Drawn from the documentary history of emancipation that has been described as "this generation's most significant encounter with the American past," *Slaves No More* brings together three essays on the destruction of slavery and the redefinition of freedom in the midst of the nation's bloodiest conflict. Each of the essays addresses a central question in the study of the Civil War. How did slaves gain their freedom? What did freedom mean? How did wartime military service reshape the lives of black Americans? Emphasizing the active role of slaves and former slaves in remaking a war for the Union into a war for freedom, these essays demonstrate that emancipation transformed the lives of all Americans, white and black. American history would never be the same once there were slaves no more.

SLAVES NO MORE

Other publications of the Freedmen and Southern Society Project

FREEDOM: A DOCUMENTARY HISTORY OF EMANCIPATION, 1861–1867

Series 1, volume 1: THE DESTRUCTION OF SLAVERY, ed. Ira Berlin, Barbara J. Fields, Thavolia Glymph, Joseph P. Reidy, and Leslie S. Rowland (Cambridge University Press, 1985)

Series 1, volume 2: THE WARTIME GENESIS OF FREE LABOR: THE UPPER SOUTH, ed. Ira Berlin, Steven F. Miller, Joseph P. Reidy, and Leslie S. Rowland (Cambridge University Press, in press)

Series 1, volume 3: THE WARTIME GENESIS OF FREE LABOR: THE LOWER SOUTH, ed. Ira Berlin, Thavolia Glymph, Steven F. Miller, Joseph P. Reidy, Leslie S. Rowland, and Julie Saville (Cambridge University Press, 1990)

Series 2, THE BLACK MILITARY EXPERIENCE, ed. Ira Berlin, Joseph P. Reidy, and Leslie S. Rowland (Cambridge University Press, 1982)

FREE AT LAST: A DOCUMENTARY HISTORY OF SLAVERY, FREEDOM, AND THE CIVIL WAR

ed. Ira Berlin, Barbara J. Fields, Steven F. Miller, Joseph P. Reidy, and Leslie S. Rowland (New Press, in press)

SLAVES NO MORE

THREE ESSAYS ON EMANCIPATION AND THE CIVIL WAR

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Dauphin Thompson
William Thompson
Charles P. Tidd

Who Risked All at Harper's Ferry
October 16, 1859

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Introduction

No event in American history matches the drama of emancipation. More than a century later, it continues to stir the deepest emotions. And properly so. Emancipation in the American South accompanied the military defeat of the world's most powerful slaveholding class. It freed a larger number of slaves than did the end of slavery in all other New World societies combined. Clothed in the rhetoric of biblical prophecy and national destiny and born of a bloody civil war, it accomplished a profound social revolution. That revolution destroyed forever a way of life based upon the ownership of human beings, restoring to the former slaves proprietorship of their own persons, liquidating without compensation private property valued at billions of dollars, and forcibly substituting the relations of free labor for those of slavery. In designating the former slaves as citizens, emancipation placed citizenship upon new ground, defined in the federal Constitution and removed beyond the jurisdiction of the states. By obliterating the sovereignty of master over slave, it handed a monopoly of sovereignty to the newly consolidated nation-state. The freeing of the slaves simultaneously overturned the old regime of the South and set the entire nation upon a new course.

With emancipation in the South, the United States enacted its part in a world-wide drama. Throughout the western world and beyond, the forces unleashed by the American and French revolutions and by the industrial revolution worked to undermine political regimes based upon hereditary privilege and economic systems based upon bound labor. Slavery had already succumbed in the Northern states and in the French and British Caribbean before the American Civil War, and it

would shortly do so in its remaining strongholds in Spanish and Portuguese America. Almost simultaneously with the great struggle in the United States, the vestiges of serfdom in central and eastern Europe yielded to the pressure of the age. Only small pockets in Africa and Asia remained immune, and their immunity was temporary. The fateful lightning announced by the victorious Union army was soon to strike, if it had not already struck, wherever men and women remained in bonds of personal servitude.

For all systems of bondage, emancipation represented the acid test, the moment of truth. The upheaval of conventional expectations stripped away the patina of routine, exposing the cross purposes and warring intentions that had simmered – often unnoticed – beneath the surface of the old order. In throwing off habitual restraints, freedpeople redesigned their lives in ways that spoke eloquently of their hidden life in bondage, revealing clandestine institutions, long-cherished beliefs, and deeply held values. In confronting new restraints, they abandoned their usual caution in favor of direct speech and yet more direct action. Lords and serfs, masters and slaves had to survey the new social boundaries without the old etiquette of dominance and subordination as a guide. Their efforts to do so led to confrontations that could be awkward, painful, and frequently violent. The continued force of these encounters awakened men and women caught up in the drama to the realization that their actions no longer ratified old, established ways, but set radically new precedents for themselves and for future generations.

