

An Interview with Chandra Manning

*Chandra Manning teaches U.S. history at Georgetown University. Her first book, *What This Cruel War Was Over: Soldiers, Slavery, and the Civil War* (Knopf, 2007), won the Avery O. Craven Prize awarded by the Organization of American Historians and Honorable Mention for the Lincoln Prize. Her most recent book, *Troubled Refuge: Struggling for Freedom in the Civil War* (Knopf, 2016) won the Jefferson Davis Prize awarded by the American Civil War Museum for best book on the Civil War. In our interview, Professor Manning provides insights into the writing and findings of *Troubled Refuge*.*



Chandra Manning

Interview by Benjamin Guterman

Contraband camps and conditions for freedpeople or refugees have received little attention until recent years. How did you become interested in the topic of Civil War contraband camps?

My first book, *What This Cruel War Was Over: Soldiers, Slavery, and the Civil War*, explored Civil War soldiers' ideas and attitudes about slavery over the course of the war, and one of the things it found was that Union soldiers (with the obvious caveat that two million men served in the Union army, so of course there were exceptions) began calling for an end to slavery quite early, generally within months of arriving in the South. I had not expected that development. It was clear to me that *seeing* slavery and interacting with enslaved people as fellow human beings forced some white northern men to confront preconceived notions. So I grew more curious about when, where, and how those interactions took place. The most common places in which such interactions took place were contraband camps, which were (largely spontaneous) refugee camps that sprang up wherever the Union Army went, and to which enslaved men, women, and children intent on escaping slavery fled. I wanted to learn more about them but soon discovered that they had not yet attracted much scholarly attention. Meanwhile, as the nation entered the Civil War Sesquicentennial, I received many invitations to speak, often about emancipation and citizenship, as if that was all one topic. Yet, as I prepared remarks, I realized that emancipation and citizenship were not at all the same thing, and that we had a lot to learn about what it had been like to actually experience both of them. I asked

myself, where did many formerly enslaved people first experience emancipation? In contraband camps. So I decided to make them the focus of my work.

Approximately how many slaves escaped to Union lines during the war?

Between 400,000 and 500,000 spent at least part of the war in a contraband camp or area under Union control (for example in an occupied city like Alexandria, Virginia) to which they had fled. To put that number in perspective, according to the 1860 census, the entire enslaved population in the United States was about 3.95 million, with 3.5 million in the states that would form the Confederacy. So well over 10 percent of the enslaved population sought freedom by running to Union lines (closer to 1/7 of the enslaved population of the Confederacy). Another way of thinking about the number is to think of it as roughly equivalent to the free black population in 1860, which was 475,000 for the entire United States.

Your title and concept of “Troubled Refuge” seems to capture well the social upheavals and unprecedented difficulties that refugees faced in wartime liberation. Were you surprised by the breadth and diversity of this story?

Surprised is probably too gentle a word. To tell you the truth, I was overwhelmed. Beyond the sheer numbers, the thousands of tiny contingencies that shaped each person's experience were just mind boggling. What if the moon was full or new when a person escaped? What if there was a freak cold snap? What if there was a hole in the bag they used to gather together a few hasty things, and their possessions, or their staples, fell out? What if they bumped into a slave patrol? What if they got to Union lines and a jittery picket shot first and asked questions later? What if they encountered a Union soldier willing to turn them in for fugitive slave reward money? What if a disease outbreak ravaged the camp? What if “freedom” just turned out to mean dying somewhere different? The more I researched, the more I felt like I was in the middle of a cyclorama painting, like the huge painting—377 feet in circumference and 42 feet in height—that wraps around a room at Gettysburg National Military Park. That painting is so full of minute detail, from tiny leaves on branches to spokes on wheels to anguished expressions on faces, that looking at it is at first very disorienting. And that is how I felt researching contraband camps. I was sure I would never find a way to make any meaning out of any of it. Then I encountered an account of an enslaved woman in North Carolina who escaped to Union lines by putting a

