

Fort Monroe National Monument



Illustration showing the interior of Fort Monroe, showing the entrance of colored soldiers and the National Guard, showing the presence of the white soldiers, and the soldiers.

The Contraband Decision and “Freedom’s Fortress”

In May 1861, three enslaved men escaped and sought freedom with the Union army at Fort Monroe. Major General Benjamin Butler declared them contraband because Confederates considered them property and they were working in war efforts against the U.S. This began an evolution in the legal status of enslaved people leading to President Lincoln’s 1863 Emancipation Proclamation.

To learn more, visit: www.nps.gov/fomr

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE