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## AN EVALUATION OF THE FREEDMEN'S BUREAU IN FLORIDA

by JOE M. RICHARDSON

LIKE ANY CONTROVERSIAL subject, the Freedmen's Bureau is difficult to evaluate. Nearly any generalization applied to that federal agency requires qualification. It possessed some undesirable features, but it had many redeeming traits and much of its work is deserving of commendation. Furthermore, the organization of the Bureau was flexible enough to enable it to adapt to and meet local needs. Therefore, its value in any locale depended to a large extent on the character and competency of the Assistant Commissioner and local agents. The Bureau officials in Florida were, in general, a creditable group and their accomplishments are worthy of praise. A *New York Times* correspondent wrote in June, 1866, that both whites and Negroes spoke highly of Florida Assistant Commissioner Thomas W. Osborn. Not only was he an "upright and efficient officer," they said, but as a general thing his subordinates were "men of honor and respectability."<sup>1</sup> The Steedman-Fullerton investigation of early 1866, which was obviously intended to discredit the Bureau, gave Florida a favorable report.<sup>2</sup> Even conservative newspapers frequently expressed approval of the Bureau. The editor of the conservative Tallahassee *Floridian* wrote in May, 1866, "we doubt whether the duties of the Bureau could have been administered by anyone more acceptably, alike to the blacks and whites, than they have been by Col. Osborn. . . . Few could have done better - many might have done worse."<sup>3</sup>

One of the earliest and most laudable of the Bureau activities was feeding the destitute freedmen and refugees. From June,

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1. Florida had five assistant commissioners, but one of them, Rufus Saxon, never served in the state. The other four, Thomas W. Osborn, John G. Foster, John T. Sprague, and George W. Gile, were all respected by Florida whites. *New York Times*, June 25, 1866.
  2. On April 11, 1866, at a time when Congress was attempting to strengthen the Bureau, President Johnson sent two carefully selected men, Generals J. B. Steedman and J. S. Fullerton, to investigate Bureau activities. The investigators found abuses and some corruption, but Florida received a favorable report. George R. Bentley, *A History of the Freedman's Bureau* (Philadelphia, 1955), 125-30.
  3. Tallahassee *Semi-Weekly Floridian*, May 25, 1866.

1865, to December, 1868, over 760,000 rations were issued in Florida at a cost of \$102,699.45; this in a state which, in 1867, had a Negro population of only 72,666. This was a substantial amount of food. For example, in June, 1868, the agent for Leon and Wakulla counties issued 146,362 pounds of pork and 159,983 pounds of meal.<sup>4</sup> Undoubtedly the distribution of food prevented starvation and extreme deprivation not only among the Negroes but among some whites. As late as 1867 it was reported that 500 whites were dependent on the Bureau at least six months out of the year.<sup>5</sup>

Contrary to popular opinion the Bureau in Florida did not support the Negro in idleness. Of course, some of the freedmen as well as whites sought to take advantage of government provisions to avoid work. Assistant Commissioner Osborn reported in November, 1865, that in some towns the drawing of rations was becoming schemingly professional. This was remedied by an order to Florida agents to inform the freedmen that rations would not be distributed after December, 1865, even though such action would necessarily cause some suffering.<sup>6</sup> By 1867, the issue of provisions was limited almost wholly to the poor in hospitals and asylums.<sup>7</sup> However, 1868 witnessed an inferior cotton crop and many supplies were issued to prevent starvation. There is little evidence that the Bureau agents profited personally from the rations.

Another phase of the Bureau's relief activities was the operation of hospitals. The Florida medical department was never large but it did render important service. In 1865 the pest-stricken Negroes were assisted by the establishment of pest houses in towns and villages, and by a systematic campaign of vaccination the Bureau helped control a small-pox scourge that was

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4. Junius E. Dovell, *Florida: Historic, Dramatic, Contemporary*, 4 Vols. (New York, 1952), II, 544.; William Watson Davis, *Civil War and Reconstruction in Florida* (New York, 1913), 451; *House Executive Documents*, 39th Cong., 1st Sess., No. 70, 276, 2nd Sess., No. 1, 640; Monthly Reports of Assistant Commissioner, July, 1866-December, 1868; Records of Tallahassee, 1866-1868, in Records of Bureau Refugees, Freedmen and Abandoned Lands, Florida, National Archives. Cited hereafter as Bureau Records, Florida, National Archives.
  5. Dovell, II, 544.
  6. Asst. Comm. T. W. Osborn to Comm. O. O. Howard, November 30, 1865, Bureau Records, Florida, National Archives.
  7. *House Executive Documents*, 40th Cong., 2nd Sess., No. 1, 677.

