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Analyzing the Relationship Between Aid Agencies and the Union Army in Civil War Arkansas from 1862 to 1865

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ANALYZING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN AID AGENCIES AND THE UNION ARMY IN CIVIL WAR ARKANSAS FROM 1862 TO 1865

By

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Abstract

This thesis examines the administration of Arkansas's contraband camps. The Union Army originally failed Black refugees in their quest for freedom as it was unprepared for the large number of African Americans seeking protection and guidance from the army. Arkansas historians have analyzed the effect the war had on the state as a whole and the operation of the Freedmen's Bureau, but none of these works detail the various agencies that worked with federal authorities. This thesis follows the Western Sanitary Commission and the American Missionary Association as they assisted the federal government by providing supplies and forming partnerships with the Union Army. This research provides coverage in the history of Civil War Arkansas by studying the humanitarian crisis during the war years and examining how agencies interacted with U.S. forces on behalf of Black refugees in Arkansas. "Analyzing the Relationship Between Aid Agencies and the Union Army in Civil War Arkansas from 1862 to 1865" employs agency reports, letters, Freedmen's Bureau communications, and WPA interviews to assess the aid offered in Arkansas's Civil War contraband camps.

Keywords: Civil War, Arkansas, Freedpeople, Western Sanitary Commission, Emancipation, African Americans

Table of Contents

List of Illustrations

Introduction

The Civil War and the emancipation of African Americans created a pivotal moment in African American history. While emancipation was a step forward, no entity was prepared to ensure a smooth process for emancipation. The transition of African Americans from enslaved to free took place hand in hand with a humanitarian disaster caused by disease, Confederate attacks, and mismanagement by Union authorities. The U.S. Army was not the appropriate entity to handle the crowds of African American refugees. The Union Army was unprepared and sometimes worsened the conditions of the freedpeople until the war department created a dedicated agency to aid with the issue. During the Civil War, Arkansas housed various contraband camps that were communities for runaway African Americans. These camps provided centers of community and a measure of relief for African Americans as they prepared for their lives after slavery. African Americans had to navigate unprecedented circumstances and battle the hardships of Union camps. They learned to read and write, participated in religious gatherings, married, gardened, and joined in other activities often prohibited while enslaved. These contraband camps became the places that provided African Americans with their first glimpse at life beyond slavery and housed their push for self-sufficiency.

The complications of emancipation and unrealized goals for the contraband camps, however, created tension and hardship. While African Americans managed day-to-day with the dangers of contraband camps, the Union Army also frequently shifted their policies for handling these refugee African Americans. The government established contraband camps in Union lines to manage these refugees until a proper solution

presented itself. Initially, the Union returned runaway African Americans to their enslavers. It was not until August 1861 that the Union Army and the United States Government changed the policy and began using the refugees to perform labor to aid the army. As a result, contraband camps grew inside Union lines to accommodate the growing runaway slave population. Several contraband camps appeared throughout the United States to address the situation of the refugees seeking Union aid. Some of the most notable camps are Camp Nelson, Kentucky, Helena, Arkansas, and Hampton, Virginia.

Several refugee camps for African Americans appeared throughout Arkansas in DeValls Bluff, Fort Smith, Helena, Little Rock, Magnolia, and Pine Bluff. Helena receives the most focus in the historiography of the Civil War due to its proximity to the Mississippi River and the fighting that occurred in the lower Mississippi River Valley. The other camps in Arkansas benefitted from river access, but none sat directly on the Mississippi River. Still, for those seeking refuge in the contraband camp at Helena, life was a struggle. Overcrowding of the city placed a strain on the Union's ability to help African Americans. While Helena was the most notorious for its conditions, that does not mean other contraband camps fared much better. Little Rock could be called the most successful due to the Union's constant presence and security for Black refugees throughout the war, while Pine Bluff had the best facilities for the freedpeople. DeValls Bluff served as a recruitment center for African American regiments, but still, the city had enough refugees seeking care to justify facilities for African Americans. Yet, in each of the locations, multiple complications arose inside the refugee camps that challenged

Union authorities. In addition to overcrowding, Union personnel struggled against frequent outbreaks of illnesses and supply shortages.

The formerly enslaved endured poor camp conditions in hopes of realizing a new beginning after the war. Contraband camps provided more than just shelter for refugee African Americans, these camps also provided them with jobs, education, enlistment in the army, and the chance for self-sufficiency. The contraband camps became centers for recruitment for the Union Army, with several regiments for the United States Colored Troops (USCT) being mustered into service. Those who could not enlist, due to their gender, age, or illness, earned wages working for the army by performing general tasks essential for survival inside the camps. Men did not contribute to the effort toward freedom alone. Women also supported the Union Army. Examining the harsh conditions highlights refugees' struggles and the early shortcomings of the military. Black Arkansans saw the war as their path to freedom. There was no time away from trying to survive and no time to rest from their traumatic experiences in slavery. Contraband camps in the minds of African Americans should have been places of refuge. Yet contraband camps did not provide adequate care or facilities to fleeing African Americans trying to survive the war. The emergence of aid agencies in Arkansas improved the functionality of Arkansas's contraband camps by providing needed assistance and supplies.

The historiography of contraband camps and emancipation during the Civil War has steadily grown. As the scholarship on this topic expands, various historians have made arguments about the complexities of contraband camps and slaves' experiences during this time. Little discussion has explored the harsh reality of experiences inside the

camps. Previous scholarship celebrates the process of emancipation, casts the Union Army as a grand liberating force, and lends itself to the idea that the African American experience in contraband camps was an ideal first step from slavery towards freedom. More recent historiography points out that contraband camps provided scarce opportunities for African Americans seeking freedom while forced to navigate the dangers of relying on the Union Army. As will be discussed below, historian Jim Downs uncovers the failings of the United States government's handling of contraband camps. Downs contends that the government's inadequate policies were responsible for the failure of contraband camps and caused unnecessary deaths. Amy Murrell Taylor has a less critical opinion on the government's handling of contraband camps but also emphasizes that African Americans were trying to survive and navigate uncertain paths that were partially due to the U.S. Army's shifting military policies. Chandra Manning analyzes the trials that slaves experienced when making their way to contraband camps and describes the environment of those camps. Manning contends that contraband camps provided ample resources and opportunities for African Americans to engage in becoming citizens. This thesis explores the struggles faced by Black refugees from slavery in a sample of Arkansas's contraband camps to assess the role of the U.S. Army and outside agencies in handling the humanitarian crisis to weigh in on how bleak the transition from slavery to freedom was.[1]

Self-Taught: African American Education in Slavery and Freedom by Heather Andrea Williams, published in 2005, does not focus on the military side of contraband

[1] Jim Downs, *Sick from Freedom: African-American Illness and Suffering During the Civil War and Reconstruction,* Amy Murrell Taylor, *Embattled Freedom: Journeys through the Civil War's Slave Refugee Camps,* Chandra Manning, *Troubled Refuge: Struggling for Freedom in the Civil War*.

camps. Instead, Williams makes a connection early in her work between emancipation and education among African Americans and the importance of being literate. Williams' work focuses on what education meant and how to achieve it for African Americans during pre- and post-emancipation eras. Williams details the struggles of African Americans in securing an education. While this deviates from the purpose of this thesis, the beginning of her work touches on the connection made between emancipation, education, and freedom. Williams examined how African Americans became creative in their efforts to become literate and "provided a rich context for their eagerness to attend schools."[2] Williams's work is more of a social history focusing on the actions of select literate individuals to form the bulk of her narrative. Most African Americans under slavery were not taught how to read and write, shielding them from the written world. For African Americans, "access to the written world, whether scriptural or political, revealed a world beyond bondage" where they could imagine their life as completely different from slavery.[3] Williams contends that their determination to become literate transformed into constructing schoolhouses "while they tackled the physical challenges of hunger, disease and homelessness."[4] Williams states that "acquiring literacy in conjunction with freedom had the potential to open access to democratic political activity."[5] Literacy, among other possibilities, represented citizenship to African Americans.

One of the most groundbreaking and controversial works on the experiences in contraband camps is Jim Downs's *Sick from Freedom: African-American Illness and*

[2] Heather Andrea Williams, *Self-Taught: African American Education in Slavery and Freedom* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 1.
[3] Williams, *Self-Taught,* 7.
[4] Williams, *Self-Taught,* 30.
[5] Williams, *Self-Taught,* 69.

Suffering During the Civil War and Reconstruction, published in 2012, argues emancipation was not a joyful process for African Americans as the transition from enslaved to free encompassed several hardships. Downs suggests that the United States military was unprepared for the volume of slaves that fled to Union lines. Downs opens the book with the shocking experience of Joseph Miller, an African American, and his family escaping slavery to introduce what many slave families experienced when they crossed Union lines. When the Millers came into the contraband camp, Joseph was required to enlist in the service in turn for a promise to protect his family. This promise was broken, leading to Miller pleading for his family to stay, when a Union official threatened to "shoot the last one of them" if they did not vacate and Miller watched helplessly as his family left.[6] Miller deserted to seek out his family, and one by one, the family passed away after they were turned away from Union lines. Downs argues the "Miller family did not experience liberation from chattel slavery as a jubilee, but rather as a continuous process of displacement, deprivation, and ultimately death."[7] When the Union recognized that emancipation was going to be a necessary component of winning the war, emancipation had to be effective "in terms of the economic, legal, political, and social consequences" and paying no attention to possible human consequences.[8]

Amy Murrell Taylor focuses on the failures of the military while weaving narratives of African Americans in contraband camps into her book. Taylor's *Embattled Refuge: Journeys through the Civil War's Slave Refugee Camps*, published in 2018, focuses on the experiences of African Americans in contraband, or refugee, camps.

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[6] Jim Downs, *Sick from Freedom: African-American Illness and Suffering During the Civil War and Reconstruction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 19.
[7] Downs, *Sick from Freedom,* 21.
[8] Downs, *Sick from Freedom,* 22.

Taylor's goal is to "reimagine a physical landscape that can no longer be seen," by examining camps in Hampton, Virginia, Helena, Arkansas, and Camp Nelson, Kentucky.[9] Taylor explores the search for freedom in a war and emphasizes the slow-moving process of emancipation in military-sponsored camps.[10] Taylor's work covers the journeys of three individuals from each of the camps she analyzes. This includes the stories of Edward and Emma Whitehurst in Virginia, who established a store that would be pillaged by McClellan's army; Eliza Bogan in Arkansas, who constantly witnessed death and disease; and Gabriel Burdett, who created a ministry and became an assistant superintendent of the Refuge Home in Camp Nelson, Tennessee.

Taylor argues that "the provision of shelter to refugees was not something for which the army was entirely prepared when the war began."[11] Taylor's argument coincides with Downs's argument that the military was the wrong entity to handle the issues of contrabands to begin with. Taylor's study of the new military history that has been exploding in recent years consistently connects the struggles in refugee camps to the policies of the United States government. Essentially, there could not be contraband camps without the military's involvement because the military was involved in every step of military emancipation and refugee camps. The military provided second-hand tents to the refugees and even began having African American men use old lumber to build accommodations for the refugees. Military officials feared giving the refugees too many liberties. There was a general fear of "what the refugees might do if left to their own

[9] Amy Murrell Taylor, *Embattled Freedom: Journeys through the Civil War's Slave Refugee Camps* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018), 7.
[10] Taylor, *Embattled Freedom*, 8.
[11] Taylor, *Embattled Freedom*, 63.

devices and preferred that the path to independence be a controlled one."[12] Taylor examines how African American women, children, and men unfit for military service went to work for the military and earned wages working crops. African Americans working in these refugee camps provided aid for the Union Army, which now had a viable workforce to do some menial jobs.

Still, no aspect of emancipation was free from struggles. The military occasionally withheld food from refugees and exposed them to "one of the more grim realities of wartime emancipation."[13] Taylor argues that food had become a weapon in Union lines and was not freely distributed. The idea of food shortages and starvation is a parallel between enslavement and time in refugee camps because this was nothing new. While enslaved, African Americans were fed little, although some were occasionally allowed gardens by their owners. In time, refugees planted gardens to survive the widespread starvation in these camps. Gardening was not an easy task because the frequent relocation of the camps and the threat of war could impede gardening.

Chandra Manning's *Troubled Refuge: Struggling for Freedom in the Civil War*, published in 2016, examines the new opportunities for African Americans inside contraband camps with access to education, but also with the journeys some slaves took to make it to those contraband camps. Manning covers how African American participation was an important part in ending the war and how they shaped emancipation. Manning's work laid the groundwork for more analysis and study around contrabands and their efforts to assist the Union Army and shape emancipation. Manning analyzes the relationship between African Americans and the federal government in contraband

[12] Taylor, *Embattled Freedom*, 71.
[13] Taylor, *Embattled Freedom*, 140.

camps. For many, their experiences in the camps were the first time African American men, women, and children interacted with the federal government. Manning breaks down the experiences of their lives, their objectives, and the obstacles by these people, to examine the relationship between the eastern and western contraband camps.[14] Manning explains that contraband camps were a unique experience for African Americans and explores the hostilities African Americans faced as they "constituted their own distinct moment" to make sense of the war and emancipation.[15] Manning states that contraband camps enabled growth for African Americans. African Americans could spend the day sewing and focus on improving their literacy through menial labor.

Manning analyzes previous structures of social relations that were broken to allow the new identity of African Americans and its relation within military emancipation in these camps. Manning explores how former slaves knew they needed to form relationships with the government that would create a "combination of" inclusion and rights protection because these basic rights were not provided by emancipation.[16] Manning examines how freedpeople hoped they would have "permanent emancipation, education, mobility, access to courts, family rights," among others wants after the war.[17] The unknown of emancipation for African Americans was worrisome, but it was about gaining autonomy and independence they lacked while enslaved. It was a complete rebuilding process from the ground up because there had been no framework about what emancipation should or should not have done or even what emancipation should grant.

[14] Chandra Manning, *Troubled Refuge: Struggling for Freedom in the Civil War* (New York: Vintage Press, 2016), 7.
[15] Manning, *Troubled Refuge*, 9.
[16] Manning, *Troubled Refuge*, 205.
[17] Manning, *Troubled Refuge*, 242.

African Americans knew they needed a source of power to help them with their newly gained freedom and civil authority to replace the army after the Civil War.[18] Freedpeople believed they needed the power of the government on their side to protect them from white resistance.

Williams, Downs, Taylor, and Manning argue the various experiences of African Americans during the war. Williams' work focuses specifically on education in contraband camps, while Taylor and Manning support the argument that education played an important role in these camps for African Americans. Manning and Downs offer generalized narratives focusing on camps throughout the country and Taylor focuses on three specific contraband camps. While related, Downs' work differs from Taylor and Manning by exploring the various ways the military failed with emancipation and their handling of refugeed African Americans. Taylor focuses on how African Americans faced the challenges of military emancipation and struggled to survive contraband camps. Manning concludes that contraband camps provided African Americans with the autonomy they desired. Clearly, there is not a true consensus among historians on how the contraband experience.

In Arkansas, the experience of contraband camps depended on their location within the state. Black Arkansans in contraband camps began to recognize these camps were not ideal places. They faced hardships of disease, death, and struggle. Their focus had to switch to survival inside these contraband camps as the original dream of refuge faded. Many Black Arkansans viewed the contraband camps as a necessary step towards freedom, yet these camps were often as challenging as slavery. The choice was theirs and

[18] Manning, *Troubled Refuge*, 278.

Black Arkansans gained a voice with emancipation and autonomy. There was no escape from the war inside contraband camps and the threat of violence always loomed. The potential for a Confederate attack was always lurking in the background even in Union lines, creating constant worry for African Americans. Food, clothing, and other necessities were scarce, and the military could not keep up with the added demand. Several factors played into the failures of contraband camps and how they did not prepare African Americans for a life after slavery. The army's designs for the contraband camps might not have been to prepare African Americans for a life away from slavery, but African Americans saw them as the place they would earn autonomy for themselves.

While Williams, Downs, Taylor, and Manning offer generalized works, regional historians, such as Thomas Staples, Carl H. Moneyhon, Mark K. Christ, and Thomas A. DeBlack have focused on the war in Arkansas. Thomas Staples's *Reconstruction in Arkansas, 1862-1874,* published in 1923, focuses on the federal presence in Arkansas during the war and Reconstruction. Staples argues that Reconstruction in Arkansas was a spontaneous and chaotic process while determining the extent of federal authorities in the state and managing Black Arkansans. Staples follows the appointment of Union General John W. Phelps as military governor of Arkansas and the organization of Union men to create a new state constitution.[19] Arkansas incubated strong Union support throughout the state and benefitted from federal authorities. The Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands (BRFAL), or the Freedmen's Bureau, deployed several military officials to oversee Black refugees throughout the state. The Freedmen's Bureau managed employment opportunities for Black Arkansans in districts throughout the state

[19] Thomas S. Staples, *Reconstruction in Arkansas, 1862-1874* (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith Publishing, 1964), 9, 21.

to ensure operations functioned smoothly.[20] Staples argues that the presence of federal authorities in Arkansas helped organize and provide success for Black Arkansans and aided in providing comfort for the freedpeople.

Another work on the Civil War in Arkansas is Carl H. Moneyhon's *The Impact of the Civil War and Reconstruction on Arkansas: Persistence in the Midst of Ruin*, published in 1994, analyzes the inner workings of the state and how the Civil War and Reconstruction transformed it.[21] When Moneyhon's focus turns to the effect of the war on Black Arkansans, he states the army's involvement with the refugees stemmed from their desire to have them "work supporting the war effort" but that the conditions of the elderly, women, and children required the "development of a more general policy."[22] Moneyhon examines the difficulties in this situation. The freedpeople constantly suffered epidemics and other struggles that created precarious conditions.[23] Moneyhon and Staples both suggest that as the federal presence increased in the state, the operations of camps for the freedpeople improved.

Thomas A. DeBlack's *With Fire and Sword: Arkansas, 1861-1874,* published in 2003, offers a history of Arkansas during the war and explains its impact on the state. DeBlack's narrative includes a discussion of the Freedmen's Bureau in Arkansas and its role in managing contraband camps. DeBlack emphasizes that Helena was a place of great suffering for African Americans.[24] The Freedmen's Bureau throughout Arkansas held an important role in the state for African Americans as the bureau had to protect the

[20] Staples, *Reconstruction in Arkansas, 1862-1874,* 192-193.
[21] Carl Moneyhon, *The Impact of the Civil War and Reconstruction on Arkansas: Persistence in the Midst of Ruin* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1994), 97.
[22] Moneyhon, *The Impact of the Civil War and Reconstruction on Arkansas,* 142.
[23] Moneyhon, *The Impact of the Civil War and Reconstruction on Arkansas,* 153-54.
[24] Thomas A. DeBlack, *With Fire and Sword: Arkansas, 1861-1874* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2003), 87.

rights of Black Arkansans while also developing a working relationship with planters and local elites for any hope of success.[25] Mark K. Christ's *Civil War Arkansas, 1863: The Battle for a State*, published in 2010, argues that central Arkansas was an important strategic location for both Union and Confederate forces.[26] Christ's monograph is important to the historiography of the Civil War in Arkansas, but it includes little discussion of contraband camp experiences and focuses instead on Union and Confederate efforts to gain control of the state. Christ does not look at the experience of Black Arkansans in the contraband camps but does include some discussion of Black refugees. His narrative includes discussions of freedpeople fleeing to Helena in 1863 which exhausted Union forces in the city and exacerbated the refugee crisis. Christ briefly mentions the Battle of Pine Bluff in 1863 and the role of the freedpeople in fortifying the city from the Confederate attack.[27]

Staples, Moneyhon, DeBlack, and Christ to some extent each address the African American experience within Civil War Arkansas and federal attempts to manage the resulting humanitarian crisis. The only more focused discussion of emancipation in Arkansas is Ryan M. Poe's article examining freedom in southwest Arkansas. Poe argues that there was little Union presence in southwestern Arkansas which led to unsuccessful self-emancipation in the region. Southwestern Arkansas was not important for Union forces as the area "lay outside of the war's most important theaters."[28] Southwestern Arkansas lacked access to the Arkansas or Mississippi Rivers, which were key rivers for

[25] DeBlack, *With Fire and Sword*, 153.
[26] Mark Christ, *Civil War Arkansas, 1863: The Battle for a State* (Norman, University of Oklahoma Press, 2010), 8.
[27] Christ, *Civil War Arkansas, 1863*, 234.
[28] Ryan M. Poe, "The Contours of Emancipation: Freedom Comes to Southwest Arkansas," *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 70, no. 2 (Summer 2011): 112.