basket of eggs and her children in a canoe and walking it for 12 miles along the shoreline to New Bern. I could not get her out of my mind. The risks she took! And the fragility of eggs in a basket in a canoe buffeted by waves! Suddenly, it occurred to me that she captured something vital about the experience of exiting slavery by making one's way to contraband camps, because whatever else she was thinking about when she put that basket of fragile eggs, not to mention her children, into that canoe, she could not see any overarching big picture, either. She simply took what she had—eggs, a canoe, a general urge to escape—and she pieced those things together into what she hoped would be a path out of slavery for herself and for her children. That insight proved crucial to me in getting my mind around the breadth and diversity of the story, but also in understanding something crucial about the experience of exiting slavery: it was precarious and there was no way of fitting it into a neat story line, no way of knowing how it would turn out. Disorientation and the sensation of being overwhelmed were, in fact, vital components of this story.

Regional differences in the refugee experience are a big part of your story, especially the dislocations and suffering found in western camps compared to the more stable eastern camps. What were some of the major local circumstances and military strategies that shaped conditions?

All camps were a mix of improvisation, sanctuary, and humanitarian crisis, but the ratio of refuge to misery depended on things like access to clean water, drainage, availability of space and resources for building shelter, access to land and tools for cultivating gardens, a working mail system facilitating the arrival of clothing from northern aid societies, and exposure to disease, which spread quickly in camps' overcrowded conditions. And of course, the military situation was crucial. The purpose of an army is to fight and win a war, and that mission always came first. Holding territory was logical on the east coast, but in the western theater, control of transit routes like rivers and rail lines was more critical to the war effort, which made encampments less permanent. If the Union Army objective of regaining control of the Mississippi River (and with it the nation's most important transit route) called for pulling up stakes and moving on, then an encampment of people who had fled slavery had to move, too, or else face hostile armed Confederates without any means of defense. Transience exacerbated shortages and hardships, for example, by making it impossible to maintain gardens or build sturdy housing, and by constantly exposing people to new disease environments.

One striking aspect of this story is the sudden, improvisational nature of federal policy toward escaped slaves. Union officers had to quickly decide on the status, or degree of freedom, of black refugees—part of what you explore as “military emancipation.” How did those policies leave freedpeople in a “liminal” state?

Armies do not make policy; they simply enforce existing national policy. When war broke out, that national policy regarded enslaved men, women, and children in the slave states solely as slaves, not as part of the body politic or members of the national community that both the army and the U.S. government had a duty to protect. In fact, the Supreme Court had gone so far as to declare that all African Americans, not just enslaved ones, were barred from U.S. citizenship and could *never* be a part of the national community. African Americans were denied U.S. passports. They were not even permitted to handle the U.S. mail. They had no standing in the eyes of the U.S. government. But then came war and with it swift action against slavery, partly as a matter of right and principle in the eyes of slaves and other opponents of slavery, but certainly as a way of fighting the war in the eyes of an Army charged with depriving the enemy of resources. Within weeks of war breaking out, the Army was barring slaveholders from reclaiming fugitive slaves who made it to Union lines, which is to say that almost immediately, the Army began to emancipate slaves. The question remained, though: who or what was a former slave once released from slavery? Exiting the institution of slavery released a person from the ownership of another person, but did not by itself change the 1857 Supreme Court ruling against black citizenship, did not confer passports or any other marker of membership within the U.S. national community, did not recognize a person’s standing as a person in the eyes of the U.S. government. Emancipation left the formerly enslaved in an in-between status, not bondage but also not full inclusion, just as emancipation had done and would continue to do almost everywhere else it occurred, such as the British West Indies in the 1830s and throughout Latin America all the way through the abolition of slavery in Brazil in 1888. Military emancipation, in short, *raised*—not answered, but raised—the question of who formerly enslaved people were in the eyes of the U.S. government.

As escaped slaves fled to Union forces, they offered their work services in exchange for protection and limited rights. How did you find that they understood their situation?

