

Christine Sink
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FREEDMEN'S BUREAU

Themes:

- **Values, beliefs, political ideas, and institutions**
- **Conflict and cooperation**
- **Patterns of social and political interaction**

Habits of Mind:

- **Historical empathy**
- **History is unfinished business**
- **Change and consequences**

National Standards for History:

- **Era 5: Civil War and Reconstruction (1850-1877) -- Standard 3:How various reconstruction plans succeeded or failed**

Objectives: Students will be able to:

- Understand the purpose, goals and positions created in the 'Act to Establish a Bureau for the Relief of Freedmen and Refugees'.
- Understand the African American feelings upon learning that they were freed and would be receiving help
- Create a two-voice poem

Resources:

- Word Splash
- "Political Cartoon: Freedmen's Bureau"
- Copy of an 'Act to Establish a Bureau for the Relief of Freedmen and Refugees'
- Purpose, Goals and Other Information Graphic Organizer
- Two voice poem instructions and worksheet

Background:

The Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen and Abandoned Lands was established in March 3, 1865 after two years of bitter debate. The Freedmen Bureau, as it was commonly called, was to address all matters concerning refugees and freedmen within the states that were under reconstruction. The Bureau was not appropriated a budget of its own, but was instead commissioned as a subsidiary of the War Department and depended upon it for funds and staff.

Commissioner General O. O. Howard who was appointed by President Andrew Johnson with the consent of the Senate headed the Freedmen's Bureau. Commissioner Howard received a salary of \$3,000 and gave \$50,000 in bonds. Assistant Commissioners were appointed to each of the ten states under reconstruction in the same manner. The Assistant Commissioner received a salary of \$2,500 and gave \$20,000 bond. The salaries of other positions were not stated in the bill, so army officers filled the majority of the positions in the Bureau.

In the beginning, the Freedmen's Bureau did not suffer from lack of funding. The Bureau sold and rented lands in the South, which had been confiscated during the war. However, President Johnson undermined the Bureau's funding by returning all lands to the pre-Civil

War owners in 1866. After this point, freed slaves lost access to lands and the Bureau lost its primary source of funding. (Source: <http://valley.vcdh.virginia.edu/HIUS403/freedmen/overview.html>)

Introduction:

Place an overhead transparency of the Word Splash on the projector. Read each word and explain to students that in their table groups they are to construct a paragraph using all of the words. Each group should work together to create a paragraph that makes sense. Go over any words that they may not understand.

Have groups share out their completed paragraphs. Explain that after the 13th Amendment, abolishing slavery, that slaves had many thoughts and feelings about what they wanted to do with this new-found freedom.

Tell students that you are granting them their freedom right this minute. What freedoms come to mind? What would they most want in their life?

Activity 1:

1. Ask students what the slaves needs would be in their new freedom. Ask questions such as:
 - How do you think the slaves felt?
 - What would they do now?
 - Where would they go?
 - How would they survive?

Write their responses on an overhead transparency. Responses can include:

- 1) freedom of travel 2) freedom to own land and make money 3) freedom to unite with family 4) the freedom to be educated 5) freedom to be treated fairly
2. Next, place an overhead of the “Political Cartoon: Freedmen’s Bureau” for the students to see. Ask students to tell what they observe in the cartoon. Tell students that this new government agency, the Freedmen’s Bureau, was created to help freedmen shift from slavery to freedom. Ask, “What could an agency like this do to help facilitate this change?”

