

Arlington's Freedmen's Village: Becoming Untethered

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## **Abstract**

This investigative study will discuss how the Freedmen's Village was designed as a community for the formerly enslaved to demonstrate what they could achieve with freedom. However, residents arriving at the Village found that they still had many restrictions placed on them and their labor, like de-facto slavery. The Freedmen's Bureau was in charge of the Freedmen's Village. The Freedmen's Village refused to allow able-bodied individuals to go without work, demonstrating the importance of employment. Furthermore, private agencies collaborated with both Freedmen's Village and the Freedmen's Bureau to provide job opportunities outside of the Village for some residents. Many of the formerly enslaved residents had skills in barbering, tailoring, shoemaking, blacksmithing, and construction work. Some of the children were apprenticed to work outside of the Freedmen's Village while women found placements as seamstresses, servants, launderers, cooks, or housekeepers.

The transition to freedom was very harsh for many Freedmen in the South. Many died from starvation and exposure to the elements. This, combined with other factors, led to a decrease in the population of African Americans in the Confederacy. They were used to a system where their masters took care of them and provided everything they needed. Now that system was gone, they had no way to support themselves or earn money. The droughts that happened after the war made things even worse. Afraid of being caught in a cycle of violence and oppression, many able-bodied men were gathered in camps, barracks, and colonies. Many of them enlisted in the Union Army. Several Freedmen were carried away by their owners further south, unable to return and find out if their families had been abandoned or if they made the fatal error of disobeying their masters' will. The Freedmen were entirely dependent on others for their very survival. Unfortunately, after the emancipation, many of them were kept in bondage

because their masters kidnapped them and ran into rural areas of the South to escape Union troops who would have freed them according to the Emancipation Proclamation.

With no men to protect or provide for them, the women and children had to take care of themselves as best they could. To survive, they gathered food from wherever they could beg door-to-door and camp-to-camp and ate anything edible they found in the fields and woods, whether it was roots, berries, or scraps. Many of them perished from cold, hunger, and exposure to the elements. The first duty of the Bureau, then, was to provide for the immediate needs of these destitute people. This was done in two ways: by establishing colonies on abandoned farms, and by building camps and barracks to house the people until they could be placed in more permanent homes. The government gave every family in the colonies a piece of land to farm as well as supplies like seeds and agricultural tools. They also provided food and clothing until harvested crops could support everyone. Sometimes, families were given livestock, too. The goal was for each colony to become self-sufficient so that its residents would not need help from the government. These efforts were reflected at the Freedmen's Village and this encampment lasted several decades after the other encampments were closed.

The Freedmen's Bureau was both an enabler of African American aspirations as well as an impediment. The Bureau did facilitate the transition from slavery to citizenship through the "incubator" environment offered by the government's administration of the Freedmen's Village. However, such existence came with bureaucracy and objectives that were not always in the Freedmen's best interest. Even well-meaning benevolent organizations were often encumbered by conscience or subconscious racism. These inconsistencies caused much hardship for Freedmen. On the other hand, Village residents were able to create a vibrant community with

schools, churches, and benevolent societies that provided social and political outlets. The Freedmen's Bureau also gave freed people access to employment opportunities and legal assistance. This dissertation will demonstrate that even though there were clear instances when the Freedmen's Bureau and Freedmen's Village failed Freedmen, these organizations were still able to help facilitate a thriving community for the Freedmen. Freedmen used beneficial assistance such as education, vocational training, health care, and housing to establish and further their self-empowerment through the establishment of African American schools, churches, benevolent societies, and labor organizations.

Through their development of the Freedmen's Village, Freedmen were able to develop a unique African American community rooted in self-determination, autonomy, and progress. Despite the challenges and restrictions of government control, Freedmen were able to use Freedmen's Village as a model of African American community development that is still celebrated and studied today. This Freedmen-driven self-determination was often in direct opposition to the Bureau's paternalistic, top-down thinking. Though the Freedmen benefited from the central planning and infrastructure established by the government, it was the Freedmen themselves who spearheaded the development of a vibrant community. At the same time, Freedmen were struggling against a system that was not always willing to recognize the human potential of Freedmen. This struggle was part of the larger struggle for African American rights and civil liberties.

## Introduction

Freedmen's Village at Arlington was a site of fresh beginnings before it became a military cemetery. Freedmen's Village at Arlington was located on the former estate of Gen. Robert E. Lee, which is now the southern end of Arlington National Cemetery. Three thousand fugitive and liberated slaves traveled through the Village. The residents lived in Sibley tents and that collection of miscellaneous tents established the Freedmen's Village at Arlington.<sup>1</sup> The Freedmen worked hard and were able to change the contraband encampment into the first black community in Arlington, Virginia. However, two things have hidden the everyday life, accomplishments, and struggles of these individuals. First, there is little evidence of Freedmen's Village remaining. Secondly, most Americans are unaware that such a place ever existed.