Throughout slavery, enslaved people wanted autonomy for themselves, their families, and their communities, but slaveholders retained the power to deny them

those things, and slaveholders had the backing of the United States government. When war came, neither enslaved people nor slaveholders changed their minds. But suddenly, the power of the U.S. government shifted away from the slaveholders' side. In this turnaround, enslaved people immediately spotted opportunity. By running to the Union army, they were choosing an alliance with a source of power that might come in on their side in their long-running battle against slaveholders. They forged an alliance (imperfect and tenuous though it was) by contributing labor, local intelligence, and, after black enlistment, even firepower to the Union war effort. As they did so, they made themselves much more valuable to the survival of the national government than slaveholders fighting against that government were. And so *they* answered the question of who they were in the eyes of the national government: they were allies who could help save it, and thus lay claim to its protection in their fight for the things they cared about, like safety for their families and autonomy for their communities. They made the case for their inclusion in the national community. They made the case for black citizenship. Of course, free black abolitionists had made the case for black citizenship for decades, but their efforts neither prevented nor nullified the Supreme Court's categorical denial of black citizenship in 1857. The actions of black men, women, and children in Union encampments, on the other hand, could not be ignored or bypassed in the same way.

Another fascinating theme you raise is how that moment of liberation in the camps effectively forced a redefinition of the Union cause as a fight against slavery—as a rejection of the long-standing Fugitive Slave Law and its legal obligations—revolutionizing the constitutional basis for the nation.

I think that interactions in camps did fundamentally change the United States, which to that point had always effectively operated as a slaveholding nation. Slavery was legal only in particular states, and the Republican Party passionately insisted upon slavery as merely a local, not a national institution. I do not doubt its sincerity. But its position was an aspirational one and not a reflection of existent reality before 1861. In its foreign policy, the United States acted as a slaveholding nation. Meanwhile, in domestic affairs, the federal government had grown more rather than less activist on behalf of the institution of slavery and the interests of slaveholders over the course of the 19th century, for example, through the massive expansion of federal power encapsulated in the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, which grew the federal government specifically to help slaveholders recapture runaway slaves. But when a slaveholder turned up in a Union camp to try to reclaim a slave, time and again the army sided with the enslaved person aiding the army

and not the slaveholder fighting against it. In so doing, the U.S. government was fundamentally switching sides in the ongoing daily battle between slaveholders and the enslaved. To me, that shift revolutionized the United States government.

In South Carolina, the military housed freedpeople in camps, but also allowed them to establish independent black townships, such as Mitchelville, or employed them on plantations. Why was the refugee situation managed so differently there?

The coast of South Carolina presented an entirely different scenario from most of the occupied Confederacy. The antebellum population there consisted overwhelmingly of enslaved African Americans at work on large rice and long-staple cotton plantations. Demographically, the landscape consisted of a lot of land and many African Americans, and few white plantation owners. When Union gunboats appeared in November 1861, white owners fled, leaving behind the land and the people who worked it. In contrast to most scenarios, in which enslaved people had to leave their homes and run to the Union army to exit slavery, in the Sea Islands, they stayed put, and the army came to them in their established communities.

You've been able to bring the refugees' voices front and center to a large degree, in addition to those of military officers, in descriptions of the refugee experience. What challenges did you find in locating and using these materials?

One lucky side-effect of the Civil War was that entities given to keeping copious records—the military and the federal government, generally—suddenly found themselves plunked down among enslaved people, and so the voices of those people made their way into military and government records in far greater numbers than before the war. The trick for the researcher is to be willing to look and listen for those voices with a lot of patience, because those voices were not usually the main focus of the record keepers, and certainly were not chief among the considerations of anyone filing or organizing the records. So, it is simply not possible to consult an index or an archival finding aid and expect it to lead you to a nicely organized cache of formerly enslaved voices. Instead, hearing these voices required weeks and weeks of sifting through the records of any individual or organization that a person fleeing slavery might have encountered. So, for example, many refugees from slavery ended up working for the Commissary or the Quartermaster, each of which kept exhaustive, if sometimes haphazard, records. Going through books of records when for days I saw row after row of requisitions for very mundane