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raging through the state.<sup>8</sup> The medical department could have been more useful if the Negroes had not been hesitant to avail themselves of its services. The year ending in June, 1868, saw the largest number of freedmen treated by Bureau doctors—1,268. In 1869 only 653 Negroes, mostly old people, utilized the medical facilities.<sup>9</sup> It would be unfair to say that the medical service of the Bureau was insignificant, but it was definitely limited.

One of the most important and complex duties of the Bureau was the supervision of labor. Florida Negroes often thought that freedom consisted of having their wants supplied without the necessity of toil, and they tended to roam about the state seeking what they thought to be liberty.<sup>10</sup> It was reported that on the other hand, the whites had little conception of the Negro as anything other than a slave, and that a lingering and gnawing desire for unrequited or poorly paid Negro labor was widespread. A "literary gentleman" of Florida expressed his view of the ex-slaves as follows: "There is now nothing between me and the nigger but the dollar—the almighty dollar—and I shall make out of him the most I can at the least expense."<sup>11</sup> Planters frequently believed that the free Negro would not work; the ex-masters and ex-slaves obviously had little faith in each other.<sup>12</sup>

By 1866, however, a large majority of the freedmen were back on the plantations, not only because the Negro was coming to realize the necessity of working, but also because the Bureau's policy endeavored to inspire mutual confidence between the Negroes and planters, and to encourage the freedmen to make contracts.<sup>13</sup> In order to insure that the ex-slaves would work, the Bureau revived the vagrancy laws and at one time even threatened to forcibly move some indolent Negroes from Jacksonville to the

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8. *House Executive Documents*, 39th Cong., 1st Sess., Rept. 11, 20; Davis, 384.
  9. *House Executive Documents*, 40th Cong., 3rd Sess., Rept. 1, pt. 1, 1024; 41st Cong., 2nd Sess., Rept. 142, 19-20.
  10. *Jacksonville Florida Union*, September 9, 1865; *House Reports*, 30th Cong., 1st Sess., Rept. 30, pt. 4, 146-147; John T. Shuften, *A Colored Man's Exposition of the Acts and Doings of the Radical Party South From 1865-1876* (Jacksonville, 1877), 7; Special orders and circulars of Assistant Commissioner, September 13, 1865-December 30, 1868, Bureau Records, Florida, National Archives.
  11. *New York Times*, August 1, 1865; *New York Tribune*, September 5, 1865.
  12. *Tallahassee Semi-Weekly Floridian*, December 1, 1865.
  13. *House Reports*, 45th Cong., 2nd Sess., Rept. 30, pt. 4, 6.

plantations.<sup>14</sup> Georgia and Florida agents probably took more drastic measures than those in any other states to coerce the Negroes to labor.<sup>15</sup>

The Bureau not only forced the Negro to work, but sometimes permitted him to sign contracts that provided inadequate returns. For example, a contract in Leon County approved by the Bureau provided that the laborers would mortgage the entire crop as security for payment of the rent of land and any advance provisions. They pledged themselves to dispose of no part of the crop until four hundred pounds of lint cotton for each acre of land, and four hundred pounds for every mule used, has been given to the owners. In the event of a poor crop year such a contract could easily have left the Negroes with nothing. Another contract signed in Leon County provided that the workers would receive one-fourth of the crop plus four pounds of pork and one peck of meal a week. The employees agreed to work diligently, paying for all lost time at the rate of forty cents a day which, together with all advances made by the employers, would be taken from their share of the crop. In addition the workers agreed to comply with all orders and begin work not later than sunrise, taking no unnecessary time for meals.<sup>16</sup> Such contracts tend to give substance to the Steedman-Fullerton report which declared that the contract system in the South was slavery in a modified form, enforced by the Freedmen's Bureau.<sup>17</sup>

The supervision of contracts, however, was of benefit to the Negroes. Reverend L. M. Hobbs, State Superintendent of Freedmen's Schools, testified that by 1866 the Bureau was becoming more unpopular with Florida whites because its agents had been obligated to restrain employers from perpetrating injustice on the Negroes by "cheating them of their wages and withholding remuneration from them." The planters had made a great number of unjust contracts during the summer of 1865. For example, several contracts were brought to the office of agent Hobbs, in which a first-class laborer was to receive one hundred pounds of meat and thirteen bushels of corn in return for seven and one-half

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14. Special Order No. 15, Bureau Records, Florida, National Archives.

