

Original Research Article

African American Women, War and Freedom

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ABSTRACT

In 1861, ten women from the Contrell plantation in St. James Parish, Louisiana ran away along with twenty other men [1]. Living in the woods near Bayou Faupron, four miles from the plantation house, the escaped fugitives slept on logs and pilfered livestock from the plantation for three months until they successfully escaped through the swamps to Camp Parapet located above New Orleans and controlled by Union forces [2]. Similarly, on the Manigault's family Hermitage and Gowrie plantations in Chatham County, Georgia, the fields were not only neglected during the war, but Manigault reported frequent escapes of men and women who "piloted boats through the creeks, swamps, rivulets, and marshes," and who assisted the "Yankees in their raids"[3]. Dolly, Louis Manigault's washer for eight years, whom Manigault listed as an "invalid" was among those who ran away in April 1863 while living with the Manigault family in Augusta [4].

Keywords: African, American women, War, Freedom

INTRODUCTION

The women who escaped in southern Louisiana and Low country Georgia found in their experiences and emancipatory struggles, the sources of inspiration for their own individual and collective praxis. As political actors, their actions during the war were driven by the desire for freedom, which were often times constrained by wartime policies and physical terror.

Freedom not only provided new and “socially liberated modes of being-with-others,” but it also created new opportunities to construct a liberated identity [5]. A comparative study of two sub regions, southern Louisiana and low country Georgia, provides an important window into understanding the commonalities and diverse experiences of two coastal areas where African American citizenship and labour became contested arenas after the arrival of Union forces along the coast of both regions in 1862; followed by a sustained campaign to capture key cities, Shreveport, Louisiana and Savannah, Georgia in 1864. This paper grapples with the multiplicity of women’s experiences by centring the conversation of war and freedom on free labour in southern Louisiana and self-emancipation in low country Georgia. In both regions, African American women engaged in oppositional politics, politics aimed at breaking exclusionary conceptions and creating new spaces of political action, to claim their freedom and contest marginalization [6].

Opportunities for freedom in southern Louisiana and low country Georgia were influenced by the natural landscape. The waterways, marshlands, and swamps

provided transport and refuge from cruel masters, mistresses, and overseers’ even if only temporarily. For a few, the waterways brought the largest cities of both regions New Orleans and Savannah within striking distance. In Louisiana, perennial flooding determined the physical layout of cotton, sugar, and rice plantations with nearly every plantation fronted on water by either the Mississippi River or one of the numerous bayous [7]. Slave labourer’s maintained the levees, which formed naturally [8]. Similarly, rice and Sea Island cotton plantations in low country Georgia were positioned near the region’s five large rivers: the Savannah, Ogeechee, Altamaha, Satilla, and St. Mary’s, which were vital to the growth of rice and served as the focal point for settlement [7]. The rice industry placed men and women in agricultural and non-agricultural occupations such as rice milling and grist milling. Additionally, men worked as carpenters, brick masons, and blacksmiths and they manned ferry boats, tugboats, drays, and steamboats, which sailed down the coastal rivers to transport rice and cotton to Savannah; and sugar, cotton, and rice down the Mississippi River to New Orleans [9].

In this context, freedom in both southern Louisiana and low country Georgia emerged from the military realities of the Civil War. President Lincoln’s Anaconda Plan, which imposed a naval blockade along the south eastern coast line, led to Union control of coastal territory from Virginia to Florida. The passage of the First Confiscation Act in August 1861 recognized fugitive men, women, and children who reached Union lines as “contraband of war” whose labour could be utilized to support the war

