

# **“AWAY I GOIN’ TO FIND MY MAMMA”: SELF-EMANICIPATION, MIGRATION, AND KINSHIP IN REFUGEE CAMPS IN THE CIVIL WAR ERA**

**Abigail Cooper**

Mary Armstrong was about seventeen years old when she got her “free papers.” It was 1863 in St. Louis, Missouri. She took a basket of food, a basket of clothes, a little money, and a boat to Texas. For the first time in her life she did not belong to anybody, and she took that knowledge and headed into a war zone: “‘63 when Mr. Will set us all free. . . . Away I goin’ to find my mamma,” Mary said. What she did next challenges the conventional view of the direction of freedom.<sup>1</sup>

As Mary relayed to an interviewer decades later, she left the only place she had ever known to go to a state she knew as her former master’s favorite slave market.<sup>2</sup> She took the riverboat from St. Louis down to New Orleans, another boat to Galveston, Texas, another boat up Buffalo Bayou to Houston, and, finally, a stage coach to Austin. Each trip and each transfer was a feat in artful invisibility. She sat in the back of the riverboat, as close to the “big wheel” as possible, and knew to “do whatever the white folks tell me” and to keep her “free papers” secure. She also had to gather information on her mother’s possible whereabouts along the way, to be a detective that white men and women would not notice. She had two days of “rough ridin’” and she looked for her mother “round Houston, but not long.” She took a stagecoach to Austin and “then I has trouble sure.” A man stopped her and asked her, “Who do you belong to?” Mary told him, “nobody now, I has been freed an’ am lookin’ for my mamma.” He took Mary and put her on an auction block. “I get rights up like they tells me . . . and they start bidding on me.” All this time, she kept her papers hidden in her dress. When the highest bidder came to claim his prize, she stayed up there. She pulled out her papers and “helt ‘em up high” out of his reach so the people around became her witnesses. “I wouldn’t let those papers out of my hand,” Mary recalled. The paper itself was a fragile bit of insurance as she made her journey.

The man in charge, a Confederate lieutenant and Texas land clerk named Charley Crosby, came to the auction block. “Let me see them papers,” he said to her. “You jes’ look at it up here,” she replied, still refusing to come down or to let him touch her papers. “He squinted up. . . . ‘This gal is free and has papers,’” he

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confirmed, and with that, the sale was void.<sup>3</sup> He “asks me lots of questions an’ tells me he is a Legislature man.” Then he took her to his home and “lets me stay in some quarters with his slaves.” Mary had managed to avoid reenslavement in Confederate Texas, but she had not found her mother.<sup>4</sup>

How can historians reckon with Mary Armstrong’s emancipation migration? She received her papers in 1863 in an emancipated metropolis under Union control and migrated south to Texas where the slave trade was still active. More than seeking the security of a wage, finding protection with the Union Army, or legal freedom in St. Louis, Mary went to Texas to look for her mother. Freedom’s function was a claim to her kin—a material corporeal being together, of knowing her mother existed, knowing her location. Mary was a seventeen-year-old black girl with free papers hidden in her bosom traveling alone into spaces where she was considered walking currency, but the risk was of only secondary importance to finding her mother.

If Civil War historians have drawn the maps and movements of armies over time in abundance, they have only recently begun to trace the migration pathways of African Americans in the Civil War era as a means to understand not just the many acts of self-emancipation, but of walking toward something—a place where an entirely new order might be possible. The new order that appeared possible to Mary Armstrong was the household of two—Mary and her mother Siby—that had been impossible in slavery. Mary’s migration suggested that traveling in search of kin (without a pass that would indicate that such travel advanced the purposes of a white person) was a legitimate form of movement for a free black woman in the U.S. South, and that Mary could expect recognition of two black females as a bonded and indissoluble family unit. Mary’s decision to move to her mother was a political act; her aspiration to stay with her mother as an independent household in Texas imagined a new order. Mary made her journey because papers alone were not enough to make her freedom real. The seal made self-ownership official, but her hunt for her mother gave it meaning.

Looking out from slavery, Mary Armstrong’s migration embodies a version of black politics that put kin before nation as the integral foundation upon which black communities would navigate the route to citizenship. Her efforts to forge her own way against her former owner’s advice illustrate a culmination of what Stephanie Camp in *Closer to Freedom* articulated as black women’s creation of “rival geographies” to counter slavery’s “geography of containment.” In her imagining of a future with her mother, she illustrates what Thavolia Glymph described in *Out of the House of Bondage* as black women’s creation of households on their own terms, not as white-emulated patriarchal institutions. She enacts what Heather Williams in *Help Me to Find My People* described as definitionally and uniquely African American in the “loss and longing” that motivated the search for family lost in slavery. Movements like Mary Armstrong’s destabilized slavery and set in

motion U.S. policy to legally sanction emancipation. More importantly, by putting physical distance between slave owners and themselves and by seeking and claiming kin as the basis for making independent households, these migrations made emancipation a human experience of freedom that could not be undone.<sup>5</sup>

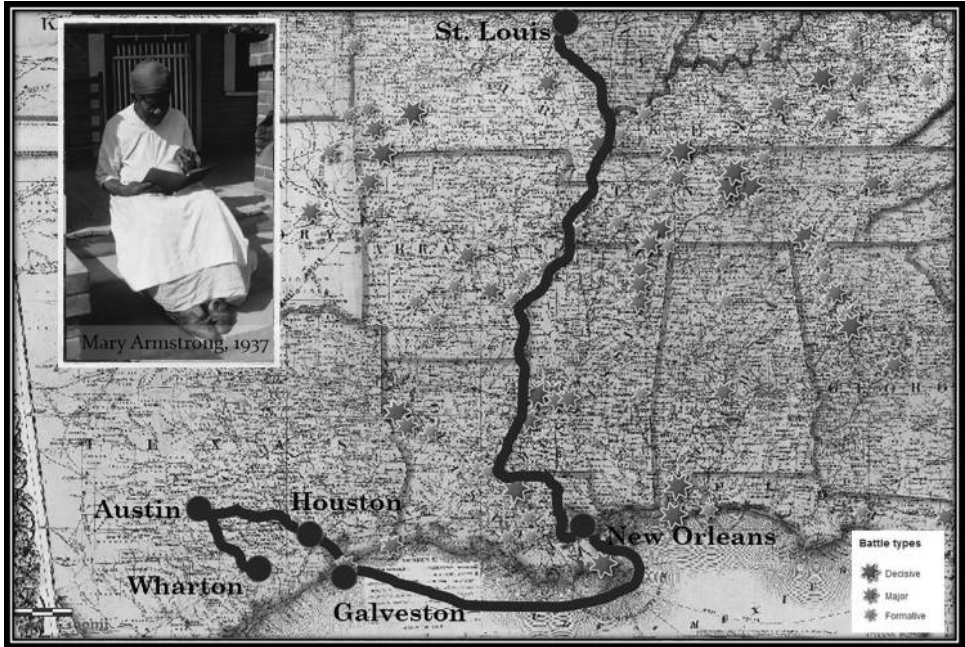


Figure 1: Mary Armstrong's migration route from St. Louis to Austin traced onto Esri ArcGIS Battlefields of the Civil War map and 1862 David Rumsey historical map.