15. Bentley, 84.

16. Records of Deeds, Leon County, Office of the Clerk of the Circuit Court, Leon County Court House, Tallahassee, Florida.

17. Tallahassee *Semi-Weekly Floridian*, August 27, 1866.

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months work.<sup>18</sup> Charles M. Hamilton, Commander of the Western District of Florida, forced the revision of some contracts in 1866 because he felt the existing ones were "outrageous."<sup>19</sup> Between 1865 and 1868 the Bureau supervised thousands of contracts in Florida.

Not only did the Bureau supervise the making of contracts, but it forced the planters to make a settlement in accordance with the terms of the original agreement. An agent in Marianna once requested and received soldiers to force the planters to make just settlements with their employees. In order to insure an equitable division of the crop, the Assistant Commissioner in 1867 ordered that all labor contracts provide for a board of arbitration to settle the disputes arising between the employer and employee. However, the decision was generally made by the Bureau agent.<sup>20</sup>

The Bureau agents were as vigorous in forcing the Negroes to adhere to the terms of their contracts as they were in compelling the planters to keep their part of the bargain. In fact, if the planter broke a contract he was subject only to a civil suit, whereas the Negro was faced with the strict vagrancy laws which existed for the express purpose of controlling him as a laborer. One historian, writing of the early policy of the Bureau, stated that "on the whole its policies, both in the administration of relief and in the supervision of labor, had been those that planters and other businessmen desired."<sup>21</sup>

The federal agency established to safeguard the Negroes actually extended a great deal of protection to the supposed oppressor at the expense of the ex-slaves; nevertheless, the supervision of contracts was valuable to the Negroes. Planters were forced to adhere to their contracts and to pay higher wages than they would have otherwise. Semi-peonage would probably have been the black man's destiny if the Freedmen's Bureau or some federal agency had not supervised his relations with the southern whites. As it was, in the long view, the foundation was laid for a free labor system.

One of the most controversial services of the Bureau involved its efforts to insure justice for the freedmen. Shortly after its or-

18. *House Reports*, 39th Cong., 1st Sess., Rept. 30, pt. 4, 8.

19. *House Reports*, 42nd Cong., 2nd Sess., Rept. 22, pt. 13, 281.

20. Bentley, 149; J. A. Remley to Maj. A. N. Jackson, October 31, 1868, Bureau Records, Florida, National Archives.

21. *Ibid.*, 86.

ganization, its agents began adjudicating disputes arising between whites and Negroes in response to the miscarriage of justice in state courts. Many white Floridians frankly advocated two standards of justice. After the hanging of a white citizen for murder, and while the trial of another for shooting a Negro was pending, military authorities received letters from some Floridians saying that they would not "live in a country where a man must be hung for resenting an insult with arms," and where "a man must be tried for his life for shooting a nigger."<sup>22</sup>

This concept of justice provoked interference in behalf of the Negro by the Bureau. In November, 1865, Assistant Commissioner Osborn issued a directive ordering that Negroes be permitted to testify, and that stripes and corporal punishment be abandoned with persons above fifteen, except by authority of the courts. Since civil authorities were not trusted, all cases of personal violence were to be reported to the nearest military commander.<sup>23</sup>

Perhaps the state could have rid itself of Bureau interference with civil courts when the new constitution of 1866 was drawn up if it had guaranteed civil rights for Negroes, but Florida enacted a series of laws popularly called "black codes" which frankly discriminated between the races.<sup>24</sup> Such legislation made the intervention of the federal government all but inevitable. The Bureau issued an order announcing that the discriminatory laws would not be tolerated.<sup>25</sup>

The state criminal courts began operation in April, 1866, whereupon the Bureau transferred cases previously taken before its courts to state tribunals. State courts, however, paid little heed to Bureau warnings against the use of discriminatory punishment. In June, 1866, judges in Alachua and Marion counties sentenced a number of Negroes to receive lashes.<sup>26</sup> In the summer of 1866 a seventeen-year-old freedman was caught riding his employer's horse without permission. He was taken before the Bradford County Court and fined two hundred dollars and costs. He was unable to pay, so he was "sold at public outcry to Mr. Allen

22. *House Executive Documents*, 39th Cong., 1st Sess., Rept. 70, 355.