Union forces during the war. Enslaved people there struggled with self-emancipation due to the risks in a region that lacked a Union presence.[29] Union forces made their way to southwest Arkansas long after thousands of fleeing African Americans reached Union lines in other cities. Union soldiers arrived "as the conquerors of a rebellious section" and as the "liberators of an enslaved people."[30] Arkansas Freedmen's Bureau historian Randy Finley states it was the limited medical knowledge of the nineteenth century that "constrained the quality of healthcare the bureau could provide."[31] Finley's article "In War's Wake: Health Care and Arkansas Freedmen, 1863-1868," maps out the challenges of the Freedmen's Bureau in providing aid to Arkansas's freedpeople, stating that "Freed persons would not become truly free until better health care facilities" were developed to enhance their quality of life.[32] Finley's article does not look at the impacts of the Western Sanitary Commission's assisting with Black refugees and focuses on the Freedmen's Bureau's handling of healthcare for African Americans. Kelly Houston Jones' recent study of Arkansas slavery, *A Weary Land: Slavery on the Ground in Arkansas,* does not dive deeply into the contraband experience.[33] None of these works on Civil War Arkansas emphasize the importance of the Western Sanitary Commission's assistance among Arkansas's freedpeople population.

This thesis offers a step toward rectifying the historiographical neglect of the contraband experience in Arkansas by examining how Black Arkansans experienced some of Arkansas's camps, the dangers those places posed, the role of the federal

[29] Poe, "The Contours of Emancipation," 126.
[30] Poe, "The Contours of Emancipation," 130.
[31] Randy Finley, "In War's Wake: Health Care and Arkansas Freedmen, 1863-1868," *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 51, no. 2 (Summer 1992): 145.
[32] Finley, "In War's Wake," 163.
[33] Kelly Houston Jones, *A Weary Land: Slavery on the Ground in Arkansas* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2021).

presence, and assistance of aid societies. The U.S. Army relied on help from outside societies like the Western Sanitary Commission and the American Missionary Association. The Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, created by Congress in 1865 and administered by the War Department, formed following the assistance from these societies. This research maps out the failures and successes of contraband policy in Helena, beginning in 1862, before transitioning to Arkansas's interior. It then turns from Helena, following Union General Frederick Steele's movements into central Arkansas and the opportunities afforded to Black Arkansans from the war in the interior camps of DeValls Bluff, Little Rock, and Pine Bluff. This thesis does not reach into the historiography of the whole of Reconstruction in Arkansas or examine the murders and depredations of African Americans during Reconstruction. This study analyzes the immediate impacts of the humanitarian crisis among African Americans in relation to the Union Army. This thesis examines outside agencies in Arkansas and their partnership with federal forces to execute relief to Black Arkansans during the Civil War. While federal forces initially failed to provide for Black refugees, its adjustment in approach and the arrival of outside relief agencies resulted in a partnership that provided improved handling of the humanitarian crisis. The collaboration benefitted freedpeople through the arrival of the BRFAL in 1865.

This thesis relies heavily on primary source material, such as soldiers' letters, U.S. Army reports, reports generated by aid agencies operating in Arkansas, and the records of the Freedmen's Bureau. This work's limited scope of analyzing aid agencies and the Union Army focuses on assessing the effectiveness of camp administration and relief and the relationship between institutions means that the thesis tends to rely on

sources created by whites. The effect of the relatively top-down view means that chapters one and two lack many sources featuring the African American point of view while chapter three benefits from WPA interviews of the formerly enslaved.[34]

Chapter one, "The Union Army Calls for Help," analyzes the outright failures of the Union Army in Helena. Helena's occupation by Union troops in 1862 occurred in the context of the contentious region of the lower Mississippi River Valley. The city offered a prime location to house troops because of its proximity to Vicksburg, Mississippi. However, Union Army resources became strained as around four thousand Black refugees fled to the city seeking refuge with the federal presence. By starting with Helena in 1862, this thesis can narrate the failures of the Union Army at the outset of the humanitarian crisis born from the war. Union officials in Helena mismanaged Black refugees early in the war before understanding and learning how to better provide for them and partnering with outside agencies. The use of abandoned plantations by the Union in Helena is one focus of this chapter because the practice of using abandoned lands and plantations provides employment opportunities for Black Arkansans in other cities. The chapter concludes by following General Steele's armies leaving Helena and heading towards Little Rock and examining the strengthening of federal forces in Arkansas to influence greater organization and functioning of contraband camps.

Chapter two, "Survival in the Interior," follows General Fredrick Steele to his forces' first stop at DeValls Bluff and the creation of the city's contraband camp. The chapter then turns to Steele's capture of Little Rock and the attendant refugee experience

[34] The interviews in *Bearing Witness* offer a glimpse into life during slavery from the interviewees, but Lankford in his introduction states there is bias in these interviews which make it hard to gain an objective picture. Lankford writes some interviewers lacked recording equipment and typed interviews from memory or notes taken at the time of interview.

there, followed by a discussion of Pine Bluff's contraband camp. While Pine Bluff is not a stop on Steele's march to Little Rock, in part because Pine Bluff is further south, Pine Bluff's contraband camp is important to the historiography of contraband camps and emancipation in Arkansas. This chapter examines the federal presence strengthening throughout the state by 1863 and the improvement in the management of contraband camps. The focus of this chapter is to analyze the success of the contraband camps in Helena, DeValls Bluff, Little Rock, and Pine Bluff as federal presence took on an active role in the African American humanitarian crisis. This chapter does focus on the improvements in Helena after federal forces learned how to manage its resources and rations for the refugees and benefit from the aid of outside agencies. The creation of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands by Congress in 1865 helped Black Arkansans with employment opportunities and increased their chance at self-sufficiency. This chapter argues that camps in Little Rock, Pine Bluff, and DeValls Bluff more successfully aided freedpeople than in Helena.

Chapter three, "The Intangible Aspects of Freedom," focuses on the other parts of contraband camp life for African Americans beyond basic survival. This chapter takes a step back from the dangers of contraband camps, enlistment, and employment opportunities to focus on the parts of freedom that Black Arkansans were most unprepared for. Most Black Arkansans were not literate but understood literacy as important for their futures. Literacy and religion, both denied to African Americans while enslaved, became a focus of contraband camps as agencies provided teachers and ministers who sought to facilitate the transition to freedom. This chapter follows Black Arkansans and their educational efforts and how they grappled with the day-to-day

realities of contraband camps. This chapter follows the American Missionary Association's efforts in Arkansas and the efforts of the Freedmen's Bureau in acquiring teachers, ministers, buildings, and funding.

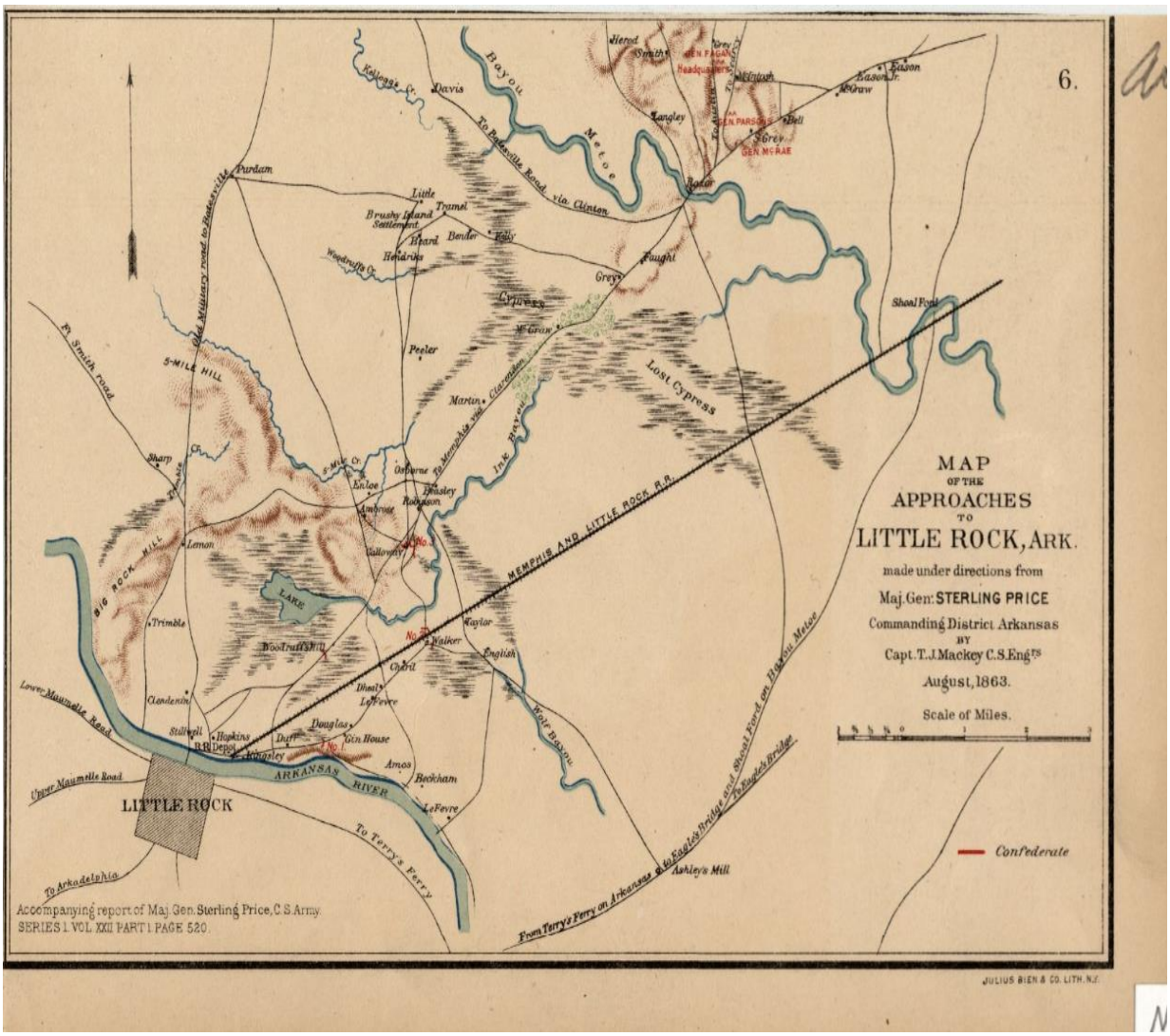

Illustration 1: Map of the Approaches to Little Rock, 1863. Butler Center for Arkansas Studies, Central Arkansas Library System. https://cdm15728.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p15728coll3/id/11372/rec/42.

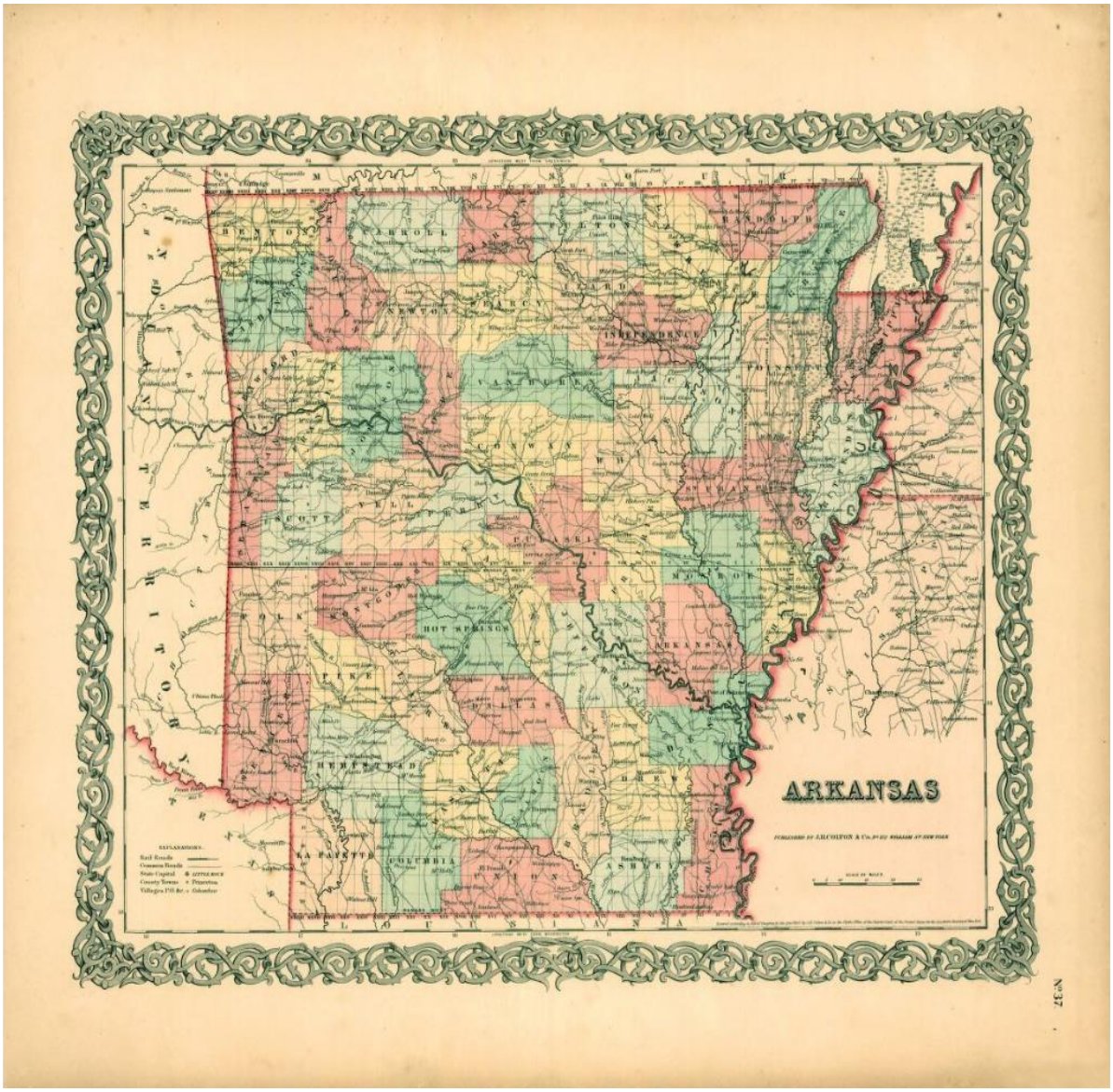

Illustration 2: Map of Arkansas, 1855. Butler Center for Arkansas Studies, Central Arkansas Library System. https://cdm15728.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p15728coll3/id/11355/rec/29.

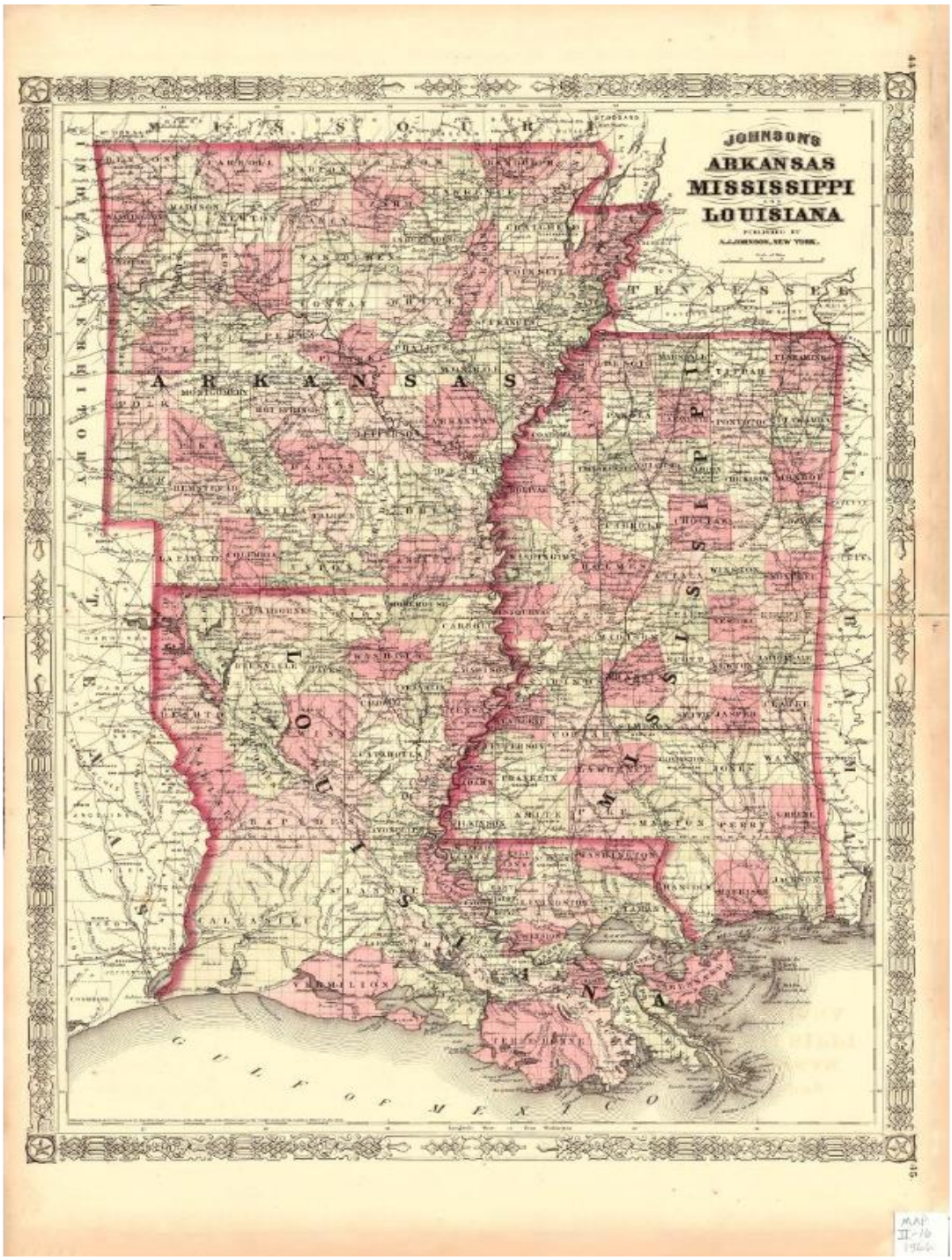

Illustration 3: Johnson's Arkansas, Mississippi, and Louisiana, 1866. https://cdm15728.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p15728coll3/id/560972/rec/58.

