

**REPORT OF THE GENERAL
SUPERINTENDENT OF FREEDMEN,
DEPARTMENT OF THE TENNESSEE
AND STATE OF ARKANSAS FOR
1864**

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Report of the General Superintendent of Freedmen, Department of the Tennessee and State of Arkansas for 1864 by Various

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VARIOUS

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SUPERINTENDENT OF FREEDMEN,
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AND STATE OF
ARKANSAS FOR 1864**

*Calton,
John H.
Jr.*

REPORT

OF THE

General Superintendent

OF

FREEDMEN,

DEPARTMENT OF THE TENNESSEE

AND STATE OF ARKANSAS

For 1864.



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REPORT.

OFFICE GENERAL SUPERINTENDENT OF FREEDMEN,
DEPARTMENT OF THE TENNESSEE AND STATE OF ARKANSAS, }
MEMPHIS, TENN., December 31st, 1864.

BRIG. GEN. L. THOMAS,
ADJUTANT GENERAL, U. S. A.

GENERAL,—This supervision has, during the year, extended over a territory from Cairo, Southward, in the Mississippi Valley, populated, according to the census of 1860, by 770,000 blacks; including the cities of Memphis, Vicksburg, Natchez, and Little Rock, and the military posts of Columbus, Island 10, Corinth, Helena, Du Vall's Bluff, Pine Bluff, Fort Smith, Goodrich Landing, Milliken's Bend, and Davis Bend.

PREVIOUS CONDITION OF THE FREEDMEN.

No phase of the former condition of this people, or of their present transition, has been excluded from our view. Previous to the time covered by this report, the officers of this supervision had more than a year's experience among the above population, observing and directing similar causes and results. These were never fully reported. Though that experience has a direct bearing upon our present plans, it can be admitted here only as shaping the views, policy and facts herein epitomized.

The rebellion, at the outset, began to disturb this population, by an increase from Missouri, and a decrease southward; by the masters' diminishing the supply of clothing,—increasing or decreasing in severity as affected by the shock of arms,—and by the seizure of the blacks, for military purposes, by the insurgents. The frequent marching and countermarching of loyal and disloyal armies, consuming or destroying the material comforts of life, such as food, shelter, and the implements of industry; the actual shock of arms, or the terror of their motion, left hardly an individual, white or black, unaffected. It was soon evident that the strength of these regions consisted in three distinct

elements: masters, slaves and poor whites. Many of the last were forced into the rebel armies, furnished with horses and better food and clothing, and their families were supported; and, therefore, they failed to see, so soon as some of the negroes and the Southern unionists, that the interests of these elements were not only diverse, but hostile; and that the war was the effort of the master to render irrevocably supreme the power of his own caste. Some whites looked Northward; but the blacks illustrated what the history of the world has rarely seen,—a slave population, sprung from antecedent barbarism, rising up and leaving its bondage of centuries, and its ardent local traditions and associations, sundering the boasted influences and attractions of the master; in rags or silks; feet shod or bleeding; individually or in families; and pressing towards the armies characterized as “Vandal hordes.” Their comings were like the arrivals of cities. Often they met prejudices against their color, more bitter than that they had left behind. There was no Moses to lead, nor plan in their exodus. The decision of their instinct or unlettered reason brought them to us. They felt that their interests were identical with the objects of our armies. This identity of interest, slowly but surely, came to be perceived by our officers and soldiers, and by the loyal public. They gave information for the guidance of campaigns; laborers for the various staff departments; took upon themselves all the serving of the army for officers, hospitals, &c.; and soon were accepted as capable of the soldier’s discipline and endurance in all arms of the service, and worthy of a soldier’s pay and honor. Out of those who came within our lines, probably not less than 80,000 have either died in the United States service, or are still in it as laborers or soldiers.