23. *Ibid.*, 87.

24. Asst. Comm. T. W. Osborn to Comm. O. O. Howard, December 30, 1865, Bureau Records, Florida, National Archives; Kathryn T. Hanna, *Florida Land of Change* (Chapel Hill, 1941), 302.

25. Tallahassee *Semi-Weekly Floridian*, February 6, 1866.

26. *New York Times*, July 4, 1866.

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Thomas of Bradford County who became responsible for the fine and who now claims the services of Alfred Jefferson for three years.”<sup>27</sup> Negroes were frequently assigned extremely high fines for petty offenses, and upon inability to pay their services were sold to white planters. Furthermore, the civil officials demanded costs in advance from the indigent Negro who came to court, which prevented him from being able to procure justice. Even Governor David S. Walker wrote that in his opinion some of the civil officials were charging more fees than allowed by the law.<sup>28</sup>

While the freedman received harsh sentences for petty crimes and in many instances could not get his case heard, white offenders were frequently not punished at all if their offense was against a Negro. The County Criminal Court in Marianna in March, 1866, tried John Bate for assaulting a freedwoman, who still had not recovered from her injuries at the time. Bate was found guilty and fined five cents.<sup>29</sup> White men were frequently acquitted for lack of evidence, even in murder charges, in the face of seemingly irrefutable proof of their guilt. After several flagrant miscarriages of justice, the Bureau renewed intervention on behalf of the freedmen and continued to supervise state courts until a new government was set up under the military reconstruction act.<sup>30</sup> Intervention usually consisted of agents observing trials in the county courts and appealing what they felt to be unjust decisions to the appellate courts.<sup>31</sup>

It has been charged that in the process of securing justice for the Negro, the Bureau sometimes treated the whites with something less than fairness. The “white man could expect nothing but oppression, and the black man nothing but partiality,” ran a popular saying in Florida.<sup>32</sup> Without doubt the Bureau courts were occasionally partial to the Negro, but a close examination of the records for Florida indicates that a majority of the agents made

27. F. E. Grossman to Lt. J. H. Lyman, October 19, 1866, Bureau Records, Florida, National Archives.

28. Gov. David S. Walker to Asst. Comm. Thomas W. Osborn, May 22, 1866, Bureau Records, Florida, National Archives.

29. Capt. C. M. Hamilton to Maj. S. L. McHenry, March 31, 1866, Bureau Records, Florida, National Archives.

30. Gen. J. G. Foster to Gov. David S. Walker, June 12, 1866, Bureau Records, Florida, National Archives.

31. Gen. Charles Mundee to Lt. J. E. Quentin, June 12, 1866, Bureau Records, Florida, National Archives.

32. Rowland H. Rerick, *Memoirs of Florida*, 2 Vols. (Atlanta, 1902), I, 299.



every attempt to be fair to native whites. Indeed, some of them were openly prejudiced against the ex-slaves. For example, Assistant Commissioner John T. Sprague wrote in 1867 that

without stringent laws, and these enforced with promptness and efficiency, the freedman will become a profligate barbarian. His gross physique, degraded intellect, grovelling pursuits, habitual slothfulness, and licentious habits, tend to make him a terror in society, which can only be governed by stringent laws faithfully administered.<sup>33</sup>

The Bureau took action against lawless Negroes as well as delinquent whites.

