

Isaac McCaslin

Savannah, Georgia. 1989-present

Pontoon Series: The Tragedy at Ebenezer Creek, 2015

This series of charcoal drawings ties together several narratives from the American Civil War beginning with 'General William Tecumseh Sherman's March toward Savannah', next, 'The Tragedy at Ebenezer Creek', and concluding with 'Forty Acre's and a Mule'. These events shed light on what it may have been like to be a freed slave in the midst of the horrors of a Civil War.

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Sherman's Army Approaching Savannah, 2015

charcoal on paper
24 x 15 in.

Union General William Tecumseh Sherman is leading his 62,000-man army toward Savannah, Georgia in 1864 on his march to the sea. In the middle-ground of the composition are freed slaves coming from plantations in Atlanta, Georgia that had been destroyed by Sherman's scorched earth campaign. Having no direction and no food, the freed people follow Sherman's army.



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***Sherman's Army Crossing a Pontoon Bridge over
Ebenezer Creek, 2015***

charcoal on paper
18 x 11 in.

When Sherman's army arrives at Ebenezer Creek 25 miles Northwest from Savannah, his military engineers construct a pontoon bridge over the water.



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Freed People Waiting to Cross Ebenezer Creek, 2015

charcoal on paper

18 x 11 in.

The freed people are told they would be allowed to cross to the other side of Ebenezer Creek after waiting for every Union soldier to get to the other side.



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The Confederate Approach, 2015

charcoal on paper
18 x 11 in.

The Confederate troops approach Sherman's army from
behind.



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Dismantling the Pontoon Bridge at Ebenezer Creek,
2015

charcoal on paper
18 x 11 in.

Fearful that the trail of freed people had been slowing down General Sherman's army, Brigadier General Jefferson C. Davis gives orders to dismantle the pontoon bridge, effectively stranding the freed people on the other side of Ebenezer Creek.



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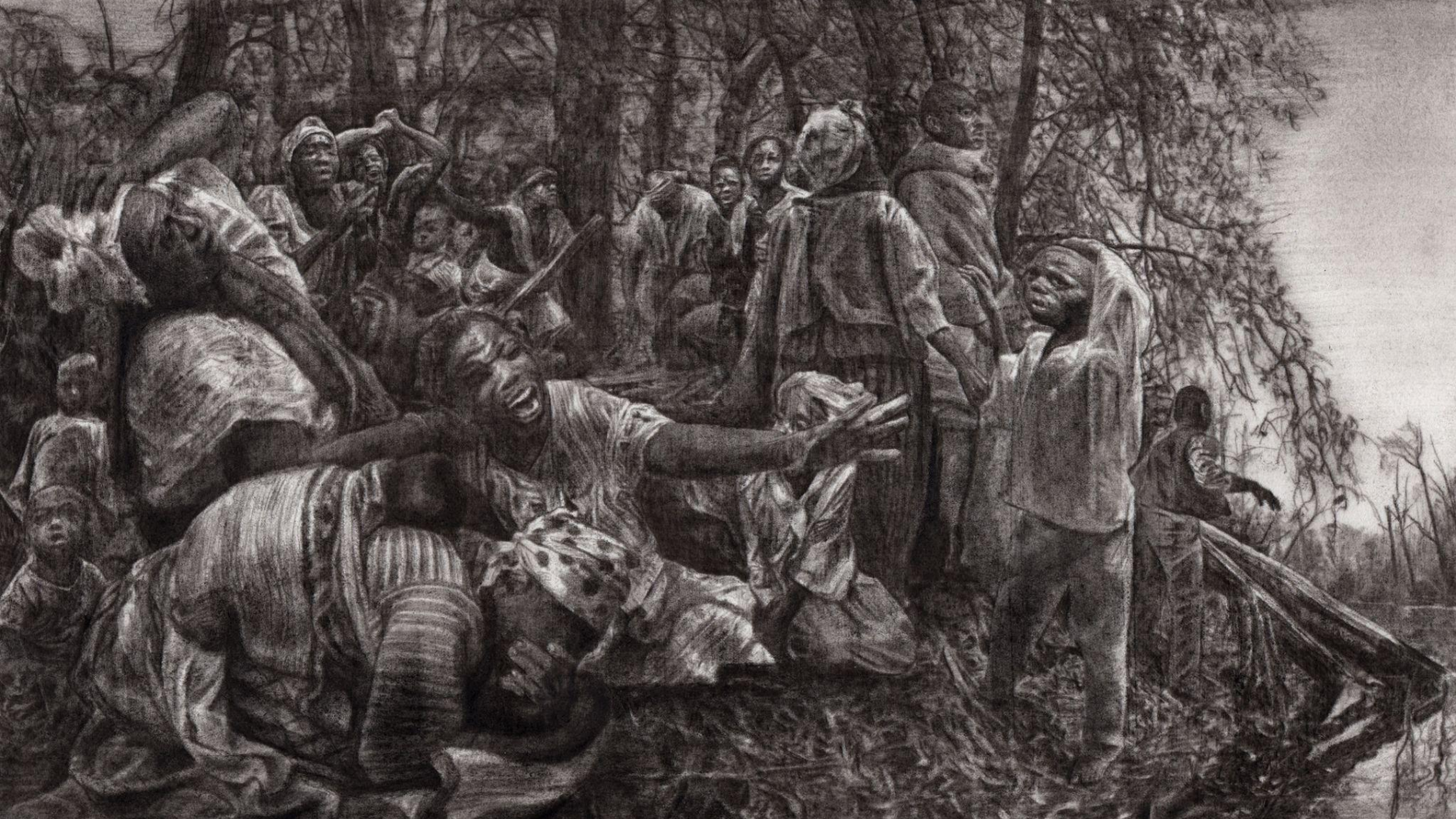
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Abandonment at Ebenezer Creek, 2015