Activity 2:

1. Distribute copies of the ‘Act to establish a Bureau for the Relief of Freedmen and Refugees’ and Graphic Organizer – Purpose, Goals, and Other Information.
2. Instruct groups to read through the Act and fill in their graphic organizer.
3. Using an overhead have group share out while the teacher records answers. Let students change, add or delete information on their own organizers.
4. Make sure students have identified the following:
 - Section 1:** Supervise and manage all abandoned lands and “all subjects relating to refugees and freedmen from rebel states”
 - Section 2:** Issue provisions, clothing, fuel, and shelter for destitute refugees and freedmen

Section 3: Assistant commissioners not to exceed 10 may be in place

Section 4: The authority to set apart abandoned or confiscated lands for use by freedmen and refugees with the possibility of purchase of such land after three years

Section 5: Any acts that are inconsistent with this act are repealed

Activity 3:

1. Divide the class into groups of 3 or 4. Each group will be given a venn diagram to fill out comparing the needs of freed slaves and the help of the *Freedmen's Bureau*.
2. Give the small groups time to fill out their charts encouraging them to discuss the issues.
3. Using an overhead of the venn diagram the teacher can list the findings of the students. Discuss the ideas as they come forward.
4. Next, the students regroup into larger groups of 6 or 8. Half of the group should represent the Freedmen's Bureau and the other half representing the freed slaves. Members of both groups discuss their venn diagrams.
5. The entire class can now predict how each group felt when their needs were or were not fulfilled. The teacher may write common predictions on the overhead.

Activity 4:

1. Students should now be grouped into pairs. One will take the part of the slave and one as someone from the Freedmen's Bureau. Pairs should write a two-voice poem where the slave is seeking help to survive and the Freedmen's Bureau is offering help to this slave. Students need to follow the form that has parts for each speaker and lines for both to speak together. Students may want to think about the following:
 - Response to being free
 - Thoughts, hopes and dreams
 - How can you help me?
 - What happened in the past?
2. After writing scripts have students share their poems with the class. (option: students can publish the poems together)

Conclusion:

Have students draw conclusions on the success or failure of the Freedmen's Bureau. Go back to the Word Splash and discuss results. How accurate did students come to predicting what the Bureau did?

**AN ACT TO ESTABLISH A
BUREAU FOR THE RELIEF OF FREEDMEN AND
REFUGEES**

SECTION 1	
SECTION 2	
SECTION 3	
SECTION 4	
SECTION 5	

Law Creating the Freedmen's Bureau

CHAP. XC.—*An Act to establish a Bureau for the Relief of Freedmen and Refugees.* Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That there is hereby established in the War Department, to continue during the present war of rebellion, and for one year thereafter, a bureau of refugees, freedmen, and abandoned lands, to which shall be committed, as hereinafter provided, the supervision and management of all abandoned lands, and the control of all subjects relating to refugees and freedmen from rebel states, or from any district of country within the territory embraced in the operations of the army, under such rules and regulations as may be prescribed by the head of the bureau and approved by the President. The said bureau shall be under the management and control of a commissioner to be appointed by the President, by and with the advice and consent of the Senate, whose compensation shall be three thousand dollars per annum, and such number of clerks as may be assigned to him by the Secretary of War, not exceeding one chief clerk, two of the fourth class, two of the third class, and five of the first class. And the commissioner and all persons appointed under this act, shall, before entering upon their duties, take the oath of office prescribed in an act entitled “An act to prescribe an oath of office, and for other purposes,” approved July second, eighteen hundred and sixty-two, and the commissioner and the chief clerk shall, before entering upon their duties, give bonds to the treasurer of the United States, the former in the sum of fifty thousand dollars, and the latter in the sum of ten thousand dollars, conditioned for the faithful discharge of their duties respectively, with securities to be approved as sufficient by the Attorney-General, which bonds shall be filed in the office of the first comptroller of the treasury, to be by him put in suit for the benefit of any injured party upon any breach of the conditions thereof.

SEC. 2. *And be it further enacted,* That the Secretary of War may direct such issues of provisions, clothing, and fuel, as he may deem needful for the immediate and temporary shelter and supply of destitute and suffering refugees and freedmen and their wives and children, under such rules and regulations as he may direct.