The success of the Bureau in its attempt to secure justice for the Negro was limited. It was of great value in seeking to obtain equal rights for the freedmen in an area where two standards of justice were commonly practiced. Though it was able to extend protection to the ex-slaves only for the short time it was in existence, and left little permanent benefit, the attempt was not wholly in vain. The federal agency had forced the termination of the use of discriminatory punishments and the threat of federal intervention encouraged civil courts to be more fair. Most of the agents were aware, however, even before the Bureau left the South that they "had not gained for the Negro courtroom protection from the violence of white people."<sup>34</sup>

One of the most idealistic of the Bureau services was the attempt to settle the freedmen on land of their own. There was great desire on the part of Florida Negroes to acquire land and the Homestead Act of June, 1866, made this possible. The Bureau made every effort to aid the freedmen. Its agents assisted in finding the plots, and free transportation and "subsistence not exceeding one month" was provided for new settlers.<sup>35</sup> Quickly the freedmen began to take advantage of the Homestead Act. The land office opened in Florida on August 25, 1866, and by October 1 of that year 32,000 acres of land had been entered.<sup>36</sup> By October,

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33. Asst. Comm. J. T. Sprague to Comm. O. O. Howard, October 1, 1867, Bureau Records, Florida, National Archives.

34. Bentley, 168.

35. Comm. O. O. Howard to Asst. Comm. J. G. Foster, August 22, 1866, Bureau Records, Florida, National Archives.

36. Asst. Comm. J. G. Foster to Comm. O. O. Howard, October 1, 1866, Bureau Records, Florida, National Archives.

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1867, 2,012 homesteads covering 160,960 acres had been secured by freedmen.<sup>37</sup> Eventually over 3,000 Negroes entered homesteads in Florida, more than in any other state.<sup>38</sup>

Despite several outstanding successes, many of the homesteaders were destined to fail.<sup>39</sup> The reasons are obvious. Much of the land was located in swamp and overflow areas. One agent reported that not more than a half-dozen persons in his district had procured land "fit to live upon."<sup>40</sup> Moreover, there were certain basic necessities for success on a homestead. A house, wagon, fencing, implements, horse, and provisions were needed. This added up to more than most Negroes could save in years working at the average wage of seven to twelve dollars a month. As one agent reported, it was difficult for the freedmen to reduce more than four or five acres to a tillable state "with no help but the axe and hoe" from "the jungle of Hammock and palmetto." Another agent wrote that due to lack of tools and food many of the homesteaders had been obliged to work elsewhere for subsistence, and could work their own land only at intervals.<sup>41</sup> There was also white opposition to homesteads for freedmen.

The Bureau attempted to help by providing seed and food to those cultivating ten or more acres. In 1868 Florida issued almost 600,000 rations, but this was not sufficient for many of the homesteaders.<sup>42</sup> Some of the Negroes were able to retain their land but for many the homestead program was unsuccessful. Though over 3,000 homesteads had been entered by Negroes by 1868, the census of 1870 lists only 1,063 freedmen holding land.<sup>43</sup> Apparently a majority of the homesteaders failed. This is not to say, however, that the program was a complete failure, for even 1,063 landowners out of an adult male population of 21,064 represents

37. John Hope Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom* (New York, 1948), 308; Asst. Comm. J. T. Sprague to Comm. O. O. Howard, October 1, 1867, Bureau Records, Florida, National Archives.

38. Tallahassee *Florida Sentinel*, September 3, 1868; Bentley, 144.

39. Asst. Comm. J. T. Sprague to Comm. O. O. Howard, July 31, 1867, Bureau Records, Florida, National Archives.

40. *Ibid.*, February 17, 1868; Capt. A. B. Grumwell to Allan H. Jackson, December 31, 1867, Bureau Records, Florida, National Archives.

41. D. M. Hammond to Lt. A. H. Jackson, February 19, 1868; Lt. W. W. Armstrong to Lt. A. H. Jackson, June 30, 1868, Bureau Records, National Archives.

42. *House Executive Documents*, 40th Cong., 3rd Sess., No. 1, 1042, Monthly Reports of Assistant Commissioner, July, 1866-December, 1868, Bureau Records, Florida, National Archives.

43. Ninth Census, 1870, unpublished population schedules for Florida.

a considerable progress from no Negro landowners in 1865. The homestead program is probably one important reason why almost half of the Negro farm operators in Florida were owners in 1900.<sup>44</sup>

