

# *Order by the Commander of the Military Division of the Mississippi*

*General William T. Sherman*

*January 16, 1865*

5 IN THE FIELD, SAVANNAH, GA., January 16th, 1865.

SPECIAL FIELD ORDERS, No. 15.

I. The islands from Charleston, south, the abandoned rice fields along the rivers for thirty miles back from the sea, and the country bordering the St. Johns river, Florida, are reserved and set apart for the settlement of the negroes now made free by the acts of war and  
10 the proclamation of the President of the United States.

II. At Beaufort, Hilton Head, Savannah, Fernandina, St. Augustine and Jacksonville, the blacks may remain in their chosen or accustomed vocations—but on the islands, and in the settlements hereafter  
15 to be established, no white person whatever, unless military officers and soldiers detailed for duty, will be permitted to reside; and the sole and exclusive management of affairs will be left to the freed people themselves, subject only to the United States military authority and the acts of Congress. By the laws of war, and orders of the President of the United States, the negro is free and must be dealt with  
20 as such. He cannot be subjected to conscription or forced military service, save by the written orders of the highest military authority of the Department, under such regulations as the President or Congress may prescribe. Domestic servants, blacksmiths, carpenters and other  
25 mechanics, will be free to select their own work and residence, but the young and able-bodied negroes must be encouraged to enlist as soldiers in the service of the United States, to contribute their share towards maintaining their own freedom, and securing their rights as citizens of the United States. . . .

III. Whenever three respectable negroes, heads of families, shall  
30 desire to settle on land, and shall have selected for that purpose an island or a locality clearly defined, within the limits above designated, the Inspector of Settlements and Plantations will himself, or by such subordinate officer as he may appoint, give them a license  
35 to settle such island or district, and afford them such assistance as he can to enable them to establish a peaceable agricultural settlement. The three parties named will subdivide the land, under the supervision of the Inspector, among themselves and such others as may choose to settle near them, so that each family shall have a plot  
40 of not more than (40) forty acres of tillable ground, and when it borders on some water channel, with not more than 800 feet water front, in the possession of which land the military authorities will afford them protection, until such time as they can protect themselves, or

until Congress shall regulate their title. The Quartermaster may, on  
 45 the requisition of the Inspector of Settlements and Plantations, place  
 at the disposal of the Inspector, one or more of the captured steamers,  
 to ply between the settlements and one or more of the commercial  
 points heretofore named in orders, to afford the settlers the opportu-  
 nity to supply their necessary wants, and to sell the products of their  
 50 land and labor.

IV. Whenever a negro has enlisted in the military service of the  
 United States, he may locate his family in any one of the settlements  
 at pleasure, and acquire a homestead, and all other rights and priv-  
 ileges of a settler, as though present in person. In like manner, ne-  
 55 groes may settle their families and engage on board the gunboats, or  
 in fishing, or in the navigation of the inland waters, without losing  
 any claim to land or other advantages derived from this system. But  
 no one, unless an actual settler as above defined, or unless absent  
 on Government service, will be entitled to claim any right to land or  
 60 property in any settlement by virtue of these orders.

V. In order to carry out this system of settlement, a general officer  
 will be detailed as Inspector of Settlements and Plantations, whose  
 duty it shall be to visit the settlements, to regulate their police and  
 general management, and who will furnish personally to each head  
 65 of a family, subject to the approval of the President of the United  
 States, a possessory title in writing, giving as near as possible the  
 description of boundaries; and who shall adjust all claims or conflicts  
 that may arise under the same, subject to the like approval, treating  
 such titles altogether as possessory. The same general officer will  
 70 also be charged with the enlistment and organization of the negro  
 recruits, and protecting their interests while absent from their settle-  
 ments; and will be governed by the rules and regulations prescribed  
 by the War Department for such purposes. . . .

BY ORDER OF MAJOR GENERAL W. T. SHERMAN:

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 Special Field Orders, No. 15, Headquarters Military Division of the  
 Mississippi, 16 Jan. 1865, Orders & Circulars, ser. 44, Adjutant Gen-  
 eral's Office, Record Group 94, National Archives, available online at  
<http://www.freedmen.umd.edu/sfo15.htm>.