

## Station #4: Assisting Freedmen

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*Most slaves were emancipated in a very piecemeal way. Even after the emancipation proclamation took effect in 1863, in practice, it only applied to slaves in areas under Union occupation. From the beginning, the Union lacked a coherent plan for helping former slaves transition to freedom. As the Civil War ended, Congress passed and the states ratified the 13<sup>th</sup> amendment, formally abolishing slavery throughout the entire country. Union efforts to assist freedmen evolved overtime, culminating in the creation of the Freedmen's Bureau, which officially functioned between 1866 and 1869. The Freedmen's Bureau was supposed to assist slaves by helping them find work, negotiate contracts, and gain an education. It also served as a legal advocate and provided some protection from resentful southern whites. Historian W.E.B. Du Bois argues that the Bureau was more successful in establishing black schools than it was at achieving land redistribution.*

### **Document A: 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment, U.S. Constitution (1865)**

“Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction.”

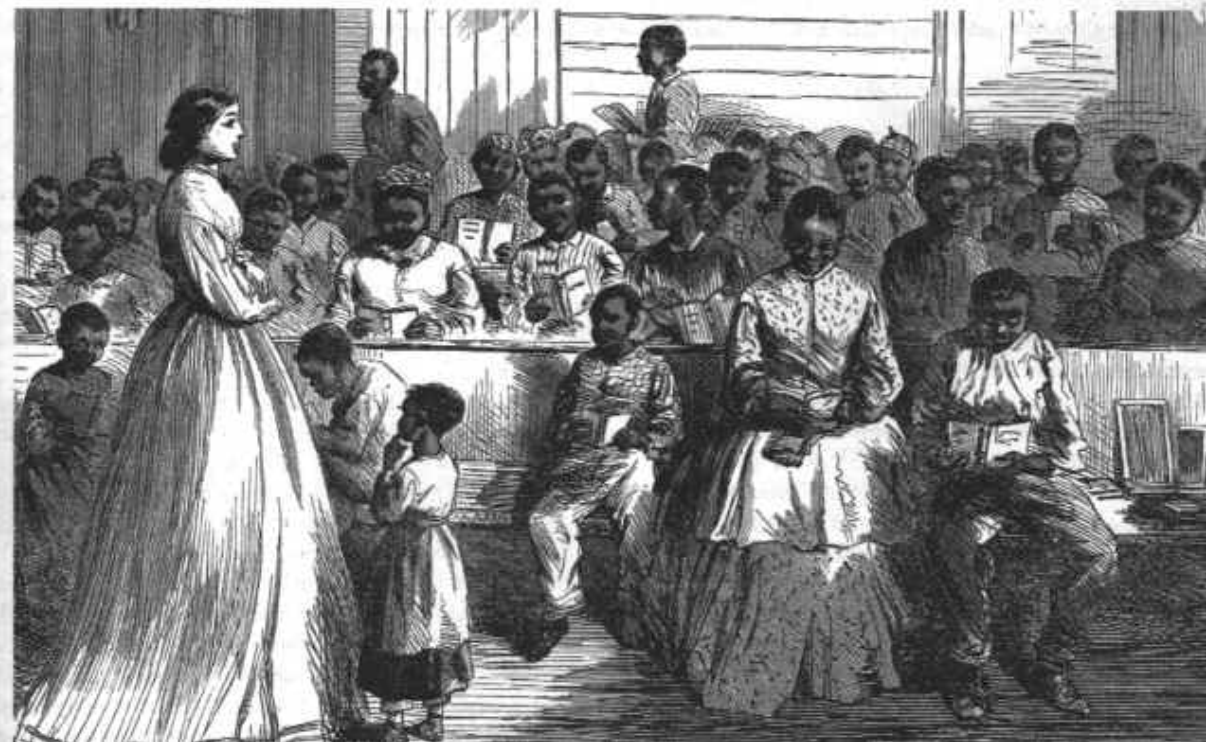
### **Document B: W.E.B. Du Bois, “The Freedmen’s Bureau,” *Atlantic Monthly*, 1901**

In the work of establishing the Negroes as peasant proprietors the [Freedmen’s Bureau] was severely handicapped... Nevertheless, something was done. Abandoned lands were leased so long as they remained in the hands of the Bureau, and a total revenue of \$400,000 derived from black tenants. Some other lands to which the nation had gained title were sold, and public lands were opened for the settlement of the few blacks who had tools and capital. The vision of landowning, however, the righteous and reasonable ambition for forty acres and a mule which filled the freedmen's dreams, was doomed in most cases to disappointment. [...]

The greatest success of the Freedmen's Bureau lay in the planting of the free school among Negroes, and the idea of free elementary education among all classes in the South. It... called the schoolmistress through the benevolent agencies, and built them schoolhouses... [...]

Such was the work of the Freedmen's Bureau. To sum it up in brief, we may say: it set going a system of free labor; it established the black peasant proprietor; it secured the recognition of black freemen before courts of law; it founded the free public school in the South. On the other hand, it failed to establish good will between ex-masters and freedmen; to guard its work wholly from paternalistic methods that discouraged self-reliance; to make Negroes landholders in any considerable numbers. Its successes were the result of hard work, supplemented by the aid of philanthropists and the eager striving of black men. Its failures were the result of bad local agents, inherent difficulties of the work, and national neglect

**Document E: A Freedmen's School Taught by a White "Carpetbagger"**



**Document F: Mary S. Battey, Schoolteacher, Andersonville, Georgia, 1866**

“Our school begun- in spite of threatenings from the whites and the consequent fear of the blacks- with twenty-seven pupils, four only of whom could read, even the simplest words. At the end of six weeks, we have enrolled eighty-five names, with but fifteen able to read. In seven years teachings at the North, I have not seen a parallel to their appetite for learning, and their active progress. Whether this zeal will abate with time, is yet a question. I have fear that it may. Meanwhile it is well to ‘work while the day lasts.’ Their spirit now may be estimated somewhat when I tell you that three walk a distance of four miles, each morning, to return after the five-hours session. Several come three miles, and quite a number from two and two-and-a-half miles...”

**Document G: Educational Statistics, 1860-1920**