Freedmen's Village was originally designed to be an experimental community for the formerly enslaved; however, upon arrival, residents discovered that they were given restrictions and rules to follow which were not dissimilar from slavery. The goal for Freedmen's Village was that it would serve as a shining example of what the Freedmen could achieve if given the opportunity. The Freedmen's Bureau refused to allow any able-bodied man, woman, or child to remain idle and emphasized the importance of employment. In addition, private agencies working with both Freedmen's Village and the Bureau sought job opportunities outside of the Village for some residents. Many of the formerly enslaved residents had skills in barbering, tailoring, shoemaking, blacksmithing, and construction work. Some of the children were

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<sup>1</sup> The conical tent was designed and patented by Henry Sibley. Sibley was a Louisiana native and West Point graduate, who left the Union Army to join the Confederate army and became a Confederate General. The Sibley tents served as a temporary shelter for Union soldiers until quarters were erected for them. The Sibley tents were A-frame canvass tents that the soldiers used for shelter on the battle fields during the Civil War. See *The Prairie Traveler: A Handbook for Overland Expeditions*. New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1859. p. 142.

apprenticed to work outside of the Freedmen's Village while women found work as seamstresses, servants, launderers, cooks, and housekeepers.

The Freedmen's Village and the Freedmen's Bureau had positive and negative impacts on the Village residents. There existed a clear dichotomy between these two federal organizations' intended purposes and the impacts they had on the Village residents. While the Freedmen's Village and the Freedmen's Bureau were developed to assist the newly freed slaves, there were many occasions when they fell short of accomplishing their goals. This dissertation will illustrate many instances when the actions of the Freedmen's Village and the Freedmen's Bureau were detrimental to the Village residents. Additionally, this dissertation will highlight the number of positive impacts these organizations had on the Village residents. The Bureau encouraged as many of the recently freed population as possible to leave Washington. Many sick, disabled, and elderly freed people were transferred to Freedmen's Village at Arlington, even though they often preferred the more familiar city streets to the stricter regime of Freedmen's Village. The Village constantly changed between being a self-sustaining community for Freedmen and becoming a farmhouse for those who were dependent. The management ranged from tolerant to extremely strict.<sup>2</sup>

The Village was developed to provide the freed slaves with a place to live, work, and receive an education. The Bureau was responsible for aiding the freed slaves in their transition from slavery to freedom. While the Bureau did provide some assistance to the Village residents, they were not always effective in carrying out their duties. One of the main problems with the Freedmen's Bureau was that it was understaffed and underfunded. This lack of resources made it

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<sup>2</sup> Robert Harrison, "Welfare and Employment Policies of the Freedmen's Bureau in the District of Columbia." *The Journal of Southern History* 72, no. 1 (02, 2006), 84.



difficult for the Bureau to effectively help the Village residents. Another issue with the Freedmen's Bureau was that its employees were often inexperienced and poorly trained. This made it hard for them to understand the needs of the Village residents and properly assist them. Additionally, the Bureau was often slow to respond to the needs, grievances, and concerns of the Village residents. The Freedmen's Village also had its share of problems. The main issue with the Village was that it was not well equipped to deal with the needs of its residents. This was because the Village did not have enough resources. For example, there were not enough stoves for all the Villagers to use. This made it hard for them to keep warm in the winter months. Additionally, there were not enough medical supplies for all the villagers. This made it difficult for them to get proper medical care. Despite the issues with the Freedmen's Village and the Freedmen's Bureau, there were also several positive aspects to these organizations. They provided the Village residents with access to education and medical care. Additionally, they helped the Village residents find jobs and housing. While the Freedmen's Village and the Freedmen's Bureau had their share of problems, they were still able to aid the Village residents.

Many Freedmen and their leaders opposed the whole theory of organizations such as the Freedmen's Bureau and the Freedmen's Village. Leaders such as W.E.B. DuBois wanted to see the Freedmen free under the law. He believed that the Freedmen should be protected in the courts of justice; if necessary, he hoped they would receive the right of suffrage and vote their former masters down and reconstruct the seceded states. DuBois did not support any system of guardianship, pupilage, and overseership over the Freedmen. A substantial number of Freedmen embraced similar ideals as DuBois.<sup>3</sup> To some Freedmen, these organizations represented paternal institutions compromised solely of white men who created policies that dictated and governed

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<sup>3</sup> W. E. B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880*. (New York: The Free Press, 1962), 365.

many aspects of their lives, without considering input from them. For many, this type of system was not much different from slavery. The government had effectively set up a grand plantation of its own, the Freedmen were returned to the status of slaves. White federal workers were reminiscent of their former overseers. It is easy to see how such a perspective could develop among the Freedmen. Under slavery, they were denied basic rights and freedoms and were forced to follow the orders of their masters without question. In some ways, the Freedmen's Bureau and the Freedmen's Village represented a continuation of this system, albeit in a different form. "The federal officials could not help treating the former slaves as children."<sup>4</sup>

After the emancipation of slaves, opportunities arose for them to learn how to read and write, as well as gain new skills. They also became elected civic leaders. This allowed the Freedmen community to transform from a contraband camp into a thriving population. After years of economic recession and acclimating to the new status quo in America and the South, various white groups, including real estate firms and those seeking to limit black political power, pushed for the dismantling of Freedmen's Village. The Village's black residents were attacked, and their legitimacy was questioned by those who wanted the land for themselves. The resident's protests allowed the Freedmen's Village to stay open until 1900 after it had thrived for nearly forty years. The fact that Freedmen's Village, the schools, and other organizations like the Odd Fellows were shut down prompted many of these institutions to relocate across Arlington. Because of the closing of Freedmen's Village, eleven black enclaves and settlements were established or expanded.

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<sup>4</sup> Joseph P. Reidy, "Coming from the Shadow of the Past: The Transition from Slavery to Freedom at Freedmen's Village, 1863-1900." *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 95, no. 4 (1987), 407.