Moments of revolutionary transformation expose as do few human events the foundation upon which societies rest. Although those who enjoy political power and social authority speak their minds and indulge their inclinations freely and often, their subordinates generally cannot. Only in the upheaval of accustomed routine can the lower orders give voice to the assumptions that guide their world as it is and as they wish it to be. Some of them quickly grasp the essence of the new circumstance. Under the tutelage of unprecedented events, ordinary men and women become extraordinarily perceptive and articulate, seizing the moment to challenge the assumptions of the old regime and proclaim a new social order. Even then, few take the initiative. Some – perhaps

most – simply try to maintain their balance, to reconstitute a routine, to maximize gains and minimize losses as events swirl around them. But inevitably they too become swept up in the revolutionary process. Barely conscious acts and unacknowledged motives carried over from the past take on a changed significance. Attempts to stand still or turn back only hasten the process forward. At revolutionary moments, all actions – those of the timid and reluctant as much as those of the bold and eager – expose to view the inner workings of society.

Because they allow for such full inspection, revolutionary transformations have long occupied scholars seeking to solve the mysteries of human society. Students of the American past have been drawn to the Civil War and Reconstruction for precisely this reason. Perhaps no period of American history has a fuller and more complex historiography, as scholars of all ideological persuasions have tried to comprehend the meaning of emancipation, for themselves and for posterity.

The Freedmen and Southern Society Project, a collaborative research enterprise at the University of Maryland, was established to write a documentary history of the transition from slavery to freedom in the American South. Drawing upon the unparalleled documentary holdings of the National Archives of the United States, the editors sought a fuller understanding of the process by which men and women moved from the utter dependence slaveholders demanded but never fully received, to the independence freedpeople desired but seldom attained. In the fall of 1976, the editors launched a systematic search of the archives. Over the course of the next three years, members of the project – including three of the present authors – selected and photocopied more than 40,000 items, representing perhaps 2 percent of the documents they examined. Subsequent research by graduate assistants added about 10,000 documents to the initial collection. Indexed and cross-referenced topically, chronologically, and geographically, this selection constitutes the project's documentary universe.

The Civil War brought ordinary Americans into contact with central-state authority as never before. During the conflict, both the Union and Confederate governments organized soldiers and laborers, mobilized material resources, fought battles, levied taxes, and confis-

cated property; the Union eventually emancipated slaves. After the war, federal agencies figured prominently in the reconstruction of the South's economy and society. The records created and collected by the Union and Confederate governments and now housed in the National Archives provide an unrivaled source for understanding the passage of black people from slavery to freedom. Such governmental units as the Colored Troops Division of the Adjutant General's Office; the American Freedmen's Inquiry Commission; the U.S. army at every level of command, from the headquarters in Washington to local army posts; army support organizations, including the Judge Advocate General's Office, the Provost Marshal General's Bureau, and the Quartermaster General's Office, and their subordinates in the field; the Civil War Special Agencies of the Treasury Department; individual regiments of U.S. Colored Troops; various branches of the Confederate government (whose records fell into Union hands at the conclusion of the war); the Southern Claims Commission; the Freedman's Bank; and, most important, the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands all played a role in the coming of freedom.

The missions of these agencies placed them in close contact with a wide variety of men and women, and their bureaucratic structure provided a mechanism for the preservation of many documents by and about people generally dismissed as historically mute. Alongside official reports in the archival files, hundreds of letters and statements by former slaves give voice to people whose aspirations, beliefs, and behavior have gone largely unrecorded. Not only did extraordinary numbers of former slaves, many of them newly literate, put pen to paper in the early years of freedom, but hundreds of others, entirely illiterate, gave depositions to government officials, placed their marks on resolutions passed at mass meetings, testified before courts-martial and Freedmen's Bureau courts, and dictated letters to more literate black men and women and to white officials and teachers. The written record thus created constitutes an unparalleled outpouring from people caught up in the revolutionary process of emancipation. Many of these documents requested official action to redress wrongs committed by powerful former slaveholders who only reluctantly recognized ex-slaves as free,

rarely as equal. Others, however, originated in relationships entirely outside the purview of either federal officials or former masters and employers. They include, for example, correspondence between black soldiers and their families and between kinfolk who had been separated during slavery. That such letters fell for various reasons into the bureaucratic net of government agencies (and thus were preserved along with official records) should not obscure their deeply personal origins.