Moreover, I offer Mary Armstrong's story as a critical complement to those of African American men whose Civil War migrations resonate more easily in the better-known historical narrative of emancipatory movement into Union soldiery. In Harry Jarvis's narrative, for example, he stole a boat and sailed to Fort Monroe, where he was allowed to labor, but not enlist. He responded to Union General Benjamin Butler's refusal to let him enlist because "it wasn't a black man's war"—"*I told him it would be a black man's war before they got through.*" He went on to enlist in the 55th Massachusetts Infantry. Just as Harry Jarvis was one of many looking to transform the "war for union" into a "black man's war," Mary Armstrong was one of many "goin' to find [her] mamma." Their efforts forged a different kind of revolution centered not on a *quid pro quo* that bartered enlistment for a route to U.S. citizenship, but on the reconstitution of kinship. Connections to both state recognition and to kin needed to take root for emancipation to be complete.<sup>6</sup>

Civil War migrations such as Mary Armstrong's ensured slavery's destruction. They disrupted slaveholders' control and pushed African Americans further toward a collective consciousness in which they imagined future households outside the plantation complex. They re-configured kinship and community as self-sustaining entities absent of white domination. As communities took shape, even in inchoate form in Civil War refugee camps, they radically reconstituted what had previously been unimaginable in the master's household. Thus, the reconstruction of the antebellum plantation household became increasingly implausible.<sup>7</sup>

In this essay, I follow Mary Armstrong on her journey (see fig. 1). I follow people like her who were searching for kin and who, like her, took boats and waterways to freedom. I follow Mary to Texas, to the frontier lands of the Confederate interior. In following Mary's path, I engage with other African American migrations of this period and note the gendered patterns of migration. I investigate tensions between migrating for labor and migrating for kin, between service to the Union and settling in a place of one's own. All of these investigations contribute to an argument for black migration's role in kinship formations that forged political solidarities and new versions of independent black households that made emancipation permanent.<sup>8</sup>

I consider freedom not as northern lawmakers did, as access to contract labor, but as freedpeople often expressed it: as the ability to move to one's kinship group. As Annie Davis of Maryland put it in a letter she wrote to Abraham Lincoln in 1864, two months before emancipation became official in Maryland, "Mr. President, It is my Desire to be free. to go to see my people on the eastern shore. my mistress wont let me, you will please let me know if we are free. and what i can do."<sup>9</sup> Annie Davis's appeal stemmed from the will to be with "my people." The will to move to kin, which slavery had made geographically distant, shaped African Americans' definitions of freedom. Annie Davis looked to Lincoln as messenger, not as messiah. Union lines, too, more often served as a portal for the freedpeople, rather than a destination. Reaching the Union held out the possibility of getting passage to one's people. Even for those who used their freedom to work for wages and to serve in the military, that service was frequently a means to an end. The end that made freedom most meaningful was the reconstitution of kinship.

### **"MOST EXCITING MOVEMENT HITHERTO KNOWN": A NOTE ON MAPPING AND METHODOLOGY**

The prevailing body of historical evidence indicates that enslaved people moved toward Union lines as the soldiers headed further south, accounting for the establishment of refugee camps for those seeking freedom. The 1860 census reported 4.2 million African Americans lived in the South; 3.9 million of which were enslaved. Data compiled from government sources—refugee camp superintendents' reports, National

Archives records gathered by the Freedmen and Southern Society Project at the University of Maryland, the Freedmen's Bureau pre-Bureau records, and the American Freedmen's Inquiry Commission records (to name only the most prominent), along with missionary sources and estimates gleaned from qualitative evidence in local archives, suggests that between 524,000 and 660,470 freedpeople populated refugee camps within Union lines by 1865.<sup>10</sup> This study's database estimates that there were around 250 refugee camps, with individual populations ranging from several dozen to several thousand. Many of these camps were at one time officially or colloquially known as "contraband camps" because African Americans escaping slavery were considered to be in legal limbo between slavery and freedom. The Union forces held them inside their lines on the grounds that they were "confiscated contraband property of war" taken from the enemy. The Union assigned superintendents of contrabands to oversee the camps. After 1863, the position's title changed to "superintendent of freedmen."

Looking beyond the government and missionary records, however, sheds light on unofficial war-formed camps that also became gathering places for emancipation. Although Union records from this period include interviews with the freedpeople, there is yet a far larger corpus of testimonies relevant to self-emancipation that also comes from the formerly enslaved themselves. In interviews from the 1930s, known camps like Fort Monroe and Camp Nelson emerged as distinct in geographical memories. Yet, in addition to these, the freedpeople referenced camps that existed beyond the usual landscape of Union-backed emancipation. This was what Mary Armstrong called a "slave refugee camp" in Texas as a location of gathering, information exchange, and family connections. Such camps deserve inclusion on the broader map of freedpeople's self-emancipation. Many more than those represented in camp census reports experienced the effects of migration and dislocation in this era. In the Confederate interior, for instance, owners moved enslaved people further away from the Union Army as it advanced, resulting in additional camps like the slave refugee camp Mary Armstrong mentioned. Historian Yael Sternhell cites one report of an estimated 150,000 enslaved people forced to move from the Mississippi Valley to Texas in the year following the fall of Vicksburg in July 1863.<sup>11</sup> These hundreds of thousands of African Americans in motion were important players in remaking the landscape of an emancipated South.

On the eve of the Civil War in 1860, the 4.2 million free and enslaved African Americans living in the U.S. South made up 95 percent of the nation's black population. When Carter G. Woodson published his history of African American migration in 1918, about 8.8 million or 87 percent of the nation's black population still resided in the South.<sup>12</sup> African America was southern, and the American South was the Black South. Woodson identified "the Civil War and emancipation" era as an "exciting" time because black movement radically remade the geography of



the U.S. South, and in so doing, demonstrated what formerly enslaved southerners could make visible on the landscape.

From 1861 to 1867 the “most exciting movement hitherto known” for African Americans had not become the movement from the “Slave South” to “Free North.” There had been no massive postwar exodus northward as some had foretold.<sup>13</sup> There had been no mass relocation to railroad building efforts in the Pacific Northwest.<sup>14</sup> There had been no widespread colonization to Haiti or Africa.<sup>15</sup> Instead, wartime African American exodus sought to transform the Egypt of the Slave South into a “New Canaan.” In wartime and Reconstruction-era emancipation, the constancy of black southern demography was not solely a function of constabulary or economic entrapment by a white establishment.<sup>16</sup> Black migrants often initially resisted relocation elsewhere because the American South was where their people were.<sup>17</sup> Through their southern migrations, black refugees would become a force in recolonizing the southern states. From 1860 to 1870, the South moved within itself. The patterns of that radical geographic remaking had much more to do with African American kinship than scholars have heretofore acknowledged. Rather than viewing the Civil War and Emancipation era as a time of black “scattering” and “chaos,” as such depictions occur in the primary and secondary literature alike, historians can track individual paths of those whose missions were “to find their people.” Their travel to places where they could find and be found were deliberate and directed, even though they were not necessarily fathomable or predictable to either Union or Confederate authorities.<sup>18</sup> These migrations were not random, aimless transience as many presumed (“vagrancy” became a common rationale for state incarceration of refugees), but were often strategically positioned toward getting to kin despite considerable risk. As historian Heather A. Williams has shown, emancipation unleashed the avalanche of black mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, uncles, aunts, cousins, husbands, and wives seeking their kin, but the migrations created opportunities to expand existing “grapevine” information networks. Travelers seeking kin followed trails of information.<sup>19</sup>

Civil War freedpeople’s refugee camps were locations where both the feats and hardships of people making their way through emancipation took place. These camps left a legacy. It was on the remnants of freedpeople’s camps of the Civil War that major institutions of higher learning would emerge. Indeed, Carter G. Woodson’s own intellectual lineage traces back to Berea College, Kentucky, where he received his undergraduate degree in 1903. Berea College emerged from the Freedmen’s School at Camp Nelson in Nicholasville, Kentucky, just as Hampton University evolved out of the camp in Hampton, Virginia, and as Fisk University out of the camp in Nashville. Even far-flung gathering grounds like the “slave refugee camp” in Texas where Mary Armstrong would go on to seek her mother were places where new knowledge was born that fueled the efforts of the fathers and mothers of African American history.

## FOLLOWING THOSE WHO “WALKED, WORKED, AND SCUFFLED” TO FIND KIN

When Mary Armstrong was four years old, the mistress of the house beat her nine-month-old baby sister to death. “She come and took the diaper offen my little sister and whipped till the blood jes’ ran.” That loss left an imprint, hardening Mary’s determination to resist a system where kinless people were more profitable. As a testament to Mary’s tenacity, when she was ten years old, she dodged a beating from this same mistress who killed her sister, throwing a rock in self-defense, “bout as big as half your fist and hits her right in the eye.” She had a new owner at that time who made sure Mary was not punished. In Mary’s world of the St. Louis slave trade, separations were the trader’s way. “Mamma . . . was in one bunch and me in ‘nother. Mamma had been put ‘fore this with my papa. . . . [the trader] would sell the man here, an’ the woman there, an’ if they has chillen, he would sell them some place else.” Mary’s experience in the Missouri of small farms and slave trading differed from that on large cotton plantations of the deep South, but her descriptions of familial separations exemplify the operation of the domestic slave trade. The antebellum period witnessed the forcible migration of 660,000 people in the domestic slave trade from the Upper South to the Lower South, but there were also disruptions due to death and inheritance as families divided up families, or spread them among expanding plantations. For many who lived through slavery, either they moved or someone they knew moved away for good.<sup>20</sup> Mary and her mother Siby lived in the same neighborhood in Missouri and could visit each other for awhile until “I hears old Cleveland done took my mamma to Texas ‘gain but I couldn’t do nothin.” Her mother’s trip down river to be sold was not something Mary could prevent while she was enslaved, but in 1863 as she traveled as a free woman the same Mississippi waters that took Siby away, she sought to change the river’s purpose.