The trajectory of each community was unique depending on the people who populated them, though they were all linked by the cross-community institutions that were created in Freedmen's Village. A small but cohesive black Arlington emerged at the end of the nineteenth century, which utilized its ties and organizations to maintain a presence in increasingly suburban Arlington. Arlington County still has three vibrant African American neighborhoods that were once part of Freedmen's Village: Green Valley, Hall's Hill, and Johnson's Hill. The Village has left a legacy in the form of thriving communities that continue to carry on its tradition. Members of the Syphax family, for example, are still prominent Arlington residents who can trace their roots back to the Village. The Odd Fellows and Mt. Olive and Mt. Zion Baptist churches are examples of such institutions, whose origins can be traced back to the Village. These neighborhoods and their inhabitants have been long-time bulwarks of Arlington's black community-building history.

This research will answer the following questions: Where in Arlington did village residents settle? What institutions formed in the village still exist? How did the Freedmen's Village experience shape Arlington's black community? What subjects were studied at the Freedmen's Village? What event or events contributed to the close of the Freedmen's Village? What personal role or ownership did the Freedmen take over their own lives? What happened to the villagers after the closure of the Freedmen's Village? How was life in the Village for the Freedmen and those who worked there? What role did the Federal Government play in the establishment of the Freedmen's Village? What were some of the challenges the Freedmen faced at the Freedmen's Village?

## Literature Review

The Reconstruction era has several schools of thought and they have changed over time. The Dunning school was one of the initial and most prominent arguments of the era. Historian John Burgess is the Godfather of the Dunning School and *Reconstruction and the Constitution, 1866-1876* was one of his major works. The central theme of the Dunning school was that the white southerners were encroached upon following the conclusion of the Civil War. Historians of this school argued in part that the Civil War was a tragic misunderstanding and Reconstruction had been an exploitive punishment imposed upon helpless white Southerners by supercilious Yankees who exploited African Americans by granting them citizenship rights.<sup>5</sup>

Revisionist historians such as William Appleman Williams and W.E.B. DuBois's argument offered an indictment against the South and the proponents of the Dunning school of thought. In his book, *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880*, DuBois argued that if the Freedmen did not have the right to vote full and free political life would be impossible in the South.<sup>6</sup> The Post-revisionist historians such as Eric Foner argued that Reconstruction was a period of radical change that fostered a backlash of conservatism. They also argued that new policies created the New South, which was essentially a continuation of the Old South's social and labor exploitation.

The shift in historiographical interpretation was impacted by the political and cultural views of the time. It does not appear that either of the schools of thought had assessed significant new sources that changed their view or interpretation of the Reconstruction era. Historians have

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<sup>5</sup> John David Smith and J. Vincent Lowery, *The Dunning School: Historians, Race, and the Meaning of Reconstruction*. (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2013), 2.

<sup>6</sup> W. E. B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880*. (New York: The Free Press, 1962), 704.

generally defined the Reconstruction Era as the period from 1865 through 1877. Some historians who specialize in African American history and the Reconstruction era expanded their research period through 1954, the start of the Civil Rights era. For this research, this study will focus primarily on the period from 1865 through 1877. Even though black code laws were born out of the Reconstruction era, many of these laws existed well into the mid-twentieth century after the era ended.

In *Reconstruction and the Constitution, 1866-1876* (1902), John Burgess asserted that the Federal government unduly imposed its will upon the South. Burgess noted how political adventurers descended upon the South during Reconstruction and organized African Americans into secret bodies. The group later became known as the Union or Loyal League.<sup>7</sup> Burgess further stated that African Americans were organized in part both for their self-interest and as Republican allies. Burgess noted that the Freedmen were left to the mercies of their former masters, who were angered because the North emancipated them. It was natural for them to look for the intellectual and political organizational power necessary to form such combinations with the whites who had helped them out of their bondage.<sup>8</sup> With regard to African Americans and culture, Burgess's focus was largely on how the political faction used them as a voting bloc.<sup>9</sup> Despite recognition as a significant early reconstruction historiography, again, the impacts of black code laws on African Americans and culture were not fully considered. This dissertation addresses gaps and develops a narrative that will run concurrently with the existing histories while focusing on the personal and community impacts on African Americans.

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<sup>7</sup> John William Burgess, *Reconstruction and the Constitution, 1866-1876*. (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1902) 250.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 250.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 253.

Historian Eric Foner's, *A Short History of Reconstruction, 1863-1877* (1984), discussed that many newly freed African Americans saw themselves as "Working Class People" who had been unjustly denied the fruits of their labor.<sup>10</sup> Foner explained that most African Americans were unable to purchase land even at the depressed prices of early Reconstruction. The white community was not willing to advance credit or sell any property to African Americans.<sup>11</sup> When whites predicted that African Americans would be lazy, African Americans responded that if any class of people shall be characterized as lazy it was the planter class. It was noted that the planter class lived in idleness and enjoyed the spoils of stolen labor.<sup>12</sup>

Foner stated that many African Americans expected to labor less as free men and women, and as Freedmen they refused to be driven into the field two hours before daylight and until ten o'clock at night.<sup>13</sup> Foner argued that the post-Reconstruction labor system embodied a return to supervised gang labor for African Americans, a denial of freedom to perform withheld black labor, and utilization of coercive apprenticeship systems. These systems were put in place by white Southerners, the Redeemers' New South.<sup>14</sup> The Redeemers were the southern wing of the Democratic party who sought to regain political power and enforce white supremacy. Foner competently illustrated the intricate political, economic, legal, extralegal, and social occurrences of the time. He explained how the South responded after losing the war, and how the Federal government created the Freedmen's Bureau in an attempt to aid the newly freed slaves. While *A Short History of Reconstruction, 1863-1877* is considered by many to be a masterpiece within

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<sup>10</sup> Eric Foner, *A Short History of Reconstruction, 1863-1877*. (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1990), 45.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 45.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 45.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 45.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 254.

the historiography of the Reconstruction period, the work does not look closely at how the newly freed individuals and communities were impacted.