These documents convey, perhaps as no historian can, the experiences of the liberated: the quiet personal satisfaction of meeting an old master on equal terms, as well as the outrage of ejection from a segregated streetcar; the elation of a fugitive enlisting in the Union army, and the humiliation of a laborer cheated out of hard-earned wages; the joy of a family reunion after years of forced separation, and the distress of having a child involuntarily apprenticed to a former owner; the hope that freedom would bring a new world, and the fear that, in so many ways, life would be much as before. Other documents offer insight into the diverse reactions of planters, Union officers, and Southern yeomen – men and women who faced emancipation with different interests and expectations. Taken together, the records now housed in the National Archives provide exceptionally full documentation of the destruction of a dependent social relationship, the release of a people from their dependent status, and the simultaneous transformation of an entire society. As far as is known, no comparable record exists for the liberation of any group of serfs or slaves or for the transformation of any people into wage-workers.

The mandate of the Freedmen and Southern Society Project is to make these documents accessible to all those interested in the history of emancipation. It is fulfilling its mission by publishing a multivolume edition entitled *Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation, 1861–1867*. In constructing each volume, the editors must pick and choose from among millions of letters, reports, depositions, and statistical compilations, knowing that although the documents speak eloquently, they do so in many different voices and from many different vantage points. The task of selecting, transcribing, and annotating the archival record of emancipation is thus no different for the project's historians than for other scholars using the same records: to select those docu-

ments that best explain the transition from slavery to freedom. But even the most forthright document tells only part of the story, and for that reason, the editors introduce each volume of *Freedom* with an interpretive essay. Originally designed to provide historical context and to mediate between the documents and the secondary literature, the introductory essays have themselves become a history of emancipation during the Civil War. Like the volumes of which they are a part, the essays address a central question of the human experience: how men and women strive to enlarge their freedom and secure their independence from those who would dominate their lives.

The Freedmen and Southern Society Project now stands at its halfway point. During the past decade, four volumes of *Freedom* have reached print. *The Destruction of Slavery* explicates the process by which slavery collapsed under the pressure of federal arms and the slaves' determination to place their own liberty on the wartime agenda. In documenting the transformation of a war for the Union into a war against slavery, it shifts the focus from the halls of power in Washington and Richmond to the plantations, farms, and battlefields of the South and demonstrates how slaves accomplished their own liberation and shaped the destiny of the nation.

The Wartime Genesis of Free Labor: The Upper South and *The Wartime Genesis of Free Labor: The Lower South* consider the evolution of freedom in Union-occupied areas of the South. Describing the experiences of former slaves as military laborers, residents of government-sponsored "contraband camps," and wage-workers in both countryside and city, these volumes examine the freedpeople's struggle to attain economic independence in difficult wartime circumstances. They also recount the federal government's involvement in labor and relief programs on a scale unsurpassed until the New Deal and trace the interplay among the conflicting conceptions of freedom held by former slaves, former slaveholders, and Northern soldiers and civilians. In so doing, they touch upon a fundamental theme of the entire edition: how emancipation transformed the meaning of freedom not only for former slaves but for all Americans – black and white, Southern and Northern.

Finally, *The Black Military Experience* demonstrates how the enlist-

ment and military service of almost 200,000 black soldiers and sailors – the vast majority of them former slaves – hastened the transformation of the Civil War into a war for universal liberty. A social history of Civil-War soldiering, the volume shows how the military experience reshaped the lives of black men, their families, and their communities, and also how it informed struggles against discrimination and for equality long after the war ended.

Although each volume of *Freedom* stands on its own, several themes unite the four published thus far. Foremost is the active role played by slaves and former slaves in destroying slavery and redefining freedom. *Freedom* thus broadens the terrain to include the emancipated as well as the emancipators, showing how the weak can lead the powerful and demonstrating the need for a democratic history – one in which all participants receive a full hearing.

Emphasizing the agency of slaves and former slaves does not simply alter the cast of characters in the drama of emancipation, displacing old villains and enthroning new heroes. Abraham Lincoln and the Radical Republicans do not play less significant parts once slaves gain an active role in their own liberation, but they do play different ones. Focusing on events beyond Washington and outside formally constituted political bodies does not excise politics from the study of the past. Rather, it reveals that social history is not history with the politics left out, but that all history is – and must be – political. The politics of emancipation in the countryside and towns of the South makes more comprehensible the politics of emancipation inside the capitol and the presidential mansion.

This book brings together the introductory essays from the first four volumes of *Freedom*. Each of the authors participated, as coeditor of one or more of those volumes, in writing the essays that appear here. We hope that this brief treatment will lead students, general readers, and scholars to the documents that have inspired our undertaking from the outset – not only the thousand-odd published to date in *Freedom*, but also the millions still awaiting examination in the vaults of the National Archives.

