

Five generations on the
Smith Plantation.



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Family and Freedom: BLACK FAMILIES IN THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR

Upton Hill, Jamaica, 12th 1862
My dear Wife it is with grate joy
I take this time to let you know I have
been in am now in safety in the 14th
Regiment of Brooklyn this day I can
address you Thank god as a free man
I had a little trouble in getting away
but as the Lord led the children of
Israel to the land of Canaan so he led me
to a land where freedom will rive in spite
of fears and hell I see you must make your
self content I am free from the Slaves
Task and as you have chose the U.S. option
of serving the Lord I hope you will pray
for me and I will try by the help of god
to serve him with all my heart
I am with a very nice man and have
all that hart can wish but my Dear
I cant express my grate desire that I
have to see you I trust the time
will come when we I had met again
and if we don't meet on earth we will
meet in heaven there your ones

John Boston's letter to his wife, telling her of his safety.

NO EVENT IN AMERICAN HISTORY matches the drama of emancipation. More than a century later, it continues to stir the deepest emotions, and properly so. Emancipation accompanied the military defeat of the world's most powerful slaveholding class. It freed some four million slaves, a larger number than were emancipated in all other New World slave societies combined.

Born of a bloody civil war that raged for four long years (1861-65), emancipation accomplished a profound social revolution. It destroyed forever a way of life based upon the ownership of human beings, restoring to the former slaves proprietorship of their own persons, liquidating without compensation private property valued at billions of dollars, and forcibly substituting the relations of free labour for those of slavery. In designating the former slaves as citizens, emancipation placed citizenship upon new ground, defined it in the national Constitution and thenceforth removed it beyond the jurisdiction of the states. By obliterating the sovereignty of master over slave, emancipation handed a monopoly of sovereignty to the newly consolidated nation-state. The freeing of the slaves simultaneously overturned the old regime of the South and set the entire American nation upon a new course.

With emancipation in the South, the United States enacted its part in a world-wide drama. Throughout the western world and beyond, the forces unleashed by the American and French revolutions and by the industrial revolution worked to undermine political regimes based upon hereditary privilege and economic systems based upon bound labour. Slavery had already succumbed in the Northern states and in the French and British Caribbean before the Civil War, and it would shortly do so in its remaining strongholds in Spanish and Portuguese America. Almost simultaneously with the great struggle in the United States, the vestiges of serfdom in central and eastern Europe yielded to the pressure of the age. Only small pockets in Africa and Asia remained immune, and their immunity was temporary. The fateful lightning announced by the victorious Union army was soon to strike (if it had not already struck) wherever men and women remained in bonds of personal servitude.

For all systems of bondage, emancipation represented the moment of

The newly-found voices of the slaves caught up in the American Civil War, and heard through letters to their families, are a testimony to their tenacity and unity in the struggle for emancipation.

truth. The upheaval stripped away the patina of routine, exposing the conflicts that had smouldered beneath the surface of the old order. Throwing off habitual restraints, freed men and women reconstituted their lives in ways that spoke eloquently of their hidden life in bondage, revealing clandestine institutions and long cherished values. In confronting new restraints, they abandoned their customary caution in favour of direct speech and action, alive to the realisation that they were setting radically new precedents for themselves and for future generations.

Because they thrust common people into prominence, moments of revolutionary transformation have long occupied historians. While those who enjoy political power and social authority speak their minds and indulge their inclinations freely and often, their subordinates generally cannot. Only in the upheaval of accustomed routine can ordinary men and women give voice to the assumptions that guide their world as it is and as they wish it to be.

Encompassing in full measure the revolutionary implications of all transitions from bondage to freedom, emancipation in the American South has left behind an unparalleled wealth of documentation permitting direct access to the thoughts and actions of the freed men and women themselves. As the Civil War became a war for liberty, the lives of slaves and ex-slaves became increasingly intertwined with the activities of both the Union and Confederate governments. Following the war, agencies of the federal government, especially the army and the Freedmen's Bureau,

figured prominently in the reconstruction of Southern economy and society. The records created and collected by these governmental agencies and now housed in the National Archives of the United States provide an unrivalled manuscript source for understanding the passage of black people from slavery to freedom.