effort.¹⁰ As early as 1862 when Federal ships threatened the Georgia Sea Islands, which comprised the counties of Chatham, Liberty, McIntosh, Camden, and Glynn, enslaved men and women had escaped in the midst of what historian Clarence Mohr referred to as “refuging” [11]. Through “refuging”, planters began relocating their slaves further inland as the Union Navy blockaded the Sea Islands. In 1860, the enslaved population of this region consisted of 28,011 [12]. By the end of August 1862, the number of persons classified as contraband of war had increased to over 500 on St. Simons Island [13]. In southern Louisiana, the capture of New Orleans and Baton Rouge in April and May 1862, respectively, by naval commander David G. Farragut and General Benjamin Butler brought both cities under Union military control [14]. Farragut, a former resident of Louisiana, led an expedition of 44 ships up the Mississippi River with the intention of taking New Orleans, closing the Confederacy’s main source of supplies and severing the South. After a five-day bombardment of Fort Jackson and St. Philip near the mouth of the river, Farragut successfully took 17 ships past the forts on 24 April 1862 and two days later occupied the city of New Orleans without opposition [15]. On 1 May, General Butler brought 15,000 Federal troops to New Orleans and imposed military rule. Farragut continued up the Mississippi River and effectively captured Baton Rouge and Bayou Sara [16]. By the end of May, Union forces controlled the parishes of St. Bernard, Plaquemine’s, Jefferson, St. John, St. Charles, St. James, Ascension, Assumption, Terrebonne, Lafourche, St. Mary, St. Martin, and Orleans, including the City of New Orleans. Geographic commonalities in both regions informed the process by which Union forces recovered both areas

from the Confederacy. The Atlantic Ocean and Gulf of Mexico facilitated the Union Navy’s successful implementation of President Lincoln’s blockade to cut off commerce to both areas. Moreover, the navigable rivers, bays, and inlets in both regions were complemented by marshlands, which promoted flight and rebellion by those who were enslaved. In his study of Louisiana, C. Peter Ripley argues that the rivers, bayous, and swamps precluded the likelihood and success of running away. However, at Coco-Bend Plantation in West Feliciana Parish, disorder and chaos of war not only resulted in numerous plantation runaways through bays and inlets, which crossed the age spectrum, but also fomented the Red River uprising in 1864, which led to the deaths of several enslaved women and men [17]. In January 1864, federal gunboats had reached the mouth of the Red River, which served as a gateway to Alexandria and Shreveport. Union forces had previously launched a Red River expedition to secure large quantities of cotton in the area. As a company of Confederate Cavalry set fire to the cotton in the area along the Federal route, flames spread to the cabins of enslaved men and women. The Red River uprising in which enslaved men and women sought refuge behind Union lines, in the midst of Confederate opposition, occurred as Union forces marched through Rapides Parish in route to the Red River [18]. In the short term, hundreds of men, women, and children self-emancipated by reaching Union lines and nearly 600 African American men were accepted for army service [19].

Gendering the Confiscation Acts in Southern Louisiana

After the occupation of New Orleans and surrounding areas, army officers searched for ways to organize labour

and poor relief. The First Confiscation Act passed in August 1861, allowed for the confiscation of Confederate property, including slaves. On 13 March 1862, Congress passed legislation prohibiting the employment of Union soldiers in returning fugitive slaves to former masters. Concomitantly, the Second Confiscation Act of 17 July 1862 freed slaves coming under national control and authorized the President to use former slaves “in any military or naval service” to suppress the rebellion.²⁰ This Act also contained a provision referred to as the ‘Militia Act,’ which freed the mothers, wives, and children of freed men whose labour and service were used to suppress the rebellion [21]. The Act declared “forever free” the mothers, wives, and children of black men who had belonged to disloyal masters and then rendered service to the United States, but only if the family members were also owned by disloyal masters----a qualification that excluded the families of most border-state black soldiers since those states remained “loyal” to the Union (Maryland, Delaware, Kentucky, and Missouri) [22]. The federal government did not resolve this exclusion until March 3, 1865 when Congress, by joint resolution, provided for the freedom of the wives and children of all men serving in, or subsequently mustered into, army or navy service [23]. The Militia Act provided the official imprimatur for soldiers to claim freedom for their wives and children during the war. African American soldiers of the reorganized Union supported First Louisiana Native Guards seized horses, carts, and mules in St. Bernard Parish for the purpose of transporting men, women and children from the surrounding plantations to the city of New Orleans. In one instance, five soldiers demanded the freedom of their wives from loyal planter Mr. E. Villerie

in August 1863 [24]. Similar demands for freedom occurred in other areas of the South, particularly in the border states of the Union. In the border state of Kentucky, Mary Wilson, the wife of United States Colored Infantry (U.S.C.I.) Lewis Wilson, claimed her freedom under the Militia Act from master William Adams by leaving his plantation and setting up residence in the city of Lexington. Adams reclaimed Mary with the assistance of the city constable and “tied her in a [s] laughter house... and inflicted upon her naked body a severe beating and bruising [25]. Through these instances of on- the- ground relations, the political struggles of husbands and wives demonstrate the myriad challenges they faced in claiming freedom during the war.