charcoal on paper

18 x 11 in.

Freed people beg across the river to the Union soldiers for help. Abandonment meant starvation and death for many of them.



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***The Tragedy At Ebenezer Creek*, 2015**

charcoal on paper

18 x 11 in.

Crowds of freed people jump into the floodwaters of the creek
in a frenzied attempt to swim across. Hundreds of those that
can not swim drown.



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***General Rufus Saxton's Speech at the Second African
Baptist Church, 2015***

charcoal on paper

18 x 11 in.

News of the tragedy reaches President Abraham Lincoln. In response, he sends Secretary of War Edwin Stanton to Savannah to talk with General Sherman about the Union's need for measures for freed people to gain stability and self-dependence.

Sherman issues his solution "Field Order No. 15" popularly known as 'Forty Acres and a Mule'. General Rufus Saxton at Savannah's Second African Baptist Church gives the speech to the local black community announcing that each family would receive ownership of 40 acres of tillable land.



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Field Order No. 15 Map, 2015

charcoal on paper

18 x 11 in.

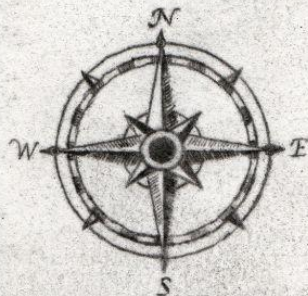
Under 'Field Order No. 15', 30 miles inland from the Atlantic Coast, stretching from below Charleston to the St. John's River in Florida, is to be an African American Colony.



CHARLESTON

SAVANNAH

ST. JOHNS RIVER



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Forty Acres and a Mule, 2015

charcoal on paper

18 x 30 in.

African American families begin settling on the land that had been issued to them. In 1865, shortly after The Civil War ends, President Abraham Lincoln is assassinated. Vice President Andrew Johnson takes his place and withdraws "Field Order No. 15" giving the land back to the former plantation owners. Many freed people become sharecroppers to their former masters.