In these archival files, alongside official reports, hundreds of letters and statements by former slaves give voice to people whose aspirations, beliefs, and behaviour have gone largely unrecorded. Not only did extraordinary numbers of ex-slaves, many of them newly literate, put pen to paper in the early years of freedom, but hundreds of others, entirely illiterate, gave depositions to government officials, placed their marks on resolutions passed at mass meetings, testified before courts-martial and Freedmen's Bureau courts, and dictated letters to more literate blacks and to white officials and teachers. The written record thus created constitutes an unparalleled outpouring from people caught up in the emancipation process.

The Freedmen and Southern Society Project (University of Maryland) is a collaborative effort to draw upon these remarkable records to write a documentary history of emancipation in the American South. During three years of systematic research in the National Archives, the project editors made an initial selection of more than 40,000 documents (about 2 per cent of the items they examined). These documents serve as the basis for *Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation, 1861-1867*, a multi-volume history combining interpretative essays with documents. Two volumes have reached print thus far, both published by Cambridge University Press: *The Destruction of Slavery* (1985) and *The Black Military Experience* (1982). Subsequent volumes will be concerned with the wartime genesis of free labour; land, labour, and capital in the postwar South; race relations, law, and justice; and black community life, including family, religion, education, and politics.

What follows is a sample of documents regarding one aspect of the story of emancipation – slave families in the wartime struggle for freedom. As slaves, black people had worked hard to maintain the sanctity of their family life. Despite enormous difficulties, they managed to create a dense network of kinship which stood at the



Shield and motto of a Black regiment. Liberty, with the fasces — symbol of authority — hands the Union Flag to the regimental sergeant.

'Reading the Proclamation', J.W. Watts' emotive engraving of 1864.

centre of black society, not only performing the tasks of reproduction and socialisation that commonly fall to familial institutions but also giving meaning and direction to the lives of people who had no legal right to their own person or their progeny. The Civil War opened the way for slaves to put their family life on a firmer footing. When the opportunity arose, they hastily gathered their children, their parents, and other kin and fled toward safe — and, they hoped, free — ground. But the war created difficulties as well as opportunities for black families. Slaves had to balance the possibility of escape against the harsh retribution that would surely face family members left behind. Often they concluded that the only way to achieve their family's freedom was to strike out alone, with the hope of returning later as liberators. In short, wartime emancipation put black families to the test. The documents presented below reflect the dimensions of the ordeal.

The documents are transcribed exactly as written, with no correction of spelling, punctuation, capitalisation, or syntax. Extra space marks the end of unpunctuated sentences. Italicised words which are enclosed in brackets have been added by the editors; letters or words in ordinary roman type and enclosed in brackets indicate conjectural readings of illegible passages.



This day i can adress you thank god as a free man...

The free-born can perhaps never know the triumph and pain felt by the slave who gained liberty. John Boston, a Maryland slave, seized freedom early in the war by escaping to a Union army regiment, where he obtained employment as the servant of a Northern officer. This route out of slavery held less promise for women, children, and old people, who were regarded as encumbrances by an army on the march. John Boston therefore fled alone, to share with the family he left behind not only the triumph of his new freedom, but also its pain.

Upton Hill [Virginia] January the 12 1862
My Dear Wife it is with grate joy I take this time to let you know Where I am i am now in Safety in the 14th Regiment of Brooklyn this Day i can Adress you thank god as a free man I had a little truble in giting away But as the lord led the Children of Isrel to the land of Canon So he led me to a land Where fredom Will rain in spite Of earth and hell Dear you must make your Self content i am free from al the Slavers Lash and as you have chose the Wise plan Of Serving the lord i hope you Will pray Much and i Will try by the help of god To Serv him With all my hart I am With a very nice man and have All that hart Can Wish But My Dear I Cant express my grate desire that i Have to See you i trust the time Will Come When We Shal meet again And if We dont met on earth We Will Meet in heven Where Jexas ranes Dear Elizabeth tell Mrs Own[ees] That i trust that She Will Continue Her kindness to you and that god Will Bless her on earth and Save her In grate eternity My Acomplements To Mrs Owens and her Children may They Prosper through life I never Shall forgit her kindness to me Dear Wife i must Close rest yourself Contented i am free i Want you to rite To me Soon as you Can Without Delay Direct your letter to the 14th Reigment New york State malitia Uptons Hill Virginea In Care of Mr Cranford Comary Write my Dear Soon As you C Your Affectionate Husban Kiss Daniel For me