The Confiscation Acts also led to the formation of the Bureau of Free labour in wartime Louisiana to address the reality of emancipation in 1862. Enslaved men and women fleeing plantations formed “contraband colonies” north of the city of New Orleans where Gen. Butler inaugurated a mass program of public works and also promised Unionists the support of the army in enforcing plantation labour in surrounding parishes provided that wages were paid [26]. The Louisiana Bureau of Free labour, the predecessor sub-agency of the Freedmen’s Bureau, managed the affairs of freed men and women employed on abandoned plantations. Under Louisiana’s first Superintendent of Negro labour, George H. Hanks, Louisiana implemented the first free labour policies, which required emancipated work in return for support. In Terre-Bonne, Louisiana, freed men received ten dollars per month; freed women received six dollars per month; and children between twelve and sixteen received two dollars per month to continue labouring on sugar, cotton, and rice plantations [27]. The devaluation of

women's labour was consistent with the formulation of nineteenth century policies which "marked" masculine identity in hegemonic and patriarchal terms.

In contrast, Julie Saville demonstrates that women in the South Carolina Lowcountry endeavoured to control agricultural production by "disputing what they would plant, where they would plant it and in what amounts." Women also demanded higher wages for task work [28]. According to Amy Dru Stanley, emancipation meant "female self-ownership" which included the right to demand fair prices for their labour [29]. On sugar and cotton plantations each labour agreement incorporated the language of "fair prices" for labour, however, government induced restrictions precluded a fair labour market place. In an ideal market, free labour removed both the legal restraints of contracts and the paternalism of the master-servant relationship [30]. During the Civil War, the Bureau of Free labour, under the auspices of the federal government, created a market in labour which contradicted free labour ideology. This contradiction undergirded federal policy during the Reconstruction period as contracts aimed to protect former slaves from exploitative former masters while concomitantly controlling the ability of former slaves to sell their labour power freely in the market [31].

From 1862 to 1865, the issue of wage labour emerged as the focus of military officials in the transition from slavery in wartime Louisiana. During the era of slavery, enslaved women in southern Louisiana laboured on plantations, worked as domestics and market women, nurtured their children, loved their husbands, and endured episodes of physical and mental terror. The enslaved female population of southern Louisiana, which comprised 23 parishes in 1860, consisted of 43, 898

women between the ages of 15 and 60 [32]. During the Civil War, as Union forces occupied much of the region, women expected and demanded fair payment for their labour. Their expectations were often at odds with former masters, mistresses, and military officials. The case of Dinah is illustrative of the conditions women faced in Union controlled New Orleans. Dinah and her three children were denied fair compensation for a day's work performed for Mr. Elin in New Orleans. According to Dinah's complaint "Mr. Elin told her he would pay her what was right. He gave her three [children] 10 cents each and refused to pay more [33]. Dinah received \$1.00 for her labour [34]. A sample of 22 registers and payrolls of freed people employed on plantations in Terre Bonne Parish from November 1863 to February 1864 indicate that the agency hired 139 women, 111 men, and 72 children to work on plantations [35]. As during their enslavement, government officials' valued women's field labour above the domestic work women performed for their families [36]. In her seminal study of black women's labour, Jacqueline Jones has demonstrated that newly emancipated women did not have the luxury of choosing between different kinds of work. Women with children found that "economic necessity bred its own kind of slavery [37].

