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Black Texans During Reconstruction: First Freedom

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After the defeat of the Confederacy, Texas became a scene of confusion for whites and blacks alike, but civil government resumed in the state on July 21, 1865, when Andrew Johnson's appointee, Unionist A. J. Hamilton, arrived in Galveston to assume the governorship. In August he began appointing fellow Unionists and some ex-Confederates to state, district, county, and precinct offices. By the end of the month, civil government functioned in eighty counties, but major adjustments remained. Authorities found themselves confronted with many problems of which the most enduring involved the question of black status. Although most white Texans hoped this would not be the case, Union victory in war carried with it emancipation for slaves. Many questions arose: How would Negroes respond to their new "condition?" How would whites react? What degree of control over black labor, if any, would the national government allow native Anglos? Would blacks have the same political rights and legal status as whites? These issues absorbed Texans in the post-war era.

After General Gordon Granger delivered the Texas Emancipation Proclamation in Galveston on June 19,2 the immediate reaction of the slaves varied. A minority temporarily became confused. Will Adams reported that on the James Davis plantation in San Jacinto County, "there was lots of crying and weeping when they were set free. Lot's [sic] of them didn't want to be free because they knew nothing and had nowhere to go."

For some freedmen joy replaced temporary confusion. Blacks turned many plantations into scenes of jubilation and alternately sang, danced, and prayed. Some became overjoyed simply because they believed freedom meant "no more whippings."

Like Harriet, most slave parents probably thought of their children first, wanting them to have the same benefits as slaveholders' children—schooling, attractive clothes, sufficient food, and exemption from work. A majority of the bondsmen, however, suffered no great confusion as a result of emancipation, and if they felt joy, they restrained their enthusiasm. Most quietly planned to leave their masters as soon as possible.

To the slaves, emancipation had many potential meanings. Generally, blacks expected the same freedoms that Anglos enjoyed, with the same prerogatives and opportunities. In terms of priorities, educated Negroes emphasized the importance of full and immediate political and civil rights while the masses advocated land redistribution and educational opportunity. Blacks believed that political rights would help protect them from social and economic discrimination.

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and that land redistribution would provide a stable base for future progress. On a more common level, Negroes also hoped that emancipation meant a new home, a new job, a new social life, complete religious freedom, and the right of unrestricted travel—to seek better employment or to locate lost family members. Emancipation had yet another definition for black women who had been field hands. They believed that they, like white mistresses, should now be exempt from field labor, that they should engage in housework only, reserving free time for visiting and for shopping.

Early in 1865, even before the army and the Freedmen's Bureau could provide assistance, blacks began trying to reorder their lives and fulfill the aspirations of freedom. Wishing to secure an education for themselves and their children, for example, many freedmen bought primers and writing slates and tried to learn how to read and write. Then they organized makeshift schools and supported teachers with moderate tuition and presents of food after the harvest. Just as they began establishing schools, blacks quickly began founding their own religious institutions. They withdrew from native white churches and joined the "northern wing" of established Anglo churches or organized their own services. Negroes also developed a more diversified social life which usually centered around their schools and churches. Church and school-sponsored picnics, dances, and fairs along with regular Sabbath services represented a few of the limited recreational outlets available to blacks. Equally important to the new freedmen was their search for lost relatives which usually began at first opportunity. In most cases, however, blacks had to wait for the aid of the bureau before they could locate family members who had been "lost" because of family splitting before emancipation.

Accepting the aid of sincere Unionists, blacks who successfully made the transition from slavery to freedom tried to help those more unfortunate. In Houston Reverend Elias Dibble organized a mutual aid society to help sick or distressed Negroes. With members paying a rather large $2.50 initiation fee and $.25 weekly dues, the society quickly collected an $80 relief fund. In San Antonio Nace Duval, preacher and barber, performed a valuable service for fellow blacks when he established an employment bureau. Many newly emerging black congregations also founded benevolent agencies to assist destitutes. Likewise, some Unionists, particularly Germans, took an interest in Negro welfare. In addition to offering protection to hunted freedmen, Louis Constant ran a combination boarding house, relief station, and employment service for ex-slaves.