Mary Armstrong was not the only daughter driven to find her mother. Eight hundred miles east, another teenager, Julia Aston, had been enslaved in Raleigh, North Carolina, in 1853. After the Union victory, she requested transport to Virginia because, as the transportation request read, “She is extremely anxious to join her Mother at Norfolk.”<sup>21</sup> Requests to Union authorities for passes granting permission to travel during the war, or for subsidized transport at war’s end, paint a picture of thousands wanting to migrate to make their families whole.<sup>22</sup> Such requests provide insight into an era in which about a quarter of the South’s black population was on the move.<sup>23</sup> Maria Johnson had already trekked 550 miles from West Point, New York, to Raleigh, North Carolina. Her husband was in Tarboro, North Carolina, and she wished to rejoin him. “I have walked, worked, and scuffled along from West Point, NY, to this City,” she testified, but now her means and

her strength were exhausted and she called upon the Freedmen's Bureau to help carry her the last seventy miles.<sup>24</sup>

While Mary Armstrong, Maria Johnson, and Julia Aston were lone female travelers moving to kin, men also traveled to their family members separated by sale or war. Gender roles circumscribed their mobility. Able-bodied men often traveled individually or in all-male groups, while women moved more often alongside children, the disabled, and the elderly. Individual men nevertheless moved frequently on behalf of their families. Men kept tight geographical memories of their families and moved to seek them when able. When the Union Army came to occupy Confederate strongholds, many men willingly—even willfully—left Union protection to go back for their families to bring them into the camps. In one instance, two hundred enslaved men were building Confederate fortifications on Roanoke Island off the coast of North Carolina when the Union took it in battle in February 1862. Confederate soldiers retreated, but the impressed laborers remained. The Union officers informed the men that they could stay on the island under Union guard, but to the officers' surprise, the men refused. They informed the Union of their intention to free their families and bring them back to the island. "We'se wives and chillren in slavery. We can't leave them. Bless de Lord, de day ob jubilee is come. We'se all to be free now. We must go back and get our wives and chillren." Amidst these declarations, a reported 173 out of 200 freedmen left the island.<sup>25</sup>

A superintendent of a refugee camp in tidewater Virginia described multiple instances in which husbands and fathers left for trips of as long as two hundred miles to gather their families and return to the camps. "'I am going for my family,' they say . . . Colored men will help colored men and they will work along the bypaths and get through. In that way I have known quite a number who have gone up from time to time in the neighborhood of Richmond and several have brought back their families."<sup>26</sup> A superintendent of a refugee camp at Hilton Head, South Carolina, echoed, "A man would come in shyly to ascertain if the stories that had been told of us by their masters were true; but when he found that he was treated well, he would be anxious to go home and get his family, and would plead and cry, if opposed."<sup>27</sup> Male refugees were determined to get back to family even though it contradicted the plans of Union authorities.

The freedmen demonstrated an obligation to use their geographical knowledge as a strategy that led to freedom not just for themselves, but for extended family networks. Before the war, male family members often had jobs on plantations—draymen, hack drivers, messengers—that offered greater familiarity with the local terrain and pathways. During the war, many men acted as scouts, in service not just to an army, but to kin. They would travel in advance of their families, check on the relative safety of the Union refugee camp, and then go back for their loved ones. A superintendent captured this exchange he had with male refugees in Suffolk, Virginia:



I found hundreds who had left their wives and families behind. I asked them "Why did you come away and leave them there?" and I found they had heard these stories, and wanted to come and see how it was. "I am going back again after my wife" some of them have said. "When I have earned a little money." "What as far as that?" "Yes" and I have had them come to me to borrow money, or to get their pay, if they had earned a month's wages, and to get passes. "I am going for my family" "Are you not afraid to risk it?" "No I know the way."

Historian Anthony Kaye has demonstrated in his study of Natchez, Mississippi, how male travelers remade neighborhoods during the war. African Americans on the move "provided indispensable contacts between neighborhoods. As these men brought home intelligence about the war, folks circulated it from plantation to plantation, neighborhood to neighborhood." In this process, they "breached and extended neighborhood boundaries from within," enlarging the geographic region of control and opening new possibilities for movement.<sup>28</sup>

The movement between plantation and Union camp revealed customary understandings and an intense communication and cooperative network between men and women. Delia Garlic of Alabama explained how she and her husband worked it out so they could have both mobility and stability. "When we knowed we was free, everybody wanted to git out," Garlic declared. "De rule was dat if you stayed in yo' cabin you could keep it, but if you lef' you los' it. Miles was workin' at Wetumpka, an' he slipped in an' out so us could keep on livin' in de cabin." When Delia Garlic was close to delivering their second child, they moved to Wetumpka permanently.<sup>29</sup>

The first official Union camps for freedpeople emerged from May to December 1861 along the eastern seaboard, especially in Tidewater Virginia and in the South Carolina Sea Islands. By 1862, Union forces occupied the North Carolina coast; New Orleans, Louisiana; Nashville, Tennessee; and more broadly speaking, the area from Washington, DC, in the east through Cairo, Illinois, at the northern point of the Mississippi Valley down to Memphis and Goodrich Landing and Lake Providence in northern Louisiana. By mid-summer 1863, the Union had occupied West Virginia through western Tennessee, Vicksburg, and New Orleans controlling the Mississippi River and much of the Mississippi Valley.

By 1864 the Union extended its grasp further into Arkansas in the west, expanded across the northern half of Mississippi and northern Alabama, and strengthened its hold on northern and eastern Virginia, edging closer to the Confederate capital at Richmond. In November of that year, General William T. Sherman's "march to the sea" cut a path through from Atlanta to Savannah, not just forging destruction as a conquering army, but also creating a train of refugees who accompanied his army on the way.

The establishment of the first major Union-recognized freedpeople's camps followed this pathway: at Fortress Monroe, Virginia, in May 1861; Port Royal, South Carolina, in November 1861; the North Carolina coast in February 1862;

Washington, D.C., and New Orleans in April 1862; and the Mississippi Valley in the summer of 1862. Thereafter, camps spread through the southern interior in Tennessee and Kentucky east of the Mississippi River and through Arkansas, Missouri, and Kansas west of the Mississippi River (see fig. 2).

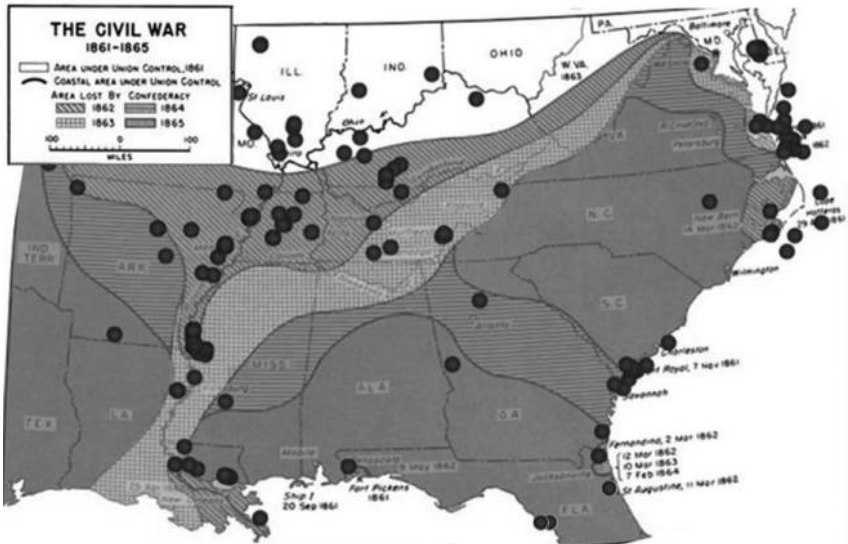


Figure 2: Freedpeople's Camp Locations on Map of Advancement of Union Occupation by Year<sup>30</sup>

Freedpeople frequently came into camps in family groups. They came like “the oncoming of cities,” one camp superintendent wrote.<sup>31</sup> Black men’s movement into Union lines retains something of an outsize representation in historical memory because, from a military perspective, the movement of men represented the shift of military might. From a political perspective, the transformation of an enslaved man into a U.S. soldier paved the way for black citizenship. Yet viewed from the perspective of those in refugee camps, they came very often as families. Photographs and sketch artists alike captured scenes of black migration that were family affairs. These were representations of displacement, but they were also representations of a kind of settler experience (see fig. 3). In these images, we see freedpeople in wagons, on livestock, with all manner of possessions they knew as their own and, as historian Dylan Penningroth has shown, that connected them indelibly to kin.<sup>32</sup> The periodicals of the day also remarked on the high frequency in which they migrated as families, as *Harper’s Weekly* reported: “[Here is] a sketch of the constantly recurring event, the coming in of what the soldiers call recruits of color; a stalwart [N]egro with his little one riding ‘pig-a-back.’”



