

From *The War Of The Rebellion: A Compilation Of The Official Records Of The Union And Confederate Armies* (1894). Series II, Vol I. Prisoners Of War, Etc.: Military Treatment Of Captured And Fugitive Slaves.

WASHINGTON, May 30, 1861.

Major-General BUTLER.

SIR: Your action in respect to the negroes who came in your lines from the service of the rebels is approved.

The Department is sensible of the embarrassment which must surround officers conducting military operations in a State by the laws of which slavery is sanctioned. The Government cannot recognize the rejection by any State of its federal obligations nor can it refuse the performance of the federal obligations resting upon itself. Among these federal obligations, however, none can be more important than that of suppressing and dispersing armed combinations formed for the purpose of overthrowing its whole constitutional authority. While {p.755} therefore you will permit no interference by the persons under your command with the relations of persons held to service under the laws of any State you will on the other hand so long as any State within which your military operations axe conducted is under the control of such armed combinations refrain from surrendering to alleged masters any persons who may come within your lines. You will employ such persons in the service to which they may be best adapted, keeping an account of the labor by them performed, of the value of it and of the expense of their maintenance. The question of their final disposition will be reserved for future determination.

SIMON CAMERON, Secretary of War.