To test their new freedom and to escape hated reminders of slavery, those Negroes who had a place to go gathered their belongings and left their former masters quickly after emancipation. Usually domestics and artisans left first while the aged and infirm tended to leave last. On the William Ballinger farm three younger slaves immediately left, but six who had no place to go continued to work for Ballinger for monthly wages. Only freedmen who had had kindly owners voluntarily remained at their old jobs because most ex-slaveholders tended to treat blacks as if they were still slaves. Rather than accept this, Negroes left. Further, those who remained usually did so only for a few months. Yet comparisons of the 1860 and 1870 census statistics reveals that no massive shifting of Negro population occurred. The percentage of black population remained relatively stable in all parts of the state. Many blacks who left old masters went only a few miles before hiring out to a new employer. Others, particularly those whom whites brought to Texas during the war, left the state
to return to old homes and to rejoin their families. Still others flocked to the nearest town.

According to one witness of what appeared to be a mass black migration to urban centers, the ex-slaves wanted "to get closer to freedom, so they'd know what it was—like it was a place or a city." Migrants became so numerous that they filled the roads to such towns as Houston, San Antonio, Gonzales, and Jefferson. Austin suffered temporary problems in public health and sanitation because of overcrowding. In the urban centers some blacks passed their time in idleness or in gaming, trying to enjoy their new freedom. But historians who have argued that "all" or "most" Negroes refused to work and led a wayward type of existence in the cities probably exaggerated. Rather, what whites called laziness usually amounted to a typical worker's rebellion against unreasonable hours and wages and became a way of demanding rest and enjoyment. Whites nevertheless expected the worst from freedmen, and this general attitude allowed them to believe almost any rumor directed against Negroes. In 1866 a Freedmen's Bureau agent in Bastrop heard reports that blacks in Austin refused to work and simply wandered around. Austin agent Byron Porter, however, wondered how his counterpart in Bastrop received such misinformation. The great majority of Negroes in Austin, Porter maintained, had jobs. In urban centers, then, most blacks sought employment. Some hired out as domestics or day laborers. Catering to the new black population in the towns, some opened business establishments such as barber shops, grocery stores, and shoe shops. Others found benevolent military commanders like those in Houston who created jobs by instigating temporary relief projects.

Black population growth in urban areas continued through the late 1860s to outstrip white increases, but many freedmen soon discovered that towns were not the havens they sought. Urban Anglos feared blacks, believing that their increased numbers would cause more crime. Further, white employers, believing absolutely in black inferiority, refused to allow freedmen the dignity accorded Anglo labor. Still, blacks found themselves treated as slaves. Refusing to hire the new freedmen, other employers replaced them with white labor even though Anglos demanded higher wages. White politicians applauded this trend. The growth of an Anglo mechanic class was necessary, said the editor of the Houston Telegraph, or "the ignorant race" would swamp Houston and retard its development. Later, the editor noted with satisfaction that whites had replaced blacks as drivers of a majority of the city's drays. The editor of the Huntsville Item noted similar trends occurring in his town and expressed approval.

Trying to encourage their removal, some city governments also discriminated against freedmen. The Galveston mayor harassed blacks whenever they tried to gather for social events. Although military authorities always gave blacks permission to conduct meetings or hold balls, the mayor broke up any gatherings and fined supposed organizers, justifying his action with an apparently little-used local permit ordinance. Victims of white discrimination and of what became a glutted labor market, many blacks returned to the rural area which they regarded as home because they knew it well. But most found that conditions in the countryside were in many ways worse than in the cities.

