

November 10, 1863 - Social change, recruiting Negro soldiers in Murfreesboro, an excerpt from the diary of John C. Spence



An order is out for recruiting negro soldiers at this place, and put them in [a] camp of instruction. Although the Yankees profess not to press them into service, they operate about this way-on Sunday evening a file of soldiers repair to the church door and stand as the negro men come out. They take them in possession, put them in confinement and any other they see about the streets.

They are taken through an examination, such as will make soldiers are retained, the others are let off. They want devilish looking and able bodied negros for this purpose.

When a sufficient number is obtained, [they] are put in squads under drill by some qualified Dutchman.

Passing one morning by one of the churches or barracks, a squad was being drilled by a Dutch officer, who could not speak english plainer than he should, is marching the negros up and down the room. Say to them, ["]Marsh! lep-lep (meaning left foot) . No! te odder foot!-lep! lep! to odder foot you po tam fool! If you tont lep when I tells you, I'll prake mine sword over you tam wooly head! Halt! Marsh! Now, lep! lep! gis see! You got de odder foot. Take tat mit your tam nonsense ["] (strikes him with the side of his sword).

Such is about the start with them at first. In a short time they get in the way of keeping the step in marching and manouvering . To every appearance make a pretty good Yankee soldier when they are dressed in the "Loyal" blue, but whether they can be made to stand powder and led is another question. Should not be willing to trust a chance with them, to go through difficulty.

Now and then [I] hear some of the younger [black] chaps talking among themselves. ["]Bill! I'm quine to jine the rigitment next week! What you quine to do in the rigitment? Quine to fite de Reb . Sesesh!["]

They appear as impudent and as confident of what they will do in the army as many of the "Old Veterans," as the Yankees call the old soldiers that has been serving some time.

At this time there are a greater number of negros coming within the lines than usual, men, women and children. Almost every vacant house is filled to overflowing, seeking their freedom. The fact is the owners generally [are] more disposed to get clear of them, have become so trifling that they wont do any thing at home but eat and sit about, seeming to have lost all energy, if they had any.

Tis hoped the Yankees will get their satisfaction of them before they get through with their phylanthopie feelings for the negro .

There are many now getting rather tired. They say the negros are a lazy indolent set of creatures and wont work without some one after them, driving, but why they continue to persist in their freedom is an enigma. They are not

willing they shall be allowed to go in their section of [the] country to live . The fact is they have poor people enough, already there. If they come here themselves to live, their wages will of course, be cut down by having so many more to contend with for employment.



Their argument now is with slavery. In this land a poor white man would have no chance to live. They are not willing to put themselves on an equality with the negro as a slave. Where can be the difference? When they are in competition in labour, both of them working for the most they can get, possibly at a less rate than if one was in the usual servitude.



Spence, *Diary*.