Thomas Brown's book, *Reconstructions: New Perspectives on the Postbellum United States* (2006), is a collection of essays by various well-regarded historians. In the first essay, "A General Remodeling of Everything: Economy and Race in the Post-Emancipation South," Stephen West stated that some members of African American families were employed as domestics or farm laborers by white landowners. These individuals were often housed in their landlords' homes. These individuals may have been used as day laborers during times of peak demand in the fields. They may have also performed other non-crop work throughout the years, such as "digging ditches, tending the landowners' livestock, and building and repairing fences and other structures."<sup>15</sup> Those who were involved in plantation labor were likely to have been deemed more essential to the economy.

West noted that those in the cotton South engaged in various productive activities, which Holt classified as household economy. This analysis needs to be studied in other parts of the South, as well as in regions where freed people had less access to markets and towns. West further asserts that there is a question of sharecroppers' and tenants' opportunities for wage-earning beyond their sharecropping contracts.<sup>16</sup> They may have engaged in harvesting, processing, or performing non-crop work for their landlords or other nearby farmers. Those who grew cotton may have been able to enjoy seasonal work in forestry, railroads, and other pursuits.

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<sup>15</sup> Brown, Thomas J. *Reconstructions: New Perspectives on Postbellum America*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006) 24.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, 24.

This would help one understand how those who worked on their property were not as impoverished as sharecroppers.<sup>17</sup>

The slave plantation hardly accounted for the whole of the antebellum southern economy, nor was it the only part to feel the effects of the Civil War and emancipation, which extended as well to agriculture outside the plantation belt and to the role of commerce, towns, and industry. West noted that the slave plantation hardly represented the entirety of the antebellum South's economy. West stated that the areas that extended beyond the plantation belt have been neglected as a research topic, particularly urban and industrial applications of enslavement.

He further explained that the South's economy was dominated by plantation slavery before the Civil War and added that it was destroyed in one of the most intense social upheavals of American history. West partly cited this as one of the reasons that plantation slavery received much more attention regarding the southern economy post-war. West also challenged the ideal of a monolithic or cohesive racial white identity that defined the South which was formed on white supremacy.<sup>18</sup> He made a sound point in stating that most of the early historiography that examines the subject focused solely on the way that white southerners viewed African Americans as opposed to how African Americans viewed themselves. In this essay, West successfully challenged the way that historians have focused on one aspect of the subject and neglected other elements.

The second essay, "Black Agency After Slavery," which was authored by John C. Rodrigue, discussed the mobility of African Americans following emancipation. It is no longer new to see free Black people and the formerly enslaved as historical agents who served the

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 24.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 38.



Union cause by destroying slavery. They should also be viewed as revolutionary figures who contributed to the free black community. These insights were first presented by Du Bois and other African American scholars during the twentieth century. They were ignored by the historical community before the 1960s, though they were still important and apparent enough to be considered by historians during that period. These perspectives gained increasing currency until the 1980s when they would become a point of departure for African American life after slavery.<sup>19</sup> Rodrigue noted that before Foner, revisionism highlighted the unity that existed amongst the former slave population, not adequately addressing the complexities of diverse African Americans' individual and communal interests.

Rodrigue aimed to analyze the origins and development of the black community in the South following slavery. Additionally, it considered the daily efforts of the formerly enslaved to achieve independence. "Agency, a concept that pervades the scholarship on black life during and after slavery, can be understood as the capacity to act on behalf of one's interests and values. In essence, it involves the ability to remain independent, to some degree, of another's control and to exercise a measure of free will."<sup>20</sup> Rodrigue discussed the creation of an autonomous African American social and cultural life, as well as the economic and social conditions that enabled African Americans to live in self-determination after 1877. This essay helped to create a new generation of scholars who have begun to look at black life during Reconstruction through a different lens than those of previous revisionists.<sup>21</sup> This study will highlight the importance of the mobility and independence of African Americans following the war.

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 40.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 41.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 41.

In its time, the reconstruction of America was a turbulent period. It involved the issues of race, reunion, and constitutional reshaping. The Rodrigue anthology features the works of leading scholars discussing the 19th century. The essays explore a variety of topics, including constitutional history, feminism, and the politics of reconstruction. They also address issues that are typically not covered by traditional historiography. This compilation provided a more nuanced view of Reconstruction's various issues, allowing scholars to study them more effectively. Each essay provides insight into the current scholarship and its direction for the future, representing a powerful addition to the historiography on the subject.<sup>22</sup>

Douglas Blackmon explained in *Slavery by Another Name* (2008) that the convict leasing system was fueled by Black Code laws. Black men were arrested and sentenced for violating these laws. Once they were sentenced these men were leased out to companies such as U. S. Steel and other convict contractors. The structural factors that led to the exploitation of black laborers were systemic. The combination of weak state institutions and white racial attitudes contributed to the conditions under which Black Codes and convict leasing system practices operated. Southerners adversely impacted by a devastating war, had to look for ways to recoup their expenses. As a result, they started to lease out cheap convict labor to contractors.