Some Negroes in rural areas found the transition to freedom particularly difficult because of the immediate reactions of their masters. Despite the fact that most farms and plantations needed laborers, a minority of owners—on first hearing of Granger's proclamation—took action that defied economic logic, relieving slaves of their jobs and telling them to get off the land. Ex-masters
dis missed some blacks because they were purported to be bad influences on other freedmen. Thomas Greer of Madison County told his slaves to get out, saying that he would horsewhip any “nigger” he found on his place after the next sunrise. Many freedmen, such as Toby Jones, reported that “they turned us out like a bunch of stray dogs, with no homes, no clothes, no nothing.” The blacks who had been turned out had no choice but to wander around, looking for work.

Some ex-slaves became victims of early Klan-like conspiracies. A large group of white citizens in Freestone County emphatically passed a general resolution in late 1865 vowing to hire no blacks and to whip any freedman who tried to contract with Anglos. Whites who violated the resolution might first only be warned but, on second offense, would be whipped or hanged. Some ex-masters, extremely disturbed by emancipation and not content to deny blacks work, decided that slaves would be better off dead than free. By poisoning slave water wells, those masters reportedly killed scores of Negroes before they could escape from the old plantations.

Slaves who were driven from the land found the first steps toward freedom painful. Some joined the migration to towns where they sought not just work but military protection from further abuse. Others relied solely on themselves and resorted to a most primitive type of existence. Unable to buy land, unwilling to accept semi-slavery under white employers, some squatted on unworked land and, using sticks as tools, planted crops. They supplemented their diet by fishing and by hunting—with bows and arrows—and made clothes from animal skins. Despite black efforts to provide for themselves, starvation became rife in some Texas counties, particularly in the north and northeast; to get food, some Negroes resorted to thievery. So difficult was the plight of freedmen that Elige Davison could only comment, “if the woods were not full of wild game, all us Negroes would have starved to death.” And blacks like Davison could expect little help. The Freedmen’s Bureau, the agency Congress established to aid blacks, did not begin to function in Texas until September 1865 and remained hopelessly undermanned until it finally was removed from the state in 1870.

Most former slaveowners did not turn the new freedmen off the land, but they, like most other whites, maintained an attitude not conducive to black freedom. Only briefly, just after the South’s defeat, did white Texans adopt an apparently moderate attitude, one encouraged perhaps by their uncertainty regarding the kind of treatment that federal forces of occupation would mete out. Further, if they acted in a conciliatory manner, they believed that President Andrew Johnson’s lenient Reconstruction policy would yet allow them to control the freedmen. Correspondents for various Texas newspapers reported that most planters and farmers quietly resigned themselves to the Union victory and black emancipation, freeing slaves and coming to terms with them. The citizens of some towns even passed resolutions vowing full cooperation with the federal government. Yet such mass displays of loyalty proved misleading. If a majority of whites at first appeared conciliatory, if newspapers advocated moderation, they did so only because they wanted to remove the necessity of a lengthy military occupation of the state.