John Boston

Give my love to Father and Mother

When circumstances permitted, slave families attempted to escape bondage together. The risks were enormous because slaveowners mobilised to prevent flight and recapture runaways, but proximity to Union army lines or to federally controlled territory like the District of Columbia could improve the chances. From the first days of the war, the District served as a haven for fugitive slaves from adjacent

portions of Maryland and Virginia. However, freedom remained insecure even for those who successfully reached its borders. A military labourer who had fled slavery with his family described the re-enslavement and punishment of his mother, wife, and infant child.

[Washington, DC] 6th day of Feb. 1864 Grandison Briskoe being duly sworn says he is about 25 years of age was born in Maryland & has been married to his wife since 1861 Came to reside with his wife in this City in April - 4th day of April 1862 & has resided in said City Since that period of time except a part of the time he has been in the Service of the United States all the time & is now in Said Service in Virginia - That his wife & his mother were taken away from Washington in April (on the 7th day) 1862 & as fugitive Slaves & taken to Piscatawa to Broad Creek to their master's [farm?] whose name is John Hunter & My mothers masters name was & is Robert Hunter - They were both taken to the barn & severely whipped Their clothes were raised & tied over their heads to keep their screams from disturbing the neighborhood & then were tied up & whipped very severely whipped and then taken to Upper Marlborough to jail My wife had a Child about nine month's old which was taken from her & died soon after. Some six or eight months after my wife was imprisoned she had a Child but the inhuman master & mistress though the[y] knew she was soon to be Confined or give birth to a Child made no arrangements provided no Clothing nor anything for the Child or mother I have sent them Clothing & other articles frequently until the first or near the first of January 1864 Since which the new jailor has refused to allow them to receive any thing from me

They have been in prison for the Crime of Coming to Washington to reside, ever since about the fourth of April 1862 now a year & ten months. They are confined in Jail at Upper Marlborough Prince George's County Maryland

Grandison Briscoe

Black men and women who reached freedom behind Union lines did not rest satisfied with their own liberty. Like former slaves in other parts of the Union-occupied Confederacy, black military labourers in eastern Virginia organised an expedition to liberate families and friends left behind. Union General Edward A. Wild, whose brigade of black troops comprised ex-slaves from Virginia and North Carolina, assigned several of his soldiers to

accompany the dangerous raid and reported its outcome to his superior officer.

Newport-News, [Va.]. Sept. 1st, 1864.

Sir, I have the honor to report that some Government employees (colored) came up here from Fort Monroe and Hampton Hospitals, having been allowed a short leave of absence for the purpose of getting their families if possible. I told them I had no boats, but would help them with men. They reappeared the next day with sailboats. I sent with them a Captain and 15 men (dismounted Cavalry). The families were in and about Smithfield. I gave them strict instructions to abstain from plundering - to injure no one if possible - to get the women and children merely, and come away as promptly as possible. They were to land in the night. They followed these directions closely: but became delayed by the numbers of women and children anxious to follow, whom they packed in extra boats, picked up there, and towed along. They also had to contend against a head tide, and wind calm. So that their progress down Smithfield Creek in the early morn was exceedingly slow. The inhabitants evidently gathered in from some concerted plan of alarm or signals. For, 3 miles below, the party were intercepted by a force of irregular appearance, numbering about 100 - having horses and dogs with them; - armed variously with shot guns, rifles, &c, and posted behind old breastworks with some hurried additions. They attacked the leading boats, killed a man and woman, and wounded another woman therein. The contrabands then rowed over to the opposite bank and scattered over the marshes. How many more have been slaughtered we know not. Two (2) men have since escaped to us singly. - When the rear boats, containing the soldiers, came up, the Captain landed, with the design of attacking the rebels. But then the firing revealed their full numbers. He found they outnumbered him, more than 6 to 1, and that the *revolvers* of our Cavalry, in open boats or on the open beach, would stand no chance against their rifles behind breastworks. He embarked again, and they made their way past the danger, by wading his men behind the boats, having the baggage and bedding piled up like a barricade. They then had a race with 3 boats, which put out from side creeks to cut them off. But for the coolness and ingenuity of Capt. White-man, none would have escaped. None of the soldiers are known to have been severely wounded; but 3 are missing in the marshes and woods. We have since learned that there are signal Stations in that neighborhood - which ought to be brooken up. I would also earnestly recommend the burning of a dozen or 20 houses in accordance with your General Order No. 23. Very respectfully Your obt. Servant