The least creditable of the Bureau activities is frequently thought to be in the political sphere. Agents in Florida generally favored Negro suffrage and, after the passage of the Reconstruction Act in 1867, supervised the registration of voters.<sup>45</sup> Freedmen were urged to register and agents actively participated in the election, even making speeches on occasions. The Bureau agents, however, looked askance at certain Northern Republicans, whom they accused of stirring up racial hostility, and counseled moderation upon the freedmen. The Negro was advised to stay in the fields and to "never lose an hour from his labor to attend a political meeting." Marcellus L. Stearns, agent from Quincy, complained that his area, which had been quiet and orderly, was becoming the scene of disorder "under the teachings of certain low and base men, who infest this part of the state." The change was effected by the visitation of radical Republicans such as Liberty Billings, a white from New Hampshire, and William Saunders, a Negro from Maryland, who taught distrust of the whites. Another agent wrote that "it does seem to me that if such apostles of mischief are allowed to poison the dark superstitious minds of the colored people then are we about to witness the failure of the Congressional plan of reconstruction." He could see no good coming from the reign of hate, the object of which was the elevation of a few men to places of profit.<sup>46</sup> Even Assistant Commissioner Sprague warned the freedmen not to permit themselves to be "influenced by designing men," no doubt referring to the radical faction of the Republican party.<sup>47</sup>

The Constitutional Convention of 1868 was controlled by the Republicans, who were divided into conservatives and radicals.

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44. *Twelfth Census of the United States: 1900* (Washington, 1901-2), Agriculture, pt. 1, 6.

45. Asst. Comm. J. T. Sprague to W. J. Purman, May 3, 1867, Bureau Records, Florida, National Archives.

46. Capt. A. B. Grumwell to Lt. A. H. Jackson, June 29, 1867; Asst. Comm. J. T. Sprague to Comm. O. O. Howard, October 1, 1867, February 29, 1868; D. M. Hammond to Lt. A. H. Jackson, January 27, 1868; M. L. Stearns to Lt. A. H. Jackson, November 1, 1867, Bureau Records Florida, National Archives.

47. Tallahassee *Semi-Weekly Floridian*, May 24, 1867.

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One of the leaders of the conservatives was former Assistant Commissioner Osborn and another, W. J. Purman, was still an officer of the Bureau. The conservatives and radicals were almost evenly divided, with the Osborn faction composed of nine ex-union Army veterans, eleven southern whites, and three Negroes. The radical Republicans, led by Billings and Saunders, had fifteen colored and five white delegates.<sup>48</sup>

The radicals gamed control of the Convention, and after using delaying tactics, the conservative Republicans seceded and organized their own convention at Monticello. On February 10 the seceders stole back to Tallahassee and gained entrance to the Capitol, but another stalemate ensued. Finally, on February 17, General George G. Meade, Commander of the Third Military District, recommended that officers of both factions resign and that Assistant Commissioner Sprague preside until the Convention was reorganized. With Sprague in the chair and with Bureau support, the conservative Republicans, dubbed the "Johnson Party" by their opponents, gained control of the Convention and drew up a constitution that was retained by the state until 1885.<sup>49</sup>

The next question was ratification of the constitution, which the radicals believed to be too conservative. It recognized the Negroes, as civil and political equals, but apportionment was such that control of the legislature would be assured to whites.<sup>50</sup> The radicals opposed the constitution, while the conservative Republicans and many native whites, along with the Freedmen's Bureau, supported it. It was accepted easily. The radicals accused Assistant Commissioner Sprague of openly using his influence to aid the Osborn faction, and one disappointed radical wrote Thaddeus Stevens that it was obvious that a deal had been made between the conservative Republicans and the rebels.<sup>51</sup> White Floridians did not approve of the Bureau politicians but did consider them the lesser of two evils, and they gave qualified praise to the constitution.<sup>52</sup> Conservative whites should have been thankful to the

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48. Tallahassee *Weekly Floridian*, February 11, 1868.

49. Davis, 503.

50. Jack B. Scroggs, "Carpenter Constitutional Reform in the South Atlantic States, 1867-1868," *Journal of Southern History*, XXVII (November, 1961), 489; *Laws of Florida* (1868), 219.

51. *House Miscellaneous Documents*, 40th Cong., 2nd Sess., Rept. 69, 1; Daniel Richards to Thaddeus Stevens, May 25, 1868, Thaddeus Stevens Papers, Library of Congress.

52. Tallahassee *Weekly Floridian*, February 25, 1868.

Bureau agents, and actually much of the violent denunciation of the Bureau came later at a time when it was not even in existence. Many of these complaints were obviously and flagrantly partisan.

Contrary to common accusations, the Bureau politicians did not purposely stimulate racial dissension. With few exceptions Bureau agents opposed the use of the race issue and certainly were much more moderate than the Republican faction they defeated. In general the Bureau contributed to racial hostility only to the extent that it made the Negroes less dependent on the whites.