In her study of Virginia, Mary J. Farmer argues that the Freedmen's Bureau believed that supporting black women were more acceptable than supporting black men. Black men had to find employment or face persecution as vagrants [38]. The court records from Louisiana's Bureau of Free labour indicate that vagrancy charges were levied against a significant number of women, as well as men. Women filed complaints for non-payment of wages and resisted "vagrancy" charges, which military

officials implemented to control the newly freed without regard to gender. Women resisted vagrancy charges by asserting their labour rights to the Bureau of Free labour and demanding full and fair compensation [39]. In so doing, they relied upon a culture of resistance which they had forged in their communities to survive living in a slave society.

As mothers, daughters, wives, and sisters, women had to contend with the problem of finding and keeping employment and depending upon white employers for payment. Women, such as Elizabeth White, Henrietta Henderson, Caroline Starks, Charlotte Ann Hall, and Amelie Candole, who filed complaints in New Orleans for non-payment of wages, are representative of the ways in which women resisted vagrancy charges and actively pursued their own objectives for fair compensation, economic justice, and a liberated identity [40]. While the records are not definitive on the final disposition of each case, Charlotte Ann Hall secured payment from her employer, Mrs. Pifer, for three weeks wages. In each of the cases, with the exception of Amelie Candole, the defendants were ordered to pay or appear in court [41]. Amelie Candole filed a complaint against the Recorder of the Second District, Mr. Gastnell, for “not giving her justice” in a preceding case, *State vs. Annette Denis*. Candole returned to the Recorder of the Second District for a “satisfactory statement” regarding the dismissal of the case [42].

Women were persistent in their demands for remuneration for serviced rendered. Edith Williams, for instances, worked for Mrs. Betsy Williams of New Orleans for one week for which \$3.00 was due in compensation. Williams complained that “she had been after her money several times but can’t get any

satisfaction [43]. In other instances, the economic ravages of the war impacted the ability and the will of employers to pay former slaves. Lucy Coleman worked for Martha King of New Orleans for six months at 3.00 per month. Lucy complained that Mrs. King would not pay her because “she says she has no money [44]. In other cases, children were often held as labourers against their will as parents were left demanding their release and filing complaints with the Bureau of Free labour. On 8 February 1865, for instance, Esther complained that “Madame Mad Dog will not give her child [45]. In other areas of the South, women whose children were held as bound labourers for extended periods sought to secure their children by force. In Georgia, Dorca Samuels, the mother of Nannie whose labour had been indentured for five years by Mr. Miller Hallows in 1866, attempted to end the indenture by threatening to bring “a band of freed people to take Nannie by force [46].

Employers habitually defrauded women of the small amounts they had earned as they worked to sustain themselves and their families; in several cases employers forced women to leave without recompense. Under the Bureau of Free labour’s complaint procedure, women asserted their right to full and fair compensation. Contracts, enticement, and vagrancy laws contradicted the tenets of free labour ideology, defined as the ability to sell one’s labour freely in the marketplace. Yet, these mechanisms were implemented by the Bureau to regulate the labour of former slaves. Historian James Schmidt has argued that “Union Army officers did not act solely or even centrally out of racial reasons to create a free-labour system based upon Northern ideology [47]. However, ideas regarding race and work influenced the consciousness of northerners and southerners. Racial

biases regarding contracts, apprenticeships, and exploitative wages remained firmly fixed as legal restraints on free labour. The policies promulgated by the Bureau of Free labour, which advocated contracts with former masters, can be viewed as an extension of this racial ideology [48].

The contract system developed out of the assumption that freed people would work for former planters out of economic necessity. This system had its origins in the antebellum Northern economy where ideas concerning discipline and hard work served to regulate the labour of vagrants. The Northern judicial system affirmed the right of employers to impose labour discipline with long-term contracts. The imposition of vagrancy laws and the contract system in southern Louisiana limited the ability of workers, including emancipated women, to expand the definition of rights and challenge old concepts of power. Yet, through acts of escape and through their engagement with the Bureau of Free labour courts, women engaged in oppositional politics to redefine freedom and citizenship.