The system of convict leasing could have been abused even without the influence of racism. The architects and beneficiaries of the program would have been more than happy to use violence and inhumane treatment to extract their money's worth.<sup>23</sup> Blackmon noted that in 1930,

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<sup>22</sup> K. M. Gannon, "Reconstructions: New Perspectives on the Postbellum United States." *Choice* 44, no. 11 (2007): 1971.

<sup>23</sup> W. F. Brundage, "Slavery by another Name: The Re-Enslavement of Black Americans from the Civil War to World War II." *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, no. 60 (Summer, 2008): 86.

the state of Georgia had 1.1 million African Americans living in the state, and approximately half of them were under the direct control of forced labor. He further stated that it would be illegal for them to move and seek other employment.<sup>24</sup> While Blackmon's work covered the institution of convict leasing and he intensively examined how Black Code laws were applied to ensure cheap black labor, he fell short of investigating the impacts these laws had on African American culture at large.

In *Witness to Reconstruction: Constance Fenimore Woolson and the Postbellum South, 1873-1894* (2011), Kathleen Diffley asserted that following the Civil War, Constance Woolson, who was born in New Hampshire, lingered in the defeated South. During the next six years, Woolson traveled the South and reported what she witnessed. She wrote about the region in both illustrated and serialized works. This book aimed to illuminate the neglected world of postcolonial literature through her example, examining how literary developments were politically charged and unpredictable.<sup>25</sup> Diffley effectively captured how white southerners viewed themselves as opposed to how they viewed the formerly enslaved. This book does an apt job in its coverage of the day-to-day life of southerners immediately following the conclusion of the Civil War.

In Michael Wayne's *Imagining Black America* (2014), he argued that race has been conceptualized as an existence that changes as circumstances change. He demonstrated how the rise and fall of the one-drop rule has affected the notions of race in American history. In

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<sup>24</sup> Douglas A. Blackmon, *Slavery by Another Name: The Re-Enslavement of Black People in America from the Civil War to World War II*. (New York: Doubleday, 2008), 371.

<sup>25</sup> Kathleen Elizabeth Diffley, *Witness to Reconstruction: Constance Fenimore Woolson and the Postbellum South, 1873-1894*. (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2011) 4.

*Imagining Black America*, Wayne investigated the construction and Reconstruction of black America from the arrival of the first Africans in Jamestown in 1619 to Barack Obama's reelection. Wayne remarked that the story of the post-reconstruction developments is too familiar to be ignored. Among the issues that emerged were the proliferation of segregation, the rising cases of lynchings, and the disfranchisement of African Americans.<sup>26</sup> While the author attempted to show a parallel between the Reconstruction period through Barack Obama's reelection, most of the research was focused on the twenty-first century. The Reconstruction era was mostly glossed over, and little attention was given to examining how Black Code interacted with African American life.

In *New Perspectives on Race and Slavery in America: Essays in Honor of Kenneth M. Stampp*, Robert Abzug explained that there were planters in the Old South, but it is not clear that they constituted a discrete class. The proliferating definitions of the word "planter" and "plantation" among scholars of the antebellum South suggest the nature of the problem.<sup>27</sup> Abzug pointed out that many historians automatically have associated planters with plantations. He argues that most historians cannot articulate a clear-cut, qualitative definition of the plantation. They tend to fall back on quantitative criteria such as the number of slaves or acres.<sup>28</sup> He noted that many historians did not distinguish between a planter who owned ten, fifteen, or twenty slaves. Abzug appropriately highlights the disparity and the common assumptions or assertions that historians have made without being rooted in quantifiable evidence.

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<sup>26</sup> Michael Wayne, *Imagining Black America*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 44.

<sup>27</sup> Abzug, Robert H., Stephen E. Maizlish, and Robert H. Abzug. *New Perspectives on Race and Slavery in America: Essays in Honor of Kenneth M. Stampp*. (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2015), 150.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, 150.

With the free people now in control of their labor, the stage was set for substantial reforms in labor relations. In a compromise known as sharecropping, landlords and sharecroppers shared both cooperative and adversarial relationships. This was a substantial change from the traditional practice of southern labor relations. The new system gave most African Americans more freedom than slave labor. Instead of being tied to a gang, they had the freedom to explore whatever opportunities were available to them. “Croppers usually worked their own plots in family-sized units rather than in large gangs. As free laborers, they had the right to move about in search of whatever opportunities were available. By one estimate, as many as one in three sharecropping families changed employers each year.”<sup>29</sup> The author noted that there were very few alternatives for African Americans living in the South who sought labor beyond sharecropping. It was extremely difficult for black farmers to purchase their homesteads.

Emancipation fell short of changing the pattern of land ownership. Abzug noted that before the war, the planter elite held unlimited control over the African American race, but postwar landlords had far less power over their African American workers.<sup>30</sup> Many of the former planters were often confronted with political and economic challenges to their authority by sharecroppers. While the author did a masterful job highlighting the nature of sharecropping, he fell short of examining other institutions or labor systems such as how the Black Codes paired involuntary labor.

In his book, *Southern Reconstruction* (2017), Philip Leigh argued that while the rest of the country was enjoying a Gilded Age, the Deep South was sinking into poverty. The Reconstruction Era remains unfinished. Reconstruction is a story of great racial injustice. It left a

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid, 151.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 152.

complex legacy that includes both White and Black people. Leigh investigated the origins of Southern Reconstruction, which he claimed led to the use of African Americans as political pawns to ensure continued Republican rule. During the Reconstruction period laws emerged that ushered in the modern banking system, but they also created a dubious alignment between banks and government, which sparked corruption and depressed the Southern industry.