It is customary to denounce Bureau agents for using their positions as federal employees for political purposes and to accuse them of entering politics for personal and party self-interest. They did use their official positions but they were not the first nor the last to do so. Most politicians are interested in protecting and furthering their party, and there is little evidence that the agents were any more selfish than the average politician. Some of them probably did not act purely on the basis of self-interest; they were generally sympathetic with the freedmen. They had witnessed outrages and murders, miscarriages of local justice, opposition to Negro education, and denial of adequate compensation for free labor. Such a record could easily have encouraged them to oppose the President's policy of leaving the problem of the ex-slaves to the white Southerners.<sup>53</sup> It is natural to look to politics for solution to such problems and it is not entirely fair to condemn them for seeking the Negro vote. It was politically wise, and undoubtedly most of them were sincere, and perhaps correct, in believing that Republican rule would be more advantageous to the Negro. The white Southerner also sought to gain Negro support. Indeed, it would have been strange had not all parties endeavored to gain adherents among the new voters. Whatever their motives, ex-Bureau officers held a large share of high state offices in the years after 1868. Former agents at one time or another held the positions of Governor, Lieutenant Governor, Adjutant General, Speaker of the Florida Assembly, United States Senator, United States Representative, in addition to lesser state and county offices.

Perhaps the most important contribution of the Freedmen's Bureau in Florida was in Negro education. When the Bureau was

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53. John and LaWanda Cox, "General O. O. Howard and the Misrepresented Bureau," *Journal of Southern History*, XIX (November, 1953), 450.

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first organized no appropriations were made for education, but valuable aid was rendered through other methods. The Bureau immediately began to co-ordinate the activities of the many benevolent organizations that were teaching freedmen.<sup>54</sup> School buildings, free transportation, and cheap provisions for teachers were contributed. Even after the state government was reorganized in 1866 the support of Negro education for all practical purposes, still rested with the Bureau and northern contributions. Indeed, the Bureau even paid the salary of the State Superintendent of Education, besides appointing him Superintendent of Bureau Schools in order to insure co-operation between the state and federal governments.<sup>55</sup>

At first white Floridians were very suspicious of Negro schools and refused to co-operate. In 1866 the Florida Superintendent of Education reported that "in no case have the people shown a willingness to render us any assistance. . . ." The whites, he said, held a deadly hatred toward the training and elevation of the Negro. "Every respectable family shirks from the idea of boarding our teachers, as from a pestilence." He continued, "Not one in a thousand has the moral courage to brook the odium which would be vested upon them by their neighbors in such a case." Whites were sometimes able to keep out teachers altogether by refusing to board them and closing all buildings to schools. Some teachers of Negro schools were driven away by violence or threats of violence.<sup>56</sup> The Bureau made a valuable contribution in protecting the teachers and in convincing the whites that Negro education was efficacious to them as well as to the freedmen. By 1867 it was reported that "a decided change has been noted" in the feeling of the whites toward Negro training. The intense hostility was declining.<sup>57</sup>

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54. Oliver Otis Howard, *Autobiography*, 2 Vols. (New York, 1908), II, 269; Walter L. Fleming, *Documentary History of Reconstruction*, 2 Vols. (Cleveland, 1906), I, 331.

55. *Senate Executive Documents*, 39th Cong., 2nd Sess., Rept. 6, 46; Gen. J. G. Foster to Asst. Comm. O. O. Howard, November 21, 1866, U. S. Army Commands, Florida, National Archives.

56. *The National Freedman*, II (January 15, 1866), 3; H. H. Moore to Asst. Comm. T. W. Osborn, February 25, 1866; A. A. Mahony to T. W. Osborn, February 23, 1866; C. M. Hamilton to S. L. McHenry, April 30, 1866; A. B. Grumwell to A. H. Jackson, September 14, 1868, Bureau Records, Florida, National Archives.

