment to protecting the freedmen during Reconstruction, and its failure indicates the low priority of contrabands and freedmen in federal policymaking during the Civil War and Reconstruction.

Another long-term consequence of Bureau policy failure is unequal education. When the Bureau ended its support of freedmen's schools, they lost their only source of funding, as local school boards remained reluctant to support black schools. When they did obtain support from local governments, it was vastly less than that given to white schools, and this funding gap persisted until *Brown v. Board* began the slow process of school integration in 1954. The lower quality education given to freedmen reduced their ability to move up the economic ladder, as they often lacked the skills necessary for higher-paying jobs and remained trapped in the exploitative sharecropping arrangements discussed above. In some communities, meanwhile, black schools faced violence from the Klan and other paramilitary organizations, and they had no protection after the Bureau and military withdrew from the South, meaning that even children faced the threat of mob violence. Education inequality is another clear demonstration that the Bureau's failures led to consequences lasting long after they withdrew from the South in 1868.

Historians often left the shortcomings of the Bureau out of textbooks. Most textbooks written prior to the Civil Rights Movement focused on the Klan and often left out any extensive discussion of the Bureau, especially how its failures contributed to increased levels of violence against the freedmen. As historian Elaine Parsons writes, the Klan became a convenient scapegoat for all violence against freedmen, which ignored the important role played not only by the Bureau and the army, but by individual white southerners completely unaffiliated with the Klan who also perpetrated violent actions against African-Americans for decades after the Civil War.<sup>6</sup> As Parsons writes, “Using the Klan as a stand-in for these pervasive violent practices also assigns responsibility for black oppression to the subset of southern white men who joined the Ku-Klux” and avoids giving any responsibility to the Bureau and to the army for its inability to protect the freedmen from violence, or to individual white southerners who perpetrated a large proportion of the attacks on freedmen.<sup>7</sup> In addition, textbooks with these ideas did not remain confined to the South. In fact, these ideas reached students nationwide, including in northern states that had been bastions of abolitionism.<sup>8</sup> The focus on the Klan in textbooks means that the Bureau’s role in worsening southern violence remained largely forgotten, even by northerners, and that the story of the freedmen themselves faced consignment to the shadows of history until the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s.

These four long-term consequences of Bureau failures clearly indicate that the problems with contraband camp policy during the Civil War, which went almost completely unaddressed by the Bureau, led to almost unrestricted exploitation of southern African Americans for almost a

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<sup>6</sup> Elaine Parsons, “The Cultural Work of the Ku Klux Klan in US History Textbooks, 1883-2015, in *Remembering Reconstruction: Struggles over the Meaning of America’s Most Turbulent Era*, ed. Carole Emberton and Bruce E. Baker (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2017), 250.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 237, 243, 251.

century. The institution of mandatory labor contracts led to sharecropping and other exploitative economic arrangements, the failure to institute equal justice in the courts led to convict leasing, the failure to stem violence against freedmen encouraged the rise of the Klan and other paramilitary groups, and the termination of support for freedmen's schools contributed greatly to school segregation and the large funding disparities between white and black schools.

Understanding the connections between contraband camp and Bureau policy is clearly not only essential for understanding the Civil War and Reconstruction periods, but also for understanding African American history from Reconstruction to the Civil Rights Movement.

The long-term consequences of Bureau policy also have significance in the political debates of today. The fear of dependency on the government that shaped much of Bureau policy is at the heart of the modern debates over welfare. The idea of instituting work requirements for welfare, such as food stamps, subsidized health insurance, childcare assistance, etc., reflect the Bureau's insistence that freedmen sign mandatory labor contracts to receive any support for their families, even if they had served in the military. In addition, it reflects the drastic ration cuts after the war, as the Bureau believed that the freedmen should work and support themselves rather than rely on government assistance. The idea of privatizing welfare also reflects Bureau policy. The Bureau's reliance on missionaries and private aid societies for aid such as clothing and support of education directly foreshadows the current debates on privatizing welfare, and the failures of these policies should serve as a cautionary tale. The government's attempts at welfare did not work a century and a half ago and they do not work now, which demonstrates that government welfare has improved little since the Civil War. The story of contraband camp and Bureau policy is not only a story for historians, but also a story necessary to understand very

important political and economic debates today more than a century and a half after the last Bureau agents withdrew from the South.

The stories of the contraband camps and the Freedmen's Bureau thus remain relevant today, and are essential to a complete understanding of United States history as a whole, not just Civil War or African American history. As the stories of Carter Holmes, the freedmen who petitioned against impressment in Virginia, and the numerous freedmen who filed complaints with the Bureau effectively demonstrate, contrabands and freedmen faced numerous obstacles to their very freedom, and the military and the Bureau did little to address these grievances during the nine years of civil war and Reconstruction. Their failures had consequences that carried over to the Civil Rights Movement almost a century later. The stories of the contrabands and freedmen who, from Fort Monroe in Virginia to the Sea Islands of South Carolina to the cotton fields of Mississippi to the barren sand islands of North Carolina, overcame pervasive exploitation by the federal government to assert their status as free Americans, remain vital today not just to historians and legal scholars, but to all Americans.

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