Introduction

The essays in this book do not differ markedly from their original form in the volumes of *Freedom*. We have resisted the temptation to overhaul them, confining ourselves to correcting errors, shifting misplaced emphases, rooting out infelicities, and imposing stylistic consistency on prose written over the span of a decade. The arguments are unchanged. The footnotes, however, have been substantially reworked. As initially published, the essays were accompanied by a large selection of the sources on which they rest; here they stand alone. We have therefore made fuller reference to the documents that shaped our interpretations. Moreover, an outpouring of scholarship on the Civil War and emancipation has appeared in recent years, and we have added relevant new publications to the notes.

From the start, the Freedmen and Southern Society Project has been a collaborative endeavor, based upon the understanding that no scholar could single-handedly master the records at the National Archives. As its work continued, the editors learned that collaborative work also had other advantages, as they taught and tested each other, broadening their collective understanding of the process by which slaves became free people and – more prosaically – sharing the drudgery that necessarily accompanies scholarly work.

The interpretations advanced in these essays owe much to colleagues who participated in the formal mutual criticism, informal brainstorming, and lunchtime chatter in which the project's work gets done. We wish especially to thank Thavolia Glymph, coeditor of *The Destruction of Slavery* and *The Wartime Genesis of Free Labor: The Lower South*, and Julie Saville, coeditor of *The Wartime Genesis of Free Labor: The Lower South*. Having left the project for academic appointments elsewhere, neither was on hand when these essays were written. However, both made valuable comments on one or more of them at some stage of development. Both also brought to the project a wealth of knowledge and a commitment to the highest intellectual standards that have immeasurably enriched our collective enterprise.

Others who have been associated with the project also deserve thanks. Steven Hahn and Wayne K. Durrill, who served stints as editors, and Michael K. Honey and Leslie Schwalm, one-year editing

fellows, all advanced our collective work during their stays; Wayne Durrill commented on an early draft of "The Wartime Genesis of Free Labor," and Steven Hahn critiqued an advanced version of "The Destruction of Slavery." This book, like the volumes of *Freedom*, also owes much to the research assistance of Cindy S. Aron, Garrine P. Laney, and Gail M. Thomas, who were on hand during the lean and uncertain first years in the National Archives, and to Gregory LaMotta, whose archival detective skills served the project well during his long tenure as a graduate assistant. Special appreciation goes to Susan Bailey, Lorraine Lee, and Terrie Hruzd, successively the project's administrative assistant. Each somehow managed to keep pace with all the chores stacked upon her desk while still pursuing important work outside the office.

Over the course of the past sixteen years, the project has had numerous benefactors. The National Historical Publications and Records Commission and the University of Maryland underwrote its work at the beginning and have been generous with their material and moral support ever since. In subsequent years, the project has enjoyed long-term assistance from the National Endowment for the Humanities, as well as smaller grants from the Ford Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation, the H. W. Wilson Foundation, Philip Morris Companies, Inc., and the Arco-Richfield Foundation.

Everyone who has worked for the Freedmen and Southern Society Project – and a great many others – learned from Sara Dunlap Jackson, who until her death in April 1991 served as its foremost mentor, booster, and friend. We miss her.

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Short Titles and Abbreviations

SHORT TITLES

Black Military Experience	*Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation, 1861–1867*. Series 2, *The Black Military Experience,* ed. Ira Berlin, Joseph P. Reidy, and Leslie S. Rowland (Cambridge, U.K., 1982).
Destruction of Slavery	*Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation, 1861–1867*. Series 1, volume 1, *The Destruction of Slavery*, ed. Ira Berlin, Barbara J. Fields, Thavolia Glymph, Joseph P. Reidy, and Leslie S. Rowland (Cambridge, U.K., 1985).
Official Records	U.S. War Department, *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, 128 vols. (Washington, 1880–1901).
Statutes at Large	U.S., *Statutes at Large, Treaties, and Proclamations of the United States of America,* 17 vols. (Boston, 1850–73).
Wartime Genesis: Lower South	*Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation, 1861–1867*. Series 1, volume 3, *The Wartime Genesis of Free Labor: The Lower South,* ed. Ira Berlin, Thavolia Glymph, Steven F. Miller, Joseph P. Reidy, Leslie S. Rowland, and Julie Saville (Cambridge, U.K., 1990).
Wartime Genesis: Upper South	*Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation, 1861–1867*. Series 1, volume 2, *The Wartime Genesis of Free Labor: The Upper South,* ed. Ira Berlin, Steven F. Miller, Joseph P. Reidy, and Leslie S. Rowland (Cambridge, U.K., in press).

Short Titles and Abbreviations

ABBREVIATIONS

NA	National Archives
RG	Record Group
ser.	series