Freedom and War in Lowcountry Georgia

In Lowcountry Georgia, the chaos of the war created a digetic layered back story for a large segment of enslaved women in this region who experienced defacto freedom by escaping in the first two years of the war. These women displayed a keen sense of the binary structure of slavery and freedom. Despite what historian Stephanie H.M. Camp refers to as women's "spatial illiteracy," women in Lowcountry Georgia demonstrated a familiarity with the landscape and waterways and expressed a determined will to use flatboats and "dug-outs" to facilitate escape [49]. Strategies of escape brought women into spaces where they re-conceptualized

the very meaning of political leadership to claim their freedom. In one poignant escape, a seventy-year-old Georgia woman used the marshlands to conceal her twenty-two children and grandchildren. Securing a flatboat, the emancipating fugitives drifted forty miles down the Savannah River reaching a Union gunboat to claim their freedom [50]. Under the terms of the Second Confiscation Act, this grandmother and her children and grandchildren were free and could be used "in any military or naval service" to suppress the rebellion [51]. Such service often included serving as cooks, laundresses, and providing other forms of labour support. The arrival of Union forces in 1862 led to more escapes in the Lowcountry than at any other period during the war [52].

The Emancipation Proclamation, issued on 1 January 1863, broadened the scope of the Second Confiscation Act by sanctioning the enlistment of African American men in the Union Army. However, the Proclamation had very little immediate impact on freeing slaves in Lowcountry Georgia since many had taken advantage of the chaos caused by the war to free themselves prior to 1863. In fact, General David Hunter's General Order No. 11 issued on 9 May 1862 had declared freedom to all slaves living in Florida, Georgia, and South Carolina [53]. Although President Lincoln rescinded the order two weeks later, Hunter's order furthered the cause of freedom among emancipating women who faced death from Confederate picket fire. Fanny, "a mulatto woman, a soldier's wife, and company laundress" escaped from the mainland near Liberty County in a boat with her two children. As she made her way through the marshes, swamps, and rivulets, her youngest child was shot dead in her arms prior to reaching Union lines [54]. The

barrage of bullets which met self-emancipating women compelled them to locate hiding spaces in nearby woods where they remained for months seeking refuge before attempting an escape to Union lines [55].

In 1863, federal policy mandated the conscription of Sea Island men by Union forces, which inured these men to fight with the all black regiments raised in South Carolina and Georgia [56]. During June 1863, military officials inaugurated a special draft for the Third South Carolina Volunteers on Ossabaw Island and Fort Pulaski in Georgia; and Fernandina, Florida on Georgia's southern border [57]. The Third South Carolina Volunteers combined with the newly formed Fourth and Fifth South Carolina Volunteers to form the Twenty-First U.S. Colored Troops (U.S.C.T). The Twenty-First U.S.C.T. numbered slightly over 300 men until December 1864 when its ranks increased with additional men who mustered into service during General William Sherman's trek to Savannah [58].

In June 1863, the Fifty-fourth Massachusetts Regiment combined with General David Hunter's South Carolina Volunteers to form a special force sent on an expedition up the Altamaha River against Darien [59]. As Union troops, led by Colonel Robert Gould Shaw of the Fifty-Fourth Massachusetts Regiment, burned the city of Darien, Nancy, an aged African born woman, asserted that she would not endure a second voyage on the "big water" and chose to remain in the ruins of Darien's destruction [60]. Union forces occupied abandoned cities such as Brunswick and Darien where women's marketing activities increasingly met the needs of U.S. Naval ships near St. Simon's Island. On St. Simon's Island, the contraband population, which reached 500 by May 1862, had become self-sufficient. The Commander of U.S.

Naval forces, J.R. Goldsborough, permitted emancipated women to sell goods and provide services such as washing for recompense to Union men [61]. Women were paid four cents to 15 cents for produce such as milk, eggs, okra, and squash.