Edwd A. Wild



Slave into Soldier: two photographs of Hubbard Pryor during the Civil War.

Slaves who gained freedom under the auspices of the Union army were not thereby assured of maintaining either their families or their liberty. The members of an Alabama slave family found them-

selves re-enslaved, separated, and sold to new masters in Kentucky, a Union state where slavery remained untouched by the Emancipation Proclamation or other war-time emancipation measures.

[Louisville, Ky. August 14?, 1865]
 Amy Moore Colored, being duly Sworn deposed and Says, that in the Summer of 1863 [1862] the United States Soldiers under command of Major McMillen came to her masters house in Huntsville Alabama, (her master and his family having left them) and carried away deponent together with her mother and three Sisters, that they brought us all to Nashville Tenn where we were put on board of a transport and Started for Cincinnati Ohio that when we arrived at Louisville Ky we were arrested by a man who Said he was a watchman and taken to the Slave pen on Second Street Louisville Ky and kept there two or three days when we were taken to the Depot of the Louisville and Nashville Rail Road and there another watchman

took charge of us and took us to Shepherdsville Ky and kept us confined several weeks when we were sold at auction by the Sherriff of Bullett County Ky. Dr. McKay bought deponent and paid for her the sum of Five Hundred (500) dollars James Funk bought deponents mother and youngest Sister paying Six Hundred (600) dollars for the two, and Soon after Sold her mother to Judge Hoegner who now holds her as a Slave James Shepherd bought my Sister Nora and Richard Deets bought my sister Ann, and further deponent saith that she and her mother and Sisters have been held as Slaves Since the above Sale and Still continue to be so held.
 her
 Amy X Moore
 mark

The recruitment of black soldiers into the Union army beginning late in 1862 helped speed both emancipation and Union victory. In the Union's own slave states (Delaware, Maryland, Missouri, and Kentucky), where the Emancipation Proclamation had no force, recruitment itself constituted the chief route to freedom. But it also created numerous difficulties for

black soldiers' families, who remained legally slaves. Masters manipulated their slaves' family ties to try to deter the men from enlisting, and then turned their wrath upon the relatives of slave men who joined the Union army despite threats. When Martha Glover, a Missouri slave, wrote the following letter to her husband soon after he enlisted, her troubles had in

fact only begun. Six weeks later, her master was apprehended while transporting her and her three youngest children to Kentucky for sale.

Mexico Mo. Dec 30th 1863
 My Dear Husband I have received your last kind letter a few days ago and was much pleased to hear from you once more. It seems like a long time since you left me. I have had nothing but trouble since you left. You recollect what I told you how they would do after you was gone. they abuse me because you went & say they will not take care of our children & do nothing but quarrel with me all the time and beat me scandalously the day before yesterday - Oh I never thought you would give me so much trouble as I have got to bear now. You ought not to left me in the fix I am in & all these little helpless children to take care of. I was invited to a party to night but I could not go I am in too much trouble to want to go to parties. the children talk about all you the time. I wish you could get a furlough & come to see us once more. We want to see you worse than we ever did before. Remember all I told you about how they would do me after you left - for they do worse than they ever did & I do not know what will become of me & my poor little children. Oh I wish you had staid with me & not gone till I could go with you for I do nothing but grieve all the time about you. write & tell me when you are coming.
 Tell Isaac that his mother come & got his clothes she was so sorry he went. You need not tell me to beg any more married men to go. I see too much trouble to try to get any more into trouble too - Write to me & do not foget me & my children- farewell my dear husband from your wife
 Martha

Slave men who enlisted in the Union army assumed that their military service should assure their families' freedom as well as their own. When Joseph Harris, a sergeant in the 82nd US Colored Infantry, found himself stationed in Florida, far from his Louisiana home and unable to accomplish his family's liberation, he sought the assistance of General Daniel Ullmann, who had supervised the recruitment of several black regiments in Louisiana.