Leigh asserted that Reconstruction was never going to work in the South. Its failure to address the region's persistent poverty and racial hostility contributed to the rise of lynchings and Jim Crow laws. Because of the racial injustices that were highlighted by the lynching of thousands of people from 1882 to 1951, mostly in the South, “modern histories of Southern Reconstruction tend to ignore, or minimize, how developments in one section of the country impacted those of the other and concentrate almost exclusively on race.”<sup>31</sup> Leigh pointed out that Foner’s *Reconstruction* failed to mention the consequences affecting both Southern whites as well as black. Leigh eloquently stated that one limitation of current Reconstruction narratives is that the “virtually exclusive focus is on race.”<sup>32</sup> This is a point with which I concur. The current and former historiography on Reconstruction focus has revolved virtually exclusively around race. This study tends to focus on the culture of African Americans and examine their transition to freedom.

Leigh contended that Southern white sharecroppers during the 1940s lived under nearly identical conditions as black sharecroppers. This dissertation will show how African Americans were forced into labor contracts following the Civil War and this created distinct challenges for them. Additionally, this research will show how the Freedmen were reinserted as forced laborers

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<sup>31</sup> Philip Leigh, *Southern Reconstruction*. (Chicago: Westholme Publishing, 2017), 8.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*, 11.

into the southern economy. This research shares the opinion of Leigh in saying that poor southern whites and the northern class were both advocates of segregation. Leigh explained that white aristocrats did not need segregation to be assured of their purported superiority to blacks, but this was not the case for poor whites. "In the antebellum period, slavery always conferred a superior social rank to all whites, including poor ones. Once the slaves were freed, however, White, and Black people competed for the same jobs."<sup>33</sup> Slavery gave poor whites a superior social rank, and once slaves were freed, they competed against each other for the same jobs. This eventually led to the segregation system that favored poor whites.

Steve Luxenberg displayed masterful research in his work, *Separate: The Story of Plessy v. Ferguson, and America's Journey from Slavery to Segregation* (2019). In 1896, the Supreme Court ruled that separate can be equal. In his book, editor and reporter Luxenberg told the story of how the US turned away from its promise of racial equality and how the court's decision helped define the country's legal structure. The author holds in part that the US moved away from its promises of Reconstruction and subsequently established a national precedent with the *Plessy v. Ferguson* case. This book presents the biographies of some of the principal characters in the case, including Justice Henry Brown, who authored the majority opinion, and Justice John Marshall Harlan, who authored the dissent. The author traces the history of civil rights in America from the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> Amendments to the *Plessy* case in 1896. He argued that the enshrining of Jim Crow laws during the early 20th century affected the country's civil rights, and this was a necessary basis for understanding US Civil Rights history.<sup>34</sup> Luxenberg's work covered a great portion of the plight of African Americans and their struggle for civil liberties.

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 111.

<sup>34</sup> T.F. Armstrong, "Luxenberg, Steve. *Separate: the story of Plessy v. Ferguson, and America's journey from slavery to segregation.*" *Choice: Current Reviews for Academic Libraries* 57, no. 1 (2019): 111.

This dissertation adds to Luxenberg's study by examining the economic, cultural, and political impacts of the various laws that were aimed at limiting their mobility.

### **Statement of Purpose**

The Freedmen's Village was a key part of Arlington's history during the Civil War. The formerly enslaved sought refuge from their former masters and found protection under Federal law. The national significance of this experience had profound effects on Arlington that still can be seen today. Arlington's black neighborhoods and institutions have only been described fragmentarily in the past. The few articles, videos, and curriculum materials on this topic are unknown to much of the public and limited in scope. Consequently, Arlington's black history has been neglected for a long time. There is extraordinarily little written material on the subject. Those few histories of Arlington focus primarily on political development during the colonial and Civil War eras instead.

This dissertation will provide a clear, easily accessible record of black community-building in Arlington. In Arlington, this research will help private individuals and public policymakers make informed decisions about the environmental impact on neighborhoods and institutions. Decisions on black neighborhoods and institutions are based on only partial knowledge of the historical forces that continue to exert an influence. Nationally, the study strives to be a timely addition to our understanding of black history studies following the Civil War in Arlington, Virginia. This research will directly benefit Arlington residents who participate in institutions established by Freedmen and their descendants by increasing their understanding of their heritage, as well as community awareness of the value of that heritage.



The majority of those who will directly benefit from this reside in one of four Arlington neighborhoods: Highview Park, Nauck, Arlington View, and Central Arlington. Based on census data for Highview Park, Nauck, and Arlington View, it appears that these neighborhoods have a high concentration of black homeowners who have lived there long-term. This conclusion is supported by preliminary research which suggests that many Freedmen's Village descendants still live in Arlington today. Additionally, values such as thrift were emphasized by churches and fraternal organizations located within the Village. In these neighborhoods, black residents were twice as likely to own their homes as both black and white residents in the county overall. One-fifth of residents have lived in their homes since 1949 or earlier, compared to 11 percent for the county.<sup>35</sup>

### **Statement of the Problem**

The Federal government carried out a major social experiment from 1865 to 1877 to see how the Freedmen would fare in freedom. They had to first assess and then enforce the Freedmen's legal, social, and political standing in the American South for society to be reconstructed. The Federal government was able to utilize urban and suburban reform ideas in Arlington, Virginia's Freedmen's Village contraband camp to envision a place for African Americans in society beyond recreating them as agricultural laborers on plantations. African Americans employed programs designed to win more liberties and fashion places for themselves. They utilized the infrastructure formed by Freedmen's Village as a steppingstone to build an

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<sup>35</sup> Freedman's Village and Reconstruction Collections Records, 1857-1996, RG 103 Box 2, Folder (18) "Copies and Transcripts from the Freedom and Southern Society Project, 1864."

idyllic community. This trial occurred during a period of attenuated authority for southern whites who were previously in charge before the war.