supplies would suddenly be interrupted by a notation of, say, 15 women now doing laundry for troops. Tracing that tiny little splinter might lead me to the stories of 15 women who had entered into Union lines one night after fleeing slavery and were now working as laundresses. Or the notes of a provost marshal about who had entered Union lines might go on for days of drudgery and then be interrupted by the testimony of a former slave who had fled slavery into the encampment. Or a list of wages paid to contract workers might suddenly include some entrants with first names, no last names, and the notation “cd” for colored. So, one type of source consisted of very mundane records in which the presence of refugees from slavery could turn up at any time. Second, both Congress and the executive branch, especially the War Department, grew interested in gathering testimony from people who had escaped slavery over the course of the war. One result was the American Freedmen’s Inquiry Commission, which sent agents to contraband camps to collect testimony from military officials, medical officers, aid workers, and also men, women, and children who had fled slavery. Those hand-transcribed interviews are captured on three reels of microfilm at the National Archives. Sometimes, individuals testified on the floor of Congress, and the *Congressional Globe* contains transcripts. Postwar sources like pension applications and Freedman’s Saving Bank account passbooks also contain written transcripts of freedpeople narrating their own stories and family connections. Obituaries in later years sometimes contained gems. And the WPA Narratives gathered during the Great Depression have their shortcomings, but when used carefully also allow us to hear the voices of some escapees from slavery. For some of these sources—Freedman’s Savings Bank records and WPA narratives for example—it is crucial to recognize the work and efforts of many, many people who have worked hard to digitize sources, making them much more widely accessible than in times past.

What do we learn from these stories about personal agency—that refugees were not merely victims but active in promoting their own welfare and new freedoms?

We learn a lot about the tension between individual agency and large structural forces. There is no question that the first impulse for freedom and the first steps toward emancipation came from the courage, determination, and resilience of slaves themselves who wanted out of slavery. They took enormous risks and showed astonishing courage and resourcefulness in choosing to run, in finding their way to Union forces, in outwitting would-be captors, and in finding ways to make themselves indispensable to the Union war effort. But of course, enslaved people before the war had also hated slavery and also had courage, determination, and resilience. Their stories, and the stories of enslaved people during the war,

remind us that no amount of human courage, determination, or resilience is invincible. I think that it's important that we not lose sight of all that refugees from slavery were up against. Sometimes immense structural forces—like firepower and state power—overcome people, no matter how resolute their will. Sometimes tiny forces—like germs—defeat even the most brave and persistent individuals. Responses of the powerful also mattered. Union officers' responses to arriving refugees, War Department orders, and laws set the boundaries between the possible and the impossible, but not even military and political leaders were all-powerful. They, too, were often overcome by the overwhelming nature of the war, or by the tiny insidiousness of disease-bearing germs. In short, everyone involved was up to some degree in over their head, and understanding freedpeople's experiences to some degree requires us to honor the enormous forces that could dwarf individual efforts, no matter how valiant.

But you did find a few instances in which former slaves resourcefully exploited wartime conditions to improve their status and the welfare of other refugees.

Absolutely! Especially once we recognize the kinds of odds freedpeople faced, the instances where they turned circumstances to their advantage are even more striking. An example that springs immediately to mind is Abraham Galloway, who had been born into slavery in North Carolina, escaped to Canada before the war but returned to take part in the crushing of slavery. As a spy, he provided invaluable intelligence to Union forces, but equally important were his personal magnetism and influence among freedpeople in eastern North Carolina, where efforts to recruit men into the United States Colored Troops lagged in the spring of 1863. Discouraged with the slow pace of enlistment, a recruiting agent suddenly received a mysterious message to go to a boarding house run by a free black woman named Mary Ann Starkey. When the agent arrived, he was blindfolded and led into a room. Once there, the blindfold was removed, and he found himself in the middle of a candle-lit circle with Galloway pointing a gun to his head. If the agent wanted soldiers, Galloway bargained, then he had to promise federal protection and an education for the soldiers' families. Under the circumstances, the agent agreed. Men enlisted, and the community's demands were met, at least while the war persisted. That example is full of dramatic flair, but there are many, many other quieter but no less profound examples. Albert and Martha Pool, for instance fled from slavery with their 8-year-old son, Benjamin, and were able to get jobs as nurses at a Union army smallpox hospital. The need for a smallpox hospital reminds us of how wretched wartime conditions could be—disease raged—but within that chaos, the Pool family wrote a whole new chapter in their life story, one