Barrancas Fa. Dec 27. 1864
 Sir I beg you the granterfunction of a Small favor will you ples to Cross the Mississippi River at Bayou Sar La. with your Command & jest on the hill one mile from the little town you will finde A plantation called Mrs Marther. H. Turnbull & take a way my Farther & mother & my brothers wife with all their Childern & U take them up at your Hed Quarters. & write to me Sir thely] ar ther & I will amejeately Send after them. I wishes the Childern all in School. it is

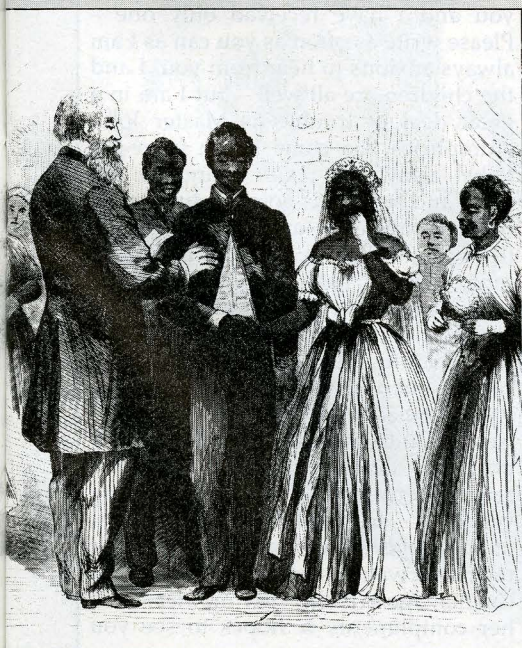
beter for them then to be their Surveing a mistes. Sir it isent mor then three or four Hours trubel I have bain trying evry sence I have bin in the servis it is goin on ner 3. years & Could never get no one to so do for me now I thinks it will be don for you is my Gen. I wishes evry day you would send after us. our Regt. ar doing all the hard fightin her we have disapointe the Rebes & surprizeed theme in all. importan pointes they says they wishes to Captuer the 82nd Regt that they woul murdar them all they Calls our Regt the Bluebellied Eagles Sir my Farthers Name Adam Harris he will Call them all to gether. & tel him to take Cousan Janes Childarn with hime

Joseph. J. Harris
Sir I will remain Ob your Soldiar in the U.S.A.

The transformation of slaves into soldiers altered the expectations of both former slaves and slaveowners. Once black men donned the Union uniform, nothing was the same. When Private Spotswood Rice, a Missouri ex-slave, learned that the woman who owned his daughter Mary refused to permit the child to visit him and charged that he had tried to 'steal' her, he exploded in anger. His letters, the first to his enslaved daughters and the second to Mary's mistress, suggest how military service made loving fathers into fierce liberators.

[St. Louis, Missouri, September 3, 1864]
My Children I take my pen in hand to rite you A few lines to let you know that I have not forgot you and that I want to see you as bad as ever now my Dear Children I want you to be contented with whatever may be your lots be assured that I will have you if it cost me my life on the 28th of the mounth. 8

Chaplain Warren of the Freedman's bureau officiating at a military wedding, Vicksburg.



hundred White and 8 hundred blacke solders expects to start up the rivore to Glasgow and above there thats to be jeneraled by a jeneral that will give me both of you when they Come I expect to be with, them and expect to get you both in return. Dont be uneasy my children I expect to have you. If Diggs dont give you up this Government will and I feel confidant that I will get you

Your Miss Kaitty said that I tried to steal you But I'll let her know that god never intended for man to steal his own flesh and blood. If I had no cofidence in God I could have confidence in her But as it is If I ever had any Confidence in her I have none now and never expect to have And I want her to remember if she meets me with ten thousand soldiers she [will?] meet her enemy I once [thought] that I had some respect for them but now my respects is worn out and have no sympathy for Slaveholders. And as for her cristianantty I expect the Devil has Such in hell You tell her from me that She is the frist Christian that I ever hard say that aman could Steal his own child especially out of human bondage