With the government finally beginning to see African Americans as more than slaves and with white America reeling from the effects of war, African Americans in Arlington saw an opportunity to create their own suburban community within the government-run Freedmen's Village contraband camp. The location of the camp in Arlington, Virginia made this reform vision possible. Located nearby Washington D.C., this placement allowed local black residents to find jobs in the government, whether they were in blue or white-collar positions. The reforms put into place offered dependable and well-paying jobs that were based on merit, something African Americans could not find steadily anywhere else in the North or South.

The Freedmen's Village was a laboratory for new policies that governed the daily lives of the formerly enslaved and helped shape their future. The nation had to decide what to do with African Americans now that slavery ended, and their solution was land redistribution and agrarianism. Most of this work fell under the War Department's jurisdiction, which was later transferred to the Freedmen's Bureau. The Federal government undertook many reforms during the war and Reconstruction, but one of the most common was tying African Americans to land through agrarian work and land distribution schemes. Arlington provides a key example: on land that once belonged to Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee, Freedmen's Village contraband camp used ideas from urban and suburban reform to create a centralized village for Freedmen.

## **Significance of Study**

The field remains virtually unexplored because of a limited number of academic publications and other scholarly works related to the Freedmen's Village. This study has discovered that less than two dozen academic articles have been published related to the Freedmen's Village. This study will be the first full-length study of this topic, Freedmen Village. It is the goal of this study to induce interest in the topic and subsequently encourage other academics to contribute to this scholarship by furthering the examination of this historical topic.

## **Methodology**

This research will explore the African American communities of Freedmen's Village, Virginia, Baltimore, County Maryland, and Barry Farms, Washington D.C. from 1861-1900. This research will chiefly examine how racial prejudice and local, state, and federal policies impacted the lives of the African Americans who were residents of the Freedmen's Village. The research methodology will emphasize primary source documents and collections such as transcripts of jury trials, labor statistics, newspapers, speeches, sermons, letters, and former slave narratives in archives from Maryland, Virginia, and Washington, D.C.<sup>36</sup> Moreover, this research will principally rely upon the following primary source collections: District of Columbia Field Offices, Freedmen's Village, Letters Received, Dec. 26, 1864–Dec. 9, 1868, Part 1; District of Columbia Field Offices, Freedmen's Village, Letters Received, Dec. 26, 1864–Dec. 9, 1868, Part 2; Registers and Letters Received by the Commissioner, Letters Received, Unregistered Letters,

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<sup>36</sup> The researcher has investigated this topic throughout the course of his Ph.D. studies, has an extensive background working as in law enforcement, and has garnered a unique perspective on how law interacts with the community.

1865–1871, Part 3; District of Columbia Field Offices, Freedmen’s Village; and Labor Contracts, June 8–Oct. 12, 1864 from the Smithsonian Institution.

Collectively, the consulted primary source collections held over 800 primary source documents that consisted of letters authored by residents of the Freedmen’s Village, documents and letters regarding the Freedmen’s Village, letters addressed to and from Freedmen Bureau and Freedmen’s Village staff, and correspondence related to the farms, schools, and hospitals located at the Freedmen’s Village. This study consulted the following collections from the Center for History Archives, Arlington County Public Library, Arlington, Virginia: Freedman’s Village and Reconstruction Collections Records, 1857-1996, RG 103 Box 1; Freedman’s Village and Reconstruction Collections Records, 1857-1996, RG 103 Box 2; and Freedman’s Village and Reconstruction Collections Records, 1857-1996, RG 103 Box Oversize Box. The consulted collection held hundreds of primary source documents, which included Court Records, a Will Book, an Inventory of Slaves at Arlington belonging to the Estate of G.W.P. Custis, Freedmen’s Village Correspondence and Documents, Copies, 1867-1889, and Civil War Era Correspondence and Documents: Copies and Transcripts, n.d., 1857-1865.

These documents will provide a first-hand account of what life was like for the Freedmen, as well as how the Village functioned. They will allow this study to examine the daily lives, progression, concerns, complaints, grievances, outrages, and overall well-being of the Freedmen. Furthermore, by understanding how the Freedmen lived and viewed the Village, it will be possible to understand what the Freedmen perceived as its successes and failures. This is especially important because this study will show that some Freedmen criticized the Village, while others fought to remain there. This study will reveal the benefits and setbacks experienced by the Freedmen who lived in the Village.

