

# Report of the South Carolina Freedmen's Bureau



**ABOUT THE SOURCE** In March 1865 Congress created the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands. Called the Freedmen's Bureau, the agency's purpose was to help newly-freed slaves adjust to life in the post-Civil War South. President Andrew Johnson objected to the Bureau's policy of giving plots of land to freedmen. Nonetheless, in July 1866 Congress renewed the Bureau and expanded its size. The passage below is from a report to Congress by the Assistant Commissioner of the Freedmen's Bureau in South Carolina. The report was dated November 1, 1866.



*As you read note the challenges the Freedmen's Bureau faced in South Carolina. The following words may be new to you: **ferreting**, **perpetrators**, **collusion**, **infirm**, **avidity**. You may want to use a dictionary to look them up.*

I found the freed people in a most wretched condition from want of clothing and food. They were treated generally in a most cruel and, in many instances, a most barbarous manner by their former masters, who seemed to be doubly bitter because they could no longer hold them as slaves. Outrages, such as whipping, tying up by the thumbs, and shooting, were of daily occurrence, and the force of troops in the State was totally inadequate to meet the demands made upon it for **ferreting** out and arresting the **perpetrators** of these outrages. Gangs of outlaws, styling themselves "Regulators," were formed in some of the State districts, who committed these outrages not only upon the persons of freed people, but upon loyal white citizens, whose houses were often burned, and they themselves driven from their homes. It has been reported at these headquarters by officers of the bureau that these . . . regulators offered to kill any freedmen who refused to contract with the planters for a fixed sum per head. The civil authorities were powerless to act, had they had the will to do so; the military were sent out, but could accomplish little, there being no cavalry in the State, as the outlaws were mounted. The inhabitants would give no information against them, whether from fear of their vengeance or because of **collusion** with them I am unable to judge . . .

The aged and **infirm** freedmen were turned off by their former owners, in whose service they had spent their strength, to shift for themselves, and had not this bureau extended aid to them, very many would inevitably have perished on the highways. Camps and hospitals were established, and large numbers of wretched victims of slavery were gathered together and fed and clothed by the bureau. Many white persons, suffering extreme poverty, were also supplied with food and clothing. On issuing days might be seen

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Class \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## **Reconstruction**

## **Primary Source**

the white lady of respectability standing side by side with the African, both awaiting their turn to receive their weekly supply of rations . . .

The schools for freed people in this State are in successful operation, under the supervision of Mr. R. Tomlinson, who by his energy and zeal has done much to establish them on a permanent basis. There is a strong desire on the part of this race of people to obtain the knowledge which was denied to them while in the bonds of slavery; their progress is very creditable to them, and their examinations would not be discreditable to a school of white children under the same circumstances. Much opposition is thrown in the way of establishing schools for their education by the citizens in some of the districts of the State, who seem determined to keep these poor people as ignorant as they were when slaves; but in some of the other districts the people feel the necessity for the education of this class of people. The teachers from the north are denied board in all southern families, yet I am happy to say that, with a few exceptions, they are among the most self-denying, laborious and useful members among the different agencies of the bureau. It is interesting to see the **avidity** with which the freed children avail themselves of the means of instruction offered them. There are thirty-eight schools established, employing 91 teachers, and they have an attendance of 5,465 scholars.

Source: U.S. Senate 39th Congress, 2nd Session, Senate Executive Document No. 6, 1866

### **WHAT DID YOU LEARN?**

1. According to this source how did the former slave-owners in South Carolina treat the recently freed African Americans? Why do you think they treated them this way?

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2. Who were the "Regulators"? Why was it so difficult to stop them?

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3. What were the accomplishments of the Freedmen's Bureau in South Carolina?

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