Military camps were based upon a discourse of civic militarism, which excluded women as the language of military posters was grounded in the language of black masculinity [62]. In one such poster, the statement "all Negroes brought inside the lines at this place, will immediately on their arrival here, before any papers are drawn up, enlisting them as soldiers, be reported at the Provost Office in person" masked the presence of women behind Union lines [63]. Such military recruitment posters embodied the micro techniques of power, such as laws, policies, and organizational norms and practices, to marginalize the presence of black women [64]. Women challenged the invisibility prescribed by military policies through their individual and collective actions as escape transformed women into emancipating "soldiers" of war and freedom. For instance, in late December 1863, thirteen fugitives from McIntosh County, Georgia, boarded the U.S.S. Fernandina in St. Catherine's Sound. Led by a twenty-seven-year-old fugitive named Cain, the group had escaped from William King's plantation like most of the escapees. Accompanying Cain was twenty-two-year-old Bella; twenty-five-year-old Lizzie, and thirty-two-year-old Sallie who each escaped with their children [65]. Early in 1864, Cain left the Fernandina to rescue his relatives from the vicinity of Sunbury, Georgia. He returned on January 7, along with ex-slave Sam, bringing forty-five-year-old Grace and her five children; her son-in-law Charley, and her grandchildren [66]. Free blacks from Darien, Georgia likewise reached

the Union lines together with those who were escaping slavery [67]. Approximately two-thirds of the would-be-escapees were women who were “mustered” into service [68].

Behind Union lines, women served as cooks, nurses, and seamstresses. As the case of Susie King Taylor illustrates, women also served as educators to soldiers of the U.S.C.T. Literate former slaves like Susie King Taylor and her husband, Sergeant Edward King of Darien performed much of the educational work in military camps and established a troupe of educational leadership which allowed men, women, and children to begin or expand their formal education [69].

In both Lowcountry Georgia and southern Louisiana, literate black women, along with white missionaries, educated formerly enslaved men, women, and children. By 1869, 8,415 pupils received an education in Georgia at Freedmen’s Bureau schools [70]. Similarly, in Louisiana, black teachers, such as Caroline and Edmonia Highgate in New Orleans, initiated educational efforts at churches, homes, sheds, stores, and white schoolhouses during the war. By 1864, 8,761 students in southern Louisiana had received an education [71].

Attempts toward liberation in many areas of the Lowcountry were often characterized by violence. Confederates viewed the act of escaping as overt rebellion against the authority of slave owners and as acts of insurrection. Confederate soldiers met the advance of Union pickets by retaliating against African Americans in the vicinity. In one instance, Confederate soldiers from Fort Chapman in South Carolina, burned a plantation home on Hutchinson Island near Savannah and murdered and terrorized over one hundred men, women and children in the area [72]. These frequent skirmishes

between Union and Confederate forces in the Lowcountry placed women in precarious positions and underscored the virulent nature of warfare. Confederate soldiers, responding to drum beating at night on the north end of Hutchinson Island, opened fired with the expectation that Union soldiers were on the Island. Union soldiers had left the Island a week earlier and malevolent Confederate forces killed 15 men, women, and children [73].

Throughout the war, diseases contributed to the mortality of black women. The cycle of life and death continued unabated as women gave birth and unyielding diseases consumed young and old. At Hermitage and East Hermitage plantations, seven women gave birth during the early years of the war [74]. While precise figures on mortality rates for black women in Lowcountry Georgia are difficult to determine, Louis Manigault, who served as medical assistant to Confederate surgeon Joseph Jones, reported deaths from the following conditions at Gowrie and East Hermitage plantations: dropsy, sunstroke, cancer in the stomach, and dysentery from 1861-1864. The most severe affliction occurred in the years preceding the Civil War when a virulent cholera epidemic swept through Gowrie plantation [75]. On the field and behind Union and Confederate lines, camp fevers, typhus fevers, and common fevers comprised the most prevalent wartime medical conditions. This issue led S.P. Moore, Surgeon General of the Confederate States of America to task Joseph Jones with instituting extended treatment of fevers and studying the relationship of climate and soil to disease. Fevers were associated with malaria, the foremost cause of morbidity among northern and southern troops [76].