The Union Army Calls for Help

Situated on the Mississippi River, Helena was the first large contraband camp in Arkansas and carried enough significance that it is discussed in the historiography of Black Civil War refugees. Helena serves as a logical starting point from which to introduce the influence of the Union Army on the experiences of Black Arkansans and the Civil War's role in remaking society. Refugees in Helena illuminate the argument offered by Jim Downs that the army should have never been involved in a humanitarian issue of disease, Confederate attacks, and Union mismanagement. Downs contends the government "unwittingly exacerbated the medical crisis" the war began and created more disaster among Black refugees.[35] Therefore, Helena, as a starting point, offers the opportunity to analyze the Union Army's evolving role throughout the duration of the war, improving from complete disaster to a measure of success facilitating Black agency. The condition of Black refugees in Helena did not remain as bleak as this chapter identifies in the early stages of the war. However, despite the struggles involved for federal authorities' policies regarding Black Arkansans, Helena provides an example of what not to do. Federal authorities single-handedly could not manage the situation in Helena and outside agencies arrived.

The Western Sanitary Commission (hereafter WSC) operated in the Southern states and western theater during the war to help the Union Army and Black refugees. The WSC helped where the Union Army could not during the war by providing clothing, food, and other necessities to African Americans to provide comfort during a tumultuous time in their history. The WSC, formed in August 1861 by James Yeatman, assisted the

[35] Downs, *Sick from Freedom*, 17.

federal government with the humanitarian crisis spawned by the war. With the WSC's assistance, the federal government was able to remove themselves from the humanitarian crisis to execute relief for Black refugees in other areas of the war. The WSC formed at the same time as the U.S. Sanitary Commission (USSC), but the two operated as separate entities. The WSC focused their efforts in the western theater of the war with no chance of merging with the USSC, but they occasionally worked in the same locations for the same outcomes.[36] These agencies, the American Missionary Association (hereafter AMA) and the WSC, assisted federal authorities and gave temporary relief to the Union Army by allowing these societies to provide supplies while the army focused on their soldiers and war plans. While these societies were present in Helena, the army officials shifted their focus away from Black refugees. In areas where the government struggled to provide necessities to the refugees, these societies stepped in to meet the need. Additionally, the government's burden of supplying resources to the refugees was paused while societies assisted in Helena. In effect, the American Missionary Association and Western Sanitary Commission provided relief to the government until the government understood how to better provide. These societies were an outlet that federal authorities could rely on in this crisis.

Historians have covered much of the history of Helena's contraband camps in the discussion of African American experiences during the war. Historian Thomas A. DeBlack states the conditions in Helena were so poor regarding disease, hunger, malnutrition, and a lack of clothing that Union soldiers called the city "Hell-in-

[36] Western Sanitary Commission, *Report of the Western Sanitary Commission, July 1, 1863* (St. Louis, MO: Western Sanitary Commission Rooms), 29, http://resource.nlm.nih.gov/101640491.

Arkansas."[37] The conditions for the freedpeople were even more horrendous. Helena's landscape was mired by the river frequently inundating the city. Amy Murrell Taylor points out that refugees easily could recognize their low standing in Helena as they waded through mud and other liquids to reach their tents while soldier's quarters rested on higher elevations.[38] Carl H. Moneyhon asserts that Helena's refugees were so destitute that some returned to their plantations.[39] The city was plagued with issues from the outset of the Union occupation in 1862 during Union General Ulysses S. Grant's Vicksburg campaign and the resulting influx African Americans seeking freedom only served to strain Union officials. DeBlack's and Moneyhon's coverage of Helena describes the city as a bleak site, and Taylor's discussion of Helena shows the city as an example of the precarity accompanied by policies privileging military necessity are only a few examples of scholars' incorporation of the city's poor conditions into narratives of the war in the Mississippi River Valley. However dangerous, Helena served as freedom's starting point for many African Americans. The challenges, they believed, would be worth the price for freedom and their reliance on the Union would guide them toward self-sufficiency.

Union forces had been present in Helena since 1862. Helena's position on the Mississippi River gave Union officials an ideal logistical position to assist with General Grant's siege of Vicksburg which began in December 1862 and would last until July 1863. As such, Helena acted as a defensive position for Union officials and could assist if the Vicksburg campaign failed. Major General Samuel R. Curtis and troops occupied Helena in July 1862 and prepared the city's fortifications. When Union forces arrived in

[37] DeBlack, *With Fire and Sword*, 87.
[38] Taylor, *Embattled Freedom*, 66.
[39] Moneyhon, *The Impact of the Civil War and Reconstruction on Arkansas*, 140.

Helena, enslaved Arkansans began fleeing to the city seeking refuge in hopes of gaining their freedom. Ryan Poe argues that self-emancipation was easier in a city with a Union presence, which encouraged the army to shift its policy to employing and later enlisting these refugees.[40] African Americans recognized the Union Army as a liberating force and believed flight to Union lines offered their chance for freedom. Thus, the strain on the Union Army increased. Helena hosted the state's largest contraband population of close to four thousand African Americans. The Black refugees flocking to the Union camps seeking protection became an unprecedented situation for the Union and created a crisis that federal authorities had to address.

Curtis's journey from Pea Ridge in March 1862 to Helena encountered numerous Black Arkansans who continuously interrupted his progress towards Helena. Part of General Curtis's delays on the march to Helena were orders by Confederate General Thomas C. Hindman. Hindman employed a "scorched earth policy" during Curtis's march and ordered civilians to delay the Union's advancement toward Helena.[41] Curtis's frustration led him to declare any slave who joined his armies as free and as contrabands of war. Curtis supplied these runaways with papers declaring their freedom and did not return them to their enslavers. Curtis's move of emancipating African Americans directly violated the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 that declared any runaway slave must be returned to their owners. In addition to violating the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, Curtis also relied on the First and Second Confiscation Acts as precedent for emancipating African Americans. Curtis viewed the acts liberally and "attacked his enemies as broadly as

[40] Poe, "The Contours of Emancipation," 129.
[41] DeBlack, *With Fire and Sword*, 58.

possible" by utilizing fleeing refugees to supply resources or serve for the army.[42] The enslaved often fled to Curtis's armies with printing presses for printing emancipation forms, livestock, and other necessities the army might need.[43] Curtis portrayed abolitionist tendencies and was in favor of arming African Americans. Curtis's armies continued their march toward Helena, with, as DeBlack put it, an "army" of the formerly enslaved followed close behind.[44] The large refugee population in Helena forced Union officials to respond. Black Arkansan's self-emancipation paved the way for Union officials to enlist African American men as soldiers.

General Frederick Steele undid General Curtis's declaration of emancipating African Americans in Helena after he took command of the city. Steele's actions were under General Order No. 48 which reduced the number of refugees in Helena and led to the separation of families. Those allowed to stay in Helena were "formally employed and working on the defenses" of the fort, leading to five hundred displaced women and children.[45] In December 1862, General Steele was charged with violating Curtis's order of emancipating Black refugees. Steele issued several military orders in September 1862 for the "return of fugitive slaves" to their owners.[46] The charges brought against General Steele assert he ignored Curtis's "papers of emancipation," and he ordered Union soldiers to retrieve African Americans to return them to their owners.[47] Several Union soldiers and surgeons provided eyewitness accounts of African Americans being taken from

[42] Moneyhon, *The Impact of the Civil War and Reconstruction on Arkansas*, 137.
[43] Mark K. Christ, "'They Will Be Armed': Lorenzo Thomas Recruits Black Troops in Helena, April 6, 1863," *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 72, no. 4 (Winter 2013): 368-69.
[44] DeBlack, *With Fire and Sword*, 61.
[45] Taylor, *Embattled Freedom*, 108.
[46] Brigadier General Frederick Steele Papers 1862-1863, December 26, 1862, Box 1, Folder 1, MC 876, University of Arkansas Special Collections, Fayetteville.
[47] Brigadier General Frederick Steele Papers 1862-1863, December 26, 1862.

Union lines and returned to their owners. However, Steele never received formal charges or responded to the charges against him in any recorded court proceedings. Steele's actions in Helena added to the refugee crisis by creating a second wave of panic among the refugees. Regardless of Steele's actions, the refugee population remained high.

Prior to Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation in 1863, authorities in Helena declared that Black men could enlist in the Union. Most white soldiers expressed pride in seeing African Americans join the army. Minos Miller, a white soldier stationed in Helena, felt a sense of pride fighting to end slavery alongside African Americans for their freedom. He wrote to his mother he felt the Union was safe now and felt like "fighting now for we have some thing [sic] to fight for."[48] For African Americans, these new opportunities provided a sense of freedom and a new reality; one different from what they knew before was possible. In April 1863, Brigadier General Lorenzo Thomas's job to recruit African American men. Finding recruits to fill the ranks of the colored regiments allowed Thomas to redirect people and ease the overcrowding in Helena. Thomas eagerly accepted the position of recruiting African Americans to enlist and his recruiting often took on the "appearance of a tent revival" as Union officers expressed support for Thomas's job.[49] Thomas's job included finding African American men for the laborious jobs around the camps but to enlist as soldiers as the Emancipation Proclamation declared.[50] After the creation of the Bureau of Colored Troops in 1863, the First and Second Arkansas Infantry units became U.S. Colored Infantry regiments. Later, these units became the 46th and 54th United States Colored Infantries.

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[48] Minos Miller to his mother, Helena, Arkansas, January 9, 1863, Box 1, Folder 2, Item 14, MS M58, University of Arkansas Special Collections, Fayetteville.
[49] Christ, "'They Will Be Armed,'" 370.
[50] Taylor, *Embattled Freedom*, 110.

In January 1863, President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, which declared enslaved people behind Confederate lines to be free. More refugees from slavery than before sought Union protection at Helena. Union soldiers knew the risks of the increased numbers of African Americans flooding into their camps. A Union soldier, John B. Howard, approved of emancipation as a war measure, writing to Jacob Bare that he believed the war would end sooner if the Union took the "slaves from the south" because it would weaken the Confederacy.[51] Howard wrote about potential opportunities for African Americans in his letter stating that the army could hire them to "work for the government at such work as digging" and have them work the fatiguing jobs.[52] Even in 1864 after Lincoln's proclamation, there was no doubt in some soldier's minds that slavery had to be abolished. Ebenezer S. Peake, a Chaplain with the 28th Wisconsin Infantry, understood the "war will no doubt be prolonged while the institution [of slavery]" exists.[53]

Some soldiers in Arkansas felt uncertain about the ability of the army to protect the African American arrivals. Union soldier Prentice C. Barrows of the 29th Iowa Infantry wrote to his brother that it would be difficult to carry out Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation without "some plan being adopted to find employment for the slaves when they are liberated."[54] Provost Marshals would apply sixty thousand dollars for destitute African Americans but understood the continuation of supporting thousands of freedpeople would "increase the burden to such an extent" that supporting

[51] John B. Howard to Jacob Bare, Helena, Ark, April 2, 1863, Box 1, Folder 24, BC.MSS.13.01, Butler Center for Arkansas Studies, Little Rock.
[52] John B. Howard to Jacob Bare, April 2, 1863.
[53] Ebenezer S. Peake to his wife, Augusta, Little Rock, Ark. April 29, 1864, Series 2, Box 1, Folder 46, BC.MSS.06.32, Butler Center for Arkansas Studies, Little Rock.
[54] Prentice Cyrus Barrows, to his brother Simon, Helena, Ark., April 18, 1863, Box 1, Folder 2, BC.MSS.11.03, Butler Center for Arkansas Studies, Little Rock.

them would become impracticable.[55] The Union Army attempted to solve the problem in part by having African Americans handle the laborious tasks in their camps. Of those who could not enlist, they gained employment from the Union Army in contraband camps and at home farms. Home farms would become the places where Black Arkansans resided to alleviate overcrowding in Union lines. Their work had already proven useful to the U.S. Army in building Helena's fortifications the previous fall. Union soldier William F. Schafer, of the 46th Indiana Infantry, wrote to his wife about the benefit of African American labor, stating that African Americans had been "doing the hard work instead of working the soldier."[56] Their work extended to jobs around the camps in exchange for "wholesome food, clothing, kind treatment, and a share of the crop" from Union authorities.[57]

African Americans' employment by the Union in these camps provided structure to their daily routines. African American men earned the opportunity to be involved in the war for their freedom and their future as freedpeople with a warm reception from white soldiers. One risk African American families faced was the separation of families. African American refugees encountered unknown situations in these camps. They did not know if they faced separation, relocation, or anything else. Therefore, their approach of taking their situation day-by-day became a survival tactic. The conclusion of the war meant freedom, and African Americans had to navigate their surroundings to reach official freedom.

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[55] Circular, Headquarters, Department of the Gulf, Major General N. P. Banks, New Orleans, Louisiana, February 16, 1863, Box 3, Folder 15, BC.MSS.00.25, Butler Center for Arkansas Studies, Little Rock.
[56] William F. Schafer, Helena, Ark, to his wife, September 18, 1862, Box 1, Folder 30, BC.MSS.15.82, Butler Center for Arkansas Studies, Little Rock.
[57] Circular, Headquarters, February 16, 1863.

Regardless of how much security and independence their labor may have offered, and however enthusiastic some white men were about the prospect of Black soldiers, freedpeople in Helena faced some white attitudes that were more amenable to their *laboring* than their fighting as soldiers. According to Minos Miller, when Union soldiers learned that African Americans would be armed, there was "such yelling you never heard I reckon."[58] Miller's letter implies the regiment was overjoyed to fight alongside African American men. Other soldiers were not overjoyed to be fighting for African American rights and some soldiers threatened to desert because they did not enlist to come and "fight to free negroes."[59] Yet, African American men who enlisted in the Union Army appreciated the opportunity to fight for their freedom themselves and managed to earn the respect of many comrades. While stationed in Helena, Prentice C. Barrows wrote to his brother he observed some of the African Americans drilling, writing they were "quite apt to learn the maneuvers" while taking "a great deal of pride in it."[60] James Hook's Civil War report includes comments like Barrows' about African American soldiers being prideful of this opportunity. In Helena, Hook had the "pleasure of seeing the negro under the arms and clothes in Uncle Sam's uniforms."[61] In the same report, Hook writes the African Americans soldiers appear happy and enjoy life as a soldier, and they "are determined to die before they will go again into slavery."[62]

[58] Minos Miller to his mother, Helena, Arkansas, April 18, 1863, Box 1, Folder 2, Item 20, MS M58, University of Arkansas Special Collections, Fayetteville.
[59] William F. Schafer, Helena, Arkansas, to his wife, February 1 and 7, 1863, Box 1, Folder 37, BC.MSS.15.82, Butler Center for Arkansas Studies, Little Rock.
[60] Prentice Cyrus Barrows, to his brother Simon, April 18, 1863.
[61] James Hook Civil War Report, May 1863, Box 1, Folder 2, BC.MSS.15.09, Butler Center for Arkansas Studies, Little Rock.
[62] James Hook Report, May 1863.

Helena was the first induction center for African Americans enlisting in the Union Army in the region. The enlistment of African Americans began in Helena with troops spreading to various camps throughout the state. Bobby Lovett suggests that Arkansas's USCTs made a significant impact on the Union Army.[63] These African American units enabled the Union Army to focus less on the western theater and focus their forces east of the Mississippi river which helped "keep the Confederate forces divided and demoralized."[64] These USCT regiments carried out important duties for the Union to prevent Confederate troops in the War's western theater from crossing the Mississippi river, allowing white troops to be focused on defeating the rebels fighting in the east. The Battle of Helena in 1863 was the first recorded instance of combat wounds for the Second Arkansas Infantry of African Descent.[65] The role of the Second Arkansas Infantry of African Descent during the battle provided Black soldiers with unprecedented agency. They proved themselves as viable for combat and fought for their own freedom. Not much about the outcome of the battle alleviated the material situation in Helena.[66]

One problem that plagued Helena was the risk of Confederate ambushes, as the city was situated close to the ongoing fighting. Little Rock, Pine Bluff, and DeValls Bluff similarly faced dangerous situations in Union lines which affected the atmosphere in the camps. Before contraband camps transitioned to home farms, African Americans frequently relied on Union troops for protection. It was not unusual for Union troops or African American refugees to be attacked when venturing outside of camp lines to find

[63] Bobby L. Lovett, "African Americans, Civil War, and Aftermath in Arkansas," *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 54, no. 3 (Autumn 1995): 327.
[64] Lovett, "African Americans, Civil War, and Aftermath in Arkansas," 327.
[65] Christ, *Civil War Arkansas, 1863,* 139.
[66] Christ, *Civil War Arkansas, 1863,* 139.

resources for the army. Additionally, soldiers often heard stories and witnessed African Americans who had been attacked coming into their camps seeking aid. At the beginning of the Civil War, runaway African Americans frequently stumbled into Union camps in hopes of finding safety and refuge. In Helena, the danger of a Confederate attack was ever-present. However, attacks between Union soldiers and Black Arkansans were an issue. Chaplain Ebenezer S. Peake wrote "another case of shooting negros by soldiers" had been reported, with this incident relating to "soldiers demanding money" from them.[67] Peake writes there has been issues finding the guilty parties involved in the shooting of Black refugees, but the threat of attacks against refugees was present.

Another attack occurred in October 1863 as soldiers camped in Helena went to a deserted camp to gather lumber and bricks. Union soldier Sereno Bridge detailed the following ambush of African Americans seeking supplies, writing that Confederates had taken "six negroes, three men and three women."[68] The Black men and women who thought they had found refuge with the Union Army were taken by the Confederates. Bridge's account outlined the continued risk for African Americans inside contraband camps as the Union Army failed to offer full protection. It was indeed challenging for the U.S. Army to protect all the Black Arkansans who sought their aid. One of the women taken by the Confederate army escaped back to the Union camp. She relayed information that the Confederates had "a large force back a little ways in the timber," suggesting the Confederates readied for a larger attack.[69] The risk of a Confederate attack or guerillas in

[67] Ebenezer S. Peake to his wife, Augusta, Helena, Ark, February 10, 1863, Series 2, Box 1, Folder 11, BC.MSS.06.32, Butler Center for Arkansas Studies, Little Rock.
[68] Sereno Bridge, Helena, Ark, to his wife, Alice Bridge, October 31, 1863, Box 1, Folder 6, BC.MSS.16.48, Butler Center for Arkansas Studies, Little Rock.
[69] Sereno Bridge to his wife, October 31, 1863.

Helena remained throughout the war and frequently challenged refugees and soldiers to remain diligent. While there remained a risk of Confederate attacks in Helena, the Union victory in the Battle of Helena ensured some relief from Rebel attacks as the Confederates shifted their focus to Little Rock over Helena.

