The Confederacy

Yorktown (Va.) June 19th 1861

In reply to your note, I would simply state that in all services, French, English, American &c working details are constantly made. It is often impossible to carry a corps of labourers with an army. My own Regiment has done two thirds of the unloading at this point without a murmur though a very large portion of the men had never labored a day in their lives, The Quarter Master here has found it impossible to procure Negroes. I sent out armed parties Saturday Sunday & Tuesday to scour the Country and only five Negroes could be got; They have been seized by the Enemy or run into the interior. Under such circumstances, the wants of the service ought not to be embarrassed by points of etiquette. See Article 890. Men of my Regiment have been detailed for unloading schooners as blacksmiths, nurses, teamsters, brick masons, well diggers and so on. No objections has been raised by either officers or men.

If C. Winston declines sending the men he must take the consequences of disobedience of orders & the reference of the matter to the Genl. Commanding Very Respectfully

D H Hill

Col. Jno A. Winston to Col. Hill, 19 June 1861, and Col. D. H. Hill to Col. Winston, 19 June 1861, ch. ii, vol. 27, pp. 21–22, Letters & Telegrams Sent, Army & Dept. of the Peninsula, Records of Military Commands, RG 109 [F-627]. Southern soldiers were also unwilling or unable to provide other services that warfare necessitated. In July 1861, General John B. Magruder, commander of the Confederate Army of the Peninsula, petitioned the Confederate Secretary of War for permission to hire black women “at very cheap rates” to work in military hospitals in the place of soldiers detailed from the ranks. “The troops here being Volunteers and unused to such duties as are required from Hospital attendants and nurses, cooks &c, the sick in the Hospitals suffer greatly if left to their care.” (Brig. Genl. J. B. Magruder to Sir, 18 July 1861, #2686 1861, Letters Received, ser. 5, Sec. War, RG 109 [F-371]).

1 Article 890, paragraph 890, of the Confederate army regulations provided: “Although the necessities of the service may require soldiers to be ordered on working-parties as a duty, commanding officers are to bear in mind that fitness for military service by instruction and discipline is the object for which the army is kept on foot, and that they are not to employ the troops when not in the field, and especially the mounted troops, in labors that interfere with their military duties and exercises, except in cases of immediate necessity, which shall be forthwith reported for the orders of the War Department.” (C.S.A., War Department, Army Regulations Adopted for the Use of the Army of the Confederate States, [New Orleans, 1861], p. 111.)

An exchange between two Confederate officers about fatigue labor

Commander of a Confederate Alabama Regiment to the Commander of the Confederate Post of Yorktown, Virginia; and the Letter’s Reply

Yorktown (Va.) June 19, 1861

Sir: The order to report Twenty Men & a commissioned Officer to Cap’ Bloomfield is I suppose for the purpose of laboring in the unloading of Ships; I conceive such a requisition a divestment from the legitimate duties of a Volunteer Soldier, and protest against it. While we are ready to work on Military roads and defences, I think there are Negroes & hirelings enough to do the menial labor of unloading transports. Respectfully

Jno A Winston

Sir, Perhaps you will think it presumptuous in me to write you, but, as an humble & I trust loyal citizen of this confederacy I feel that I have the right to appeal to you for redress when I think myself imposed upon by the military authorities of the day; a government that does not protect its subjects in the enjoyment of their property, so far as lies in its power, is not the kind of government to command respect, or encourage the feelings of patriotism— do you think it is? I allude to the late order of Gen. Mercer for the impressment of slaves in Geo. he has sent his agents
into our country & without notice or ceremony impressed & taken 20 pr ct of the slaves away from their owners, under penalty of arresting every man who refused, & he still holds them against their wishes when they think it is time for their hands to be sent home, & other counties be called on to bear their part of the risque & labor necessary to make the city of Savh impregnable.— The people of Laurens county I believe are patriotic, & are ever ready to do their full share in any work calculated to promote the welfare of our country,— in this case, our patriotism has not been appealed to at all, the ipse dixit of a military commander was the first intimation we had of the matter, & with but few exceptions our county people responded forthwith & without a murmur,— other counties refused, and telegraphed to you on the subject, & your answer soopt the further impressment of slaves, those counties that refused to obey the order, were the most able to send slaves, & have sent none.— Is it right for a few poor counties to risk their slaves & do all the work, while the wealthier counties stand aloof & do nothing at all? nor do we complain at helping, we are willing to help, but we do complain at having to do more than our share— I am sorry you interfered, for it has been the means of exposing a degree of selfishness among our people, that is both shameful & alarming, and has convinced me that Gen Mercer was right in ordering the impressment— Please be kind enough to tell me if Gen. Mercer can keep our impressed slaves as long as he pleases, his agent said they would be needed about a month, the month is now out. & I hear no talk of the hands coming home. have we any way to get them back? if so, please tell me how— If you deny his right to impress hands, you ought certainly to make him give up those he has impressed, will you allow him to take property from some men, & not others, & then keep it as long as he pleases? we must have equality in this confederacy or it will blow up— If this is to be a free-will offering upon the altar of our country, I wish to be placed on an equal footing with the people of other counties, so that when I send my hands, no one can deny but that a motive of patriotism & not the order of Gen' Mercer has prompted me to do it— you can readily perceive the distinction