in which Martha and Albert entered into an agreement with the U.S. government and received wages for their labor. Moreover, nobody could sell their son away from them. One of the most gratifying aspects of writing *Troubled Refuge* was encountering stories like these, in which freedpeople thrust into the chaos of war found a way to forge a path through that chaos to a destination that had simply not been reachable before war upended everything.

How critical was the African American contribution, in its varied ways, to the success of the Union war effort?

Very! President Lincoln himself identified the contributions of the more than 180,000 African American men who served in the Union armed forces as a pivotal factor in the Union's success, especially since the military outcome ultimately came down to which side could keep an army in the field longer. But besides black soldiers, non-combatant contributions were essential. Refugees from slavery—women as well as men—in Union Army camps dug ditches, built fortifications, drove teams, hauled goods, loaded and unloaded ships, worked docks, navigated tricky water inlets, built and maintained railroad lines, and generally provided countless forms of labor required to keep the giant logistical operation that was the Union military in the field and operational. They spied, providing crucial local intelligence that blow-ins from the North simply would not have known otherwise. They nursed, cooked, and laundered . . . contributions easily overlooked but all vital to keeping soldiers healthy enough to fight, which mattered in a war in which disease killed many more than battle wounds did, and again, in which victory ultimately came down to who could keep a healthy force in the field longer.

A fascinating chapter in this story is the enthusiastic volunteerism of charitable organizations and individuals to help newly freed people, particularly in South Carolina. What were their goals for relief and education, and what did they believe they could achieve?

Organizations and individuals flocked to the occupied Confederacy to serve as aid workers among former slaves and to establish schools. They varied among themselves, of course, but what they shared was a determination to break the back of slavery. For most, there was also an element of restorative justice at work, based on recognition that slavery was wrong and its victims deserved redress of some sort. After that, motives started to diverge. For someone like Harriet Jacobs, herself an escapee from slavery decades earlier who had been living in Boston and then went to Alexandria, Virginia, to work among former slaves during the war, the focus was on relieving

suffering and opening pathways for freedpeople to achieve their own goals. For a number of religious organizations, northern black churches as well as white, moral uplift was a major goal; they reasoned that slavery had wronged former slaves' souls as well as bodies and that attention to spiritual edification was at least as important as material need. Some white reformers, well aware of endemic racism among white northerners, aimed to "prove" the fitness and capability of former slaves for freedom in contrast to widespread assumptions about black laziness and dependency. In some cases, their zeal to do so cut against the genuine material need faced by former slaves who owned nothing and fled with little besides clothes on their backs. Other white reformers carried unconscious biases themselves, convinced that their northern ways were superior and that the best way to improve the lives of former slaves was to graft northern habits and customs onto former slaves, regardless of freedpeople's own preferences. Finally, there was a subset of reformers utterly convinced that slavery was a less efficient economic system than wage labor, and their goals consisted of turning a profit while also elevating former slaves' standard of living in order to prove their theories (which, it turned out, were wrong). Freedpeople themselves largely sought autonomy for their families and communities and identified freedom and education as means to those ends. Sometimes their goals and methods aligned with aidworkers and reformers. Sometimes they clashed, with results ranging from the trivial to the tragic, as in the case of one New England woman who inadvertently led to the death of a young teenager because she was so convinced of the necessity of teaching him personal cleanliness that she did not ask if he could swim before sending him to bathe in a tidal creek, which pulled him into its undertow and drowned him. And while many northern aid workers retained their own implicit biases, a few actually came to recognize their own shortcomings and their need to join with and learn from the former slaves whom they initially saw themselves as helping.

