Fort Negley: Past, Present, Future

OLLI WINTER 2020

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The Plan

• Jan 17: Enslavement & Building the Fort
• Jan 24: Defense, the US Colored Troops, Battle of Nashville, Emancipation
• Jan 31: Fort Negley & 19th Century Black Nashville
• Feb 7: Fort Negley as a Historic Site Under Threat
• Feb 14: Fort Negley & UNESCO
• Feb 21: The Future of Fort Negley
Slavery in the US

Characterized by **chattel slavery** – The Enslaved were considered objects like animals, not humans as they were elsewhere in the Americas.
Rees W. Porter operated a slave mart in downtown Nashville
March 20, 1856, Republican Banner. (Image: Tennessee State Library and Archives)
Nashville’s Strategic Importance
Round up of Nashville’s Enslaved

The union army's constant raiding and impressment frightened the young black children so much they ran when they saw the "blue mans" (Union Soldiers) approaching.

Building the Fort

"To the credit of the colored population be it said, they worked manfully and cheerfully, with hardly an exception, and yet lay out upon the works at night under armed guard, without blankets and eating only army rations. They worked in squads, each gang choosing their own officers..."

- Dr. Morton, Engineer
Runaways & Contraband Camps
Southern Slavecatchers & Evasion

The contraband camps had to be guarded to "keep the rebels from carrying them [the former enslaved] back to the white folks" – Joseph Fowley, formerly enslaved (Fisk University Social Science Institute, 1945, 128-29).
Fort Negley is Finished

The impressed enslaved, runaways, and free persons of African descent completed Fort Negley on December 7, 1862.
Making A Stand

• The majority of the soldiers in the colored regiments were fugitive slaves, who fought for a host of complicated reasons, among them personal freedom and the opportunity to live in a nation without slavery (Lovett, 1976: 40).

• "...the hills of Nashville will forever attest to how desperately the despised slave will fight when he strikes for freedom." (Nashville True Union, December 17, 1864).

• One former black soldier remarked, "I fought to free my mammy and her children all through Nashville and Franklin and Columbia, Tennessee, and all down through Alabama and Georgia...I'm fighting to get free. (Fisk, 1945: 218)"
Optional Reading

- Mrs Kate E R. Pickard, *The Kidnapped and the Ransomed* (1856)
- Tommie Morton-Young, *Nashville, Tennessee: Black American Series*
- Bill Carey, *Runaways, Coffles and Fancy Girls: A History of Slavery in Tennessee*