Very respectfully

Joseph. M. White


From: Ira Berlin, ed, ed.
Freedom, Series 1, Vol. 1
The Destruction of Slavery (1985):
699-700
New York Black Soldier to the President

New Orleans Camp Parpit Louisiana [August] 1864

My Dear Friend and x Pre. I take up my Pen to Address you A few simpels And facts We so called the 20th u.s. Colored troops we was got up in the state of New York so said By A grant of the President we Dont think he know wether we are white or Black we have not Bin Organized yet And A grate money Brought Away without Being Mustered in, and we are treated in a Different maner to what others Rigiments is Both Northern men of southern Raised Rigiment Instead of the musket It is the spad and the Whelbarrow and the Axe cutting in one of the most horable swamps in Louisiana stinking and misery Men are Called to go on these fatigues wen sum of them are scarce Able to get Along the Day Before on the sick List And Prehaps weeks to And By this treatment money are thownen Back in sicknesswich they very seldom get over. we had when we Left New York over A thousand strong now we scarce rise Nine hundred the total is said to Be. we lost 1,60 men who have Left thire homes friends and Relation And Come Down hear to Lose thire Lives in For the Country thy Dwll in or stayd in the Colored man is like A lost sheep Money of them old and young was Brave And Active. But has Bin hurried By and ignominious Death into Eternity. But I hope God will Preseare the Rest Now in existence to Get Justice and Rights we have to Do our Duty or Die and no help for us It is true the Country is in A hard strugle But we All must Remember Mercy and Justice Grate and small. it is Devine. we All Listed for so much Bounty Clothing and Ration And 13 Dollars A month. And the most has fallen short in all thes Things we havent Recived A cent of Pay Since we Bin in the field. Instead of them Coming to us Like men with our 13 Dollars they come with onlyseven Dollars A month wich only A few ruck it we stand in Need of Money very much indeed And think it is no more than Just an Right we should have it And Another thing we are Cut short of our Ration in A most Shoking maner. I wont Relate All now But we Are Nerly Deprived of All Comforts of Life Hardly have Anough Bred to Keep us From starving six or 8 ounces of it to Do A Soldier 24 hours on Guard or eney other Labor and About the Same in Meat and Coffee sum times No meat for 2 Days soup meat Licqour with very Little seazing the Boys calls hot water or meat tea for Diner. It is A hard thing to be Kempt in such a state of misery Continuly. It is spoken Dont musel the ox that treads out the corn. Remember we are men standing in Readiness to face thous vile traitors an Rebeles who are trying to Bring your Peaceable homes to Destruction. And how can we stand them in A weak and starving Condition

W.

Unsigned to My Dear Friend and x Pre., [Aug.] 1864, filed with R-26 1864, Letters Received, ser. 360, Colored Troops Division, RG 94 (B-57). This unsigned letter is filed with another letter in the same hand which was written by Nimrod Rowley, a soldier in the 20th USCI.
Snow Hill near Thomson Georgia April 17th 1866

Dear Sir— Allow me to call your attention to the fact that most of the Freedwomen who have husbands are not at work—never having made any contract at all— Their husbands are at work, while they are as nearly idle as it is possible for them to be, pretending to spin—knit or something that really amounts to nothing for their husbands have to buy them clothing I find from my own hands wishing to buy of me—

Now these women have always been used to working out & it would be far better for them to go to work for reasonable wages & their rations—both in regard to health & and in furtherance of their family wellbeing— Say their husbands get 10 to 12— or 13$ per month and out of that feed their wives and from 1 to 3 or 4 children— & clothe the family— It is impossible for one man to do this & maintain his wife in idleness without stealing more or less of their support, whereas if their wives (where they are able) were at work for rations & fair wages—which they can all get; the family could live in some comfort & more happily— besides their labor is a very important percent of the entire labor of the South— & if not made available must effect to some extent the present crop— Now is a very important time in the crop— & the weather being good & to continue so for the remainder of the year, I think it would be a good thing to put the women to work and all that is necessary to do this in most cases is an order from you directing the agents to require the women to make contracts for the balance of the year— I have several that are working well—while others and generally younger ones who have husbands & from 1 to 3 or 4 children are idle—indeed refuse to work & say their husbands must support them. Now & then there is a woman who is not able to work in the field— or who has 3 or 4 children at work & can afford to live on her childrens labors— with that of her husband— Even in such a case it would be better she should be at work— Generally however most of them should be in the field— Could not this matter be referred to your agents They are generally very clever men and would do right— I would suggest that you give this matter your favorable consideration & if you can do so to use your influence to make these idle women go to work. You would do them & the country a service besides gaining favor & the good opinion of the people generally.