Why were attempts to give freedpeople land belonging to Confederates largely unsuccessful?

They were unsuccessful partly because of President Andrew Johnson, partly because of the swift return of former Confederates to national power, partly because of widespread white (northern as well as southern) concerns about the sanctity of private property, and partly because of the quick abandonment of an original Republican Party principle, namely that labor's value was prior to and independent of capital's. In the case of Andrew Johnson: during the war, freedpeople continued to work the land they had long made profitable along the coast of South Carolina and Georgia while plantation owners in those areas fled. When Gen. William T. Sherman made it to Savannah, he met with black leaders who advised him that

retention of that land was the key to former slaves' independence, and the result was General Orders No. 15, conferring the right to those lands on former slaves. Many purchased lands under that and similar orders. But when white plantation owners appealed to President Andrew Johnson for return of their antebellum lands, he acceded, and lands were wrested from freedpeople and returned to antebellum owners. The entity that could have legislated otherwise was Congress, and some members, most notably Thaddeus Stevens, in fact proposed plans for redistribution of land abandoned by plantation owners, which would have amounted to roughly 10 percent of land privately owned before the war being redistributed. But former Confederates were returned to Congress with stunning rapidity—Alexander Stephens, vice president of the Confederacy, was back in Congress by 1873—and with no intention of voting in favor of such measures. Nor, I hasten to add, were all northern members of Congress willing to support such measures, partly out of straightforward racism but also out of worries over the perception of undermining private property rights. Of course, the property rights they meant were the property rights of those who owned the land before the war—capital—not of those who had worked the land or had begun to purchase it after the war—labor. In that sense, we see that a key principle of the antebellum Republican Party (the relative values of labor versus capital) did not survive the war.

You highlight Fort Monroe, Virginia, with its harsh conditions, as a poignant example of a troubled refuge for newly freed people, but also as a site where they fought for freedom. How so?

When Virginia left the Union on April 17, 1861, the U.S. Army was still in control of Fort Monroe located near Hampton, Virginia. Three enslaved men nearby, Shepard Mallory, Frank Baker, and James Townsend, had been put to work building Confederate fortifications when they learned that their owner, Confederate Colonel Charles Mallory, planned to remove them farther south to labor for the Confederate army, separating them from their families. They ran to Fort Monroe on May 23. The colonel sent an agent to demand their return, in compliance with the federal Fugitive Slave Act, but the Union general in command, Gen. Benjamin Butler, refused on the grounds that Colonel Mallory had used the men to build fortifications that would aid a force in armed rebellion against the United States, and so the rules of war conferred authority to confiscate the three slaves as contraband property. In a stroke, Butler used slaveholders' own insistence that slaves were legal property to release slaves from owners' grasps, gave rise to the terms "contraband" and "contraband camp," and illustrated how war could create possibilities unavailable in peacetime. War, of course, also creates misery, and so from the outset, the misery of harsh conditions

and new possibility were intertwined for the men, women, and children who ran to Fort Monroe. And run they did! About 800 appeared within a matter of weeks, and thousands more over the course of the war. Overcrowding happened almost immediately. Food shortages were not so much a problem, but clothing shortages, especially for women and children were, since the army did not keep supplies of women's or children's clothes on hand. Disease spread. Wages for those who worked for the army were constantly delayed and sometimes lost or withheld altogether. And Confederates and the risk of kidnapping was never very far away. Now, none of these risks or conditions were unknown to the thousands who ran to Fort Monroe; they chose to face those risks and conditions because the fort represented a way out of slavery, and allying their efforts with the army's gave them a way of fighting against slaveholders. For once, all the power was not on the slaveholders' side, as had been the case before the war. Freedpeople themselves called Fort Monroe "Freedom's Fortress," and they did so despite the hardship and even sorrow so many faced there. To me, that name signifies not some sort of naïvete, but rather clear-eyed recognition of the costs, risks, and uncertainty of escaping slavery, and then determination to escape anyway.