By February 1, 1864, Chaplain J. L. Henrick, Chaplain of the 29th Wisconsin Infantry, recognized Helena required assistance for the management of the freedpeople and necessary supplies. Henrick stated the situation in Helena was dire and he struggled to maintain "perfect supervision of the people" due to the refugees.[70] Henrick tried providing for the refugees as best as possible until he required assistance and wrote to the Superintendent of Freedmen in Arkansas, Major W. G. Sargent. In addition to Henrick's plea for assistance, David Worcester wrote to Major Sargent expressing his dissatisfaction with Henrick. Worcester was a private in the army but transitioned and became Camp Master in Helena, which meant he oversaw the management of the freedpeople. Worcester frequently requested clothing and supplies from Henrick after noticing an abundance of male clothing but few children's and women's clothing. In his letter dated February 23, 1864, Worcester wrote his verbal and written requests remained unanswered asking for clothing. The letter continues to state Worcester cannot keep giving empty promises to Black Arkansans as it is only an "injustice to myself, to the colored people of the camp, and the country."[71] The communication between Henrick and

[70] J. L. Henrick to W. G. Sargent, February 1, 1864, "Arkansas, Freedmen's Bureau Field Office Records, 1864-1874," Little Rock (Superintendent of Freedmen) Roll 15, Letters and orders received, Jan 1864-Sept 1865. Images. FamilySearch. http://FamilySearch.org : December 28, 2022. NARA microfilm publication M1901. Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration.
[71] David Worcester to W. G. Sargent, February 23, 1864, "Arkansas, Freedmen's Bureau Field Office Records, 1864-1874," Little Rock (Superintendent of Freedmen) Roll 15, Letters and orders received, Jan 1864-Sept 1865. Images. FamilySearch. http://FamilySearch.org : December 28, 2022. NARA microfilm publication M1901. Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration.

Worcester highlights the frustration between the federal government and Union Army in providing for the freedpeople. The lack of communication between Worcester and Henrick exasperated the issues between the two in handling the refugees' needs. Both men pleaded for assistance for the African American refugees to alleviate some of the issues in the camp among the freedpeople's quality of life. The frustration between the two men highlights the difficulties the federal government experienced when managing the issue of refugees. Helena struggled to balance all the hardships in their camps between the freedpeople, Union soldiers, and necessary supplies. However, this was not characteristic of only Helena.

Several agencies worked to alleviate the burden of the U.S. Army, which had shown its inability to both prosecute the war and handle the humanitarian crisis. James Yeatman, the founder of the Western Sanitary Commission, observed the status of the freedpeople as destitute and recorded their disposition as one of congregating in cities and something that needed to be discouraged.[72] Yeatman was imperative to the Union war effort to improving soldiers' living conditions. He was active helping wounded soldiers during the war and worked to help African Americans during the war years. Arkansas benefited from the assistance of two societies during the war. The first society discussed, the Western Sanitary Commission (hereafter WSC), was established by an abolitionist society to aid wounded soldiers before transitioning to provide medical supplies, food, rations, and housing to wounded soldiers and Black refugees.[73] The

[72] Western Sanitary Commission, *Final Report of the Western Sanitary Commission from May 9, 1864 to Dec. 31, 1865* (St. Louis: R.P. Studley and Co, 1866), 114, https://curiosity.lib.harvard.edu/contagion/catalog/36-990068945610203941.
[73] Western Sanitary Commission, *Final Report of the Western Sanitary Commission from May 9, 1864 to Dec. 31, 1865*, 1.

second society, the American Missionary Association (hereafter AMA), assisted Black Arkansans by providing teachers, school supplies, and religious instructions in the camps. The AMA provided more assistance with educating the freedpeople rather than providing medical supplies or daily necessities. The introduction of these societies into Arkansas gave the government relief. Then Congress established a new agency that focused only on African Americans. In 1865, the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands (BRFAL), or the Freedmen's Bureau, a government agency attached to the U.S. Army, was created to protect and assist African Americans in their transition to freedom. Introducing African Americans into a society they had not previously encountered was the justification for the Freedmen's Bureau to ensure a successful transition for the refugees. The BRFAL aided in the transition and created a springboard for African Americans to become autonomous. The support offered by aid agencies in Arkansas helped the government establish various locations for African Americans to reside during and after the war enabled the government to continue managing the freedpeople. The WSC and AMA assisted with necessities while BRFAL protected Black Arkansans in their steps toward autonomy. The U.S. Army relied on this assistance.

The Western Sanitary Commission established a Soldier's Home in Helena that assisted Union soldiers in the city, but the home also aided Helena's African American population. The Soldier's Home was formed on February 11, 1864, and the Chaplain of the 29th Wisconsin Infantry, John L. Henrick, supervised the home. During Henrick's time as overseer of the home, he served as an agent of the WSC and oversaw the sanitary stores and medical supplies for the regiments in Helena, and the refugee and freedpeople

population.[74] Yeatman's report describes Henricks's contribution to the WSC as an agent and superintendent of Helena's Soldier's Home "highly satisfactory to the Commission" and his aid was invaluable to relieving the suffering of the freedpeople.[75] Helena's Soldier's Home provided supplies for soldiers, bedding, and meals to both white and colored regiments, as well as to the refugees and freedmen in the area to alleviate any suffering.[76]

An essential challenge in Helena and at the contraband camps was the scourge of disease. Physicians during the Civil War did not yet have a full understanding of the importance of sanitation, sterilization, and quarantine, which exacerbated deaths. The injuries and illness of the Civil War highlighted the importance of healthcare standards. The threat of disease only heightened the danger for freedpeople in contraband camps as the Union was ill-prepared to handle them. The military did not provide separate facilities for those sick and dying civilians. As disease spread quickly, officials did little to prevent contagion from person to person. There was little understanding of how germs worked during the Civil War, leaving doctors unable to protect patients. The problem was exacerbated by the poor living conditions within the refugee camps.[77]

Jim Downs's *Sick from Freedom's* focuses on the health problems experienced by African Americans in the contraband camps while the military neglected them. African American refugees did not expect to experience the widespread sickness, disease, and death that they endured in the contraband camps. They initially viewed these camps as a

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[74] Western Sanitary Commission, *Final Report of the Western Sanitary Commission from May 9, 1864 to Dec. 31, 1865*, 81.
[75] Western Sanitary Commission, *Final Report of the Western Sanitary Commission from May 9, 1864 to Dec. 31, 1865*, 81.
[76] Western Sanitary Commission, *Final Report of the Western Sanitary Commission from May 9, 1864 to Dec. 31, 1865*, 82.
[77] Downs, *Sick from Freedom,* 163.

place of refuge and comfort, but the army did not prepare or protect African Americans from sickness. The struggle and "constant movement of soldiers and prisoners" made handling the spread of disease almost impossible.[78] Outbreaks of disease in Helena were so persistent that buildings had been burned down following military orders to stop the spread of disease. Federal authorities struggled to keep physicians on hand to handle outbreaks among the refugees. Physicians abandoned their posts often as disease outbreaks occurred.[79] The Union not only struggled to keep physicians employed in Helena's hospitals, but also struggled to provide supplies necessary for the sick. Carl Moneyhon states that malnutrition, inadequate housing, and clothing shortages worsened epidemics as diseases such as smallpox "raged through the camp."[80] The healthcare crisis produced from the Civil War and contraband camps encouraged some Northern societies to offer their assistance.

Illnesses decimated the African American population in the contraband camp in Helena. By the time the AMA began traveling to the southern states, they encountered weakened populations in Helena and elsewhere. Although the AMA worked with military officials to provide blankets, tents, and clothing for the refugees, around 25 percent of Helena's earliest contraband refugees succumbed to disease and exposure.[81] The winter of 1862-1863 proved particularly rough and exacerbated the desperate conditions of Helena's inhabitants. By August 1863, half of the 54th United States Colored Infantry in Helena suffered from fever with eighty lives succumbing to illness. Union soldier Minos Miller noted the difference between white and black troops handing illness and wrote

[78] Downs, *Sick from Freedom*, 98.
[79] Finley, "In War's Wake," 145.
[80] Moneyhon, *The Impact of the Civil War and Reconstruction on Arkansas*, 139.
[81] Lovett, "African Americans, Civil War, and Aftermath in Arkansas," 314.

"Black [soldiers] stands it [sickness] better than the white soldiers."[82] Maria R. Mann of the Western Sanitary Commission traveled to Helena to help in alleviating the suffering of African Americans. The WSC provided funding to secure surgeons and nurses to assist the sick.[83] Eventually, the WSC established a hospital for the freedpeople, and furnished it with supplies to "relieve them from sickness, suffering, cold, and want."[84] The assistance from Maria R. Mann over the years proved invaluable as she taught freedwomen to sew, sold essential daily necessities to refugees, provided medicine to the sick, and visited African Americans in their camps and dwellings with advice to improve their conditions.[85] Space in Helena became limited following the overcrowding of Black refugees seeking protection within Union lines, prompting Mann, Curtis, Washburne, and Prentiss to work together for "the amelioration of the condition" of African Americans.[86]

The WSC's contributions in Helena provided much needed supplies via Mr. A. W. Plattenburg (who also aided other Arkansas camps) when he established a depot of sanitary supplies.[87] The WSC stated Plattenburg's aid was unexpected yet beneficial, and he remained vital to the WSC's operations.[88] To combat malaria, the Western Sanitary Commission discussed a floating hospital on the Mississippi River. With the hospital on the river, the "fresh currents of pure air" would be advantageous to the sick patients in

[82] Minos Miller to his mother, Helena, Arkansas, August 3, 1863, Box 1, Folder 3, Item 25, MS M58, University of Arkansas Special Collections, Fayetteville.
[83] Western Sanitary Commission, *Report of the Western Sanitary Commission, July 1, 1863*, 25.
[84] Western Sanitary Commission, *Final Report of the Western Sanitary Commission from May 9, 1864 to Dec. 31, 1865,* 123.
[85] J. G. Forman, *The Western Sanitary Commission: A Sketch of its Origin, History, Labors for the Sick and Wounded of the Western Armies, and Aid Given to Freedmen and Union Refugees, with Incidents of Hospital Life* (St. Louis: R. P. Studley and Co, 1864), 113, https://digital.library.cornell.edu/catalog/may924203.
[86] Forman, *The Western Sanitary Commission*, 113.
[87] Forman, *The Western Sanitary Commission*, 33.
[88] Forman, *The Western Sanitary Commission,* 34.

combating the low and marshy grounds around Helena.[89] At the time, stagnant water and marshy areas were associated with disease and its spreading until the germ theory was understood. Helena was not the only location on the river. DeValls Bluff, Little Rock, and Pine Bluff had rivers close to their camps which enabled the camps to receive supplies by the river.

The Western Sanitary Commission proved an invaluable partner to the U.S. Army in aiding of sick refugees. The military's effort to manage sickness was complicated by the constant movement of regiments and freedpeople. Black Arkansans and soldiers received treatment from Union hospitals with the appropriate supplies and medicines. Major W. G. Sargent, Superintendent of the Freedpeople (a position in the U.S. Army that predated the creation of the Freedmen's Bureau), reported in 1864 of the government supplying medicines and hospital stewards to assist those in the hospital.[90] By constructing hospitals to separate the sick from the healthy, conditions among those in the camp could hopefully begin improving. The surgeons in Helena and DeValls Bluff expressed their approval to the WSC for their "great efficiency and usefulness."[91] Helena's access to resources, food, and medicine helped aid the sick refugees. These resources would not solve all of Helena's issues, but the resources helped shift the focus elsewhere while aiding the sick and wounded. Helena benefited from the Western Sanitary Commission's support throughout the war, but the camps still received some assistance from the government. With the WSC present, the government focused their

[89] Western Sanitary Commission, *Report of the Western Sanitary Commission, July 1, 1863,* 20.
[90] John Eaton, Jr, *Report of the General Superintendent of Freedmen, Department of the Tennessee, and State of Arkansas for 1864* (Memphis, Tenn.: Slavery, Abolition & Social Justice; Published by permission, 1865), 60, HeinOnline.
[91] Western Sanitary Commission, *Report of the Western Sanitary Commission, July 1, 1863,* 28.

resources on the soldiers and allowed the WSC to assist the refugees. For all the aid from the WSC provided in Arkansas, the commission was most beneficial for camps in DeValls Bluff and Helena.

The Union Army could not successfully deal with the healthcare crisis when the Civil War began. Their resources were stretched thin as they learned the best methods for addressing Black refugees while working to secure more resources. Outside societies offered the Union some relief by allowing the army to take a step back from the healthcare crisis and instead focus on the humanitarian crisis. African Americans began these crises when the war began which strained the Union Army's ability to solve these issues. The WSC provided more assistance to Helena and addressed the healthcare in the city in a stronger capacity. The AMA remained diligent in assisting with the healthcare crisis. Yet the AMA provided more resources for education than they did for healthcare. WSC agents would cease contributing to education in 1865 and left the "supplying [of] teachers and schools for the freed people of the South" to other agencies.[92] The WSC provided relief for soldiers and sick refugees through donations of food, clothing, and bedding that provided temporary relief in cases that did not require medical supplies.

The danger of disease combined with the complications of a large and growing refugee situation in Helena created the need for living space, protection, and a supply of food. The Union Army sought to remedy these problems by securing abandoned plantations by 1863 to place the refugees in need of living quarters and opportunities for employment. The government intended these plantations to become self-sufficient and produce crops for the advantage of the freedpeople and encourage self-sufficiency among

[92] Western Sanitary Commission, *Final Report of the Western Sanitary Commission from May 9, 1864 to Dec. 31, 1865*, 119.

them. The abandoned plantations were in disrepair and required some labor before crops could be harvested and bring in revenue. The federal government leased abandoned plantations to any willing and loyal white person. If no white person to oversee the care of a designated plantation could be found, African Americans could lease these plantations. This arrangement provided an opportunity for the formerly enslaved to become caretakers of property for their own direct benefit for the first time. The harvest would be theirs to eat and sell. The government did not impose rent for the upkeep of the abandoned plantations. Instead, a tax was imposed by the government of "$2.00 per bale of 400 pounds of cotton" and 5 cents per bushel of corn.[93] Autonomy served as the ultimate satisfaction for African Americans entering a new chapter beyond enslavement. Autonomy meant the ability to produce and form the life they desired once freedom was within reach.

The army had to determine their best plan of action working with the incoming African Americans as contraband camps became overcrowded. The Union mimicked a program implemented in Tennessee and Mississippi of leasing plantations and employing African Americans to work the field. This represented a slavery model, but African Americans earned wages. Maude Carmichael argues the program had a chance for success in Arkansas. Carmichael states that in early 1863, the Treasury Department handled recruiting African American troops, feeding, and caring for the refugees, and supervising any abandoned or confiscated land in war zones.[94] This program was intended to provide the pathway to autonomy for African Americans. The situation

[93] Maude Carmichael, "Federal Experiments with Negro Labor on Abandoned Plantations in Arkansas: 1862-1865," *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 1, no 2 (June 1942): 103.
[94] Carmichael, "Federal Experiments," 102.

surrounding contraband camps required the army to solve the problem of African Americans fleeing to Union lines. These home farms taught African Americans to work and "prepare for new employments" to support themselves following the war's end.[95] Additionally for Helena, these new home farms helped lessen the burden in contraband camps from the large quantity of African American refugees. These home farms allowed the camp to become less crowded and removed African Americans from the danger imposed by being inside Union lines. Even though African Americans were displaced to locations outside of Union camps, this did not completely remove the threat of war. The army intended to register African Americans at various home farms supervised by the army. These farms were "worked by the free people" who could not find employment in contraband camps.[96] Carl Moneyhon writes this system was "intended to familiarize Black workers with free labor," and states this work on the "government-supervised plantations" represented slavery.[97]

Land ownership for Black Arkansans meant independent access to land for their personal use. As Arkansas's Black population knew the land and farming techniques, land ownership provided incentive and agency. African Americans were "encouraged to take small plots, [and] equip themselves with workstock [sic] and tools" provided by neighboring plantations or the government to be their own boss.[98] In Helena, about 40 Black Arkansans were farming on lands they leased from the government "with their own means" on land acreage ranging between 25 to 75 acres.[99] Kelly Houston Jones examines

[95] Western Sanitary Commission, *Final Report of the Western Sanitary Commission from May 9, 1864 to Dec. 31, 1865*, 112.
[96] Carl H. Moneyhon, "From Slave to Free Labor: The Federal Plantation Experiment in Arkansas," *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 53, no. 2 (Summer, 1994): 144.
[97] Moneyhon, "From Slave to Free Labor," 146.
[98] Carmichael, "Federal Experiments," 105.
[99] Moneyhon, "From Slave to Free Labor," 148.

the importance of land ownership for Black Arkansans who faced a difficult conflict during the war. Jones focuses on the importance of land, farming, and community of Arkansas's Black population to highlight the importance African Americans saw in the land. Her work follows how African Americans viewed Arkansas's landscape as outlets of what agency meant and how the war encouraged "increased autonomy" for Black Arkansans while others were caught in the crosshairs of war.[100] The shift from being property of whites to owning property for African Americans provided an outlet of possibilities for autonomy; the freedpeople labored on land they could lease for their desire.

Land leasing by Black Arkansans meant gardening was important and an outlet for them to grow food for their consumption. While enslaved, some African Americans had the occasional luxury of keeping a small portion of crops for themselves and their family. The food harvested in the gardens by the African Americans became a "triumph of love" when a mother and her children "filled a bushel basket with beans grown by themselves for themselves."[101] In September 1863, Ebenezer S. Peake stumbled upon African Americans on a plantation enjoying peaches, who offered them to the soldiers for four dollars a bushel.[102] These Black Arkansans offering fruit for sale in exchange for money showed a sense of easiness. For African Americans, gardening for their consumption introduced a bond between African Americans and communities. The Freedmen's Bureau allotted African Americans a small garden and an acre of land for their consumption. The Union supplied each family with separate quarters on a plantation

[100] Jones, *A Weary Land*, 202.
[101] Manning, *Troubled Refuge*, 108.
[102] Ebenezer S. Peake to his wife, Augusta, at the mouth of the White River, Ark, September 5, 1863, Series 2, Box 1, Folder 38, BC.MSS.06.32, Butler Center for Arkansas Studies, Little Rock.

to house African Americans and give them responsibilities.[103] As Arkansas's contraband camps grew overcrowded with African Americans, the Union needed to alleviate this issue. Helena's overcrowding posed the biggest obstacle in managing the refugee situation.

By 1864, there were 1,045 freedmen in Helena, 958 in Little Rock, and 977 around Pine Bluff. DeValls Bluff had around 600 freedpeople in its camp, made up mostly of women, children, and the elderly. Carmichael and Moneyhon express different opinions on the army's plan of employing African Americans to combat the overcrowded camps. The home farms intended to encourage self-sufficiency among African Americans under observation by federal authorities. The government found a plantation in Pine Bluff and hired African Americans to work the crops, only for their crops to be taken by scouting parties to "go out [and] take everything eatable" from the laborers.[104] Even though African Americans worked the land and harvested crops, their work remained minimized by others who took advantage of the free labor. Regardless, Black Arkansans earned wages for their labor, which differed from their time in enslavement. The monthly wage for African American men averaged between $15 to $25, with women earning around $10 to $18.[105]

It was the new opportunities of the Civil War that enabled African Americans to begin shaping their life according to their desires. African Americans no longer had to bear the burden of their owners and could begin shaping their lives to their wants. Moneyhon writes these programs brought an end to the physical coercion of labor and

[103] Carmichael, "Federal Experiments," 106.
[104] Ebenezer S. Peake to his wife, Augusta, Pine Bluff, Ark. October 19-22, 1864, Series 2, Box 2, Folder 3, BC.MSS.06.32, Butler Center for Arkansas Studies, Little Rock.
[105] Moneyhon, "From Slave to Free Labor," 145.

encouraged an independent family dynamic including "religious" and "social life" aspects.[106] The obtaining of abandoned lands for African American lessees was not always easy. Black Arkansans who leased lands experienced conflicts from outside forces or disgruntled whites, which made the possibility of leasing lands for the refugees dangerous. Abandoned lands acted as a refuge for African Americans fleeing slavery and facing the unknown with these dangers and the uncertainty of war.