**Figure 3: Civil War photograph, 1863. Courtesy of Library of Congress (LOC).**

They came looking for kin. “This is the rendezvous. They come here from all about, from Richmond and 200 miles off in North Carolina,” a Virginia superintendent wrote.<sup>33</sup> One refugee woman captured the sense of anxious longing for reunion on her island camp. “I always look out when the boat comes, thinking its my children.”<sup>34</sup> In many cases, they found kin. As one missionary teacher wrote, “We sometimes witness the unexpected meeting of scattered members of a family. When the [boat] was at the Craney Island wharf, a little girl who had wondered where she should go . . . strolled upon the deck of the steamer and found in one of the hands her father!” The teacher continued, “After reaching Norfolk there were other surprising meetings and recognitions.”<sup>35</sup> Refugee camps were not only locations of familial displacement as a consequence of war, but were locations of gathering because, for many, the systematic displacement of slavery was ending.

The reputation of freedpeople’s camps as rendezvous points held out the distinct and tangible possibility of reunion, which, in turn, spurred migration to them. “After two or three years in de camp with de orphans, my kin found me and took me home,” one man explained.<sup>36</sup> As a missionary teacher recounted,

While I was teaching, a black face was thrust in at the door. . . . “Ise come!” Upon that, such a screaming and clapping of hands I never heard. They all rushed for him; and I thought they would devour him, clothes and all. One of the more thoughtful ones said, “Do ‘scuse them, missus, for that boy lived on de next plantation to Massa Taylor: we never ‘spect to see him. Lord bless me, how we do come together!”<sup>37</sup>



Figure 4: *Harper's Weekly*, 21 March 1863

The camps were sites of reunion, and these incidents happened according to the confluences and crossings of black migrations rather than through the machinations of white stewards. This was empowering beyond words because it shifted the focus from “who you belong to?”—the question Mary Armstrong had to answer—to a sense of belonging among those Annie Davis would call “my people.”<sup>38</sup>

While overland and rail passage was common among black wartime migrants, so, too, was passage by water. A large majority of black wartime migrants, including Mary Armstrong, traveled by water; moreover, their migrations lend insight into why many freedpeople’s camps emerged where they did.

## FOLLOWING THOSE WHO TOOK TO THE WATERWAYS

Mary Armstrong was still staying at the estate of Charley Crosby when she learned “[there] is a slave refugee camp ... an’ some of ‘em has been brought down from Missouri.” Crosby told her, “This camp is over on Pedernales River near some

place call Shoveltop Mountain. I don't know whar that is from Austin, but it 'pears to me now it was over that way (west). But they wasn' no way I could get there an' pretty soon I hear they has moved this refugee camp to some place else in Wharton County." Mary learned how she could get from Austin to Wharton, "but I didn' have much money left." Crosby offered her a deal. "He let me work in the house for my livin' an' paid me a little besides," Mary explained.<sup>39</sup> In getting this information about a "slave refugee camp" in Texas, Mary found out that whole camps could move just as people did, and she also learned what features these camps had in common—they were on rivers. The Shoveltop Mountain camp was on the Pedernales River; the Wharton relocation was on the Colorado River. Mary would have to follow the water.

When Mary Armstrong started her journey in St. Louis in 1863, the first thing she did was board a riverboat embarking on a 1,200-mile trip to New Orleans. She embarked at some point after 9 July, when the Union's full control of the Mississippi River meant the opening of passenger transport.<sup>40</sup> A steamship in this era could complete the voyage in four days. For Mary Armstrong, the entire trip likely took about a week due to the delays occasioned by wartime precautions. She boarded with two big baskets—one of food, another of clothing—"an' it took two big husky colored men . . . to carry it to the boat." Mary continued, "They put me in the back end whar the big old wheel what run the boat was, an' I was all by myself, 'cause Mr. Will tell the Capt'in I is free an' has papers. I goes all the way to New Orleans. . . ." To Mary Armstrong, boats were vital in closing the distance between separated kin.

Boats could solve the single most potent dilemma dissuading enslaved people during the antebellum era from escape—transporting kin who did not have the physical ability to travel long distances on foot. As Confederate forces worked overtime to catch and return runaways "in possession of passes of all descriptions," boats were another matter altogether. "The boats also permit perfect freedom of transportation to the [N]egroes, with or without passes," a Confederate official noted.<sup>41</sup> Boats might carry whole families, including those members whose limited mobility had once ruled out antebellum escapes. Indeed, boats transporting folks of all manner of abilities and disabilities are what sketch artists of the day captured in their scenes. In a sketch in *Harper's Weekly* on 9 April 1864, a stooped woman with a cane makes her way to the rowboats coming onto the bank. She moves alongside a child with a dog and a man carrying flailing chickens (see fig. 5). Another sketch, captioned "Fifteen escaped in this schooner," shows women and young children queuing up to have their turn disembarking from a sailboat onto the steep slopes of League Island, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania—a destination that saw its African American population swell during the Civil War (see fig. 6).





Figure 5: “Negroes Leaving Their Homes” *Harper’s Weekly*, 9 April 1864



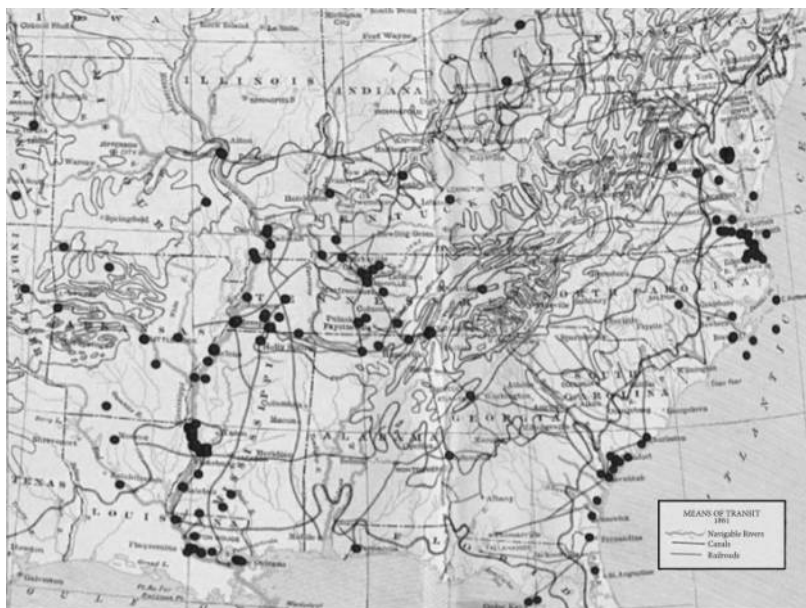
Figure 6: “Arrival of a party at League Island; Fifteen escaped in this schooner” (1872)  
Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Manuscripts, Archives, and  
Rare Books Division, New York Public Library.