SEC. 3. *And be it further enacted,* That the President may, by and with the advice and consent of the Senate, appoint an assistant commissioner for each of the states declared to be in insurrection, not exceeding ten in number, who shall, under the direction of the commissioner, aid in the execution of the provisions of this act; and he shall give a bond to the Treasurer of the United States, in the sum of twenty thousand dollars, in the form and manner prescribed in the first section of this act. Each of said commissioners shall receive an annual salary of two thousand five hundred dollars in full compensation for all his services. And any military officer may be detailed and assigned to duty under this act without increase of pay or allowances. The commissioner shall, before the commencement of each regular session of congress, make full report of his proceedings with exhibits of the state of his accounts to the President, who shall communicate the same to congress, and shall also make special reports whenever required to do so by the President or either house of congress; and the assistant commissioners shall make quarterly reports of their

proceedings to the commissioner, and also such other special reports as from time to time may be required.

SEC. 4. *And be it further enacted*, That the commissioner, under the direction of the President, shall have authority to set apart, for the use of loyal refugees and freedmen, such tracts of land within the insurrectionary states as shall have been abandoned, or to which the United States shall have acquired title by confiscation or sale, or otherwise, and to every male citizen, whether refugee or freedman, as aforesaid, there shall be assigned not more than forty acres of such land, and the person to whom it was so assigned shall be protected in the use and enjoyment of the land for the term of three years at an annual rent not exceeding six per centum upon the value of such land, as it was appraised by the state authorities in the year eighteen hundred and sixty, for the purpose of taxation, and in case no such appraisal can be found, then the rental shall be based upon the estimated value of the land in said year, to be ascertained in such manner as the commissioner may by regulation prescribe. At the end of said term, or at any time during said term, the occupants of any parcels so assigned may purchase the land and receive such title thereto as the United States can convey, upon paying therefor the value of the land, as ascertained and fixed for the purpose of determining the annual rent aforesaid.

SEC. 5. *And be it further enacted*, That all acts and parts of acts inconsistent with the provisions of this act, are hereby repealed.

APPROVED, March 3, 1865.