While African American men handled their enlistment duties, women faced uncertainties about remaining in the camps alone. As the men left to complete their enlistment, women and children became disproportionate figures in the camps. The women and children residing in Helena believed they had a place of refuge under General Samuel Curtis before General Frederick Steele took command of Helena. When Steele assumed responsibility for Helena and issued General Order No. 48, the order removed all women and children not employed by the Union from Helena to their previous plantations and positioned Steele defiantly behind the "Union policy on slavery."[107] The news of Steele's actions in Helena against women and children in the contraband camp attracted the attention of popular newspapers, such as the *New York Times*, with several publications condemning Steele's actions.[108] Regardless of Steele's actions, women in contraband camps were invaluable to the Union. The women could be employed as seamstresses or cooks, which provided relief for the Union. Taylor argues women did not fit inside the army's image of contraband camps but tried to find an outlet for women to

[106] Moneyhon, "From Slave to Free Labor," 138.
[107] Taylor, *Embattled Freedom*, 107-108.
[108] Taylor, *Embattled Freedom,* 108.

contribute to the war's cause. Women in Helena worked the same way they previously labored while enslaved.

Women worked to fill daily quotas but the difference now became women worked to benefit the Union. Taylor states women's daily quotas and long hours appeared no different than slavery on the surface, but the Union attempted to change "the meaning and purpose attached" to their jobs.[109] Union officials attempted to change the meaning associated with working for women in the camps to a proper employee and employer relationship that was drastically different than the meaning of chattel slavery. This provided different regulations for Black women which reformed previous experiences under slavery. Black women could now reform their image in the eyes of the government by working the mundane necessities in the camps for the soldiers. The gesture seems small. Women became imperative to the war's cause by providing relief to the Union Army, but women began breaking the molds of their enslavement by contributing to the war and gaining independence.

Other soldiers wrote to their families about African American labor in the camps. African Americans intended the camps to relieve them from slavery, and while not exactly similar, African Americans continued to work for the soldier's benefit. While the Union Army employed African American men in the colored regiments, women, children, and the elderly worked around these camps for the Union. Oftentimes, the enlisted African Americans became separated from their families to fight. African Americans had to navigate being on the front lines for the Union Army and work. The employment opportunities introduced by the Union Army for the African American

[109] Taylor, *Embattled Freedom*, 115.

refugees gave them a chance at financial stability. African Americans employed in the contraband camps became financially stable enough that they were able to provide for their needs and not rely on rations from the government.

These camps aided in improving African Americans' situation after their first interaction with Union troops. The Union Army began employing the refugees around the camps to assist with the functions of the camp. The Union Army's supplies were instrumental in initially improving the freedpeople's conditions upon entering the camps. Yet, as their numbers grew, the Army's ability to meet the demands of the refugees was strained. The large number of African Americans dependent on Union rations weakened the Union's ability to aid the refugees. Originally, contraband camps began as places for African American refugees while the number of refugees remained low. As refugees kept seeking out contraband camps, the jobs around the camps were filled by other refugees. This meant jobs inside the camps filled quickly and no other work was available for refugees, which placed a strain on the Union Army and its resources.

Throughout the war, the meaning of contraband camps would transform from a temporary camp setting to a home settlement farm model. The government needed to implement a program that provided relief for the African American refugees and the Union Army. The home farms answered the overcrowding issues present at contraband camps by removing some of the working refugees to new workable locations. Helena's camp was fully occupied by refugees as early as March 1864.[110] To alleviate the overcrowding of refugees, Chaplain Henrick requested a Freedmen's Home Farm be established on General Gideon Pillow's plantation. The home farm would create more

[110] J. L. Henrick to W. G. Sargent, February 1, 1864, Little Rock (Superintendent of Freedmen), FamilySearch.org.

jobs to keep the refugees busy.[111] Federal authorities in March 1864 moved 3,300 Black refugees from Helena's camp and relocated "many inhabitants to resettle on supervised and protected" home farms.[112] The army, however, struggled to find appropriate plantations to place African Americans to test out their home farm model. Many African Americans remained in Helena's contraband camps because the army only secured two locations for the home farm program.[113] These home farms provided alternatives to contraband camps and removed the refugees from the dangers in Union lines. Home farms provided relief to Union officials because they could focus only on soldiers instead of both soldiers and refugees. While working abandoned plantations gave African Americans the opportunity to care for their own property and needs, but the process by the Union lacked structure. Federal authorities were unsure of the best way to transition from contraband camps to home farms. After the arrival of the Freedmen's Bureau, agents slowly learned the best methods to implement for smooth operations between its agents and the freedpeople. Likewise, Freedmen's Bureau agents formed a routine within home farms that provided the best stability for all involved.

Black Arkansans' experiences at Helena illustrate the failures of the Union in undertaking the plight of African Americans. Helena set the tone for the possible realities for African Americans if change did not happen in handling the refugee situation and their seeking of Union aid. It is easy to place the blame of Helena on the Union and their neglect of not properly handling the situation. However, the Union did not know the correct ways to handle fleeing African Americans who were dependent on Union aid.

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[111] J. L. Henrick to W. G. Sargent, February 1, 1864, Little Rock (Superintendent of Freedmen), FamilySearch.org.
[112] Lovett, "African Americans, Civil War, and Aftermath in Arkansas," 314.
[113] Moneyhon, "From Slave to Free Labor," 140.

Helena's operations highlight the struggles the Union faced, and the experience could only improve other camps throughout the state. Arkansas's other camps were located near rivers and railroads making them accessible to have the necessary supplies transported to and from these locations. These contraband camps benefitted from river access to ensure they received supplies when necessary to improve life inside the camps. Contraband camps should have acted as places of refuge for African Americans, but Helena ruined this idea for Black Arkansans. African Americans should have received the necessary supplies and environment to encourage learning and autonomy. However, Helena showed the freedpeople their freedom and survival depended on themselves, and they would have to survive with a day-to-day mentality to overcome the horror in Helena.

Helena's instability made the camp harder to manage. Chandra Manning states that Helena's situation was not unique. Instead, the situation in Helena emphasized that other camps in the western theater were susceptible to a "constant state of instability and flux."[114] Helena presented similar problems as other contraband camps in the western theater. This exhibits the Union Army's failure in handling the situation they never expected or should have handled. Regardless, African American men drilled in preparation for action and labored around the camps working more fatigue-inducing jobs than white soldiers. Contraband camps represented new beginnings for African Americans and the rebuilding of their lives. African Americans enlisted in the Union Army and experienced their lives in ways African Americans previously dreamed. African Americans could begin learning to be autonomous in their journey from slavery. Little Rock, Pine Bluff, DeValls Bluff, and Helena created outlets for African Americans

[114] Manning, *Trouble Refuge,* 108.

to experience the troubles of war while building a community with other African Americans to create an atmosphere of safety. However, contraband camps and home farms were not always safe communities. African Americans had to survive the war and access new opportunities while also fighting disease, threats of war, and the separation from their family.

This chapter examined how Helena would shape the Union Army's treatment of fleeing African Americans. The management of Arkansas's interior camps would be stronger and less dangerous than Helena's, but authorities in Helena eventually stabilized the situation to provide some success for Black refugees. The riverport of Helena remained important during the war and Helena remained a Union controlled city. As such, improvements in managing Black Arkansans began as authorities learned how to best provide for these refugees. The movement of General Steele's army shows a strengthening of operations among Arkansas's other camps that demonstrate the Union would not completely fail African Americans. Helena remained an imperfect location for Black refugees, but Helena began as Arkansas's starting point to autonomy. The challenges in Arkansas's interior were present but they did not cause the amount of destruction that Helena did. As Steele's army moved west in Arkansas's interior, the army understood how to improve the refugee situation in other camps. Arkansas's camps in DeValls Bluff, Little Rock, and Pine Bluff experienced smoother operations and fewer horrors than Helena. While the functions of these camps benefited from Helena's experience, these camps still faced individualized hardships.

Survival in the Interior

Black refugees in Arkansas's interior experienced some differences from what transpired in Helena. Black Arkansans farther from the Mississippi River faced a lesser threat of Confederate attacks. Daily life inside the camps, however, looked different and presented new challenges. As in Helena, major areas of struggle in these camps included economic precarity, physical danger, and the lack of healthcare. It became imperative for the Union to remedy the problem for the survival of Black refugees. This chapter follows Steele's armies westward into Arkansas's interior in 1863 to DeValls Bluff then Little Rock before checking back into the evolving situation at Helena. Next, the thesis turns to the somewhat unique situation of Pine Bluff, which was significant in the region albeit outside of Steele's route. The organization and management of contraband camps in these other cities strengthened as Steele's army continued westward and the Union understood how to better manage African American refugees. These other camps benefited from Helena's anchor as a stable jumping off point as Steele's army marched west in Arkansas's territory to other cities. This chapter will weave through Arkansas's interior cities to map out the creation of structured routines for Black Arkansans that provided them with increased success. The Union Army understood reforms were required to avoid another disaster like Helena. This chapter follows a chronological approach through each city's contraband camps to analyze their successes and failures. Federal forces understood as they traveled into Arkansas how to manage the refugees and provide better protections, but this did not end all dangers for African Americans. Black Arkansans were not immune to the inherent dangers inside contraband camps during the war.

These interior camps experienced similar challenges to the camp at Helena. For example, the healthcare crisis in Helena traveled with Steele's armies. Confederate attacks remained constant in Union lines and contraband camps. DeValls Bluff, Little Rock, and Pine Bluff all benefitted from being farther in the state and from the Union Army's improvement in handling the influx of Black refugees. Federal forces in Helena were disastrous and mismanaged, leaving the freedpeople unsure of their situations. However, DeValls Bluff, Little Rock, and Pine Bluff experienced a better structure from federal forces as the war continued. Throughout the war, federal authorities recognized that contraband camps did not provide relief to refugees. Federal authorities began establishing freedmen's home farms near military posts where refugees could work on abandoned plantations, receive employment at other camps, receive wages, and rations.[115] This encouraged Arkansas's separation into districts with superintendents to overlook operations in the home farms. As Federal power in Arkansas moved west, contraband camps in DeValls Bluff, Little Rock, and Pine Bluff were stronger and better managed as federal authorities separated Arkansas into districts following the Union's failure of assisting refugees in Helena. Captain A. L. Thayer was in charge at Helena, Captain S. W. Mallory in Pine Bluff, Lieutenant W. Davis at DeValls Bluff, and Major W. G. Sargent as state superintendent in Little Rock to "supervise the work, keep accurate accounts, and pay a definite scale of wages" to refugees seeking government assistance.[116]

Steele's armies arrived in DeValls Bluff in August 1863 on his march toward Little Rock. The town achieved strongly fortified Union lines on the White River in 1863,

[115] Staples, *Reconstruction in Arkansas, 1862-1874*, 185.
[116] Staples, *Reconstruction in Arkansas, 1862-1874*, 186.

offering a tempting target for Confederate ambushes. DeValls Bluff served as a federal outpost that transported supplies to Little Rock during the war on the Memphis and Little Rock Railroad (M&LR). This railroad connected DeValls Bluff to Little Rock, creating an important line for the Union to control. DeValls Bluff was important to the Union due to the city's railroad access. The M&LR railroad played a key role in DeValls Bluff because at various times it benefited both sides of the war. The 24th Iowa Infantry traveled from Helena to DeValls Bluff to help protect the camp, the refugees, and Union supplies. Union forces expected a Confederate attack at DeValls Bluff, and it became apparent that extra soldiers had been required to protect the location and to make the Confederates "afraid" to come near.[117]

DeValls Bluff was another important camp for the freedpeople who enjoyed the opportunities presented them in this small town and the benefits of supplies brought from the railroad. The railroad enabled DeValls Bluff to have a Soldier's Home in the city, that was established by the WSC in August 1864. The home provided more necessary relief for soldiers than Helena's because of the frequent travel of marching regiments. The DeValls Bluff Soldier's Home acted as a staging point for General Steele's armies. These regiments would stop for two or three days, and the Soldier's Home provided soldiers with indoor accommodations for those "awaiting transport."[118] The WSC's DeValls Bluff and Helena Soldier's Homes combined aided close to thirty thousand white and colored troops, refugees, and freedpeople. No such homes existed in Little Rock or Pine Bluff. The soldiers home in DeValls Bluff included a physician on site for the refugees. The

[117] John B. Howard to Jacob Bare, on the White River above St. Charles, Ark., January 18, 1863, Box 1, Folder 15, BC.MSS.13.01, Butler Center for Arkansas Studies, Little Rock.
[118] Western Sanitary Commission, *Final Report of the Western Sanitary Commission from May 9, 1864 to Dec. 31, 1865*, 82.

doctor assisted with anything needed to ameliorate the issues in the camps with around 1,100 refugees in their care. The WSC was there to address the needs of the refugees through clothing, food, or support. In the report, Yeatman noted the refugees desired a vegetable diet and ordered supplies to be sent to these locations for the freedpeople. The supplies sent were "10 barrels of potatoes, 2 barrels kraut and pickles, with soda crackers, zwiebeck [sic], dried fruit," with tea and sugar for the sick receiving care.[119]

The DeValls Bluff contraband camp fell short of fully protecting and caring for Black Arkansans because the Union struggled to manage the situation. Union officers did not employ Black labor throughout the camp like officers in Helena did. Instead, the strain of labor and fatigue rested on white soldiers. Military officials did not apply Black labor and kept Union soldiers fatigued. The government offered a small wage for Black laborers and enlisted Union soldiers to help to "keep up the supply" of lumber for boats arriving and leaving from DeValls Bluff on the White River.[120] Black refugees faced prolonged suffering in DeValls Bluff until the camp underwent reforms in the operations of the camp. The army was stretched thin in DeValls Bluff and the Black refugees struggled to secure necessities for survival. Following an adjustment in military leadership, Black refugees in DeValls Bluff began working alongside Union soldiers to increase the camp's function.[121] Black refugees in DeValls Bluff consisted mostly of around 600 soldiers' wives and their families who were not employed in the camp.[122] By

[119] Western Sanitary Commission, *Final Report of the Western Sanitary Commission from May 9, 1864 to Dec. 31, 1865*, 110.
[120] Eaton, Jr., *Report of the General Superintendent of Freedmen*, 27.
[121] Eaton, Jr., *Report of the General Superintendent of Freedmen*, 27.
[122] Eaton, Jr., *Report of the General Superintendent of Freedmen*, 71.

1864, Lieutenant Davis's command of the camp provided good houses for the refugees, and some assistance for the sick.[123]

One family in DeValls Bluff failed to benefit from the combined U.S. Army and WSC aid. An unnamed mother and her children sought out DeValls Bluff and prepared to seek Union aid. The mother was extremely sick and had one child stay behind at home outside of the town until she could get the younger children to a safe location at Benton Barracks. The older son waited for a few days until agents of the Western Sanitary Commission found him. His mother died from sickness, and he became inconsolable. Eventually he was sent to the Mission Free School operated by WSC agents to reunite with his siblings. The Western Sanitary Commission's report of 1865 includes the story, emphasizing that the family could have been aided sooner if they knew help was available. The report states this mother could have been "assisted at the sanitary rooms by the superintendant [sic] of refugees" if she had not waited to come to the barracks.[124] The WSC's report includes another story of a sick mother waiting with her children to get aid. The mother had eight children but was hesitant to seek out medical attention at Benton Barracks. Five of her children died. The remaining children were sent to the Mission Free School. The Mission Free School was established in St. Louis, Missouri, by the WSC in June 1864.

As Steele's forces reached Little Rock on September 10, 1863, illness quickly spread among the city's contraband population. J. W. Wheelock, the Acting Hospital Steward, observed the operations in Little Rock's hospital for Black Arkansans was

[123] Eaton, Jr., *Report of the General Superintendent of Freedmen*, 71.
[124] Western Sanitary Commission, *Final Report of the Western Sanitary Commission from May 9, 1864 to Dec. 31, 1865*, 89.

inadequate. Freedpeople throughout the state had been transferred to Little Rock's hospital but the lack of supplies, Wheelock noted, hindered their care. The volume of sick refugees from Little Rock and surrounding cities only worsened the ability of doctors to appropriately care for the needs of ailing and wounded freedpeople. Various local societies offered clothing for the healthy freedpeople, but Wheelock lacked medical supplies for the sick. Little Rock's home farm hospital, built on the abandoned plantation of William R. Vaughan, on the outskirts of Little Rock, averaged around one hundred patients at any time and had to manage the "inadequacy of medical facilities" to care for the infirm.[125] Little Rock suffered from a lack of planning from government authorities assigned to the home farm which created a revolving mess of frequent mismanagement. The lack of commanders in Little Rock's home farm created destitute conditions again as the hospital underwent repairs. Freedpeople unnecessarily died from the problems in Little Rock. The constant influx of the sick from other camps, the lack of commanders, and the hospital never finishing construction hindered any success among the freedpeople in Little Rock.[126]

By 1864, close to three hundred African Americans died from various diseases, such as dysentery, cholera, typhoid fever, and others. An additional staggering statistic of medical supplies and rations issued shows Little Rock issued just over five thousand rations and supplies to the freedpeople whereas Pine Bluff issued close to three thousand rations and supplies.[127] J. W. Wheelock wrote to Major Sargent about the money contributed to benefit the freedpeople in Arkansas for want of supplies, food, and

[125] Carl Moneyhon, "The Little Rock Freedmen's Home Farm, 1863-1865," *Pulaski County Historical Review* 42 (Summer 1994): 29.
[126] Moneyhon, "The Little Rock Freedmen's Home Farm," 31.
[127] Finely, "In War's Wake," 140.

medicines to help in the hospitals. Wheelock states he has suffered "considerable inconvenience in consequence of want" for sanitary supplies that would help end the suffering of the refugees.[128] The help was needed due to many sick refugees being sent to the hospital in Little Rock because the other camps lacked the space or resources to care for the sick. Among the supplies Wheelock asks for were shirts, sheets, blankets, pillows, cooking utensils, soaps, and miscellaneous food supplies. These items could provide temporary relief to the freedpeople's suffering if the Freedmen's Hospital in Little Rock could acquire them. The Freedmen's home farm in Little Rock experienced a situation like the Freedmen's Hospital in needing funding or the funding used for purchasing supplies.