You can tell her that She can hold to you as long as she can I never would expect to ask her again to let you come to me because I know that the devil has got her hot set againsts that that is write now my Dear children I am a going to close my letter to you Give my love to all enquiring friends tell them all that we are well and want to see them very much and Corra and Mary receive the greater part of it you sefves and dont think hard of us not sending you any thing I you father have a plenty for you when I see you Spott & Noah sends their love to both of you Oh! My Dear children how I do want to see you

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[St. Louis, Missouri, September 3, 1864]
I received a leteter from Cariline telling me that you say I tried to steal to plunder my child away from you now I want you to understand that mary is my Child and she is a God given rite of my own and you may hold on to hear as long as you can but I want you to remembor this one thing that the longor you keep my Child from me the longor you will have to burn in hell and the quicer youll get their for we are now makeing up a bout one thoughtsand blacke troops to Come up tharough and wont to come through Glasgow and when we come wo be to Copperhood rabbels and to the Slaveholding rebbls for we dont expect to leave them there root near branch but we thinke how ever that we that have Children in the hands of you devels we will trie your [vertues?] the day that we enter Glasgow I want you to understand kittey diggs that where ever you and I meets we are enmays to each orthere I offered once to pay you forty dollers for my own Child but I am glad now that you did not accept it Just hold on now as long as you can and the worse it will be for you

you never in you life befor I came down hear did you give Children any thing not eny thing whatever not even a dollers worth of expences now you call my children your pro[per]ty not so with me my Children is my own and I expect to get them and when I get ready to come after mary I will have bout a powrer and authority to bring hear away and to exacute vengencens on them that holds my Child you will then know how to talke to me I will assure that and you will know how to talk rite too I want you now to just hold on to hear if you want iff your conchosence tells thats the road go that road and what it will brig you to kittey diggs I have no fears about geting mary out of your hands this whole Government gives chear to me and you cannot help yourself

Spotswood Rice

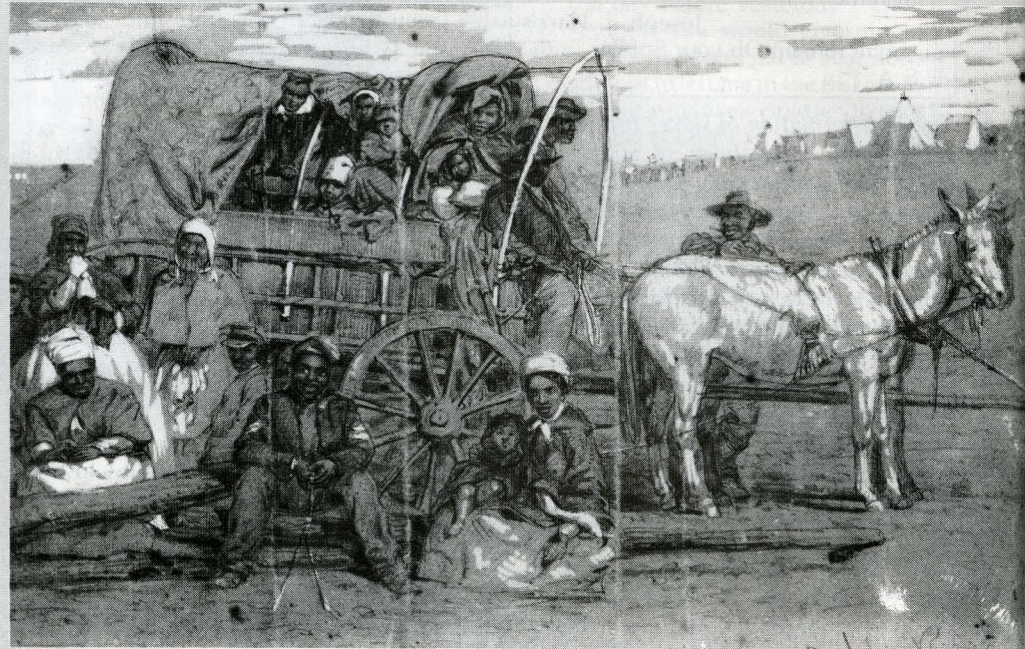
Fearing that their families would be abused by angry masters, slave volunteers brought their wives, children, and other relatives with them to the Union recruitment centres. In the Union-occupied Confederacy, many of the black soldiers' families joined earlier fugitive slaves in 'contraband camps' established by the army for ex-slaves not suited to military labour or armed service. Others were employed on plantations supervised by Union authorities, or took up residence in the shantytowns that proliferated near military posts. Some Union army officers, however, had little regard for the family ties of black soldiers and labourers and — deeming the women, children, and old people a nuisance — periodically evicted them from military camps. Private Joseph Miller, who had recently enlisted in the 124th US Colored Infantry, testified to the cruel fate of his family when they were forced out of Camp Nelson, Kentucky.