Even after the Union government made known its determination to end slavery, a majority of white Texans quickly reaffirmed their belief in white supremacy. As William Ballinger asserted even before Kirby Smith’s surrender, Anglo Texans would always “remain Southern in their feelings.” After the war, whites clung to the “lost cause,” sometimes making up new “Rebel ditties”
like "Conquered Banner" and "Faded Gray Jacket" to glorify the Old South. Whites feared that freedom for blacks implied equality of the races, an idea that most refused to accept. Many believed the Negro race so inferior that amalgamation represented the only way to uplift it; thus, arguments against black equality often focused on the question of racial mixing. Whites feared that granting the Negroes political and legal rights ultimately would lead to social equality which in turn would lead to amalgamation; hence, many Anglos opposed giving any rights to Negroes. If freedmen received any rights, "then the kinky hair," lamented one editor, "the mellow eye, the artistic nose, the seductive lips, the ebony skin and bewildering odor will be ours, all ours, ours, ours." Like most white Texans, the editor of the San Antonio Daily Herald joined the critics, telling the black man that "this is our government and country, and not his, if he don't like it, he is at liberty to seek another." In addition to objecting to black freedom for racial reasons, most Anglos stressed economic arguments, using the complaint that unless compelled, freedmen would not work. Whites attributed this alleged reluctance about work to the irresponsible, lazy, and ignorant "nature" of the Negro and to the "foolish" notion that Yankees would give blacks land. Anglos apparently failed to remember that the hot summer, even in the antebellum period, traditionally had been a time of less work. Moreover, blacks moved about immediately after emancipation to test their freedom, to escape hated masters, and to find new jobs or lost family members. Whites attributed the migration to pure wanderlust which, they believed, proved their point: free black labor was unstable. Whites resisted Negro emancipation for yet other reasons. Some believed that unless blacks were controlled they would take revenge on the society which had enslaved them. This fear became especially pronounced in areas of large Negro population. In Harrison County, where freedmen numbered about 60 per cent of the total population, Anglos around Marshall set up contingency plans to protect themselves from a rebellion. Even in areas of smaller black population, whites did not feel safe unless they placed some restrictions on freedmen. In San Antonio the city council adopted a nine o'clock curfew for any type of black meeting. The belief that blacks committed most crimes further stimulated white fears of rebellion. Anglo criminals helped reinforce this belief by committing night robberies while disguised as Negroes. A group of whites in black-face beat and robbed a German named Homeyer in his home near Brenham, but they proved to be inept for Homeyer later identified them as Anglos. So strong was the white desire to "keep blacks in their place" that when they realized abolition to be a fact, Anglos took overt action which necessitated strong countermeasures by the federal government. A one-sided guerilla war with strong racial overtones developed in Texas and continued to influence the entire course of events in the attempted Reconstruction of the state. The war took many forms, with black people the usual targets for violence perpetrated by whites. The violence sometimes seemed casual, with Anglos having no apparent motive except to chastise "uppity" blacks who were guilty of nothing more than exercising their new freedom. At other times the violence became well directed, with planters using force to keep Negroes in illegal bondage. Disgruntled whites did not confine their wrath to blacks but also identified Anglo Unionists as targets because to varying degrees they supported Negro rights. Most white Texans committed no outrages, but many actively conspired with those who did, by hiding them from the authorities and by refusing to testify against them. Violence against blacks and Unionists erupted sporadically
throughout the state. Although outrages occurred more frequently in the interior at isolated points unprotected by federal forces, white men murdered and whipped blacks even in areas of military occupation. Federal officials reported that at times entire counties went out of control.²²

In many areas trouble began with early military occupation. Whites immediately demonstrated their hostility for the government. In Millican when Unionists raised the United States' flag, Colonel W. B. Lowery pulled it down. At Weatherford ex-Confederates took the flag from the court house and tore it to pieces. Through 1865 reports came to Governor Hamilton from all over the state informing him that disloyal factions just waited for their "chance" to "get at" freedmen and Unionists.³³

While demonstrating contempt for the Union, some Anglos also inflicted barbarities on freedmen. Whites killed Negroes for the most trivial offenses. In Huntsville during a celebration of emancipation by freedmen, one local white rode into the midst of a jubilee and, wielding a knife, disemboweled a black woman whose body was then pitched into a wagon and taken away.³⁴ An historian listed other "reputedly assigned reasons" for murder:

freedman did not remove his hat when he passed him (a white man);
newo would not allow himself to be whipped; freedman would not allow his wife to be whipped by a white man; he was carrying a letter to a Freedman's Bureau official; kill negroes to see them kick; wanted to thin out niggers a little; didn't hand over his money quick enough; wouldn't give up his whiskey flask.³⁵

Anglos beat blacks for almost any offense, including indications of freedmen that they were in fact emancipated. If Negroes did not show due deference in all matters involving whites, they faced punishment. Beginning after emancipation and continuing throughout Reconstruction, Anglos complained about impudent behavior by Negroes, failing to understand that blacks needed to test their freedom. Further, white men clung to the sexual mores of the antebellum period, which included exploitation of black women. Freedmen Bureau records contained frequent complaints of rape or attempted rape of Negro women by white men.³⁶