While Little Rock handled the situation of funding the freedpeople and receiving supplies, other issues within the camps and home farms remained present. Chaplain Ebenezer S. Peake wrote about the constant flow of ambulances and surgeons in Little Rock to aid the sick. The hospital in Little Rock had constant sick refugees sent to the camp from other locations in Arkansas. While the hospitals in Little Rock faced overcrowding, the buildings had been "built with haste" and were of inferior quality that challenged the ability to appropriately care for the sick and wounded.[129] Several communities worked to improve the conditions of the sick with citizens "very kindly" treating the sick and wounded to "buy items for their comfort."[130] African Americans placed a "large kettle of water set over to prepare an early breakfast" the following day

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[128] J. W. Wheelock to W. G. Sargent, July 16, 1864, "Arkansas, Freedmen's Bureau Field Office Records, 1864-1874," Little Rock (Superintendent of Freedmen) Roll 15, Letters and orders received, Jan 1864-Sept 1865, Images, FamilySearch. http://FamilySearch.org : December 30, 2022. NARA microfilm publication M1901. Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration.
[129] Eaton, Jr., *Report of the General Superintendent of Freedmen*, 71.
[130] Ebenezer S. Peake to his wife, Augusta, Little Rock, Ark. May 23, 1864, Series 2, Box 1, Folder 50, BC.MSS.06.32, Butler Center for Arkansas Studies, Little Rock.

before additional ambulances arrived to begin moving the sick and wounded.[131] Peake's account shows the atmosphere in Little Rock as a team effort in healing the sick, wounded soldiers, and freedpeople. The freedpeople in Little Rock became a part of a community, interested in taking care of all involved.

Little Rock struggled to provide for Black Arkansans under the care of the government and sought out assistance. The federal government had the funds available to help the conditions of Black Arkansans in their care for temporary relief. Captain S. M. Yearick wrote a letter to Major Sargent outlining the needs of the home farm like Wheelock wrote about the hospital's request for help. Yearick states the "poor should not be neglected," and the African Americans at present "are amply able to sustain themselves."[132] The condition of the freedpeople was desperate at the time of Yearick's letter to Major Sargent. Yearick advocated for funding for the freedpeople so they could sustain themselves with some of the government's assistance. The department could not continue operating in Little Rock without funding from the federal government for the benefit of the freedpeople. Without funding, Black Arkansans kept laboring for the Union's benefit without earning wages to become self-sufficient. Yearick states that by funding the freedpeople who labored on the home farm, they become able to sustain themselves during and after the war. The freedpeople could become independent citizens without needing government assistance if the practice of funding them begins.

[131] Ebenezer S. Peake to his wife, Augusta, Little Rock, Ark. May 23, 1864.
[132] S. Yearick to W. G. Sargent, November 25, 1864, "Arkansas, Freedmen's Bureau Field Office Records, 1864-1874," Little Rock (Superintendent of Freedmen) Roll 15, Letters and orders received, Jan 1864-Sept 1865, Images, FamilySearch. http://FamilySearch.org : December 28, 2022. NARA microfilm publication M1901. Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration.

Little Rock served as a hub for supplies for the Union. It was supported by a robust Union occupation force that included USCTs. In addition, the WSC assisted with establishing the agency in Little Rock that housed necessary supplies. The post in Little Rock distributed supplies to Pine Bluff, the DeValls Bluff Soldier's Home, and "stations" for the refugees and freedmen from 1863 to the war's end.[133] The resources available at Little Rock and the stability in dispatching them benefited others at Pine Bluff, DeValls Bluff, and Helena. Little Rock assisted the other Union camps in the state by providing resources for the other camps' success during the war. African American troops stationed in Little Rock were imperative. African American troops guarded rebel prisoners following General Benjamin H. Greathouse's capture of some Confederate soldiers. These African Americans marched the prisoners through the town to a different prison, feeling a sense of satisfaction. Minos Miller wrote the African Americans guarding the rebels had "done the boys more good than it would to see the paymaster," suggesting that overseeing Rebel prisoners highlighted the changing status quo between southern whites and African Americans.[134]

The stability made opportunities for African Americans in Little Rock greater than in Helena, DeValls Bluff, and Pine Bluff. Little Rock is the capital of Arkansas and additionally served as the headquarters for units of the 54th United States Colored Infantry. The opportunities for success and enjoyment differed in Little Rock from in the other camps because of Little Rock's position in the state. The atmosphere in Little Rock was not as precarious as it was around Helena or DeValls Bluff. Minos Miller, a captain

[133] Western Sanitary Commission, *Final Report of the Western Sanitary Commission from May 9, 1864 to Dec. 31, 1865*, 83.
[134] Minos Miller to his mother, Little Rock, Arkansas, April 14, 1864, Box 1, Folder 4, Item 31, MS M58, University of Arkansas Special Collections, Fayetteville.

in the 54th US Colored Infantry, discussed the potential of African Americans' ability to vote in a letter to his mother in 1865. Miller felt that African Americans deserved to vote and the ability to voice "their fair shair [sic]" where voting was necessary.[135] Indeed, Black residents asserted their feelings of autonomy. On July 5th, 1866, African Americans came together for a celebration in Little Rock. The celebration included around one thousand participants, who funded the event themselves. Jefferson Robinson of the 54th United States Colored Infantry observed the celebration of the African American population dancing, writing to his wife, "dance they did and dance they do" in this celebration for the Fourth of July.[136]

Helena did not remain disastrous after the WSC's arrival in Arkansas to assist the Union Army and Helena's instability lessened. Helena began benefiting from the improved structure the WSC provided by enabling the Union Army to focus its resources on the soldiers and lessen their strain. The assistance from the WSC provided stability in the city as federal authorities could shift focus on forming a dedicated agency for the freedpeople's benefit. Federal authorities took advantage of the WSC to create a partnership that allowed the government to shift their focus into establishing an agency dedicated solely to Arkansas's freedpeople. A. W. Plattenburg, an independent Arkansans not associated with any agency, provided needed resources for the Western Sanitary Commission, Black Arkansans, and Union soldiers. The WSC valued Plattenburg's assistance and he became an agent. In Helena, Plattenburg's stores received a generous distribution of clothing, wine, jellies, and stimulants for the sick, along with "towels,

[135] Minos Miller to his mother, Little Rock, Arkansas, September 1, 1865, Box 1, Folder 5, Item 41, MS M58, University of Arkansas Special Collections, Fayetteville.
[136] Jefferson Robinson, Little Rock, Ark., to Mary Burnell, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, July 5 and 6, 1866, Box 1, Folder 19, BC.MSS.04.03, Butler Center for Arkansas Studies, Little Rock.

handerchiefs [sic], socks, combs" from the WSC because these supplies were not easily attainable in Helena.[137] Plattenburg requested these items be sent to Helena while requesting similar supplies sent to Little Rock, Pine Bluff, and DeValls Bluff. This ensured the reach of the WSC was felt throughout Arkansas's interior to provide relief for the suffering of the freedpeople.

Although General Steele's Little Rock campaign did not include Pine Bluff the contraband camp provided significant success for Black refugees. Pine Bluff more effectively overcame sickness better than Helena, Little Rock, and DeValls Bluff because of Federal leadership on the home farm there. Like Little Rock, Pine Bluff benefitted from railroad and Arkansas River access, making it another important location for the Union and African American success. Pine Bluff was contested before the Battle of Pine Bluff in October 1863. In this conflict, Black Arkansans in the contraband camp helped the Union thwart the Confederate attempt at taking the city. When the city was attacked by Confederate forces, African Americans helped the Union Army protect the city by setting up a barricade made of bales of cotton to protect the area. The Battle of Pine Bluff constituted a team effort between Union troops and the freedpeople against the Confederate attack. Pine Bluff did not see any more fighting during the Civil War, which contributed to its relative stability.

In his 1864 report, General John Eaton Jr. writes that Pine Bluff had an easier time managing sickness throughout the home farm and lowering the number of sick in the camps. In May 1864, there was 870 sick Black Arkansans and by November 1864, the number had fallen to zero.[138] Captain S. W. Mallory served as the Superintendent of

[137] Western Sanitary Commission, *Report of the Western Sanitary Commission, July 1, 1863*, 24.
[138] Eaton, Jr., *Report of the General Superintendent of Freedmen*, 70.

Freedmen in Pine Bluff and succeeded in caring for the sick freedpeople because of the numerous "old quarters" at the home farm that helped with the "sanitary conditions" in Pine Bluff.[139] Mallory utilized the empty quarters in Pine Bluff to assess the situation of the refugees. Because there were numerous empty accommodations, the spread of disease in Pine Bluff was low because there was no overcrowding. The healthy freedpeople in Pine Bluff that could not enlist stayed on the home farm and worked the crops. As Moneyhon and Carmichael have asserted, the freedpeople worked on these plantations for the Union and harvested its crops for their own benefit. Black Arkansans could work the lands at the home farm in Pine Bluff to plant and harvest crops for their consumption, generally for the cost of a small tax imposed by the federal government. Harvested crops were taxed but the freedpeople additionally earned a monthly wage. The Home Farm was situated two miles south of Pine Bluff with around 800 acres "under cultivation by freed negroes."[140] Wages were earned by African Americans who worked the plantations and cultivated the crops. These crops benefited everyone for the war effort and gave the freedpeople a sense of employment outside the reigns of enslavement. The freedpeople had quotas to fill but earned wages for their efforts and were not regulated to strict or harsh punishments as they would have been previously. Pine Bluff introduced stability to the freedpeople through accessible lands with harvestable crops for their consumption and to pay necessary costs.

General Eaton described the Pine Bluff home farm as one of the best in Arkansas, but the ending of the war and the different agencies supporting the freedpeople created

[139] Eaton, Jr., *Report of the General Superintendent of Freedmen*, 70.
[140] Ebenezer S. Peake to his wife, Augusta, Pine Bluff, Ark. May 10-12, 1864, Series 2, Box 1, Folder 48, BC.MSS.06.32, Butler Center for Arkansas Studies, Little Rock.

friction. During the war, Pine Bluff had success in providing treatments for the sick freedpeople and managing sickness. By 1866, construction plans to add additions to a Bureau hospital in Pine Bluff were given to the Superintendent of Freedmen to describe the location of the hospital. The plans proposed building the addition by taking lumber from pine log houses on the home farm to build the hospital using available lumber from the farm.[141] Pine Bluff did not have a dedicated hospital building for the sick on the home farm during the war. Most of the sick were observed by doctors on the home farm while those who were too sick were transported to the hospitals in Little Rock. By constructing a dedicated hospital building in Pine Bluff, Black Arkansans no longer had to leave Pine Bluff for Little Rock to receive any medical attention they needed.

This change did not last long in Pine Bluff. By August 1866, government rations for Black Arkansans ceased. Brigadier Major General Sprague notified Captain E. T. Wallace, the Superintendent to Pine Bluff, that the Assistant Commissioner announced government rations would no longer be issued to residents of Jefferson County. The order from Sprague stated the "care of the poor" would become a matter for the civil authorities, effectively creating a strain on the functionality of Pine Bluff.[142] Government rations were ending for Black Arkansans in Pine Bluff and their assistance now rested with civil authorities in the city. As tensions rose in Pine Bluff following the ending of government rations, relations between white and African Americans in Pine Bluff had

[141] Henry M. Lilly to E. T. Wallace, April 6, 1866, "Arkansas, Freedmen's Bureau Field Office Records, 1864-1874," Pine Bluff (Jefferson County) Roll 20, Letters received, Mar 1866-Dec 4868, Images, FamilySearch. http://FamilySearch.org : January 6, 2023. NARA microfilm publication M1901. Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration.
[142] J. W. Sprague to E. T. Wallace, August 14, 1866, "Arkansas, Freedmen's Bureau Field Office Records, 1864-1874," Pine Bluff (Jefferson County) Roll 20, Letters received, Mar 1866-Dec 4868, Images, FamilySearch. http://FamilySearch.org : January 6, 2023. NARA microfilm publication M1901. Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration.

been tense. The Freedmen's Bureau's taking of abandoned lands did create issues. African Americans who leased lands became familiar with the operations of owning their land. In 1866, Jerry Saunders created a small and successful homestead for himself with the Freedmen's Bureau's aid as an essential factor in his success until issues arose that hindered Saunders' ability to lease property.[143]

Saunders leased land from the Freedmen's Bureau and built a house and raised a crop of cotton in Pine Bluff while paying the necessary taxes to the U.S. Government. Angry whites, however, accused Saunders of interloping on someone else's land; the alleged owner wanted Saunders' house and crops. Edwin T. Wallace, who tried the case, wrote in his letter to Brigadier General J. W. Sprague that the case's implications reached far beyond ordinary interest, and involved the rights of all freedmen "who have property" and could find themselves in a similar situation.[144] The struggle Jerry Saunders experienced highlights that Black Arkansans could own property, but without security. Because of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, African Americans could lease property, build homes and gardens, and begin establishing a foundation for a new life, for now.

Major Miner, a resident of Pine Bluff and formerly enslaved, represents another example of those who managed to acquire property in the area, but with mixed results. He applied his wages to the purchase of mules while employed at Pine Bluff's contraband camp. Miner's work for the U.S. Army included building coffins and constructing

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[143] E. T. Wallace to J. W. Sprague, May 7, 1866, "Arkansas, Freedmen's Bureau Field Office Records, 1864-1874," Little Rock (Superintendent of Freedmen) Roll 20, Letters received, Mar 1866-Dec 4868, Images, FamilySearch. http://FamilySearch.org : January 6, 2023. NARA microfilm publication M1901. Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration.
[144] E. T. Wallace to J. W. Sprague, May 7, 1866, Little Rock (Superintendent of Freedmen), FamilySearch.org.

pontoon bridges for use on the Saline River. He bought the mules around spring 1864.[145] A Union officer, however, requisitioned the animals while an employee of Miner's loaded wood into a wagon pulled by the mules.[146] Miner states there "has been nothing" paid to him "on account of any property taken" by the Union as a reimbursement for his requisitioned mules.[147] Miner filed a claim for repayment from the U.S. government, filing a petition with the Commissioners of Claims in 1878 for $300 compensation. Miner's claim was denied, and he never received reimbursement for his stolen property. Miner's unsuccessful claim from the Southern Claims Commission depicts the struggles that freedpeople encountered both during and following the war. Miner is just an example that while Black Arkansans could receive wages and property, they were never secure in their possessions.

As the federal presence in Arkansas expanded throughout the state when Steele's armies reached Little Rock, the management of contraband camps improved. The Union Army learned what failures occurred in Helena and how to avoid repeating those disasters throughout Arkansas. While the opportunities available for Black Arkansans improved following the disaster in Helena, not every part of contraband life was without its issues. DeValls Bluff was still dangerous for the refugees. Like Helena, DeValls Bluff was situated on a riverside with higher chances of a Confederate attack. Regardless, Pine Bluff's contraband camp experienced challenges like Helena. African Americans remained steadfast in their desire for agency. These opportunities gave African Americans the push towards an autonomous lifestyle with the chances for education and

[145] Petition of Major Miner of Pine Bluff for mules taken near Pine Bluff by U.S. Army, August 22, 1871, Publication number M1407, Southern Claims – Barred and Disallowed, Roll 6596 8892, Fold3.com.
[146] Petition of Major Miner, 1871, Fold3.com.
[147] Petition of Major Miner, 1871, Fold3.com.

religious instruction. Black Arkansans were provided clothing by the Western Sanitary Commission which gave the refugees comfort during the troubling situation. The Western Sanitary Commission did not only provide necessary food for the freedpeople to improve their conditions, but the Commission also ordered clothing and other household items that provide comfort.

A necessity to life, clothing, was scarce in Arkansas's contraband camps. Helena had a harder time receiving clothing for the refugees, while other camps did not struggle as much. The disparity in the availability of clothing between Helena and Arkansas's interior is dependent on the proximity to the state's capital. By 1864, the availability of fabric for Black women meant they could produce clothing purchased from their wages if provided with the appropriate supplies and fair prices. In return, DeValls Bluff and Little Rock had better access and prices of fabric, whereas Pine Bluff, being one of the more distant posts, had higher prices of fabric. Prices were higher in Pine Bluff because the camp was south of Little Rock but the opportunity to purchase clothing remained important for refugees there. Fabric prices ranged from sixty cents per yard at Freedmen's Stores to $1.25 per yard in camps further from the central outlet for refugees to purchase their supplies.[148] Stores in Little Rock became very popular among Black Arkansans and the demand for fabric for the refugees' benefited whites by lowering the demand for traders throughout the city.[149] However, these stores selling fabric became important for Black Arkansans to sew their clothing for their benefit. For the refugees, this illustrates the importance of their freedom and agency to work for their benefit of themselves.

[148] Eaton Jr., *Report of the General Superintendent of Freedmen*, 67.
[149] Eaton Jr., *Report of the General Superintendent of Freedmen*, 67.

Their education became an empowerment that enabled freedpeople to become successful in life. The camps in Helena, Little Rock, Pine Bluff, and DeValls Bluff were some of Arkansas's locations for African American refugees to build communities to become successful citizens following the Civil War. Little Rock and Pine Bluff provided the most opportunities for African Americans escaping slavery and success in being prepared for freedom. Additionally, DeValls Bluff and Helena did not share the same advantages as Little Rock and Pine Bluff. The atmosphere in DeValls Bluff struggled with the threat of Confederate attacks and limited availability and funding for African Americans' success. While Helena implemented structure into the contraband camps and home farms, educational opportunities increased, and the government focused on their education. DeValls Bluff struggled to find locations for educating African Americans, but the freedpeople received education and invested in their future. Education became a facet of life inside contraband camps for Black Arkansans as they became literate.

Intangible Aspects of Freedom

The atmosphere in contraband camps began as intense, uncertain, and contradictory. There was a threat of violence and sickness, but also the beginning of a free life for African Americans. These refugees from slavery enjoyed new experiences in life that they could not previously take part in, in which education and religion remained paramount. Freedpeople's education got off to a rocky start. However, the freedpeople and their partners became creative in how they met the challenges of funding and dedicating buildings. African Americans who survived the lack of rations, employment, and the threats of disease and war in the camps could focus on education and religion as outlets. The Freedmen's Bureau combined their efforts with resources secured by the American Missionary Association to provide teachers and school supplies for the freedpeople's education. African Americans understood education to be central in their preparation to enter society as freedpeople. As such, the efforts of the federal government via the Freedmen's Bureau, and other volunteer partners improved their chance at success. The freedpeople used their education to their advantage to help each other and influence the younger generations to pursue education. African Americans assumed full responsibility for their education after the American Missionary Association and other entities no longer contributed. Some of Arkansas's interior cities provided more educational success for Black Arkansans while other cities, such as DeValls Bluff, struggled to acquire teachers. Helena serves as the starting point for this chapter before transitioning to DeValls Bluff, and Pine Bluff, and ending the chapter with educational success in Little Rock. Discussion of religious activity appears throughout the analysis of

each city's educational programs because agencies and their teachers often combined their instruction.

