

# Mississippi

Contraband camps took different forms in different places. For instance, while in Memphis camps were created, often from the ground up, along or in the Mississippi River, in South Carolina many camps existed on the same plantations where blacks had been slaves. Still other camps simply consisted of a number of blacks resident at Union encampments. Especially in the case of newly-built camps, the populations were ever-changing since fugitives arrived daily, men were recruited into service, and women were often sent to work on abandoned farms or plantations. Some of what is known about these makeshift communities comes from official record while important details have been provided through the writings of various people—often associated with religious groups or benevolent organizations—who visited them. The most remarkable of these first-hand accounts is provided by Quaker Levi Coffin, who transitioned from his work on the Underground Railroad directly to fundraising for the contraband. Two other witnesses to camp life were Michigan Quaker and Underground Railroad operative Laura Haviland, and John Eaton, Jr. General Superintendent of Freedmen.

## Corinth

This has been described as one of the best run camps before its closing. In May of 1863, when Coffin visited it, the camp was under the superintendence of Col. James Alexander. According to Eaton, there were 6,000 contraband within the picket line, and 300 children were attending school. Cabins and tents, in Coffin's opinion, were kept clean. With Alexander, Coffin toured the farm and gardens; over one thousand acres were under cultivation. This activity provided food for soldiers and all. Despite the camp's overall success, it was closed in December 1863, with the residents being transferred to Memphis. Masses of blacks were transferred by rail. According to Eaton, at least the first transferees were provided housing and employment. A black regiment (1<sup>st</sup> Regiment Alabama Infantry of African Descent – later re-designated the 55<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, United States Colored Troops), composed of men mostly from Alabama, was organized here, along with another battalion of a second regiment (2<sup>nd</sup> Alabama Regiment Infantry of African Descent – later designated the 110<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, United States Colored Troops) was also organized. In 2004, the community of Corinth officially recognized the grounds as an historic site, which today is managed by the National Park Service under the administration and stewardship of Shiloh National Military Park.<sup>1</sup>

## Meridian

Noralee Frankel references a camp in Meridian.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Updated February 2011 by Stacy Allen of the National Parks Service.

<sup>2</sup> See Noralee Frankel, *Freedom's Women, Black Women and Families in Civil War Era Mississippi* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 38.

## Natchez

According to one Elizabeth Brown, a camp was quickly erected “in the swamp, mosquito-infested area just north of the steamboat landing known as Under-the-Hill-Natchez.”<sup>3</sup> Haviland visited this camp. She wrote of the miserable conditions. She referred specifically to delivering supplies to a store, “passing down the **‘Paradise Road’ to the camp in Natchez-under-the-Hill.**”<sup>4</sup> Haviland also referred to a new camp opening on the **Ralston Plantation**. She reported that 4,000 were at the Under-the-Hill-Natchez. Writing of conditions at Natchez, she criticized an order that mandated that every colored person not gainfully employed be sent to the “corral.” They gathered two hundred and fifty, mostly women and children, and drove them through the streets of Natchez on a chilly, rainy day, and marched them into the camp of four thousand in condemned tents.<sup>5</sup>

Frankel writes of a slaveowner, a Mrs. Clark (wife of Charles Clark) who moved her slaves from northwest Mississippi in Bolivar County to an area of Fayette County just above Natchez. According to Frankel, Mrs. Clark’s group was stopped by federals, and the slaves were moved to Grand Gulf, north of Fayette, near Port Gibson and southwest of Vicksburg. At Grand Gulf v, Union officials separated the slave men from the slave women.” The men were soon listed in the army, the 53<sup>rd</sup> Infantry USCT.<sup>6</sup>

According to Frankel, in 1864, Gen. Tuttle moved to decrease the number of blacks in Natchez. In keeping with policy in other areas, he demanded of blacks proof that they were employed by and living under the roof of a responsible white. After Tuttle himself was removed from office, other commanders continued with the goal of decreasing the black populations in Natchez.<sup>7</sup>

## Vicksburg

John Simon, editor of Grant’s Papers, wrote that Vicksburg and Port Hudson were key locations for gaining control of the Mississippi River.<sup>8</sup> The Confederates surrendered Vicksburg on July 4, 1863. One might reason, then, that Vicksburg, once it fell, would like Cairo, Illinois and Memphis, Tennessee become a base of federal operations. Vicksburg is therefore a site of both major labor initiatives, more specifically, the leasing of plantations.

J.M. Anderson was the Supt. at Vicksburg.

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<sup>3</sup> Elizabeth Brown (Elizabeth Brown’s Diary, 1853-1863), quoted in “Occupied Natchez, Elite Women, and the Feminization of the War” by Joyce L. Broussard, *The Journal of Mississippi History* 71 (2008): 10.

<sup>4</sup> Haviland, <http://www.gutenberg.org/dirs/etext05/wlwrk10.txt>.

<sup>5</sup> Haviland.

<sup>6</sup> Frankel, 15.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>8</sup> See Simon, 123.