Boats were also excellent means of escape due to their hiding places. Mary Armstrong seated herself “as close to the big wheel as possible” when she rode on the Mississippi steamer. Some boats could also provide a hiding place for kin. Jane Kamper of Baltimore wrote of her effort to rescue her children from slavery. I “got my children by stealth & brought them to Baltimore. . . . My Master pursued me to the Boat to get possession of my children but I hid them on the boat.”<sup>42</sup> Indeed, when the war hero Robert Smalls made his famous escape by piloting the *CSS Planter* from its Charleston port into the midst of Union territory, the boat’s most winning attribute was its ability to stow away seven of Robert Smalls’s family members undetected.<sup>43</sup>

Boats had the advantage over ground transport (like wagons or mules) with almost noiseless propulsion. Better yet, a boat put an aquatic barrier between run-aways and the encroachments of patrollers' hounds. Freedpeople's camps were often on islands for this reason. One nighttime escape plan took root in tidewater Virginia. When a group from Smithfield Creek, Virginia, had been in the camps for awhile and had seen not only naval warships, but also the sailboats of fishermen—many with black pilots—coming in and out of the docks every day, they hatched an idea. Those boats could scoop up the people they loved who had not been able to make it out of slavery on foot. From the Union forces they received not only a leave of absence, but also the aid of a captain and fifteen dismounted cavalymen as they went to retrieve their families. On 1 September 1864, they left Fort Monroe and headed to Smithfield, twenty miles west and landed in the night. They worked quickly but left their property behind. "Injure no one" and "get the women and children merely" were the instructions, and "they followed these directions closely." What they were not ready for were the numbers. They "became delayed by the numbers of women and children anxious to follow, whom they packed in extra boats, picked up there, and towed along." There were too many to fit in the boats. People packed themselves in, or improvised additional flotillas. They were sailing down a creek, their progress "exceedingly slow." Soon they ran out of night, and in the morning's light they were vulnerable. Patrollers sounded the alarm, and a posse of one hundred "having horses and dogs with them; armed variously with shot guns, rifles, etc." attacked the boats. The sailboats with their tows full of families steered to the opposite bank and everyone took to the woods. Two men made it back to the Union forces; the whereabouts of the others were unknown at the time the officer made his report of the incident. What the Union officers learned from this thwarted river mission was how widespread was the demand to flee slavery and how insistent the freedpeople were to leave no one behind.<sup>44</sup>

To make it to a camp in North Carolina, one mother transported her children in a canoe rocking against a strong wind. She "put for the shallow water, where however, the waves were higher." In deep darkness, she "jumped out, and walking kept the boat steady, all the way—12 miles—to Newbern" where she and her children found rest and food, a camp official's testimony related.<sup>45</sup> Fifty boats of self-emancipated people successfully escaped on the Nansemond River, Virginia, in late August 1861, leading a local planter to write angrily to the Confederate government, "Should [boats] not at once be ordered under the Guns of the Batteries? or *disabled*?"<sup>46</sup> Indeed, freedpeople's tenacity in ferrying away families by water transport compelled Confederate authorities to issue war orders to systematically destroy all boats, considerably hobbling their own war effort (see fig. 7). Even then, migrants like Jack Frowers got creative, fashioning a five-foot-by-three-foot

skiff from an “old shutter nailed on the bottom” with coiled sweetgrass, pine tree sides, and sealed with “pitch I got by cutting into a tree and catching the gum.”<sup>47</sup>



**Figure 7: A map of freedpeople's camps with the overlay of navigable rivers and other means of transit in 1861 reveals how potent the correlation between waterways and camp formation was. Water served as a migration route as well as a vital necessity for sustaining large populations.**

If being sold “down the river” meant the trauma of family separation in slavery, then Joseph Harris, who had been serving in the naval forces on the Mississippi, sought a reversal of the river's power. He beseeched a Union officer to use the vessels he had come to know to detour a few hours out of their way to reach his kin. Sergeant Joseph Harris wrote:

[W]ill you please to Cross the Mississippi River at Bayou Sar La. with your Command & jest on the hill one mile from the little town you will [find] a plantation Called Mrs. Marther H. Turnbull & take a way my [father] & mother & my brother's wife with all their Childern & [you] take them up at your [headquarters] & write to me. Sir they are there & I will [immediately] Send after them. Sir it isnt more than three or four hours [trouble]. I have [been] trying evry sence I have bin in the serv[ice], it is goin on ne[a]r 3. years & Could never get no one to so do for me.<sup>48</sup>

Joseph Harris's request reads as simultaneously modest and audacious. Joseph Harris was so very close to his family by marine transport, and his letter speaks to the urgency of his circumstance. He gave succinct details of geographical land-

marks and features—"across the Mississippi at Bayou Sar La . . . on the hill . . . one mile from town"—of plantation ownership—"the plantation Called Mrs. Marther H. Turnbull"—who to take—"Father & mother & my brother's wife with all their Children"—and where to take them—"to your Head Quarters." "[T]hey are there," he wrote. Making this kind of personal expedition was not something the U.S. Navy did as a matter of military policy, but from Joseph Harris's perspective, as a principle of military service, how could it not? The black soldier was supposed to bring his family into the citizenry through his soldiery. He took that imperative as more than a metaphor. As many an officer and chaplain had made clear, his military service was supposed to prepare him for the rigors of protecting a household. To make good on the bargain, his military service was supposed to stand for as soldier-citizen and civilian-father, Joseph Harris sought his family.

The experiences of Mary Armstrong and Joseph Harris show how efforts to move toward family changed the imperatives of emancipation. Neither conceived of the state certificate of freedom, nor the soldier's contract, as the end worth pursuing in itself. Both used their recognition to seek family as fulfillment of freedom's promise.

## FOLLOWING THOSE WHO WENT TO TEXAS

When Mary Armstrong migrated to Texas, her path coincided with a larger migration of formerly enslaved people moving westward. Civil War-era Texas earned a fearsome reputation. One enslaved man said his owner told him "in Texas dere never be no freedom."<sup>49</sup> Indeed, Mary had close knowledge of the risks of traveling into Texas before surrender. This knowledge is evident in the way she related each leg of her journey to her interviewer decades later. She traveled with ample warnings that Texas was inhospitable. As she told it, her former owner Miss Olivia "cry and carry on and say be careful of myself 'cause it sho' rough in Texas." As she recounted her migration, Mary's tone shifted from general reminiscence to detailed chronological testimony.

They puts me in the back in the boat . . . and I goes all the way to New Orleans . . . an' the Capt'in puts me on 'nother boat an' I comes to Galveston, an' the Capt'in of this boat puts me on 'nother boat an' I comes up this here Buffalo Bayou to Houston . . . I looks 'round Houston, but not long. It sure was a dumpy little place then, an' I gets the stage coach to go to Austin. It looked like a bus you see nowadays but it had big wheels an' had six horses pullin' it. They puts me in the back of that, too, an' it takes us two days to get to Austin. Lawd me, when we get there I think my back busted sure 'nuff, it was sech rough ridin'.<sup>50</sup>

Mary Armstrong relayed this story seventy-four years later with the precision and immediacy of a person giving directions to a stranger. "I went here. Then I

went there. I stayed there a little while, not long. Then I went there. I took a boat. I took a stagecoach. This is where I sat.” Mary Armstrong’s telling reveals that this migration created an indelible memory. When she gave her interview in 1937, Mary already knew how the story would end; yet in her interview she relayed, and perhaps relived, the suspense of her journey.

Civil War historians have often characterized the space of self-emancipation primarily as Union enclaves: protected spaces the Union created, and spaces where Union policy reigned. Freedpeople’s camps became makeshift villages, tent cities, and shantytowns within Union lines.<sup>51</sup> The term “refugee” appears in wartime sources for both white and black southerners displaced by war. The term also appears in wartime sources as a verb, usually followed by “to Texas.” “To refugee” was a term that white southerners used to describe coercing their unfree workers further into the Confederate interior. An enslaved person who “got refugeeed” to Texas was like one who disappeared. Texas was the site of the *refugeed* refugees. Yet here was a meeting ground, and for Mary and her mother, here was a site of reunion realized. With a sizeable black population, Texas gives us a glimpse of what the “refugeed” refugees made possible, even in the Confederate interior.

The wartime migrations of black refugees westward left its demographic footprint. Texas’s black population grew from 58,558, or 27.5 percent of the total population in 1860, to 253,475, or 31 percent of the total population in 1870. Those from Mississippi, Missouri, Arkansas, and especially Louisiana made the move. One formerly enslaved man made these observations of the process:

Near to the close of the war I see some of the folks leaving for Texas. They said if the Federals win the war you have to live in Texas to keep the slaves. . . . So plenty of them started driftin’ their slaves to the west. They would pass with the womens riding in the wagons and the mens on foot. When some of them come back they said that it took three weeks to walk the way. Some of them took slaves to Texas even after the Federals done decreed a breaking up.<sup>52</sup>

Another black man already living in Texas had this to say: “Just before de slaves was freed, a lot of settlers come both black and white,” a testament that the ripples were felt at both the leaving and the receiving end of migration.<sup>53</sup>

Another woman who told her story to the interviewers of the Federal Writers’ Project in 1937 was Nora Ford, who also passed through Wharton, Texas. She said she was “goin’ on seven years ol’ de firs’ year of ‘mancipation.” She was born in Vicksburg, Mississippi, where her mother was “a full-blooded Indian woman” and seamstress on the plantation. One day a man “brought us from Vicksburg to Eagle Lake [Texas] and sold us there . . . me and my mother. I kin little bit remember that trip like a dream,” Ford recalled. “We come by ox and mule team. I remember we come through Crockett. . . . I remember we come the wagon way. My mother said we was six months in coming. . . . The people I come with, some of ‘em live in Wharton.”



