

# Freedman's bureau

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Freedmen's Bureau is also known as "the Ex-Slave's Friend" was created on March 4th of 1865 during the Reconstruction era by the U. S. government as a federal agency and a part of the United States Department of War to help the newly released and freed slavery which is also known as freedmen and southern white refugees transition to freedom in the Southern States and the District of Columbia. The Bill was created by President Abraham Lincoln and was originally intended to last for one year to help the freedmen but instead it lasted until 1872 and President Ulysses S. Grant broke it up.

To distinguish it from being known as just a welfare agency, the agency's employees also helped ex-slaves find employment, investigated unfair treatment complaints, and also help negotiated labor contracts for the slaves. After the Civil War, Freedmen's Bureau is the only federal agency that help protects the civil rights of the former slaves and the only place that enable them to seek help when their rights were violated thus creating a hostility among the White Southerners.

Although the bureau was setup to help distribute food, housing, medical aid, and clothing to the freed slaves and the Southern white refugees, the bureau most well known successes were in education. During that period of 1865 - 1872 there were more than 1000 Negro schools built and was taught by well-qualified instructors and had educated more than 250, 000 African Americans. Most of the black colleges around the United States were founded with the help of the agency and a lot of them still exist today.

The successes of the Bureau in its education goals were marred by the failure of its land redistribution. At first the Bureau had gave 850, 000

acres to the freedmen but President Andrew Johnson later took it back and the land in turn were given to the Confederate landowners giving the blacks no choice and forcing them to work in the plantations. At first the white landowners wanted to restore gang labor but the freedmen wanted to maintain their freedom refused to sign the contract ultimately forcing the white owner to come up with sharecropping as some sort of compromise. Under sharecropping, the land was divided into a 20 to 50 acres parcel that allowed a single family to farm it. The deal is usually half of the crop to be given to the landlord in exchange for the land, housing and supplies.

The Bureau one and only commissioner is Major General Oliver Otis Howard. General Howard was the provider of "moral purpose, an ideological framework and a vision for the bureau". He was once warned by his friend, General William Sherman after hearing about his new assignment and the task given to him that this is a "Hercules" of a task. After accepting his new assignment, General Howard was given very little help from the Congress and most of it is from some sort of "hand me down" from the Department of War in the form of personnel and what left of the army funds and relied heavily on the few private relief, missionary and educational associations of the North.

In his autobiography, General Howard expressed his frustration on how the Congress disbanded his Bureau by sending him on a temporary mission to deal with the Indian affairs in the west and upon his return he found out that the Bureau and all its activities had been suspended. Howard University in Washington D. C. which is founded by General Howard is a well known and it

is a predominantly black university and he was the third president of the university.

In conclusion the Bureau did not accomplished all that it is set up to do. Its role in Reconstruction in the South had created a huge debate on if the bureau had done enough to help the freedmen and the refugees but given that they were working on a limited resources one cannot fault the bureau completely and most historian agreed that whatever " the bureau did not do" was " because it could not"

## References

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