The arrival of Gen. Sherman's army in Georgia provided an additional opportunity for women to claim their freedom. The capture of Atlanta in September 1864, following Confederate Gen. John Bell Hood's evacuation, led Sherman to propose to Gen. Grant a destructive march across Georgia to force Confederate capitulation [77]. As Sherman marched through central Georgia in November 1864, 19,000 men, women, and children left the plantations to follow his army [78]. Before the capture of Atlanta, General Sherman received some indication of what he might expect in the execution of his plan to cut and burn a path up to sixty miles wide through central and southern Georgia to Savannah. Wherever he encountered African Americans, a considerable following of women joined in what they considered a march for freedom [79]. Sherman's Special Field Order No. 120, issued on 9 November 1864, endorsed the use of "able bodied Negroes" in the march through central Georgia who would comprise a "pioneer battalion" to repair and reinforce roads as they followed the advance-guard [80].

Gen. Sherman divided his army into two wings: the right wing, Army of Tennessee, commanded by Major-General Oliver Otis Howard; and the left wing, Army of Georgia, commanded by Major-General Henry W. Slocum. According to Major Slocum, who commanded the Fourteenth and Twentieth Corp of the left wing of the Army of Georgia (the section closest to the Savannah River and to South Carolina), "I think at least 14,000 of these people joined the two columns at different points on the march, but many of them were too old and infirm, and others too young, to endure the fatigues of the march, and therefore were left in the rear. More than one-half of the above number, however, reached the coast

with us. Many of the able-bodied men were transferred to the officers of the Quartermaster and subsistence departments, and others were employed in the two corps as teamsters, cooks and servants [81]. While Slocum's description masks the presence of women, the meta-language of his description suggests that not only men, but women and children were among the young and "too old and infirm [82].

The large number of women following the Union Army led to drastic measures at river and creek crossings to reduce the number of refugees. One Union officer illustrated these measures by writing, "when the lower and less fruitful lands were reached, the embarrassment and military annoyance increased. This was more particularly felt in the left wing, which was then the only one exposed to the attacks of the enemy. Losing patience at the failure of all orders and exhortations to these poor people to stay home, Gen. Davis (now commanding the Fourteenth Corps), ordered the pontoon bridge at Ebenezer Creek to be taken up before the refugees who were following that corps had crossed, so as to leave them on the further bank of the unavoidable stream and thus dis-embarrass the marching troops...those who could not swim as well as those who could swim, were drowned. The loss of life was still great enough to prove that...it was literally preferable to die free rather than to live slaves [83]. Sherman defended the actions of Gen. Davis as "militarily necessary" thus reconciling emancipating women's moral quest for freedom with his desire to reach the sea. Northern newspapers reported that hundreds of refugees had drowned or were re-enslaved [84]. Gen. Slocum's left wing was under constant harassment from Confederate forces (Gen. Joseph Wheeler's Calvary Corp of the Army of

Tennessee). The Confederate general believed this harassment led Union forces to abandon African Americans at Ebenezer Creek [85]. Precise figures on the number of African Americans who followed Sherman's army remain difficult to determine. Some women joined for brief intervals, became discouraged, and returned to their homes. Many found it difficult to associate freedom with the harsh measures applied by General Sherman's troops on their way to the sea. Frequently the inherent racism of many Union soldiers prevailed to give a grim view of what the future promised. When such treatment was encountered, African American soldiers of war and freedom turned away from the jubilant march and awaited an uncertain future [86].

As in other areas of the former Confederacy, the Civil War devastated much of the state of Georgia. Widespread destruction of physical structures, including hundreds of miles of railroads, and an economic depression, inherent in the ravages of war, left women destitute and in need of food, clothing, and medical care [87]. One month after Sherman's occupation of Savannah in December 1864, Sherman issued Gen. Field Order No. 15, which reserved the Sea Islands and abandoned inland rice fields for former slaves. Sherman and other Union officers were under investigation by Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton for acts of cruelty against African American refugees. The issuance of Field Order No. 15, after meeting with African American religious leaders in Savannah, represented Sherman's effort to recast him as amiable to the cause of freedom, while simultaneously jettisoning the newly emancipated from the lines of the Union Army. Women, who were head of household, received from five to forty acres of "abandoned land" under Sherman's order [88]. On Grove

Hill and Grove Point plantations near Savannah, 16 women held possessory title to 161 acres of land. By comparison, 63 men received possessory title to 834 acres of land at Grove Hill and Grove Point plantations [89]. In 1860, this area had a population of 2,435 slaves and 411 whites [90]. The reversal of Gen. Sherman's Field Order No. 15 by President Andrew Johnson in May 1865 failed to disabuse former slaves in Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Florida of the idea of receiving forty acres of land as compensation for enslavement [91].