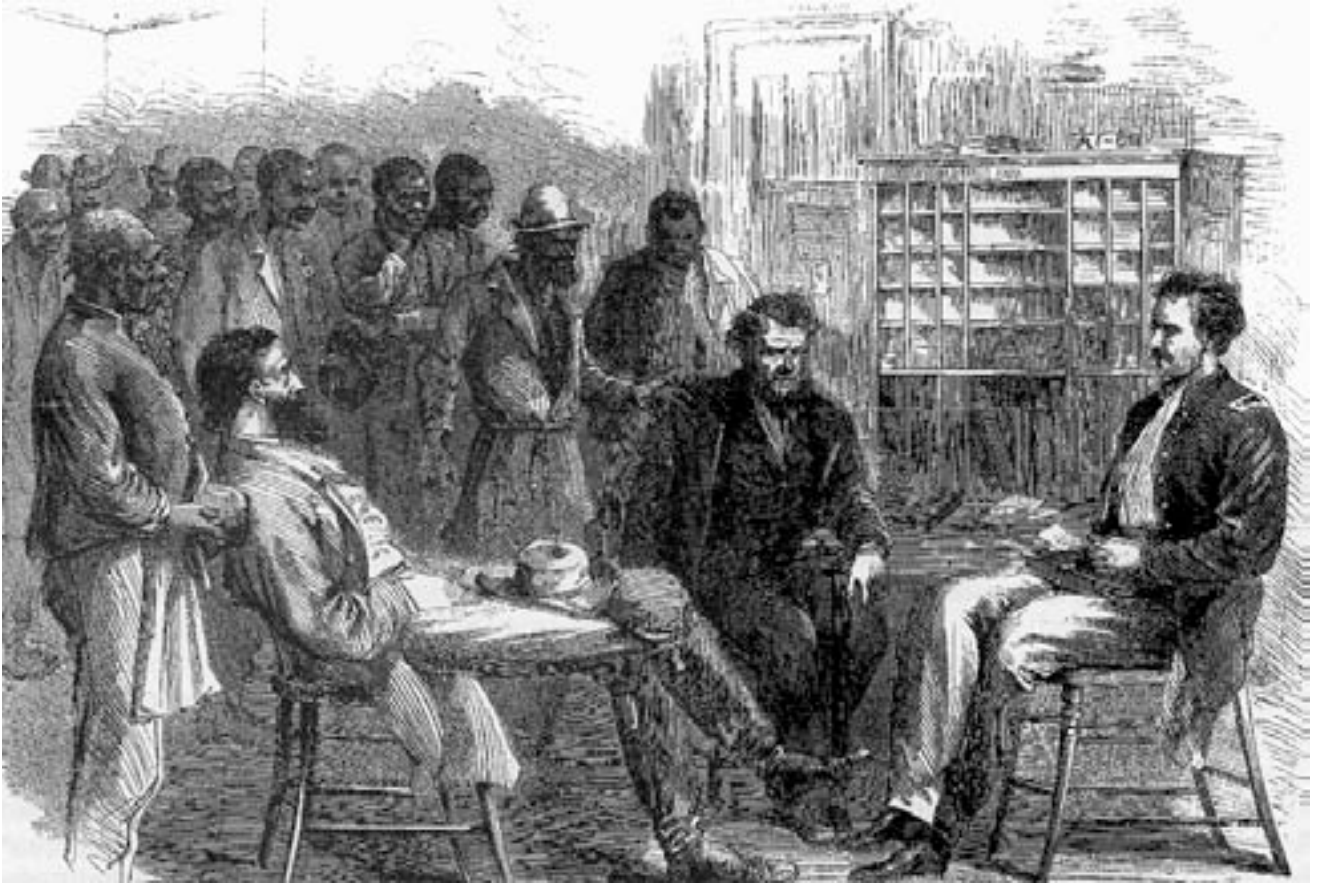
U.S., *Statutes at Large, Treaties, and Proclamations of the United States of America*, vol. 13 (Boston, 1866), pp. 507–9.
<http://www.history.umd.edu/Freedmen/fbact.htm>



THE FREEDMEN'S BUREAU.—(Drawn by A. S. Wain.—(See Page 407.)

Bureau officer promotes racial peace in the postwar South.

<http://www.latinamericanstudies.org/slavery/freedmans-bureau-1.jpg>



African American line up at the Freedmen's Bureau.

<http://www.latinamericanstudies.org/slavery/freedmens-bureau.jpg>

THE FREEDMAN'S BUREAU!

AN AGENCY TO KEEP THE **NEGRO** IN IDLENESS AT THE **EXPENSE** OF THE WHITE MAN.
 TWICE VETOED BY THE **PRESIDENT**, AND MADE A LAW BY **CONGRESS**.
SUPPORT CONGRESS & YOU SUPPORT THE NEGRO. SUSTAIN THE PRESIDENT & YOU PROTECT THE WHITE MAN