57. J. H. Durkee to A. H. Jackson, January 1, 1867, Bureau Records, Florida, National Archives.

One reason for the decline in hostility was that planters were beginning to recognize that their employees were more content if schools were available. The planters began to seek aid in having their laborers taught to read and write and the Bureau readily co-operated. Assistant Commissioner Sprague wrote that, instead of erecting expensive school buildings in towns, it was his intention "to dot the state . . . with cheap log cabins in the vicinity of large plantations to permit parents to send their children to near-by schools with little expense." It was thought that such a plan would enable Florida to be "among the first of the Southern states to establish and sustain a public school system."<sup>58</sup>

When the Bureau was extended in July, 1866, formal appropriations were made for support of Negro schools, which enabled the Bureau to render more assistance, but it still could not pay teachers' salaries. The instructors were paid primarily by northern contributions.<sup>59</sup> Therefore, when the benevolent organizations were forced to curtail their expenditures in 1868, the Bureau had to devise a method to fill the gap. It circumvented the obstacles to teachers' salaries by giving buildings for schools and then paying rent for the buildings, which was used for salaries.<sup>60</sup> In 1869 the Bureau paid rent sufficient to support forty instructors, in addition to constructing buildings at a cost of \$52,-600 in 1868-1869.<sup>61</sup> In 1869, even after the State had established a public school system, the Bureau in Florida provided three times more money for education than the State did for both Negro and white children.<sup>62</sup> It constructed many buildings in 1869-1870, supplied books, and still paid teachers. The growth of Florida schools in 1869 was said to have exceeded that of any other state.<sup>63</sup>

The quality of the teaching was frequently poor in the Bureau schools, with some of the instructors being barely literate.<sup>64</sup> Still

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58. Asst. Comm. J. T. Sprague to Comm. O. O. Howard, September 9, 1867, Bureau Records, Florida, National Archives.

59. Howard, II, 331.

60. Bentley, 173.

61. Florida *Senate Journal*, 1872, Appendix, 58; Florida *Senate Journal*, 1870, Appendix, 65.

62. Thomas Everett Cochran, *History of Public-School Education in Florida* (Tallahassee, 1921), 55.

63. J. W. Alvord, *Ninth Semi-Annual Report on Schools for Freedmen* (Washington, 1870), 31.

64. Henry L. Swint, *The Northern Teacher in the South* (Nashville, 1941), 7.

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the schools were good enough that several white students attended, and during the state convention of Florida teachers in May, 1867, the complaint was published that Negroes had an excellent system of instruction while white schools were inadequate.<sup>65</sup> Furthermore, the Bureau in 1869 opened the Stanton Normal School in Jacksonville to train teachers. In that year Stanton boasted 348 students taught by six instructors.<sup>66</sup> Despite the inadequacy of some of the schools the freedmen did make progress. According to the census of 1870, 15.9% of Florida Negroes over ten were literate. Furthermore, an age group widely reached by the Bureau, six to ten, was not counted in the census, which leads to the obvious conclusion that the federal agency's educational work was highly successful.<sup>67</sup>

The Bureau could have made greater contributions to education of the freedmen had it not incurred the hostility of whites. The South would have been hostile to alien control of Negro schools under any circumstances, even had the teachers and agents not allied themselves with the Republican party. Nevertheless, the Freedmen's Bureau founded the public school system in Florida, and the introduction of a school system for Negroes in the South in the years immediately following the Civil War was without question one of the truly significant accomplishments of the Bureau in the period of Reconstruction. Florida, as well as all of the states of the South and of the nation, gained from this accomplishment.

What the freedmen really needed after their emancipation was something that no federal agency could secure for them, a change in the attitude of the white South. The Bureau was able to provide much needed relief, education, a free labor system, and equal rights before the law for a short time. It created a small independent land-owning class of freedmen and guided them politically, but it could not induce the white South to accept its former slaves as equals. The Bureau failed to solve the im-

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65. *The Freedmen's Record*, III (December, 1867), 190; A. B. Mangum to H. H. Moore, November, n.d., 1865; Teachers Monthly School Reports, 1866-1868, Bureau Records, Florida, National Archives; Tallahassee *Semi-Weekly Floridian*, May 28, 1867.

66. *Florida Senate Journal*, 1870, 65 in appendix; Howard, II, 412.

67. Jabez L. M. Curry, *Peabody Education Funds* (Cambridge, Mass., 1898), 120; *Ninth Census of the United States: 1870* (Washington, 1872), I, 19, 405.



portant problem of establishing good relations between whites and Negroes, but, probably it did as well as any agency could have done in like circumstances. It should not be criticized for failing to accomplish the impossible.