At the close of the war, the Federal government imposed military rule on the state of Georgia in accordance with President Lincoln's Reconstruction policy, which lasted until 1 November 1865. Louisiana, Tennessee, Arkansas, and parts of Virginia met the requirements of Lincoln's Ten Percent Plan and were re-admitted to the Union prior to the end of the war. The execution of new state constitutions abolishing slavery and ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment reinstated the remaining seven states by the end of 1865. For many former slaves, economic retribution and access to the franchise constituted the only means by which they could resist marginalization in the post-Confederate South [92]. While the city of Savannah was physically intact, it was desolate in spirit and desperately poor [93]. Thousands of African American refugees, including a significant number of women, wandered aimlessly in need of food, shelter, and clothing. Sherman sought help from General Rufus Saxton in Beaufort, who was overwhelmed by 15,000 refugees [94].

Name	Acreage	Family Size
Hannah Butler	5	3
Jane Jones	6	3
Lucy Wilson	10	4
Mary Bush	30	3
May Anderson	10	7
Tina Jones	5	5
Jane Hargrave	10	3
Susannah Gordon	10	2
Polly Burroughs	10	2
Hannah Davis	10	4
Dinah Green	15	3
Lucy Barnard	15	5
Amy Wilkins	5	1
Rosanna Edwards	10	3
Susie Wright	5	3
Catsey Cheves	5	5

Table 1: Possessory Land Titles Issued to Women at Grove Hill and Grove Point Plantations, March-April 1865.

Source: List of Possessory Titles Issued to Freed people, Records of A.P. Ketchum, Savannah, Ga., Record Group 105, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, National Archives Building, Washington, D.C.

Saxton suggested soldiers from a black regiment protect the islands of St. Simons in Georgia and Edisto in South Carolina, which would also serve as refuge for the homeless. General Sherman accepted the suggestion as meritorious, especially for women, believing that most, if not all able bodied men could be put to work by the quartermaster corps as mechanics. Women aided the quartermaster corp by serving as laundresses and cooks [95].

The wartime experiences of emancipated women in southern Louisiana and Lowcountry Georgia provide invaluable insights into both slavery and the Civil War. Their escape, military service, and demands for economic retribution underscore the importance of freedom and citizenship as they endeavoured to establish a liberated identity for themselves. In both regions, women seized their freedom before 1863, in some cases without direct assistance from Union soldiers, and struggled against wartime polices that often negated their activism and masked their presence. The complex inter-relationships of gender, class, and race produced varied responses as emancipation required finding ways to give meaning to freedom within a society devoted to circumscribing the attempts of African American women to assert their freedom. The myriad challenges they faced during the war represented distilled expressions of freedom and a desire for economic justice.

In southern Louisiana and Lowcountry Georgia, emancipated women lived within a patriarchal system of labour and citizenship that limited their freedom. Low wages and legal battles placed women at a disadvantage; however, their labour aided their families and communities. Through the contract system in Louisiana and access to abandoned lands in Georgia women were able in the short term to improve their condition. Although they derived marginal economic benefits from their labour in the immediate aftermath of the Civil War, Louisiana women were persistent in their demands for full and fair compensation and the Bureau of Free labour adjudicated a significant number of cases in their favour. In Georgia, women made it through the “terror of emancipation” and secured remuneration from Federal troops as market women providing goods and services

during the war [96]. Women, like men, maintained deep-seated aspirations to invest in land. Land was a tangible manifestation of their independence as well as an asset that might strengthen kinship and family ties. However, single and widowed women, particularly in rural areas, found it difficult to purchase land because of low wages and familial responsibilities. In spite of economic hardships, African American women in Savannah-Chatham County became landowners. By 1876, 117 African American women in Chatham County, most of who were ex-slaves, owned land [97]. Gaining access to land at the conclusion of the war represented an end to emancipation and the beginning of an uncertain future.

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