News of war's end and universal emancipation did not reach Texas in April 1865, the date of the Confederate surrender. According to some informants, the news reached the Texas "frontier" on 19 June 1865, or "Juneteenth." Nora Ford's Juneteenth was memorable, not because she experienced jubilee in the streets, but because it was the day she was sold. Being sold this time meant taking a train westward. This was to be a migration without her mother:

I remember the day freedom come. I was sold that day . . . sold at the dinner table. They say, 'Nora, go upstairs and get your things.' That day seven engines and trains come to Eagle Lake. I went upstairs and look out the window and see them seven trains, and I tell my mother.

For Nora Ford, as for many enslaved women, men, and children, the destruction of slavery brought additional danger and uncertainty. When she went upstairs and told her mother,

Mother say, 'I'm free.' I'm willin' to go with few clothes and half naked. We lef' and went to a ol' section house. Mother took in boarders and work at day work for Bill Good at the hotel. That was 'bout a year and six months after we come to Texas.<sup>54</sup>

"The day freedom come" for Nora did not entail a Union Army's presence. It came instead when "Mother say, 'I'm free.'" Nora's mother told Nora she was free only when they were about to be separated, hinting that she may have already had a legal claim to freedom. But this was the moment that her free status was invoked, when familial separation was imminent. She then said, "I'm willing to go," revealing that she had some choice in the matter, though not without material sacrifice. Freedom came for Nora when she was willing to forsake her things upstairs and to leave with nothing but her mother. The descriptions of staying at the "ol' section house" (a railway storage and lodging facility), taking in boarders, and doing "day work . . . at the hotel" attest to how a mother and daughter scraped by in order to make a free home for themselves.

Around this same time, as Nora and her mother built their household together, Mary Armstrong began her last major migration. "When the war was over, I started out an' looked for mamma again," Mary explained, "an' found her like they said in Wharton County near where Wharton is. Lawd me, talk 'bout cryin' an' singin' an' cryin' some more, we sure done it." After she found her mother, "I stayed with mamma an' we worked right there 'til I gets married in 1871 to John Armstrong an' then we all comes to Houston." Mary Armstrong went on to become a nurse and she saved numerous lives in the yellow fever epidemic of 1875. She joined the church and had two children of her own—Lubeta and John.<sup>55</sup> She passed away in her 90th year, just twenty-two days after giving her interview to the Federal Writer's Project.<sup>56</sup>

Ultimately, it was not the movement itself that appeared most important to

the freedpeople, but the distance from physical domination that such movement created. White domination would find new modes and manifestations in the Reconstruction and post-Reconstruction South, but one thing that could no longer stand was the systemic separation of child and parent, brother and sister, husband and wife. In the early days of Reconstruction, freedpeople fought fiercely to claim children whom white former slave owners claimed as “apprentices,” with one Freedmen’s Bureau agent noting, “In every case where I have bound out children, thus far Some Grand Mother or fortieth cousin has come to have them released.”<sup>57</sup> Such efforts were a testament to the power of extended kin networks forged during slavery and within wartime camps.

For many who narrated their lives in slavery and freedom in retrospect, it was antebellum enslavement that was notable for its sense of displacement. Yet, like Mary Armstrong’s Mississippi steamboat journey, emancipation migrations were different from slavery’s removals. On her mind was not just locating her mother, but the making of a permanent home with her.

Emancipation was made permanent because the migrations that the war set into motion led to further migrations. Yet most freedpeople moved in pursuit of settling down. Wartime exodus was not intended to create perpetual cycles of migration. Carter G. Woodson wrote in 1918, revealing the depth of the essentialist claims against African Americans, “The usual charge that the Negro is naturally migratory is not true.”<sup>58</sup> Emancipation’s migrants were showering the Union with pass and transportation requests not in order to keep moving, but to find the place where they could stay. African American men resisted migrant labor because they wanted to work where their families were.<sup>59</sup> For many, wartime migrations attempted to rectify the displacements of slavery. Mary Armstrong went “down river” voluntarily—as retracer and reclamer. But what made freedom irreversible was not the moving, but the staying, especially alongside one’s kin. As Nancy Rogers Bean declared in 1938, “I sure am glad slavery is over. Now I can stay peaceful in one place, and that’s all I aim to do.”<sup>60</sup>

## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup>All details of Mary Armstrong’s story in this article originate from her interview with C. H. Drake, Works Progress Administration (WPA) Federal Writer’s Project, 1 September 1937, in *The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography* (hereafter *AS*): *Texas Narratives: Parts 1 and 2*, Vol. 4, ed. George Rawick (Westwood, CT, 1972), 66–74; and *AS: Texas Narratives: Part 1, Supp. Ser. 2. Vol. 2*, ed. George Rawick (Westport, CT, 1979), ebook edition.

<sup>2</sup>In this essay I use “Mary Armstrong” or “Mary” oftentimes instead of the more conventional surname preference

of “Armstrong” as the sole identifier. Many of the historical actors I write about are formerly enslaved women. The surnames used in 20th-century interviews usually refer to the surnames of their owners or (as in Mary Armstrong’s case) to the surnames of future husbands, the marriage taking place after the time under consideration. It is therefore more accurate and true to identity to preserve the first name as much as possible. The convention of using the surname can be stylistically appropriate in some cases (in cases of parallelism with male names, for example), but I more frequently use “Mary,” the name she knew most distinctly as her own in 1863.

<sup>3</sup>A number of factors were at play in this auction block reversal. Mary’s free papers were from the state of Missouri, admitted as a member state of the Confederate States of America in November 1861, despite also being considered part of the Union. (This is why Confederate flags had thirteen stars, representing the eleven seceded states as well as Missouri and Kentucky.) Missouri had two competing state conventions—Union and Confederate—until Union Army advancement forced the secessionist Missouri government into exile (in Marshall, Texas). Mary’s prominent display of her free papers also primed the crowd of buyers to know that purchasing her would be a risky venture, likely not worth the trouble. She exploited the distrust circulating in this market, knowing many speculators were seeking to profit from slavery’s tenuous sustainability that she just made plain. Mary subverted the auction block’s purpose, transforming it into a soap box disseminating the message that she was a free woman with official documents to show for it.

<sup>4</sup>In an effort to lend further context and dimension to the world Mary inhabited, I have corroborated the identities of people she mentions in her WPA interview. Charles Crosby was a land clerk and son of Texas land commissioner Stephen Crosby. Stephen Crosby was elected Commissioner of the General Land Office for the State of Texas from 1862 to 1867. Charles Crosby was also a lieutenant in the 21st Confederate cavalry. Mary Armstrong’s former owners, whom she identified as William Cleveland and Will Adams consecutively, appear as Missouri slave owners in the 1840 U.S. Census and the 1860 U.S. Census slave schedules, respectively, owning slaves matching the ages of Mary and her mother. Mary Armstrong identified William Cleveland as a slave trader who sold people who were “in custom,”—on loan and not fully paid off—selling them for full price in Texas, then telling his creditor in Missouri that the person ran away, pocketing the profit. Texas, rather than Louisiana, was a safer market to pull this off, as Cleveland was once caught in Shreveport, Louisiana, for the offense of taking a “slave in custom” out of state. It is likely that there was a family connection between trader and buyer in Texas as well, given the frequency of the surname Cleveland on the 1860 Texas slave schedules. Charles Crosby, the “legislature man” who oversaw the auction and subsequently employed Mary, was married to Ophelia Dexter Cleveland, a possible relation of William Cleveland. In the 1860 census, there were “seven slaves” listed under the name Crosby and “ten slaves” listed under the name Cleveland in Austin (Travis County), Texas, and “eighteen slaves” listed under the name Cleveland for Wharton, Texas. *Report of the Commissioner, Texas General Land Office* (Austin, TX, 1905), 56; Pension file of Charles Adolphus Crosby, File no. 9822, Confederate Pension Applications, Collection #CPA 16526; Roll #2770; Texas State Library and Archives Commission-Austin, Texas; National Park Service, *U.S. Civil War Soldiers, 1861–1865* [online database]; 1860 U.S. Census, Austin, Travis County, Texas, roll M653\_1306, p. 270, *National Archives and Records Administration* (hereafter NARA); *Handbook of Texas Online*, Charles G. Davis, “Crosby, Stephen,” accessed 9 March 2017.