Both education and religious freedom had been denied to enslaved people in Arkansas and elsewhere. While state law did not prohibit the educational instruction of enslaved people in Arkansas as in many other slave states, whites' convention was to harshly discourage it. It was dangerous for most enslaved people to learn to read and write. And while their religious beliefs did not come under the same type of scrutiny, whites in Arkansas as elsewhere feared subversive Black Christianity and preferred some supervision of worship activities.[150] The Nat Turner Rebellion of 1831 reshaped how slaveowners felt about religious teachings to their slaves. Slaveowners believed that religious freedom encouraged rebellions. As free people, however, African Americans could now learn to read and write while building autonomous church lives as well. Some formal religious instruction came with the arrival of outside agencies, however. While the AMA served in Arkansas as teachers to the freedpeople, they also acted as missionaries to them.[151] The AMA recognized an opportunity to educate the refugees and show them the importance and relief that religion provides as an outlet in troubling situations. As a result, AMA teachers distributed religious pamphlets for African Americans to study scripture.[152]

As contraband camps improved and African Americans experienced better structure, education became the focus for federal authorities. The Freedmen's Bureau

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[150] Jones, *A Weary Land*, 85, Kelly Houston Jones, "Slave Literacy," in *Encyclopedia of Arkansas History and Culture* ed. Lancaster, accessed April 4, 2023, https://encyclopediaofarkansas.net/entries/slave-literacy-12577/.
[151] Larry Wesley Pearce, "The American Missionary Association and the Freedmen in Arkansas, 1863-1878," *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 30, no. 2 (Summer 1971): 129.
[152] Moneyhon, *The Impact of the Civil War and Reconstruction on Arkansas*, 152.

oversaw the education of African Americans during Reconstruction and by 1868, African Americans as a class became familiarized with free public education.[153] As the Freedmen's Bureau continued its efforts at educating African Americans, education provided connections for African Americans. Throughout the war and into Reconstruction, education faced various obstacles before a uniform system emerged. Much of this is related to white resistance. Thomas Staples writes that the Freedmen's Bureau worked to "remove" from the minds of whites the "prejudice of educating" African Americans.[154] While African Americans prepared to become citizens, the federal government worked to protect them.

It was difficult for Union officials to acquire enough teachers for the freedpeople in these camps for their education and it was also difficult for the Union to find locations for schoolhouses. Superintendent of Freedmen General John Eaton Jr. wrote in his 1864 report that the Union struggled and found it "impossible" to procure teachers because of the "raids, the want of and impracticability of getting houses," and the general destitute conditions of the freedpeople and inside the camps.[155] In addition to struggling to find teachers, it was a challenge to find suitable classroom locations. Eaton wrote the plantations hardly kept school buildings and federal authorities made no improvements to the school buildings.[156] While it was challenging to create the necessary conditions for education with ample teachers and suitable school buildings, freedpeople's desire for education only grew.

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[153] Staples, *Reconstruction in Arkansas, 1862-1874*, 315.
[154] Staples, *Reconstruction in Arkansas, 1862-1874*, 315.
[155] Eaton Jr., *Report of the General Superintendent of Freedmen*, 32.
[156] Eaton Jr., *Report of the General Superintendent of Freedmen*, 32.

The Northwestern Freedmen's Aid Commission and the American Missionary Association traveled from the North to help, blending education, and religion into one focus in these camps. The American Missionary Association began arriving in 1863 in Arkansas to Helena, Little Rock, Pine Bluff, and DeValls Bluff to aid the Union in managing the influx of freedpeople. The American Missionary Association situated itself in various locations in Arkansas and encountered mixed reactions from the community. The American Missionary Association's arrival in Little Rock was controversial, as Larry Weasley Pearce writes, with the teachers reporting "much hostility" among the white civilians but received a warm reception from the army chaplains and some officers.[157] The American Missionary Association arriving in Pine Bluff faced similar situations like those who went to Little Rock. The American Missionary Association in Little Rock overcame the negative attitudes from the white citizens and excited African Americans who desired their help in education.

However, when the AMA began arriving in Arkansas in 1863, things did not look hopeful. The AMA entered Arkansas and witnessed the freedpeople in destitute conditions. Upon the AMA's arrival, there were 916 self-supporting freedpeople in Little Rock and only about 100 freedpeople received regular rations from the camp.[158] However, this did not hinder the AMA's goal of supporting the freedpeople in their new journey. The AMA aided with the freedpeople's desire for education in Little Rock. African American troops stationed in Little Rock attended the classes when they were able, but their schedule as soldiers occasionally hindered their involvement in class. Unlike Little Rock, Helena did not have many AMA teachers assisting in their camps.

[157] Pearce, "The American Missionary Association and the Freedmen in Arkansas, 1863-1878," 126.
[158] Pearce, "The American Missionary Association and the Freedmen in Arkansas, 1863-1878," 127.

Pearce states this was because the Quakers and the Indiana Yearly Meeting of Friends "had chosen Helena" as an important location which the AMA never fought.[159]

The next move required finding structures to serve as schoolrooms or locations to build schools. The AMA constructed schools in Helena for the refugee's benefit. Maria R. Mann with the WSC remained in Helena to assist with the schooling of African Americans, but Helena faced a lot of discouragements and "every effort to improve the condition of the freed people" existed.[160] Arkansas's camps needed to provide relief through education and religion for the freedpeople. Arkansas's camps required many school buildings because of the large number of African Americans seeking education at these locations. Helena, for example, had the highest number of African American refugees and had more schools than Little Rock, Pine Bluff, or DeValls Bluff. A July 1864 report from the Superintendent of Freedmen states Helena had six schools for the freedpeople, with five in Helena and one located outside of the city.[161] These schools in Helena provided outlets of relief for the African Americans in Union lines by using several locations that alleviate any issues of overcrowding in Helena.

General Superintendent Eaton organized education plans for African Americans to become literate as a part of their self-sufficiency and northern teachers came to Arkansas. By 1864, thirteen teachers arrived in Helena, Little Rock, and Pine Bluff. Chandra Manning suggests that while the overall situation in Helena was rocky, schooling demonstrated a "reasonably steady trajectory" in 1864.[162] The conditions were

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[159] Pearce, "The American Missionary Association and the Freedmen in Arkansas, 1863-1878," 130.
[160] Western Sanitary Commission, *Report of the Western Sanitary Commission, July 1, 1863,* 25.
[161] J. R. Locke to W. G. Sargent, July 1864, "Arkansas, Freedmen's Bureau Field Office Records, 1864-1874," Helena (Phillips County) Roll 11, Copies of reports, 1864-1867. Images. FamilySearch. http://FamilySearch.org : December 13, 2022. NARA microfilm publication M1901. Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration.
[162] Manning, *Troubled Refuge*, 108.

difficult for all involved in education for the freedpeople. Major Sargent reported in 1864 there was a struggle placing schools on plantations but found success having schools "inaugurated in towns near wood-yards" which provided educational opportunities in home farms in Arkansas.[163] The freedpeople in Helena learned rapidly and the 1864 report recorded the advances in education by the freedpeople. A total of 213 freedpeople attended schools in Helena, with 158 able to read, 4 understanding geography, 37 understanding architecture, and 56 freedpeople able to write.[164] Schools began teaching subjects to African Americans about the necessities of life. These subjects were math, reading, and writing.

Existing plantations were not designed with schoolhouses to educate African Americans and often lacked buildings for education. Helena, Little Rock, Pine Bluff, and DeValls Bluff began with no buildings appropriate for schooling or religious instruction. At the beginning of the war, the Union and AMA teachers searched for buildings to host these lessons. Education and religion classes were held wherever space was found, which included the outdoors, civilian living quarters, and soldier's quarters. As the war progressed and African Americans fell under the care of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands (BRFAL), more dedicated resources were allotted by the agency for building schoolhouses to incubate education and religious instruction. As the Freedmen's Bureau began dedicating resources to education for African Americans, the construction of schoolhouses began in areas where they would receive the most students to support a school's location.

[163] Eaton Jr., *Report of the General Superintendent of Freedmen*, 61.
[164] J. R. Locke to W. G. Sargent, July 1864, Helena (Phillips County), FamilySearch.org.

One of the largest groups of victims of war and disease was Black children. The children became the focus for the troops and citizens around Helena to protect their future during the Civil War and Reconstruction. The quality of life for children was imperative in Little Rock when, in 1867, locations were scouted for new school buildings. The government would help invest in schools on one acre of land or more that was "healthfully and centrally located" in a neighborhood with enough children to support the establishment of a school.[165] This report also included the creation of a school board following advice from African Americans in the community. Helena was the only location in Arkansas with a dedicated answer for handling orphans. It would have been understandably difficult for many of the refugee children to focus on education. Because of this, orphans from around Arkansas and Tennessee ended up being sent to Helena by WSC agents and Union officials. Eventually, construction commenced for an asylum in Helena for children whose parents enlisted and were fighting in the army or those whose parents died from diseases.

The reality of children being victims of the Union Army and losing their parents indicated another fault of contraband camps that federal authorities needed to address. However, the asylums for orphans became beneficial to their development to adulthood. Orphans received shelter, food, and clothing, along with "schooling and religious instruction."[166] The orphans became an important issue in Helena, but the orphans received opportunities they might not have received otherwise. In the anniversary

[165] W. M. Colby to Albert Coates, May 5, 1867, "Arkansas, Freedmen's Bureau Field Office Records, 1864-1874," Pine Bluff (Jefferson County) Roll 20, Letters received Mar 1866-Dec 1868. Images. FamilySearch. http://FamilySearch.org : December 8, 2022. NARA microfilm publication M1901. Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration.
[166] Taylor, *Embattled Freedom*, 235.

celebration of the asylum for orphans in Helena, the children received support from local Black grocers who donated "peaches, blackberries, and sugar cakes" for the children.[167] The support for the orphans and their education is remarkable because these children only lacked families because of the war and deadliness of the contraband camps. The presence of so many orphans in Helena heightened the need for some aspects of education. Without education, these already disadvantaged freed children lacked the necessary components for a successful life after the Civil War. Because Helena's orphans were given the ability to further their education in the asylum, the orphans learned under Mrs. Clark from Indiana and maintained "excellent discipline" and learned rapidly.[168] The 56th United States Colored Troops (USCT) became instrumental in the preservation of the asylum for the children. Amy Murrell Taylor contends the 56th USCT recognized the children stood to lose the most because they lacked family support.[169]

DeValls Bluff, a much smaller camp in comparison to Arkansas's interior camps, would not be as successful. Six hundred Black women, children, and the constituted the population within DeValls Bluff's camp while men enlisted. DeValls Bluff served more as a recruitment center for colored regiments instead of providing opportunities to the refugees. However, Freedmen's Bureau agents tried to secure funding and resources for education. DeValls Bluff acquired several teachers to aid in educational instruction for the colored regiments stationed in the area. Arkansas's opportunities justified schoolhouses and teachers assisting the refugees throughout the state. DeValls Bluff experienced an increase in pupils like Little Rock, but the lack of teachers in DeValls

[167] Taylor, *Embattled Freedom*, 235.
[168] J. R. Locke to W. G. Sargent, July 1864, Helena (Phillips County), FamilySearch.org.
[169] Taylor, *Embattled Freedom*, 236.

Bluff hindered educational progress. DeValls Bluff never had an established schoolhouse, not for lack of freedpeople involvement, but because the location lacked teachers. DeValls Bluff required three teachers for the 150 pupils, and the progress the freedpeople made with what they had was "encouraging" and would support the decision for a schoolhouse.[170] DeValls Bluff did suffer issues and was not as successful as Little Rock, Pine Bluff, or Helena. The camp at DeValls Bluff was smaller than the other three locations, and often the city was unsuccessful at obtaining and keeping relevancy. Because Little Rock and Pine Bluff had access to teachers, these cities saw success for the freedpeople. DeValls Bluff and Helena's availability of teachers differed. Federal authorities tried to keep plenty of teachers in DeValls Bluff, but it was easier to provide teachers in Little Rock and Pine Bluff.

Pine Bluff's educational opportunities for Black Arkansans were better than Helena's or DeValls Bluff's. AMA teachers arriving received a warm welcome among the refugees and a similar reception among white civilians like they had in Little Rock. Pine Bluff built school buildings for the freedpeople, as did Little Rock, DeValls Bluff, and Helena. One of Pine Bluff's schoolhouses finished construction in January 1863 and was small with rooms to separate the refugees by gender. The freedpeople in Pine Bluff had improved and could spell 32 words "from three letters to three syllables" and a few learning to read by mid-April 1863.[171] The American Missionary Association teachers in Pine Bluff had been denied appropriate lodging, but Captain S. W. Mallory, "promised"

[170] J. Grant, Report of the condition of schools for month ending Jan. 27, 1865, January 1865, "Arkansas, Freedmen's Bureau Field Office Records, 1864-1874," Little Rock (Superintendent of Freedmen) Roll 16, Narrative school reports from teachers and superintendents of freedmen's schools, Dec 1864-June 1865. Images. FamilySearch. http://FamilySearch.org : December 16, 2022. NARA microfilm publication M1901. Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration.
[171] Pearce, "The American Missionary Association and the Freedmen in Arkansas, 1863-1878," 132.

the teachers a schoolhouse and teachers' quarters "would be built independent of the military post."[172] A schoolhouse built away from the military post lowered the risk of Confederate attack. Most enslaved African Americans were illiterate and "didn't git [sic] no chance" to learn anything.[173] Matilda Hatchett from Pine Bluff benefited from education after the war was over. Hatchett recalled being unable to learn during her time enslaved, but after the war, she became literate and involved in her community.

African Americans in Pine Bluff excelled as quickly as Black refugees would in Little Rock. These subjects included "geography, singing, and Scripture memorization."[174] Education for the freedpeople opened them up to new opportunities, and by attending classes in topics other than math, writing, and reading, their education heightens their ability to be successful after the war. Unfortunately, DeValls Bluff and Helena's African Americans did not experience the same advancement as Little Rock and Pine Bluff. The Freedmen's Bureau recognized that education for African Americans increased their success in their becoming U.S. citizens. The American Missionary Association teachers in Pine Bluff remained and continued supporting the education of the freedpeople. Education in Pine Bluff provided a successful learning environment for the freedpeople. By 1866, the AMA prepared to send an authorized two or three more teachers to Pine Bluff. These teachers sent to Pine Bluff would be "recognized by the Bureau" and given appropriate lodging accommodations.[175] A high priority was given to

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[172] Pearce, "The American Missionary Association and the Freedmen in Arkansas, 1863-1878," 131.
[173] Matilda Hatchett in George E. Lankford, ed., *Bearing Witness: Memories of Arkansas Slavery Narratives from the 1930s WPA Collections* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2003), 404.
[174] Moneyhon, *The Impact of the Civil War and Reconstruction on Arkansas*, 152.
[175] W. M. Colby to General Superintendent of Schools, October 17, 1866, "Arkansas, Freedmen's Bureau Field Office Records, 1864-1874," Pine Bluff (Jefferson County) Roll 20, Letters received Mar 1866-Dec 1868. Images. FamilySearch. http://FamilySearch.org : December 8, 2022. NARA microfilm publication M1901. Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration.

AMA teachers for their comfort in exchange for their efforts in educating the freedpeople. Arkansas relied heavily on AMA teachers to educate the freedpeople in preparation for an autonomous life. In May 1866, the freedpeople relocated their building room used for schooling purposes from the Home Farm to within Pine Bluff with the understanding that the freedpeople use this location as a schoolhouse and "must not be disturbed."[176] Efforts within Pine Bluff were made by the government to ensure that education for the freedpeople remained undisturbed by any outside factors related to the Home Farm by 1866. Pine Bluff offered the most stable chance at educational success for the freedpeople over Helena and Little Rock. Pine Bluff's home farm had the best advantages and management for the freedpeople in their education and building an autonomous lifestyle.

Louisa Mallory, the wife of the Pine Bluff Home Farms Superintendent of Freedmen Captain S. W. Mallory, writes about the freedpeople's educational improvements. In early 1865, the "colored children" had made "very good progress" in courses consisting of singing, reading, writing, and spelling.[177] The progress of the freedpeople's education continued to receive high praise as the freedpeople soaked up their lessons and their improvement reflected that. Mallory writes about the African American soldiers at the Home Farm, writing they have improved enough to "write to their families" themselves.[178] Writing to family members served as a bittersweet moment for African Americans. African Americans no longer had to rely on others to write or

[176] J. W. Sprague Orders to E. T. Wallace, May 1, 1866, "Arkansas, Freedmen's Bureau Field Office Records, 1864-1874," Pine Bluff (Jefferson County) Roll 20, Letters received Mar 1866-Dec 1868. Images. FamilySearch. http://FamilySearch.org : December 8, 2022. NARA microfilm publication M1901. Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration.
[177] Louisa Mallory to her son LeRoy, Freedmen's Home Farm, Pine Bluff, Ark., February 22, 1865, Box 1, Folder 2, BC.MSS.13.62, Butler Center for Arkansas Studies, Little Rock.
[178] Louisa Mallory to son, February 22, 1865.

read a letter to them. Because of the war, they could write and read themselves. Elmira Hill of Pine Bluff benefited from her family's ability to read and write during the war. Because of their education in Pine Bluff, Hill attended school after the war's end and learned to read. Hill keeps a letter "for remembrance" from her mother, written by Hill's sister, dated 1867.[179] It is unknown when Hill's mother passed, but the letter from her mother gives her a sense of familiarity and pride.

Reading and writing connected African American families together with the common factor of being literate. As African Americans searched for their family following the war, literacy aided in that search and reconnected torn-apart families. Hill's recollection is only one story is a plethora of others. The point remains that African Americans cherished the ability of literacy granted to them. One African American said the ability to read and write was a "consolation" to their plight.[180] As African Americans furthered their education, these educational opportunities continually improved during the war as the Freedmen's Bureau learned the best way to operate schools. Before the war, African Americans knew education was elusive to them and only something they could dream of. Henry H. Butler of Fort Worth, Texas, served with a regiment in Pine Bluff and mustered out in 1865. Butler recalled his father telling him to get an education if ever offered the chance, and Butler decided to act on his desire for education. Butler faced the opportunity head-on following his mustering out of the service. After his service, Butler "entered the grade school at Pine Bluff" and worked at any job he could find.[181] Later, Butler graduated from Washburn College in Kansas to become a teacher to assist his

[179] Elmira Hill, *Bearing Witness*, 200.
[180] John Jones, *Bearing Witness*, 14.
[181] Henry H. Butter, *Bearing Witness*, 194.

"race to improve their station" in life.[182] Little Rock and Pine Bluff had an advantage that Helena did not. Little Rock and Pine Bluff benefited from frequent attempts to provide the freedpeople with educational opportunities. Pine Bluff fared as well as Little Rock did in terms of educational success for the freedpeople. Education and religion in Pine Bluff were taught in schoolhouses together as a daily schedule. There was no attempt to separate the two subjects and Black Arkansans enjoyed the ability to participate in both. Educational success in Pine Bluff was heightened than it was in Helena or DeValls Bluff, which created lasting opportunities for Black Arkansans.

