

*Embattled Freedom: Journeys through the Civil War's Slave Refugee Camps*, by Amy Murrell Taylor. Civil War America Series. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018. xv, 349 pp. Maps, illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$34.95 hardcover, \$27.99 ebook.

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War is often an abstraction in history. Many historians have focused on the causes of wars and their aftermath, leaving the war itself to military historians. In the past decade, that trend has changed. It is no longer enough to say that the Civil War destroyed slavery in the United States. We now ask, how? At the highest political level, historians have carefully unpacked the development of Abraham Lincoln's thinking and his move toward a policy of emancipation. On the ground, we have learned that soldiers in both blue and grey uniforms were fighting about the future of slavery in the country long before Lincoln issued his Emancipation Proclamation. In addition, historians have long argued that enslaved African Americans provided critical human power for the Union Army, working as laborers and enlisting as soldiers. But before they joined the Union war machine, they first had to escape from their plantations. And they did so in droves. The flight of the enslaved destroyed the South's plantation complex and transformed the Union Army into a liberating force.

But even this, Amy Murrell Taylor would contend, is an abstraction. In *Embattled Freedom*, Taylor unravels the tangled process of emancipation during the Civil War. Slave refugee camps, Taylor argues, were the places where freedom moved from abstraction to a lived reality. Crossing Union lines was an "act of faith" (9), Taylor claims, because the future of the refugees depended on the capricious interpretation of the phrase *military necessity*. The presence of refugees forced military leaders to enact federal policies and to create their own *ad hoc* solutions; the justification always followed "the fluid, inconsistent and contradictory logic" of military necessity (12). At times, that meant building refugee towns and providing food and clothing; at other times it meant confiscating food and goods from the refugees or removing them from their newly built homes. Refugees, therefore, had to align their needs with shifting military policy. By taking readers inside the camps, Taylor convincingly shows that slave refugee camps played a pivotal role in emancipation because they were the places where policy was enacted in the lives of individuals.

Taylor's narrative is not strictly linear because, as she argues, emancipation was not a linear process. She uses three microhistorical chapters to structure her narrative. Vignettes of the Whitehursts, Eliza Bogan, and Gabriel Burdett allow Taylor to personalize her narrative. But these

chapters also highlight one of her central arguments: context had a significant effect on the experience of refugees. The Whitehursts worked toward emancipation in the familiar eastern theater in Virginia, Bogan was embroiled in combat as a refugee along the Mississippi River, and Burdett sought spiritual liberation in the border state of Kentucky.

After each microhistory, Taylor explains the path to freedom enacted in the different locations. In Virginia slave refugees worked. The Whitehursts opened a store, selling goods to soldiers and refugees alike. But the Union Army raided their store and confiscated the structure for military use. Along the Mississippi River, refugee men and women fought for their freedom. The Union Army confiscated plantations as they invaded the South. Eliza Bogan was placed on these plantations as an occupier. She worked the land, but the resources came back to the Union Army. Her husband served in a company of refugees who defended the occupied plantation from Confederate guerrilla fighters. This policy proved untenable. As the Union Army moved, women could be left behind or uprooted and expected to follow the army. Finally, emancipation was most peculiar in border states, where slavery remained legal until after the war. In that context, Gabriel Burdett worked as a minister and made the invisible church visible. He still had to align his message with that of white Christians, but he could openly embrace religion as a liberating force.

Taylor also offers five thematic chapters in which readers might find information most directly relevant to midwestern history. These five chapters cover shelter, removal, hunger, clothing, and loss. Well-meaning Northern missionaries sought to prepare refugees for freedom by enacting freedom in material ways. For example, Northerners believed that freedom carried certain sartorial expectations. They sought to move refugees out of their "rags" and into respectable clothing. At each turn, refugees negotiated their own understanding of material freedom. Refugee women retained their headdresses and resisted "slave cloth" for their clothing. The negotiation process between Northern humanitarians and refugees is fascinating and eloquently explained by Taylor.

Taylor ends her narrative with loss. At the end of the war the Union Army dismantled and destroyed refugee camps. "It was a tangible loss of something concrete, something they believed they already possessed and even improved" (216). President Andrew Johnson granted amnesty to former planters and restored their land, leaving many refugees dispossessed. Refugees had to struggle to obtain land or to rent land from the restored planters. In many ways, the old order was restored. But the refugees had wrought freedom from the war through their actions in the refugee camps. Yet, as Taylor argues, the refugee camps were just the beginning of the emancipation process.