The congressional investigation of 1866 produced statistics and testimony proving that such violent acts had become a common theme of early postwar race relations in Texas. From mid-1865 to early 1866, authorities issued 500 indictments for the murder of blacks by Anglos, but because of white attitudes, no convictions resulted. Additionally, whites committed many murders that brought no indictment. Two Anglos killed a black domestic servant in Harrison County because she would not punish her child for stealing money. Lucy Grimes explained that the young child only played with the money, as one would with a toy. After hearing what they regarded as a "fishy" story, the men took the woman to a wooded area outside of Marshall, stripped her, and beat her to death. The murder went unpunished because the county judge refused to hear a complaint brought by a Negro, Lucy's older son.³⁷

Some slaveholders who desperately wanted to control their labor force added to the violent atmosphere by refusing to free their chattels. Other owners merely followed a policy of drift, informing bondsmen of Granger's proclamation only after rumors of freedom became so strong that they could not be denied. Still others determined to get summer crops in before telling slaves of emancipation. This group usually tricked the freedmen into remaining at their jobs. Unscrupulous masters promised blacks full rations and a share of all crops—some even
promised to give them small plots of land and livestock. After the harvest, most refused to honor their agreements and drove Negroes from the land.38

Some owners refused to free their bondsmen even after the harvest. Anderson Edwards remained a slave on the Rusk County plantation of Major Matt Gaud for one full year after Granger's proclamation. Saying that God "never did intend to free niggers," Gaud ignored the emancipation order until federal soldiers discovered his illegal actions and forced him to release Edwards and other slaves. One mistress kept a black woman chained to a loom to prevent her escape and continued to work her for "about" a year. In statements corroborated by white Unionists, other slaves reported similar experiences.39

In other instances, which occurred more frequently than many historians previously have supposed, owners kept blacks in illegal bondage not for just a few months but for years. After Union forces occupied Galveston, John E. Chisholm retreated deep into East Texas, settled, and worked his bondsmen as late as December 1866. On July 4, 1867, a group of freedmen in Austin encountered a black couple traveling with a white man who still held them in slavery. The freedmen's hostile protests influenced the immediate release of the couple. In the same month, the Freedman's Bureau agent in Austin reported that he recently had freed two girls whom planter William Greenwood had maintained in bondage. No one released the slaves of Alex Simpson, a horse thief, until he was hanged in 1868.40 Certainly, most owners freed their slaves before 1868, but six months after Granger's proclamation, Flake's Daily Bulletin reported that some openly bragged that they continued to hold freedmen.41

Not all blacks submitted to illegal enslavement. When they learned that by right they should be free, they attempted to escape. As before the war, however, some whites used as much force as necessary to return escapees. Of his own personal knowledge, one Freedman's Bureau agent indicated that in the counties around Houston with considerable black population Anglos still used dog packs to capture runaways.42 Further, whites sometimes killed escapees to discourage attempts by others. In Harrison County, most slaveholders freed their bondsmen before owners in neighboring Rusk County. Impatient for emancipation, slaves in Rusk County frequently ran away, trying to get over the county line, but many were killed in the attempt. "You could see lots of niggers hanging to trees in Sabine bottom right after freedom," asserted ex-slave Susan Merritt "because they [white men] caught them swimming across the Sabine River and shot them."43