<sup>5</sup>Stephanie M. H. Camp, *Closer to Freedom: Enslaved Women and Everyday Resistance in the Plantation South* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2004); Thavolia Glymph, *Out of the House of Bondage: The Transformation of the Plantation Household* (New York, 2008); Heather Williams, *Help Me to Find My People: The African American Search for Family Lost in Slavery* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2016).

<sup>6</sup>Steven Hahn, *Nation Under Our Feet: Black Political Struggles in the Rural South from Slavery to the Great Migration* (Cambridge, MA, 2003), 62, 70–71; *The Political Worlds of Slavery and Freedom* (Cambridge, MA, 2009), 77–80; *A Nation Without Borders: The United States and Its World in an Age of Civil Wars, 1830–1910* (New York, 2016), 251. For recent work that enriches the soldier-to-citizen freedom narrative in both critique and retelling, see, Thavolia Glymph, “‘Invisible Disabilities’: Black Women in War and in Freedom” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 160, no. 3 (2016): 237; Stephanie McCurry, “War, Gender, and Emancipation,” in *Lincoln’s Proclamation: Emancipation Reconsidered*, ed. William A. Blair and Karen Fisher Younger (Chapel Hill, NC, 2009), 120–150; Amy Dru Stanley, “Instead of Waiting for the Thirteenth Amendment: The War Power, Slave Marriage, and Inviolate Human Rights,” *American Historical Review* 115 (June 2010): 732–765; and Carole Emberton, “Only Murder Makes Men: Reconsidering the Black Military Experience,” *Journal of the Civil War Era* 2 (September 2012): 369–393.

<sup>7</sup>For more on how wartime emancipation fundamentally reconstituted the politics of the household, see Nancy Bercaw, *Gendered Freedoms: Race, Rights, and the Politics of Household in the Delta, 1861–1875* (Gainesville, FL, 2003); Glymph, *Out of the House of Bondage*; and Leslie Schwalm, *A Hard Fight for We: Women’s Transition*

from Slavery to Freedom in South Carolina (Urbana, IL, 1997).

<sup>8</sup>Recent scholarship is already beginning to push the field to recognize the import of migration and displacement in the making of emancipation. See, Yael Sternhell, *Routes of War: The World of Movement in the Confederate South* (Cambridge, MA, 2012); Jim Downs, *Sick from Freedom: African-American Illness and Suffering During the Civil War and Reconstruction* (New York, 2015); Chandra Manning, *Troubled Refuge: Struggling for Freedom in the Civil War* (New York, 2016); and David Silkenat, *Driven from Home: North Carolina's Civil War Refugee Crisis* (Athens, GA, 2016).

<sup>9</sup>Annie Davis to Mr. President, 25 August 1864, D-304 1864, Letters Received, ser. 360, Colored Troops Division, RG 94, NARA. Letter discovered in the records of the Freedmen and Southern Society Project, University of Maryland (hereafter FSSP, with file number in brackets after citation) [FSSP B-87].

<sup>10</sup>This estimate is calculated from a large-scale, ongoing relational database project.

<sup>11</sup>Sternhell, *Routes of War*, 99.

<sup>12</sup>Figures come from the U.S. Census. The 1860 census listed a total population of 31.4 million. For the 1918 figure, I made an estimation based on the 1910 and 1920 figures of the decennial censuses. Those figures were: 1910—total U.S. population was 92.3 million and southern black population was 8.75 million; and 1920—total U.S. population was 106.5 million and southern black population was 8.9 million.

<sup>13</sup>See, for instance, the concerns in local northern and western newspapers such as “What Does It Mean?” *Vermont Chronicle*, 11 March 1862; and “Negro Immigration—Late Arrival of a Crowd of Runaway Slaves from Cairo,” *Newark Advocate* (OH), 3 October 1862, which reported of black refugees: “They are coming by every train, and we shall not soon see the end of them.” Even abolitionist Governor John Andrews rejected plans to relocate former enslaved people in Massachusetts, a sign of both practical concerns and political fears. As Gov. Andrews explained it, his was a determination that the freedpeople stay in the South and fight for the Union to advance the cause of emancipation. Ira Berlin, et al., *Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation, 1861–1867, series 1, vol. 2: The Wartime Genesis of Free Labor: The Upper South* (hereafter WTG-US) (New York, 1993), 94. In Ohio, conservative Democratic districts in southern Ohio maintained higher proportions of black residents than northern Republican districts, complicating the political picture. As one editorial put it, “‘Conservatives’ here in Southern Ohio, who are constantly prating about ‘[N]egro immigration,’ are the very men who give employment to [N]egroes instead of white men.” *The Scioto Gazette* (OH), “Colored Population,” 17 February 1863.

<sup>14</sup>See the published schemes for relocating freedpeople to the west to be the labor force for the Pacific Railroad in Charles Ward, “Contrabands: To the Editor of the Boston Courier,” *Boston Courier*, 8 January 1863; and *Contrabands: Suggesting an Apprenticeship under the Auspices of Government, to Build the Pacific Rail Road*. (Salem, MA, 1866); Frederick Starr, *What Shall Be Done with the People of Color in the United States* (Albany, NY, 1862), 25; For more on the freedpeople who migrated to the Midwest of their own volition, see Leslie Schwalm, *Emancipation's Diaspora: Race and Reconstruction in the Upper Midwest* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2009).

<sup>15</sup>For details on emigration schemes to Haiti, see the Testimonies of Dr. William Brazier and James Redpath, American Freedmen's Inquiry Commission (hereafter AFIC), RG 94, Series O328, File IX: Hayti and the South, M619, reel 201, NARA.

<sup>16</sup>For scholarship that privileges an argument for southern black demography as a function of economic entrapment, see Gavin Wright, *Old South, New South: Revolutions in the Southern Economy Since the Civil War* (New York, 1986); Jay Mandle, “Black Economic Entrapment After Emancipation in the United States,” in *The Meaning of Freedom: Economics, Politics, and Culture After Slavery*, ed. Frank McGlynn and Seymour Drescher (Pittsburgh, PA, 1992), 69–84.

<sup>17</sup>Wilson Moses argues that many African Americans shifted from looking transnationally beyond U. S. borders to looking inward to American soil as the location for a black nation in this period of Civil War and Reconstruction-era emancipation. Wilson Jeremiah Moses, *The Golden Age of Black Nationalism, 1850–1925* (New York, 1978).

<sup>18</sup>A typical depiction of chaos and transience comes from Freedmen's Bureau head O. O. Howard: “Four millions of [N]egro slaves . . . left their places of work and abode and had become indeed nomadic, wandering wherever want drove or untutored inclination enticed them. They had drifted into nooks and corners like debris in slough and eddies; and were very soon to be found in varied, ill-conditioned masses,” as quoted in Silkenat, *Driven from Home*, 97.

<sup>19</sup>Williams, *Help Me to Find My People*.

<sup>20</sup>See Michael Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves: Masters, Traders, and Slaves in the Old South* (Madison, WI, 1996); Brenda E. Stevenson, *Life in Black and White: Family and Community in the Slave South* (New York, 1996).

<sup>21</sup>Request from T. D. McAlpine to Col. A. G. Breedy, Office Sub District, Raleigh, NC. 8 September 1866, Bureau of Refugees Freedmen and Abandoned Lands (hereafter BRFAL), RG 105, NARA; Request Approved, A.

G. Breedy, Office Superintendent, Central District, 17 September 1866, BRFAL, RG 105, *NARA* [FSSP A-552].

<sup>22</sup>Such requests are legion. For a representative sample, see, Edward Fowler and others to Oliver Otis Howard, Farmville, Charlotte Co., Virginia (re: transportation to Bolivar, Mississippi), 1 January 1867, Series 3972, box 16, RG 105, *NARA* [FSSP A-8130]; Circular Letter from Bvt. Maj. Stuart Eldridge (re: many people requesting transportation, need to keep records of those requesting it), Washington, DC, 29 October, 1866, Assistant Commissioner's Office, Unregistered Letters Received (series 9, box 3, filed under "E" for Eldridge), BRFAL, RG 105, *NARA* [FSSP A-2812]; Charlotte Bolling and Eliza Fauntleroy to Gen. O. O. Howard (re: two freedwomen to reunite their families) Montgomery AL, 15 March 1866; and Jno S. Corbin to Hon. Chas. Sumner, 18 June 1866, Alabama Assistant Commissioner's Office, Unregistered Letters Received, series 9, box 4 (filed under "H" for Howard), BRFAL, RG 105, and related document in AL Assistant Commissioner's Office, Letters Sent, series 3, pp. 103–104, BRFAL, RG 105, *NARA* [FSSP A-1700].