I beg you will not consider this matter lightly for it is a very great evil & one that the Bureau ought to correct—if they wish the Freedmen & women to do well— I have 4 or 5 good women hands now idle that ought to be at work because their families cannot really be supported honestly without it This should not be so— & you will readily see how important it is to change it at once— I am very respectfully Your obt servant

M. C. Fulton

I am very willing to carry my idle women to the Bureau agency & give them such wages as the Agent may think fair— & I will further guaranty that they shall be treated kindly & not over worked— I find a general complaint on this subject everywhere I go—and I have seen it myself and experienced its bad effects among my own hands— These idle women are bad examples to those at work & they are often mischief makers— having no employment their brain becomes more or less the Devil's work shop as is always the case with idle people— black or white & quarrels & Musses among the colored people generally can be traced to these idle folks that are neither serving God— Man or their country—

Are they not in some sort vagrants as they are living without employment—and mainly without any visible means of support— and if so are they not amenable to vagrant act—? They certainly should be— I may be in error in this matter but I have no patience with idleness or idlers— Such people are generally a nuisance— & ought to be reformed if possible or forced to work for a support (and such too have [our?] business)— Poor white women have to work— so should all poor people—or else stealing must be legalized—or tolerated for it is the twin sister of idleness—

M. C. Fulton to Brig. Genl. Davis Tilson, 17 Apr. 1866, Unregistered Letters Received, ser. 832, GA Assistant Commissioner, RG 115.

An 1868 Sharecropper Contract (South Carolina)

South Carolina,
Laurnes Dist. Jany. 1st, 1868

Know all men by these presents that I—John
D. Williams of the Dist and State aforesaid have agreed to give to the following negroes
on my White Plains plantation in said Dist one third of all the corn, sweet potatoes, wheat
& Cotton or oats & Malassus the said negroes do raise on Said plantation I am to furnish
as much mule or horse power & provision for the Mules & horses as may be necessary to
Cultivate the lands they plant. the negroes are to Cloth & feed themselves & pay all other
necessary expenses they need—medical bills & and I am to let them have corn—bacon—at
the current prices for such articles—the negroes hereby consenting and binding them-
selves to abide and settle by the accounts kept against them by myself or by my Agent
for articles supplied and furnished them and that binds them Selves to be steady & atten-
tive to there work at all times and to work at keeping in repair all the fences on Said
plantation and assist in cutting & taking care of—all the grain crops on Said plantation
and work by the direction of me or my Agent—at all times to command their Services
untill Jan 1st 1869—

They are to be careful of all animals or empletents used by them shall protect the same
from injury from other persons & shall be answerable for all propety lost—destroyed or
enjured by their negligence dishonesty or bad faith and should any of them depart from
the farm or from any services at any time with out our approval they shall forfeit one dol-
lar per day for the first time and for the second time without good cause they shall forfeit
all of their interest in the crop their to me the enjured person—they shall not be allowed
to keep firearms or deadly weapons or ardent Spirits and they shall obey all lawful orders
from me or my Agent and shall be honest—truthful—sober—civel—diligent in their busi-
ness & for all wilful Disobedience of any lawful orders from me or my Agent drunkenness
moral or legal misconduct want of respect or civility to me or my Agent or to my Family
or any else, I am permitted to discharge them forfeiting any claims upon me for any part
of the crop as for this agreement & they are to assist in Sowing all of the Small Grain next
fall & winter and in a settlement with them at the end of the year each hand is to draw
their portion of their crop fall hands—far three forths hands—half one forth hands as is
Set down opposite their names as witness our hands & Seals January 1st, 1868

Moses Nathan I full hand?
Jake Chappal " "
Milly Williams ½ "
Easter Williams " "
Mack Williams

Laurnes Dist
South Carolina

We the white labores now employed by John. D. Williams on his white plains plantation
have lisened and heard read the foregoing Contract on this Sheet of paper assign equal
for the black labores employed by him on said place and we are perfectly Satisfied with
it and heare by bind our selves to abide & be Governed & Controwed by it

As witness our hands & seals this January 1st 1868

Wm Wyatte 1 fall hand Wm. Wyatte
John Wyatte 1 fall hand John Wyatte
Packingham Wyatte ½ " " P Wyatte
Franklin Wyatte ½ " " F Wyatte
R M Hughes 1 fall hand R M Hughes
B G Pollard 1 fall hand B G Pollard
G W Pollard 1 fall hand George Washington Pollard

* All of the Negroes and two of the whites made their marks.