Camp Nelson Ky, November 26, 1864
Personally appered before me E. B W Restieaux Capt. and Asst. Quartermaster Joseph Miller a man of color who being duly sworn upon oath says

I was a slave of George Miller of Lincoln County Ky. I have always resided in Kentucky and am now a Soldier in the service of the United States. I belong to Company I 124 U.S.C. Inft now Stationed at Camp Nelson Ky. When I came to Camp for the purpose of enlisting about the middle of October 1864 my wife and children came with me because my master said that if I enlisted he would not maintain them and I knew they would be abused by him when I left. I had then four children ages respectively ten nine seven and four years. On my presenting myself as a recruit I was told by the Lieut. in command to take my family into a tent within the limits of the Camp. My wife and family occupied this tent by the express permission of the



Flight to Freedom: (Above) Fugitive slaves with a Black military escort in Virginia.
(Below) 'Contrabands' coming into a Union Camp, by A.R. Ward, 1862.



aforementioned Officer and never received any notice to leave until Tuesday November 22" when a mounted guard gave my wife notice that she and her children must leave Camp before early morning. This was about six O'clock at night. My little boy about seven years of age had been very sick and was slowly recovering My wife had no place to go and so remained until morning. About eight Oclock Wednesday morning November 23" a mounted guard came to my tent and ordered my wife and children out of Camp The morning was bitter cold. It was freezing hard. I was certain that it would kill my sick child to take him out in the cold. I told the man in charge of the guard that it would be the death of my boy I told him that my wife and children had no place to go and I told him I was a soldier of the United States. He told me that it did not make any difference. He had orders to take all out of Camp. He told my wife and family that if they did not get up into the wagon which he had he would shoot the last one of them. On being thus threatened my wife and children went into the wagon My wife carried her sick child in her arms. When they left the tent the wind was blowing hard and cold and having had to leave much of our clothing when we left our master, my wife with her little one was poorly clad. I followed them as far as the lines. I had no Knowledge where they were taking them. At night I went in search of my family. I found them at Nicholasville about six miles from Camp. They were in an old meeting house belonging to the colored people. The building was very cold having only one fire. My wife and children could not get near the fire, because of the number of colored people huddled together by the soldiers. I found my wife and children shivering with cold and famished with hunger They had not recieved a morsel of food during the whole day. My boy was dead. He died directly after getting down from the wagon. I know he was Killed by exposure to the inclement weather I had to return to camp that night so I left my family in the meeting house and walked back. I had walked there. I travelled in all twelve

miles Next morning I walked to Nicholasville. I dug a grave myself and buried my own child. I left my family in the Meeting house - where they still remain And further this deponent saith not

his
(Signed) Joseph Miller
mark

The war ended when the Confederacy surrendered in April 1865, but many black soldiers were not mustered out of service for months or even years. As former masters returned home and reasserted their authority, black soldiers' families became special objects of abuse.

One Louisiana black soldier received the following letter from his wife about the difficulties forced upon his family in his absence. A sympathetic officer granted the soldier a furlough to attend to his family and then, in the second letter, warned the newly organised Freedmen's Bureau that Union military authorities were unwittingly assisting erstwhile slaveowners in their persecution of black soldiers' families.

Roseland Plantation
[St. Charles Parish, La.] July 16th 1865

My Dear Husband I received a letter from you week before last and was glad to hear that you were well and happy.