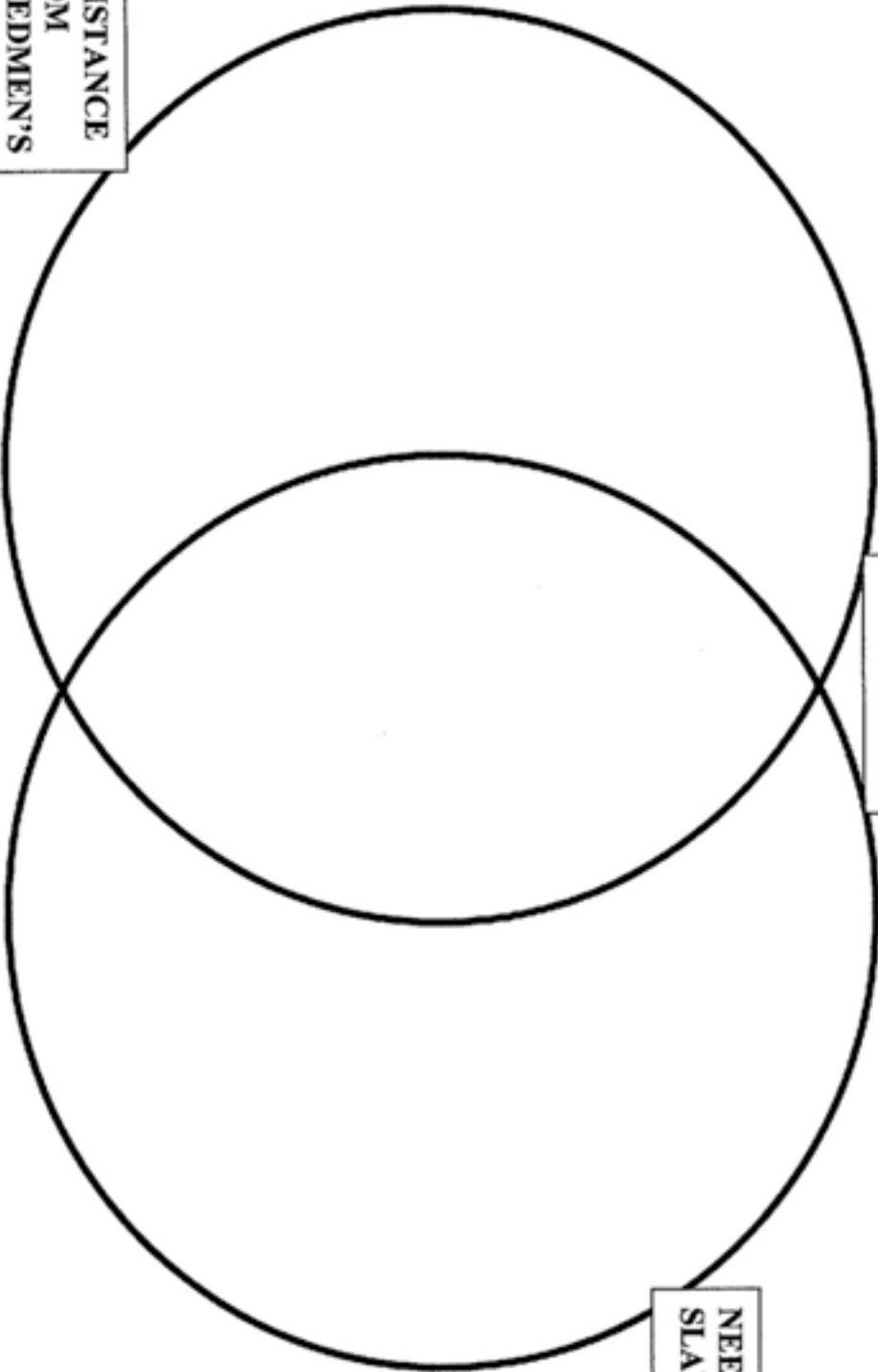


For 1864 and 1865, the FREEDMAN'S BUREAU cost the Tax-payers of the Nation, at le **TWENTY-FIVE MILLIONS OF DOLLARS.** For 1866, THE SHARE of the Tax-payers of Pennsylvania will be about **ONE HUNDRED THOUSAND DOLLARS.** **GEAR!** is FOR the Freedman's Bureau. **CLYMER** is OPPOSED to it.

Democratic Party flyer during the 1866 Pennsylvania congressional and gubernatorial campaign.

<http://www.latinamericanstudies.org/slavery/freedmans-bureau.jpg>

**ASSISTANCE
FROM
FREEDMEN'S
BUREAU**



BOTH

**NEEDS OF FREED
SLAVES**

RECONSTRUCTION

SHARECROPPING

SHELTER

LAND

REFUGEE

CLOTHING

HOWARD

FOOD

COMMISSIONER

FREEMEN

ACT

EDUCATION