In 1865 and after, the widespread violence against African Americans in the South demonstrated the fragility of their freedoms and rights. How did those outrages ultimately lead to the call for constitutional protections?

Freedpeople themselves pushed hard to consolidate and retain their wartime gains, but many lawmakers had initially hoped that emancipation itself would simply cure all problems, with no additional effort. Outrages in 1865 and 1866, along with "Black Codes," or laws passed by hastily reassembled southern state legislatures, alerted principally Republican lawmakers in Congress that if freedom was to have any real meaning, freedpeople would need to retain direct access to a source of power. It had to be strong enough to counteract white resistance and to safeguard former slaves' efforts to act on their own aspirations and priorities once the Union Army was no longer on the ground in the states of the former Confederacy. The results were the Civil Rights Act of 1866 and the 14th and 15th Amendments.

In the section titled *Time in the Desert*, you trace postwar efforts to keep order in the South and promote black advancement through the Freedmen's Bureau and Freedman's Savings Bank. Why did those efforts ultimately fall short?

They did not so much fall short as achieve dramatic change—biracial voting, increased black land and property ownership, biracial state legislatures, black

members of Congress—which was later overturned or even overthrown. I find it helpful to think of the reasons for the overthrow as falling in two categories: the practical and the structural. In terms of the practical, the Freedmen’s Bureau from the time of its creation by federal law was, by law, a time-limited entity. As it was, Congress had to override President Johnson’s veto in order for the Bureau to make it past 1866, but even with that override, eventually its time was up. The Freedman’s Savings Bank got dragged under by the Panic of 1873, which was followed by a depression that led to the failure of many banks nationwide. But beyond the nuts and bolts, entities like the Freedmen’s Bureau and the Freedman’s Savings Bank were also up against huge historical and structural obstacles. There had never been a federal agency dedicated to humanitarian purposes before, and the creation of one was a real departure that met with resistance from the outset. To survive something like the Panic of 1873, any bank would need deep cash reserves, which the Freedman’s Savings Bank, dependent upon deposits made by people who until recently had enriched others while being robbed of the wealth they created and thus had little cash, did not have. The tasks of undoing centuries of slavery, an institution that had done such violence to the millions of laborers who created the bulk of the nation’s wealth and fostered such entrenched racism against them, were much bigger than one agency or one bank was capable of accomplishing, especially in the face of violent ex-Confederate resistance. The agencies themselves, of course, contained their own share of racial bigots insufficiently committed to freedpeople’s well being, but they also contained agents who truly did regard the work of the agency as a matter of justice; *all* of them were up against more than they could handle in the wake of the war.

Overall, *Troubled Refuge* is not limited to exploring African Americans’ wartime experiences of survival and freedom, but continues through 1868. What threads or developments in the wartime years make that extended story essential?

The primary reason for extending the time frame is to underscore a truth that is terribly easy to overlook, and that is that emancipation was both fragile and reversible. In most other times and places, wartime emancipation was turned back either wholly or partially once hostilities came to an end. Given how deeply embedded slavery was in the political and economic systems of the United States, how outrageously profitable it remained in 1861 when war broke out, there was every reason to suspect that emancipation in the United States might follow world historical patterns and simply be rolled back. After all, in world history, wars generally made *more* slaves, not fewer. So it took concerted federal action, at the constitutional level, to ensure that the abolition of slavery in the United States

would be permanent. The first step was the ratification of the 13th Amendment in December 1866, but even after that, violence against freedpeople testified to a continued impulse among former Confederates to reinstate bondage. It is, however, much more difficult to enslave a citizen than a non-citizen. The 14th Amendment, which was ratified in 1868 partly in recognition of former slaves' contributions to the Union war effort, which in turn saved the Union itself, recognized and safeguarded black citizenship. It marks the firm and final abolition of the legal institution of slavery, in my view. As for translating abolition of a legal institution into meaningful freedom . . . that task persists to the present day.

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