The Harrison County murders did not represent infrequent occurrences. A correspondent for Flake's Daily Bulletin reported that in "Middle Texas" as late as August, whites behaved in the same manner as those in Harrison. "More than twenty dead Negroes," he said, "have [of late] drifted down the Brazos."44 Moreover, four separate reports made by army officers in December, 1865 indicated that suppression and continued enslavement of blacks remained common throughout East and Central Texas. One federal official asserted that in the interior ex-masters still conducted their plantations as if the South had won the war. General E. M. Gregory, first commissioner of the Freedmen's Bureau in Texas, and General William E. Strong, inspector general of the bureau, held similar views. Gregory toured the region between the lower Colorado and the Brazos, while Strong toured the area between the Trinity and the Neches. They found that wherever government troops were stationed Anglos behaved themselves but that where troops were absent some whites held blacks in bondage and treated them with utmost cruelty. Strong, who gave the more pessimistic
report, recommended a military campaign to correct the situation. In conjunction with the tours of Gregory and Strong, I. J. W. Mintzer, surgeon-in-chief for the bureau, visited over 100 plantations along the Brazos and the Colorado and disgustedly reported that at will planters broke oral and written contracts with blacks. Whites who did not continue to hold Negroes in bondage sometimes exercised a more subtle type of control which proved equally effective. Anglos banded together and agreed not to hire any laborers without the consent of their previous employer.\textsuperscript{45}

While some ex-slaveholders circumvented federal laws by continuing to hold blacks after June 19, 1865, others reenslaved those who had been emancipated. Operating along the Texas coast, some whites gifted with beguiling stories convinced Negroes to board ships that would carry them to "a better place." Ship captains then took them to Cuba to sell them into slavery. In late 1865 some planters, like David F. Portis of Austin County, decided to leave the United States and tried to force their ex-slaves to go with them. Leading a party of sixteen men, Portis confronted Louis Constant, German Unionist, and asked the whereabouts of a certain teenaged black male whom Portis intended to carry with him to Brazil. Constant knew where the freedman was hiding but refused to allow a search.\textsuperscript{46}

As late as 1867 some white entrepreneurs evolved an elaborate plan that one witness called the "Brazilian emigration scheme." Allegedly, Anglos from the coast went into Smith County offering blacks work as boat hands. Eventually, the businessmen transported several hundred freedmen to the coast and divided them into crews. Ships then sailed, bound for New Orleans. Before reaching the port, whites put the blacks in chains. Captains then loaded the "cargo" aboard vessels bound for Brazil where the captives again would be enslaved.\textsuperscript{47} As was obvious from the attitudes and actions of white Texans, the first few months of the new freedom found most blacks in a difficult situation.

Although the myth developed that the white South cared for the ex-slaves' welfare, kindness and concern may have been the exception rather than the rule. Yet freedmen could expect little relief from the still disorganized state government. Hamilton filled offices slowly and unknowingly appointed many unreconstructed rebels. Although other southern states held their constitutional conventions in the fall of 1865, he postponed the Texas convention until February 1866, explaining to President Johnson that he could not act more rapidly because whites refused to give freedmen their rights. In the interim, Hamilton took no position action to settle the outstanding issues involving Negroes. He appealed publicly for racial conciliation, but in his November proclamation to freedmen he put little emphasis on their rights and instead stressed order, told Negroes to work, and tried to discourage rumors of land redistribution.\textsuperscript{48}

The Texas Emancipation Proclamation guaranteed freedmen absolute equality in personal and property rights, but confusion resulted regarding the legal status of blacks. Many state judges like Hiram Christian, chief justice of Bell County, wrote Hamilton inquiring about the judicial rights of Negroes—could freedmen sue, complain against or testify against whites? The governor ruled that these were judicial questions to be settled by the courts. Some justices like C. C. Caldwell of Harris County instructed juries that perfect equality prevailed in all cases, but most judges in the state, following the old antebellum codes, refused to hear black complaints or testimony against Anglos. Furthermore, blacks usually faced exclusion from jury service. Even if courts accepted their testimony, white juries generally refused to convict fellow Anglos. So unfair
was the system of justice that ranking federal officers labeled proceedings involving freedmen as complete farces. Denied the protection of the Hamilton administration and the state courts, blacks continued to place faith in the federal government. Most believed that the Johnson government would implement a land redistribution program to give them economic security and that the army and the Freedmen's Bureau would protect them from further abuse. Negroes were disappointed on all counts.