But there was a background to this sublime march of events. Ignorance; perverted ideas—taking liberty for idleness—embracing all the fostered vices and crimes of the old system, cringing deceit, theft, absence of chastity, and of the safeguards and promptings of the family relation; tatters, nakedness, torn limbs; women in travail; helpless childhood; age and decrepitude; multiform sickness and unwept death. The sublime dashings and roar of the surge could not conceal the wreck or drown the piercing cry of distress. The army shared its own food, shelter and clothing; charity, gathering in its small rills from the loyal mountains and valleys, came forward in a full, gushing stream, bearing laborers and material.

GENERAL GRANT AND THE ARMY.

The laws of Congress had freed some; the proclamation, all. The law of the army, here the only expression of the law of the land, began to declare itself in behalf of the blacks. All the wise and humane devisings and issues of General Grant, antedate the past year, though pervading its events, as they must those of the future.

It is not unworthy of note here, that the army, though embracing in itself all the instrumentalities for the destruction of its foe, at whatever cost of comfort, treasure and life; though having in it the usual admixture of good and bad; though looked upon by many benevolent people, as only another master for the black; has done all that has been done to free, feed, shelter, protect and give him medical attendance; and has formed the only safe channel for the benevolence, that has come to his aid; nay, has added to protection, transportation, rations and quarters. More than all this, it has sought out of its forms for administering justice, an adaptation to the peculiar condition of these freed people.

This has been the work in the hands of my officers and myself. To some extent, it may have affected all of the above 770,000, during the year; but direct authority has reached them only when they or their employers have come within our lines; and this report must be, necessarily, subject to the usual military limitations. I cannot stop even to mention the circumstances of their removal from Corinth and Island 10. My object is not so much to detail the history, as to concentrate those events, facts and opinions, which may serve to throw light upon the future.

DUTY UNDER ORDERS NO. 94.

Special orders, No. 94, (of the Secretary of War, issued by Adjutant General Thomas, at Goodrich Landing, La., Nov. 5th, 1863,) provides that the General Superintendent of Freedmen shall assign,

"The Field and Staff of the Regiments raised by him, for the supervision and protection of these people and their industry, to duty as General Assistants, and the companies and their commanders to local duty. All Assistant Superintendents will be subject to his order.

"This supervision will embrace the general guardianship of all interests of the freed people; their registration; all necessary permits and contracts for labor with private parties, lessees, officers, citizens, or others; the provision of industry for them in camp, or on plantations; determine the location of camps, the occupation of plantations to be worked by the

infirm, vagrant, or idle, and all others necessarily or temporarily in charge of the Government.

"No freed people will be recruited or ordered out of camp, excepting through the officer in charge.

"Superintendents will encourage the people to answer calls to industry, by voluntary agreement to labor, and enforce the inviolability of the agreement.

"To prevent the frequent infringement of the interests of these people, and secure proper uniformity to the action of the Government, there will be no change of the regulations, forms of contracts, permits, &c., except through the General Superintendent."

THE GUARD REGIMENTS.

The organization of these regiments, approved by General Grant, and ordered by the Secretary of War, (by Adjutant General Thomas,) for this special purpose, has not only proved eminently serviceable, but the only instrumentality for the execution of the above order.

TERRITORIAL DIVISIONS.

To facilitate the work, the territory was divided into the Districts of West Tennessee, office at Memphis, Capt. T. A. Walker, Supt.; Arkansas, office at Little Rock, Maj. W. G. Sargent, Supt.; with local offices at Helena, Capt. A. L. Thayer; Pine Bluff, Capt. Mallory; Du Vall's Bluff, Lt. W. Davis; and Fort Smith; District of Vicksburg, office at Vicksburg, Col. Samuel Thomas, Supt. and Provost Marshal, assisted by Lieut. Col. A. L. Mitchell, at Natchez; Capt. Norton, at Davis Bend; Lieut. Thirds, at Vidalia; Lieut. Mathews, at Goodrich Landing; and Capt. Weber, at Vicksburg.

WHAT SHALL WE DO WITH THEM?