While Pine Bluff's educational opportunities were successful, Little Rock fared the best when it came to African American education. In 1865, Little Rock had seven teachers and around 500 pupils, and Pine Bluff had five teachers between two schools with 350 pupils.[183] The education progress between Little Rock and Pine Bluff was encouraging, and attendance at these schools in DeValls Bluff, Little Rock, and Pine Bluff remained high. The unabated desire for education among the freedpeople constantly rose. As the success of schools in Little Rock increased, the number of students in attendance in Little Rock increased. In Little Rock, Ebenezer S. Peake observed the freedpeople in a "condition of pitable ignorance" and yearning for education and religious teachers to improve their morale.[184] The schoolhouses in Little Rock were constructed by the Union for African American children before the Freedmen's Bureau

[182] Henry H. Butler, *Bearing Witness,* 195.
[183] Joel Grant to Freedmen's Department, January 31, 1865, "Arkansas, Freedmen's Bureau Field Office Records, 1864-1874," Little Rock (Superintendent of Freedmen) Roll 16, Narrative school reports from teachers and superintendents of freedmen's schools, Dec 1864-June 1865. Images. FamilySearch. http://FamilySearch.org : December 16, 2022. NARA microfilm publication M1901. Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration.
[184] Ebenezer S. Peake to Adjutant General, U.S.A., Little Rock, Ark. March 31, 1865, Series 1, Box 1, Folder 13, BC.MSS.06.32, Butler Center for Arkansas Studies, Little Rock.

began handling the construction and location of schoolhouses. The teachers in these schoolhouses were women from the North, such as those from the American Missionary Association. Eventually, the schools incorporated African American teachers. Julia A. White remembers when the schools included African American teachers. White recalled one of those teachers was Charlotte Stephens, who would have a school named after her in Little Rock in the twentieth century.[185] The freedpeople lacked a routine to occupy themselves and escape from the reality of a mundane life in a contraband camp.

The Office Superintendent of Freedmen's Schools in Arkansas relates this increase in pupils and attendance as coinciding with the "increased appreciation of the schools" and the additional lack of schools.[186] By May 1865, Little Rock only had three schools with more students than Pine Bluff in 1865. African Americans desired education in Little Rock, yet not all had schoolhouses easily accessible. Little Rock's educational opportunities inside the city created an easier chance for freedpeople's education. The freedpeople on the Home Farm had no schoolhouses located on site. Schoolhouses in Little Rock were in the city limits and the Home Farm was a few miles outside of the city. Eventually, the Home Farm would establish a schoolhouse, but it would not be for a few years. Joel Grant, Chaplain of the 12th Illinois Regiment, states in his report the capabilities of teachers in Little Rock while the freedpeople and teachers lacked designated schoolhouses. Grant states the teachers "have done a great and good work"

[185] Julia A. White, *Bearing Witness,* 345.
[186] Department report of schools to W. G. Sargent, May 31, 1865, "Arkansas, Freedmen's Bureau Field Office Records, 1864-1874," Little Rock (Superintendent of Freedmen) Roll 16, Narrative school reports from teachers and superintendents of freedmen's schools, Dec 1864-June 1865. Images. FamilySearch. http://FamilySearch.org : December 16, 2022. NARA microfilm publication M1901. Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration.

teaching the refugees while teaching from sheds or underneath trees.[187] Black Arkansan's desire for education overcame any obstacles and showed their tenacity in becoming citizens.

The desire of the freedpeople in Little Rock for education was "unabated" and "so strong" it was described as "excessive" by a Freedmen's Bureau official.[188] Education was invaluable to African Americans who were reforming their lives following enslavement, and imperative for the freedpeople to ensure they were prepared for the realities of life. Little Rock struggled with a lack of supplies available to the freedpeople. Unmet demands for "writing desks, black boards, outline maps, etc." hindered educational progress.[189] *McGuffey's First Reader* and *McGuffey's Second Reader* were used in classrooms to encourage reading among the freedpeople. The Union struggled to get enough copies of the books. However, as the freedpeople continued with their education, they got access to other copies of *McGuffey's* to improve their reading skills. Educated freedpeople while lacking the fundamental supplies necessary for education created problems the Union needed to address. By 1866, Pulaski and Jefferson counties, Little Rock and Pine Bluff respectively, had a goal to create twenty-five schools for the freedpeople between the two counties. In a letter dated October 15th, 1866, the American Missionary Association planned to supply teachers to each county for $15 per month if adequate school buildings were erected and furnished for the "intellectual and moral

[187] Joel Grant to Office Superintendent of Freedmen's Schools, May 31, 1865, "Arkansas, Freedmen's Bureau Field Office Records, 1864-1874," Little Rock (Superintendent of Freedmen) Roll 16, Narrative school reports from teachers and superintendents of freedmen's schools, Dec 1864-June 1865. Images. FamilySearch. http://FamilySearch.org : December 19, 2022. NARA microfilm publication M1901. Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration.
[188] Joel Grant to Office Superintendent of Freedmen's Schools, May 31, 1865, Little Rock (Superintendent of Freedmen), FamilySearch.org.
[189] Joel Grant to Office Superintendent of Freedmen's Schools, May 31, 1865, Little Rock (Superintendent of Freedmen), FamilySearch.org.

improvement" of the freedpeople.[190] Education could be successful for the freedpeople with the right learning opportunities to encourage learning.

In 1867, the Society of Friends arrived in Little Rock. Charlotte Stephens called them the "Quackers," and they erected a two-story schoolhouse at Sixth and State streets for the education of African Americans.[191] The school built by the Society of Friend's purpose was for the education of the freedpeople until the city took property and took control of the school from the freedpeople. Several organizations offered their help in educating the freedpeople and how to help them be prepared citizens. Before the city took control of the schoolhouse, old African Americans frequently attended classes to learn to read and write. Henry H. Butler, of Texas, was not the only African American to benefit from education during the war. Charlotte Stephens benefited from the education provided to the freedpeople and began teaching at Little Rock schools at fifteen and continued teaching in Little Rock for 69 years.[192]

Stephens was successful in her education in Little Rock and had the Charlotte E. Stephens school in Little Rock named in her honor.[193] Stephens attended Oberlin College in Ohio before returning to Little Rock. Little Rock's stability in Arkansas's interior gave Black Arkansans the structure and opportunities for success. The federal presence throughout Arkansas's capital offered more stability for AMA teachers and facilities that heightened educational chances. Religious teachings in Little Rock proved valuable to Black Arkansans throughout the city and provided agency that refugees lacked

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[190] W. M. Colby to Major Davis, October 15, 1866, "Arkansas, Freedmen's Bureau Field Office Records, 1864-1874," Pine Bluff (Superintendent of Arkansas River District) Roll 19, Letters and orders received, Jul 1866-Feb 1867. Images. FamilySearch. http://FamilySearch.org : December 8, 2022. NARA microfilm publication M1901. Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration.
[191] Charlotte Stephens, *Bearing Witness*, 336.
[192] Charlotte Stephens, *Bearing Witness*, 336.
[193] Charlotte Stephens, *Bearing Witness*, 336.

previously. Pine Bluff and Little Rock's stability enabled Black Arkansan's agency to take education and apply it to their free lives. The stories of Henry H. Butler and Charlotte Stephens demonstrates the careers that African Americans entered after they were educated in these camps. Not only did African Americans enjoy the liberty to determine their free paths, but the ability also to write encouraged families to reconnect. The Freedmen's Bureau provided structure to prepare Black Arkansans for freedom after the war. By preparing refugees for citizenship, contraband camps and education gave them agency to determine their future.

Inextricably embedded in both the outsider educational outreach to freedpeople in Arkansas and in their own communities for the future was the Christian faith. Church mattered to African Americans so much so that they often attended Sunday school weekly in addition to their courses during school even in adverse conditions. Religion in the contraband camps was not separated from the education classes, but the Freedmen's Bureau tried to guarantee African Americans could practice their religion. Sunday services were in place for the freedpeople and many attended these services. Religion served as a fundamental element of freedom for African Americans after they were denied religious freedom while enslaved. One of the churches in Little Rock was the Methodist Episcopal church for African Americans. The church was located on Eighth and Broadway in Little Rock, and the preacher was the father of Charlotte Stephens. Stephens recalled her time at the church during slavery and the separation of whites and African Americans. The war changed the division of the church and Stephens states the

church went back to its "original Methodist" ideologies where African Americans could continue practicing their religion.[194]

The church was an outlet for African American refugees to forget the continued struggles they faced in contraband camps. This momentary release from reality meant that African Americans were free to celebrate their religion and ignore the confines of life in a contraband camp. Chaplain Ebenezer S. Peake preached to African Americans in 1863 and 1864, usually in Helena and Little Rock. Peake was imperative throughout Arkansas as a chaplain and often preached to African Americans and gained appointment to the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands. In one letter, Peake described scenes of preaching to African Americans as "worthy of a Hogarth" as the refugees sang and "went round the circle shaking hands & keeping times to the music."[195] Peake enjoyed working with the African American refugees, he writes in other letters about preaching to the African Americans. Peake observed African American children attending religion classes who have received high remarks, writing that 35 African American children attend church Sunday mornings. He states most of these children can write, and "all show a great desire to learn."[196] Religious instruction for African Americans served as an outlet for relief and allowed the freedpeople to spiritually rationalize their present situations.

Religious instruction for the freedpeople in Helena struggled. By 1865, Helena could not obtain an appropriate minister for the freedpeople. The lack of a reputable

[194] Charlotte Stephens, *Bearing Witness*, 336.
[195] Ebenezer S. Peake to his wife, Augusta, Helena, Ark, January 25, 1863, Series 2, Box 1, Folder 10, BC.MSS.06.32, Butler Center for Arkansas Studies, Little Rock. William Hogarth, 1697-1764, was a famous English painter during the seventeen century.
[196] Ebenezer S. Peake to Adjutant General, U.S.A., Little Rock, Ark. March 31, 1865.

minister for the freedpeople did not hinder their educational efforts, but they were not able to satisfy their religious desires. Two separate reports from 1865 detail the struggle of the Freedmen's Bureau's search for a reputable minister who will not "throw off the Cloak of Jesus and go in search of the almighty dollar" but will preach to the freedpeople.[197] Henry Sweeny, of the 60th United States Colored Infantry, requested a minister who will be "honest, truthful, and industrious," teaching the freedpeople with a practical approach over a theoretical one.[198] The opportunities for religious instruction in Helena suffered. The freedpeople did not have the adequate opportunities that Little Rock, Pine Bluff, or DeValls Bluff had when it came to religious instruction. Various reports and messages from the Freedmen's Bureau identify the freedpeople's desire for religion. The Freedmen's Bureau attempted to remedy and supply the freedpeople in Helena with opportunities for religious instruction. Because the American Missionary Association did not commit many resources to Helena, Helena struggled in providing religious studies. It becomes obvious that Helena lacked the proper capabilities in the beginning to manage the overcrowding of freedpeople and provide them with educational and religious opportunities.

The locations in Little Rock, Pine Bluff, and DeValls Bluff did not struggle to supply religious instruction for their freedpeople. Helena's education and religious opportunities for the refugees experienced success after frequent instability during the

[197] Report on the condition of freedpeople, 1865, "Arkansas, Freedmen's Bureau Field Office Records, 1864-1874," Helena (Phillips County) Roll 11, Copies of reports, 1864-1867. Images. FamilySearch. http://FamilySearch.org : December 11, 2022. NARA microfilm publication M1901. Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration.
[198] Report on the number of freedpeople in the Eastern District of Arkansas, June 30, 1865, "Arkansas, Freedmen's Bureau Field Office Records, 1864-1874," Helena (Phillips County) Roll 11, Copies of reports, 1864-1867. Images. FamilySearch. http://FamilySearch.org : December 13, 2022. NARA microfilm publication M1901. Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration.

early stages of the war. Maria Mann's assistance was invaluable to Helena, the refugees, and army officials as she managed the operations of the contraband camps. The freedpeople learned quickly given the dangerous situation surrounding them and began their journey toward literacy. Religious studies in Helena failed while education flourished. It was a challenge for Freedmen's Bureau agents to provide respectable preachers with proper intentions for the refugees. Regardless, Helena's educational scene provided stability to the freedpeople after the disastrous beginning with Helena's refugee crisis.

African Americans needed to be prepared for the transition from enslavement to freedom. Educating African Americans struggled in the beginning like they struggled to survive in the camps. It was a priority to educate African Americans, but in the beginning, the acquiring of appropriate schoolhouses and teachers proved troublesome. As the Freedmen's Bureau figured out how to appropriately handle educating African Americans, education became a successful path for the remainder of their lives. Education provided opportunities to the freedpeople to be successful in life and motivated them and influenced their career paths. African Americans desired education and showed the Freedmen's Bureau that educating them produced results. Several accounts highlight the success of African American education and the progress of their education. African Americans and education improved at similar rates as the progress continued throughout and after the war. The war gave Black Arkansans their first chance at education. Education served as the connection between freedom and citizenship for African Americans because it enabled them to connect beyond their reach. Letters could be written to family members, and newspaper ads searching for family lost among other

endless possibilities. Black Arkansans desired education and religious instruction in contraband camps because these lessons offered a distraction from the struggles of the camps. Little Rock's opportunities gave the freedpeople increased chances of success after the conclusion of the Freedmen's Bureau's aid ended. The stability offered in Arkansas's interior enabled greater structure and understanding of the methods to best assist the humanitarian crisis that resulted from the war.

Conclusion

Black Arkansans overcame unprecedented obstacles during the Civil War and Reconstruction. This study does not cover in depth the effects of Reconstruction on Black Arkansans after the war and the other struggles produced by Reconstruction.[199] While the understanding of Reconstruction is important to the historiography of African American history, this thesis analyzes the power of aid agencies and the federal government in aiding Black Arkansans during the war years and briefly after. The humanitarian crisis born from the Civil War created tension and uncertainty for African Americans who sought Union assistance and refuge. The unprecedented number of refugees seeking Union support strained the U.S. Army. The federal presence in Arkansas increased as General Steele marched west to Little Rock in 1863, but Arkansas's first major experience with contraband camps and fleeing African Americans began in 1862. Federal authorities exacerbated the disaster in Helena by poorly handling Black refugees. Helena acted as the beginning point in the relationship between the government, Black refugees, and aid agencies and illustrated the challenges of war within the state. Contraband camps were places of danger and uncertainty as early as 1862. However, as the war progressed and the government adapted to the needs of fleeing African Americans, life inside contraband camps improved. As federal authorities worked to solve the humanitarian problem, employment opportunities provided an ideal solution. Refugees worked as

[199] For more, DeBlack's *With Fire and Sword* covers more on the impacts of Reconstruction on African Americans in Arkansas and the difficulties produced by droughts, merchant prices, and other variables that created a strain for Black Arkansans, Moneyhon's *The Impact of the Civil War and Reconstruction on Arkansas* provides another narrative that looks at Reconstruction on the state and Black Arkansans.

barbers, hackmen, draymen, carpenters, and seamstresses, among various others, was intended to keep them working and Union camps functional.[200]

Without the assistance from the WSC, Arkansas's contraband camps would have struggled throughout the state until the government received assistance from some agency. The Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands was not established until 1865 towards the conclusion of the war. The WSC provided Arkansas's freedpeople with requested clothing, mattresses, tin-cups, and plates to be sent to Little Rock and DeValls Bluff for their relief.[201] These items sent to DeValls Bluff and Little Rock would be distributed throughout the state for the other camps. Black Arkansans were not the only ones grateful for the WSC's efforts to supply camps with necessities. The administrations and doctors inside the camps were thankful for the assistance and sent letters thanking the WSC. Surgeon W. H. Hipolite of the 113th U.S. Colored Infantry wrote to James Yeatman of his appreciation for the supplies they received and how they helped improve the camp. Hipolite wrote these supplies had been "unexpected" but "very acceptable" to help with the suffering of the regiment and the refugees in Arkansas.[202] The AMA, additionally as important for freedpeople's education, assisted the Union Army by providing teachers for education. The WSC and AMA allowed the government to remove itself from assisting with the humanitarian crisis regarding medical supplies, clothing, rations, etc. The government could place their focus on providing job security

[200] Eaton Jr., *Report of the General Superintendent*, 17.
[201] Western Sanitary Commission, *Final Report of the Western Sanitary Commission from May 9, 1864 to Dec. 31, 1865*, 110.
[202] Western Sanitary Commission, *Final Report of the Western Sanitary Commission from May 9, 1864 to Dec. 31, 1865*, 61.

and land to Arkansas's freedpeople while partnering with the WSC and AMA to relieve the freedpeople's suffering.

The experience of African Americans in Arkansas improved as Union officials marched toward the interior. Arkansas's interior offered better conditions for freedpeople because the camps were away from the Mississippi River, which faced constant threats of Confederate attacks. The Arkansas River, flowing through Little Rock and Pine Bluff, remained important during the war. Yet the Arkansas River did not hold the same importance for Union and Confederate forces as the Mississippi River. River access during the war enabled supplies to arrive in occupied cities when necessary. The Mississippi River transported supplies and other necessities and acted as the lifeline for the Union and Confederacy. As a result, skirmishes and battles took place to secure control of the river. Helena's importance for the Union was because of the Mississippi River and its proximity to Vicksburg. In addition, the railroad held similar significance during the war and served as an alternative way of receiving supplies. The Union improved in handling the African American crisis created because of the war and survival for Black Arkansans further in the state experienced a relatively smooth transition from enslaved to free. Even though refugees in Helena experienced great suffering, Helena became an example of how to not manage fleeing refugees.

Helena only highlighted that reform was necessary to limit the suffering and death of Black refugees under the Union's watch. Black refugees began working in the camps and farming while relying on assistance and working toward self-sufficiency. Arkansas offered abandoned plantations for government officials and freedpeople to work on. This opportunity enabled Black Arkansans to earn wages for their labor while giving them the

agency to become citizens. Black Arkansans saw contraband camps as their opportunity for freedom with government and agency assistance to protect them and aid them in their transition. The management of Black Arkansans improved as the Union learned and adjusted. The WSC's assistance created stability in DeValls Bluff, Little Rock, and Pine Bluff which ensured success for the freedpeople. This agency provided clothing, food, and supplies to Black freedpeople when the army struggled and lacked the appropriate supplies to assist. As a result, DeValls Bluff, Little Rock, and Pine Bluff benefited from the emergence of the Western Sanitary Commission in Arkansas to improve these camp's functions and relationship between the refugees and government.

This study analyzed the Union's capacity to protect and assist Black Arkansans. The assistance improved by 1864 as Union authorities understood what was required to care for the exodus of African Americans to their lines and partnered with outside agencies. The federal government still was not the appropriate agency to handle the humanitarian crisis that emerged from the war. African Americans benefited from the increased ability of federal authorities to assist freedpeople. The evolving federal policy on freedpeople's employment, as well as the partnership with the WSC, helped create more effective camp relief. Congress created the Freedmen's Bureau as the agency to assist African Americans with employment, wages, and other needs. The bureau provided opportunities as a "real boost for the prospects of Arkansas freedmen" to improve their station after the war and increase their agency.[203]

The Civil War gave Black Arkansans their opportunity for freedom. Contraband camps served as their first glimpse at freedom with obstacles they needed to overcome.

[203] DeBlack, *With Fire and Sword*, 154.

As Black Arkansans overcame these obstacles, their self-sufficiency improved and offered them freedom. Union authorities provided education from teachers working with the American Missionary Association and secured funding and other necessities Black Arkansans needed to be prepared for citizenship. Black Arkansas used the war for their benefit and took the war years to improve their agency and be prepared for the conclusion of the war and their introduction into society as freedpeople. Contraband camps were the stepping stones for African Americans to begin the process of emerging as citizens with hardships they had to overcome. The importance of their day-to-day mentality ensured they focused on each day separately and tackled what each day brought. Black Arkansans grappled with their new reality during the Civil War to reach the conclusion of the war and their status as United States citizens. This thesis analyzed the struggles Black Arkansans had to overcome in chapters one and two before looking at the opportunities the war gave them in chapter three. The war gave African Americans the education they longed for, something they craved as much as an autonomous life.

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