Because the bureau did not enter the state until late 1865, the army shouldered the early responsibility for helping Negroes adjust to freedom and for settling racial disputes. When General Granger issued the emancipation order, he initiated Texas Reconstruction. By his order blacks received equality in personal and property rights. At the same time, however, the general established a trend that later federal officials would follow. He showed more concern for order, stability, and the Negro labor "problem" than for black rights. He advised freedmen to sign labor contracts and to remain with their old masters. He warned that he would not allow blacks to collect at army posts nor would be support them in idleness. He also forbade Negroes to travel without passes from their employers.

The attitude of a majority of military personnel limited the effectiveness of the army. White soldiers in the ranks felt prejudice against Negroes and did little to help or protect them. Occasionally, elements of the occupation force committed depredations on those who most needed protection. Blacks sometimes complained that soldiers, Negro and white, assaulted and robbed them. In Houston freedmen became so dissatisfied with troop behavior that in January 1866 they organized a vigilance committee numbering thirty to forty men and swore vengeance on the soldiers. A local war seemed unavoidable until a bureau agent managed to conciliate the freedmen.

Prejudice permeated command positions as well as the lower ranks. Most officers made it no secret that they did not accept full Negro equality. General William T. Sherman asserted that "the white men of this country will control it, and the Negroes, in mass, will occupy a subordinate place as a race." Some commanders, of course, managed to overcome their prejudice, particularly those whose position necessitated frequent contact with freedmen. After gaining first-hand knowledge of the black plight, some officers changed their opinions of Negroes. They adopted attitudes which ranged from benevolent paternalism to outright sympathy.

Even when prejudice did not limit the army, President Johnson's lenient Reconstruction plan did. Johnson, following his "easy" policy, did not envision a long occupation of Texas or the rest of the South. Nor did he foresee advancement of freedmen as one of the army's prime functions. To satisfy Johnson, former Confederate states had to acknowledge the end of slavery and accept federal law. The president intended to leave the black question to state authorities; he wanted rapid restoration and enjoined his military commanders from interfering with the organization and functioning of state governments.

The impossibility of patrolling Texas with a limited force also hamstrung the army. Granger's original force of 1,800 men increased to 45,424 by September, partially because the Mexican Civil War made such a concentration necessary. But by January 1866 troop strength fell to 25,085. By February further reductions left approximately 5,000 soldiers in Texas. Furthermore, commanders were ordered to concentrate troops not along the coast or in the interior of the state but along the Rio Grande and in frontier outposts. Thus undermanned
in the areas of concentrated black population, the army could not provide the supervision needed to protect Negroes or to adjudicate racial disputes.

The Freedmen's Bureau finally began to function in Texas during September, 1865, when the first Assistant Commissioner for Texas, General E. M. Gregory, arrived in Galveston. Congress originally planned for the bureau to continue only one year after the end of the war. But when southern states passed the Black Codes and thus made known their determination to resist legal equality for Negroes, Congress renewed the bureau in 1866 over Johnson's veto and every year thereafter until 1870. As first conceived, the duties of the bureau varied. In Texas, because there were no abandoned lands to adjudicate, agents took legal jurisdiction over blacks if state courts appeared prejudicial and violated Negro rights and provided relief work if such aid seemed absolutely necessary. Bureau officials also encouraged blacks and their employers to honor labor contracts and sought to found and maintain bureau schools.67

In areas other than labor supervision, the early work of the bureau achieved only moderate success. In extending immediate relief and medical aid to distressed freedmen, efforts fell far short of what blacks needed. The bureau issued relief rations to only sixty-four Negroes in 1865. In view of widespread want and some cases of starvation and in view of the increased rationing of 1866, it became obvious to Gregory's replacement, General J. B. Kiddoo, that the undermanned, underfinanced bureau reached only a small portion of the state's freedmen. The limited bureau established only one hospital, which never employed more than five doctors at any one time and was disbanded in September 1866.53