This is the fifth letter I have written you and I have received only one - Please write as often as you can as I am always anxious to hear from you. I and the children are all well - but I am in a great deal of trouble as Master John Humphries has come home from the Rebel army and taken charge of the place and says he is going to turn us all out on the Levee unless we pay him (8.00) Eight Dollars a month for house rent - Now I have no money of any account and I am not able to get enough to pay so much rent, and I want you to get a furlough as soon as you can and come home and find a place for us to live in. and besides Amelia is very sick and wants you to come home and see her if possible she has been sick with the fever now over two weeks and is getting very low - Your mother and all the rest of your folks are well and all send their regards & want to see you as soon as you can manage to come - My mother sends her compliments & hopes to see you

soon

My children are going to school, but I find it very hard to feed them all, and if you can not come I hope you will send me something to help me get along

I get all the work I can and am doing the best I can to get along, but if they turn me out I dont know what I shall do – However I will try & keep the children along until you come or send me some assistance

Thank God we are all well, and I hope we may always be so Give my regards to all the boys. Come home as soon as you can, and cherish me as ever Your Aff wife

Emily Waters

*

Fort St. Philip. La. Aug. 1st, 1865
 Sir. I am an officer in a co. of 140 men. – have been with them continually Since their organization as a Co., and most of the time the Sole officer with them. Feeling an interest in the advancement and prosperity of the colored race and always sympathizing with them in their trials and Sufferings, which are now very great, owing to the peculiar condition of the country, and their people, those under my immediate charge have learned to look to me for consolation in regard to many matters not Strictly military. I always do what I can but frequently that is nothing at all. One of the most frequent complaints brought

to me is the mistreatment of Soldiers wives, and in Some cases their ejection for non-payment of rent by *returned rebels* who seem to be resuming their old positions all over the country. This of course is inhuman as well as contrary to Genl. Orders. No. 99. Hd Qrs. Dept. of the Gulf. June 30th, 1865, which declares that the families of Soldiers in the Service of the Gov't. either on land or water, Shall not be ejected for rent past due, and no collections of rent forced until further orders. . . .

My object in writing you this letter is to call your attention to a Mr. John Humphrey, who I am told is a returned rebel officer, now living on Roseland Plantation, St. Charles Parish, who is Said to have made innumerable threats and at least one attempt to put out the family of one of my Soldiers. – for *non-payment of rent*. – I gave the man a furlough and he got home just in time to find a *Provost Guard* at his house for the purpose of ousting his wife and children. These look like Strange proceedings viewed at this distance with my understanding of the law. The fact is, persecution is the order of the day amongst these returned rebels, against the colored race in general, and Soldiers families in particular. And I am grieved to Say that many wearing the U.S. uniform are too easily bought body and Soul over to the evil designs and purposes of these same individuals. It

seems to me that your Bureau and its agents are the “forlorn hope” of the colored people. – These rebels Strongly object to these agents, and declare that they will only keep up a confusion and disturbance, continually. That means that they do not intend to manifest the “good faith” for which Genl. Howard hopes, but intend to take Such a course with the colored people as will *oblige* the interference of the agents of your Bureau.

These are my views, although I owe you an apology for expressing them at Such length. If it pleases you I shall be glad to lay the frequent cases which arise in my Co. before you, as I know your voice is very potent With respect I am Your Most Obt. Servt.

Hugh P. Beach.

FOR FURTHER READING:

Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation, 1861-1867, Series 1, vol. 1, *The Destruction of Slavery*, eds. Ira Berlin, Barbara J. Fields, Thavolia Glymph, Joseph P. Reidy and Leslie Rowland; Series 2, *The Black Military Experience*, eds. Ira Berlin, Joseph P. Reidy and Leslie S. Rowland (Cambridge University Press, 1985 and 1982); W.E.B. DuBois, *Black Reconstruction in America 1860-1880* (1935, reprinted Atheneum, 1969); Herbert G. Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750-1925* (Pantheon, 1976); Leon F. Litwack, *Been in the Storm So Long: The Aftermath of Slavery* (Knopf, 1979); Willie Lee Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction: The Port Royal Experiment* (Oxford University Press, 1976).

General Wild and his brigade of Black troops liberating slaves in North Carolina.