The change of the negro's position at once excited to activity all the old prejudices regarding him, and renewed, in various forms, the old conflicts over the question, What shall be done with him? Shall he still be treated as, in fact, a slave to the individual, or be required to work for the Government, without supplies, pay, or the consideration that was accorded to him when he was of value as a marketable commodity? Or shall he be free? Shall these men and women, long abused, whose industry was the source of all the regal wealth which adorned the Southern palaces; who have come over from the enemy to our help, be held deserving of our consideration? Shall they, who have been robbed of manhood,—of the very essentials of improve-

ment in personal character and condition, receive from us due sympathy? Shall they, who, whatever their capacity, yet need our temporary care, until they become conscious of their ability to use the instrumentalities around them for their good, be refused our help? Shall they, who, as laborers, could give efficiency to the staff departments of the army; or, as soldiers, form regimental organizations, and thus promote military ends, be thoughtlessly pushed aside? Shall they, who are familiar with the by-paths and cotton piles; and could become the carriers of supplies through our lines to the enemy; or, as the tillers of this rich soil, rendered a hundred fold more productive by the increased value of the cotton fibre; and thus the negro, himself, a hundred fold more an object of the consideration of speculative capital; be disregarded by Government?

PREJUDICES.

In the midst of all the conflicts of interests, which arose out of this state of affairs, and of the temptations incidental to the occasion; and of the scramble that ensued, among various parties, for emolument; and of fellow-officers, who, not only did not respect, but found a peculiar pleasure in obstructing, the settled policy of the Government—and sneering at the “nigger men”—my assistants were exposed to a test more severe to moral courage than the battle-field, and more trying to judicial and business capacity, than any amount of perplexity in more peaceful and common scenes. It is not surprising that some officers failed, or that it was difficult to secure and retain those most faithful. Those who have stood the test, could have no better proof of official merit.

DEPARTMENTS OF LABOR.

In addition to this territorial subdivision of labor among my assistants, the importance of three classes of interests, namely: The control of property; the supply of medicines and medical attendance; and the arrangement of educational affairs, rendered it necessary that I should have one officer, whom I could hold responsible for each of these classes of labor. In respect to education, during nine months, this plan was defeated by circumstances beyond my control. Lieut. B. K. Johnston was assigned to duty as A. A. Q. M., and A. C. S., of Freedmen, and has done much for the economical management of property; render-

ing satisfactory reports to Washington, as usually required of officers of those Departments. To meet the medical necessities, Dr. D. O. McCord, Surgeon, 63rd U. S. C. I., was designated Surgeon-in-chief of Freedmen. His powers, by this assignment, proved inadequate. The sanitary condition of the people was appalling. Neither medicines nor surgeons were at hand. Every one acknowledged the importance of doing something. The distress and confusion were met by Orders 114, of the Secretary of War, issued by Adj. Gen. Thomas, making Surgeon McCord, Medical Director, with power to employ surgeons and control medicines.

NO MONEY DRAWN FROM GOVERNMENT.

All officers handling supplies, received from the Government, adjusted their methods of business, forms of reports, vouchers, &c., to army regulations. Not a cent of money has ever been drawn from Government, for the Freedmen, on any account. A careful use of the tax, temporarily required by orders 63, and of funds accruing from the profits of labor of the department, under the care of the different superintendents, has met all the incidental expenses of these wide spread operations; paid five thousand dollars for hospitals; the salaries of all hospital stewards and medical assistants as per Orders 94, and enabled us to supply to the people, aside from the abandoned property, implements of industry, &c., secured to their benefit, clothing, household utensils, and other articles, essential to their comfort, which they could not have secured, otherwise, at less than three hundred and fifty thousand dollars. The management of these funds and supplies, has sprung out of the exigencies of the people's condition; adapted, as far as necessary, to army methods; requiring a rigid system of accounts, monthly reports covered by certificates and vouchers, followed up by careful inspections, not only from this office, but the different commanding Generals.

GENERAL ASSISTANTS.

H. B. Spelman, Esq., widely known for his scrupulous honesty and business experience, President of one of the Freedmen Aid Societies, has been employed to market the crop now closing out. Chaplain A. S. Fisk, ordered to report to me by General Grant; Chaplain Joseph Warren, D. D., by General McPherson; and Chaplain James A. Hawley, in accordance with Orders 94,