

## MYSTERY MONDAY:

# Mass Graves Remain in "The Devil's Punchbowl" of Natchez

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"And even to this day they talk about wild peach trees that come up down there but no one in Natchez will eat 'em because they know what the fertilizer was," Westbrook said.



"Disease broke out among 'em, smallpox being the main one. And thousands and thousand died. They were begging to get out. 'Turn me loose and I'll go home back to the plantation! Anywhere but there'," Estes said.

Concentration camps.

People mostly associate the term with Nazi Germany but historians say - it's true - they also existed in America.

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Jacob Kittilstad explores this forgotten history this MYSTERY MONDAY.

Untouched fruit falls to the ground near the banks of the Mississippi River around a bend in Adams County, researcher Paula Westbrook said.

"They talk about there's the most beautiful wild peach groves down in the punch bowls," Westbrook said.

And like a peach, the area known as "The Devil's Punchbowl" has a pit: a mass grave from the 1860's, Westbrook, who co-founded Delta Paranormal Research, said.

Historians estimate that in one year following Union troops' arrivals in Natchez, up to 20,000 freed slaves died in "contraband camps" below steep bluffs.

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"So they decided to build an encampment for 'em at Devil's Punchbowl which they walled off and wouldn't let 'em out," Don Estes, former director of the Natchez City Cemetery, said.

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"But they wouldn't let 'em out," Estes said.

Westbrook adds that, "The union army did not allow them to remove the bodies from the camp. They just gave 'em shovels and said bury 'em where they drop."

WJTV NEWS CHANNEL 12 photographers would have liked to show viewers more of the terrain but it's just too thick with plant life to get through. The bluffs are also straight down - so not only is it dangerous to navigate, it's still very mysterious.

"It's a bed of alligators and snakes. It would take Indiana Jones, at this point, to get back in there," Westbrook said.

"Then you come on up the bluffs, the washing away bluffs, and there's the devil's punchbowl that has so many people that no one knows how they got killed or when," Estes said.

"And they're still down there. Wasted," Estes said.

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Even now locals might discover old skeletal remains after flooding on the Mississippi River. But, being on the Natchez Trace, sometimes it's difficult to tell which century the bones are from.

<http://www.wjtv.com/story/25910346/mystery-monday-mass-graves-remain-in-the-devils-punchbowl-of-natchez>