Likewise, in its educational endeavors, the bureau met with limited success. Edwin M. Wheelock, first superintendent of freedmen's schools in Texas, experienced difficulties in finding teachers and securing school supplies. He also found that the majority of white Texans opposed black education, which presented problems that would continue throughout the Reconstruction period. Nevertheless, Wheelock established the first black school in the state, with an initial enrollment of eighty pupils, at Galveston in September. With only limited income from tuition charges of $1.50 per month from each student, bureau schools reached few Negroes in 1865. By October, Wheelock maintained five day, night, or Sabbath schools, with four teachers and an enrollment of 264. The bureau had increased the number to twelve, with nine teachers and 615 students by Christmas.59

To black Texans, the early absence of Freedmen's Bureau activity only mirrored similar developments which had occurred in the state in the first seven months after emancipation. Largely, Negroes found it possible to achieve their aspirations only in a most limited way. They hoped that freedom would bring economic and educational opportunity, religious autonomy, and family stability along with legal and political rights. True, they acquired more control over their family and social life and more freedom of movement and of expression, but only if they used their imagination could Negroes consider themselves free men. A majority of individual whites, the state government, the Johnson administration, and the army worked to limit black freedom. Whether they were city officials trying to force blacks out of urban areas, planters seeking to control Negro labor, or army officers wanting "order," Anglos discriminated against the new freedmen. Some whites who could not accept black emancipation committed barbarities on the Negroes, including murder whenever they wanted to "thin out niggers a little." Blacks found little relief. Self-help associations slowly developed, and a few Unionists offered aid. The early months of emancipation re-
vealed the tensions between black hopes and white fears which would influence efforts by freedmen as they sought to fulfill their aspirations in the decades to follow.
NOTES


9*New Orleans Tribune*, June 11, 17, 18 and August 5, 1865; P. F. Duggan to James Kirkman, August 1, 1867, Letters Sent, Sub-Assistant Commissioner, Columbia, Texas, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Land, Record Group 105, National Archives, Washington, D. C., hereafter abbreviated BRFAL, RG 105, NA.


13*Houston Tri-Weekly Telegraph*, June 30, July 12, October 6, 1865; *New York Times*, July 17, 1865; *San Antonio Herald*, October 14, December 29, 1865; Byron Porter to A. B. Coggeshall, October 15, 1866, Letters Sent, Sub-Assistant Commissioner, Austin, Texas, BRFAL, RG 105, NA.

14Amelia Barr to Jennie, June 3, 1865, Amelia Barr Papers, Archives, University of Texas Library.

15*Houston Tri-Weekly Telegraph*, July 10, 12, 1865; *Huntsville Item*, July 14, 1865.
STATEMENT OF ARMSTEAD BARRETT, “SLAVE NARRATIVES,” TEXAS, XVI, PT. 1, 47; STATEMENT OF TOM HOLLAND, Ibid., Pt. 2, 146; STATEMENT OF LUCY THOMAS, “SLAVE NARRATIVES,” TEXAS, XVI, PT. 4, 90; STATEMENT OF ELLA WASHINGTON, Ibid., 133.


STATEMENT OF ELIGE DAVISON, “SLAVE NARRATIVES,” TEXAS, XVI, PT. 1, 295.

Houston Tri-Weekly Telegraph, June 5, 28, 30, October 20, 1865; Flake’s Daily Bulletin, June 8, July 10, 12, 1865.

Balingo Dairy, May 13, 1865, Balingo Papers.

Barr to Jennie, October 25, 1866, Barr Papers.

Flake’s Weekly Bulletin, November 19, 1865, February 7, 21, 1866; San Antonio Weekly Herald, August 31, 1865.


San Antonio Daily Herald, September 2, 1865.

Galveston Tri-Weekly News, October 13, August 25, 1865; Porter to Chanccey Morse, February 1, 1866, Letters Sent, Sub-Assistant Commissioner, Houston, Texas, BRFAL, RG 105, NA.


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