<sup>23</sup>My estimate of "nearly a quarter" (roughly one million African Americans) combines figures for those counted within Union lines (about 524,000–660,470) with figures for those who were moving due to the efforts of slave owners to push enslaved people further into the Confederate interior (estimated to be roughly 300,000). Early estimates in my own refugee camp study consider census data comparisons between 1860 and 1870, marking significant black population increases in counties of refugee camp locations. These calculations reasonably suggest that "nearly a quarter" of the South's black population being in motion is a defensible estimate.

<sup>24</sup>Request from T. D. McAlpine to Col. A. G. Breedy, [FSSP A-552].

<sup>25</sup>Patricia Click, *Time Full of Trial: The Roanoke Island Freedmen's Colony, 1862–1867* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2001), 32; Silkenat, *Driven from Home*, 20.

<sup>26</sup>Testimony of Charles B. Wilder to AFIC, May 9, 1863, M619, Reel 200, *NARA*.

<sup>27</sup>Testimony by B. K. Lee (Former Superintendent of Contrabands at Hilton Head, South Carolina), AFIC, Beaufort, S. C. June 1863, M619, Reel 200, *NARA*.

<sup>28</sup>Anthony E. Kaye, *Joining Places: Slave Neighborhoods in the Old South* (Kindle Edition), 116–117.

<sup>29</sup>Interview with Delia Garlic in *AS: Vol. 6 Indiana and Alabama*, Rawick, ed. (Westport, CT, 1972), ebook edition.

<sup>30</sup>Note: The map shown here is a representation of data I have collected in my research of freedpeople's camps with coordinates mapped onto satellite imagery through the geographical information system (GIS) program Google Earth. This map shows an overlay that replaces the satellite imagery. Because the Union occupation map is not drawn to scale, the camp locations do not align perfectly; nonetheless the map offers a strong visual to the locations of the freedpeople's camps in the context of Union advancement by year. Source for Union Occupation Overlay: Virginia Center for Digital History, University of Virginia, <http://www2.vcdh.virginia.edu/HIUS323/occupation.htm> (with color-coded photostopping by author), accessed 31 January 2012.

<sup>31</sup>John Eaton, *Grant, Lincoln and the Freedmen: Reminiscences of the Civil War* (New York, 1907), 2.

<sup>32</sup>Dylan Penningroth, *Claims of Kinfolk: African American Property and Community in the Nineteenth-Century South* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2003).

<sup>33</sup>Wilder, AFIC.

<sup>34</sup>Lucy and Sarah Chase, Correspondence, Chase Family Papers, MSS "C," box 1, folder 4, *American Antiquarian Society*.

<sup>35</sup>Lucy Chase, *Dear Ones at Home: Letters from the Contraband Camps of the Civil War*, ed. Henry Swint (Nashville, TN, 1964), 97.

<sup>36</sup>O.W. Green of Del Rio, Texas (Interviewer Unknown), *AS: Texas Narratives Parts 1 and 2, Vol. 4*, e-book.

<sup>37</sup>Signed S.E.F., 15 October 1864, Letters of Teachers and Superintendents of the New-England Freedmen's Aid Society, fifth series, *American Antiquarian Society*, <http://faculty.assumption.edu/aas/default.html> (Accessed January 14, 2012.)

<sup>38</sup>See, for example, Williams, *Help Me Find My People*; Penningroth, *Claims of Kinfolk*, Michael Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks: The Transformation of African Identities in the Colonial and Antebellum South* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1998).

<sup>39</sup>Mary Armstrong, *AS: Texas Narratives*, e-book edition.

<sup>40</sup>Less than two weeks after the Union victory at Vicksburg, the first steamboat carrying passengers had made the journey from St. Louis to New Orleans without the disturbance of naval gunfire. "Opening of the Mississippi—Arrival of the Steamer 'Imperial' at New Orleans from St. Louis, July 16, 1863," *Harper's Weekly*, 8 August 1863.

<sup>41</sup>Major William H. Echols to Brigadier General Thomas Jordan, Charleston, SC, 25 August 1863, E-294 1863, Letters Received, Series 72, Dept. of SC, GA, & FL, Records of Military Commands, RG 109, *NARA* [FSSP F-110].

<sup>42</sup>Jane Kamper, Baltimore, 14 November 1864, in Ira Berlin, Leslie Rowland, et al., *Families and Freedom: A*



*Documentary History of African-American Kinship in the Civil War Era* (New York, 1998), 214.

<sup>43</sup>*Harper's Weekly*, 14 June 1862.

<sup>44</sup>Brigadier General Edward A. Wild to Brig. Gen. G. F. Shepley, 1 September 1864, Dept. of VA & NC, Records of Other Military Commands, ser. 731, Records of the War Records Office, RG 94, NARA in Ira Berlin, et al., *Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation, 1861–1867, Series 1, Vol. 1: The Destruction of Slavery*, [Hereafter DOS] (New York, 1985), 98–99.

<sup>45</sup>C. Fitz-Simmons, Maj. 3rd regt., NY Cavalry, File No. 4, North Carolina, AFIC, M619, Reel 200, NARA.

<sup>46</sup>Virginia Slaveholder Jas. W. Cook to Confederate Congressman Hon. J. M. Mason, 27 Aug. 1861, #3666 1861, Letters Received, Ser. 5, Sec. War, RG 109, NARA [FSSP F-38].

<sup>47</sup>Jack Frowers's 1864 interview with the *Daily News* in *Slave Testimony: Two Centuries of Letters, Speeches, Interviews, and Autobiographies*, ed. John W. Blassingame (Baton Rouge, LA, 1976), 449–454.

<sup>48</sup>1st Sgt. Joseph J. Harris to Gen. Ullman, 27 December 1864 in Ira Berlin, et al., *Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation, 1861–1867, Series 2, Vol. 1: Black Military Experience* (hereafter BME), 691–692.

<sup>49</sup>Quoted in Linda K. Kerber, *No Constitutional Right to Be Ladies: Women and the Obligations of Citizenship* (New York, 1998), 47.

<sup>50</sup>Mary Armstrong, *AS: Texas Narratives*, ebook edition.

<sup>51</sup>The “contraband” language originated with General Benjamin Butler’s orders at Fort Monroe, Virginia, 23 May 1861, and received sanction by Congress through the First Confiscation Act of 1861, Act Prohibiting the Return of Slaves of March 1862, Militia Act of July 1862, and Second Confiscation Act of August 1862. For an illuminating study on the word “contraband” in public consciousness, see Kate Masur, “‘A Rare Phenomenon of Philological Vegetation’: The Word ‘Contraband’ and the Meanings of Emancipation in the United States” *Journal of American History* 93 (March 2007): 1050–1084.

<sup>52</sup>Cato Carter interview with Heloise M. Foreman, Dallas District #4, Texas, 6 December 1937, in *AS: Texas Narratives, Supplement 2*, Vol. 3, Rawick, ed. (Westport, CT, 1979), ebook edition.

<sup>53</sup>Wesley Burrell interview with Ada Davis, McLennan County, Texas, 11 July 1937, in *AS: Texas Narratives, Supplement 2*, Vol. 3, ed. Rawick (Westport, CT, 1979), ebook edition.

<sup>54</sup>Ella Nora Ford, interview with Fred Dibble, Beaumont, Jefferson County, Texas, 8 May 1937 in Rawick, ed., *AS: Supplement 2: Vol. 4* (Westport, CT, 1979), ebook edition.

<sup>55</sup>1900 U.S. Census.

<sup>56</sup>“Death Certificate of Mary Armstrong,” 23 September 1937, Texas Department of Health, Bureau of Vital Statistics, Houston, Texas.

<sup>57</sup>Berlin and Rowland, ed., *Families and Freedom*, 242.

<sup>58</sup>Woodson, *A Century*, 121.

<sup>59</sup>*WTG-US*, 41.

<sup>60</sup>Nancy Rogers Bean interview, Hulbert, Oklahoma, 19 October 1938 in *AS: Oklahoma and Mississippi Narratives*, Vol. 7, ed. Rawick (Westport, CT, 1972), ebook edition.