## Emancipation in the United States of America

Frederick Douglass supported Abraham Lincoln's presidential campaign in 1860. Immediately after Lincoln's election, Southern states began to secede from the Union and subsequently bringing about the Civil War. Douglass continued to support President Lincoln, despite their varied views on the war. President Lincoln's initial war aim was to reunite the Union and Douglass saw the war as an opportunity to abolish slavery in the United States. Douglass was critical of some of President Lincoln's policies. Lincoln supported various colonization plan efforts to encourage African Americans to leave the United States and settle in Liberia, Haiti, or other foreign countries. Douglass argued for allowing free Blacks and escaped slaves to join the Union army, but President Lincoln was reluctant to do so early in the war.<sup>37</sup>

As President Lincoln traveled across Washington during the war years, he encountered many African Americans. For example, in April 1863 as he drove past some camps for black refugees with Mary Lincoln and journalist Noah Brooks, they caught a glimpse of numerous shanties and stenchy tents on a hillside. Lincoln frequently visited the Contraband Camp on Seventh Street while he stayed at the Soldiers' Home, which led to his changing views regarding emancipation and the Freedmen's mobility.<sup>38</sup> Douglass frequently pressured President Lincoln to consider the interest of the free Blacks and escaped slaves. Douglass had a great deal of influence on the President. President Lincoln once told Douglass that did not value any man's opinion in the country more than his.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> James Tackach, "Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglass: A Bond Cut Short." *Phi Kappa Phi Forum* 101, no. 2 (Summer, 2021): 16.

<sup>38</sup> Jonathan White, *A House Built by Slaves: African American Visitors to the Lincoln White House*. (Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2022), 175.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid*, 167.

Lincoln always argued that even enslaved people deserved the same inalienable rights as stated in the Declaration of Independence, starting from the mid-1850s. The main reason was his great capacity for empathy which allowed him to connect with individuals coming from life circumstances entirely different from his own.<sup>40</sup> This understanding of Freedmen as part of a larger community and imbued with inherent rights was a cornerstone of Lincoln's politics and it was instrumental in the development of the Freedmen's Village. By creating a Freedmen-friendly village within a civil war setting, Freedmen were able to establish an infrastructure that enabled them to create a community and participate in public life. In the Freedmen's Village, Freedmen interacted with each other and the Union forces in ways that had been denied to them before. This dynamic was a perfect example of the Freedmen's ability to use the Village as a platform to engage in politics, create organizations and networks, and participate in the larger American society.

The first act of war gave rise to a new vigor to the anti-slavery sentiment in the North. This sentiment was further reinforced by the election of Lincoln, who stated that slavery should be curtailed and not extended within the territories of the United States. This was an emphatic political statement, and it marked the end of his long campaign. It was also considered that since slavery had already been legalized in several states, the Federal government had no authority to interfere with it; and President Lincoln acted on this belief until he came to address the issue under exceptional wartime powers.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid, 177.

<sup>41</sup> American Freedman's Union Commission, and African American Pamphlet Collection. The results of emancipation in the United States of America. (New York City etc. American Freedman's Union Commission, 1867),6.

The preliminary Emancipation Proclamation was issued on September 22, 1862, with a final version released on January 1, 1863. It declared that all slaves in the rebellious states were to be free as of that date. This act changed the course of the war and the fate of millions of African Americans. A Union army's goal now became the destruction of slavery, rather than simply reunion with the seceding states. Lincoln also hoped that the proclamation would cause Great Britain and France to stop diplomatically and economically supporting the Confederacy. This was a smart and cunning political maneuver as this placed the Confederacy at a dangerous disadvantage. Otherwise, with the support of these two nations, the war could have concluded much differently.

Although many slaves were freed by the proclamation, it did not apply to those enslaved held by citizens loyal to the United States living in Union-occupied areas or in border states that had not seceded from the Union. Moreover, the proclamation was an executive order with no constitutional basis, so it could be reversed by a future president or instituted by the Supreme Court. The Emancipation Proclamation did not end slavery immediately or everywhere in the United States, but it was a critical step in that direction and helped to change the course of the Civil War. After the Union army began to enforce the proclamation with military might, thousands of slaves escaped to their lines for protection. The Union army initially refused to accept them as soldiers, but by early 1864, the policy was reversed, and African American men were recruited in large numbers.

On November 16, 1861, Major General John E. Wool informed Major General J. A. Dix, that he received his note at the request of Mr. Jessup, who went to Fort Monroe, VA to obtain a

slave who was taken from him by a regiment.<sup>42</sup> General Wool noted that he had nothing to do with returning slaves to those who claim them until he had been instructed on the subject by the Secretary of War. General Wool stated that all he had to do with that "species of property is to see them taken care of, as follows, all parties called contrabands employed as servants by either officers or citizens within my military jurisdiction are to be subsisted and paid at least eight dollars per month, from which is to be deducted the necessary clothing to be furnished by the Quartermaster of the Department. Those employed as laborers on public works, ten dollars, and subsistence, clothing to be furnished as above. All that remains after furnishing them with clothing is to be reserved as a fund to support such as are unable to work, including women and children. In other words, the contrabands are to support themselves. All able-bodied men and women are compelled to work."<sup>43</sup>

Southern papers, Southern politicians, and Southern sympathizers continued to claim that the Civil War was an abolitionist war. The assertion that the war was an abolitionist one was met with resolute denial. While supporting strong measures for suppressing the rebellion, loyal publications, orators, and preachers almost without exception denied any desire to disrupt the "peculiar institution" of the South. The Secretary of State informed foreign governments through

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<sup>42</sup> General Wool was a United States Army officer who served in three consecutive wars: the War of 1812, the Mexican American War, and the Civil War. When the civil war began, Wool was 77 years old and had been a brigadier general for 20 years. Out of all four United States Army generals in 1861, he had the most service. He commanded the Department of East and was thus considered the oldest general on either side during this period. See John H. Eicher and David J. Eicher's *Civil War High Commands*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001. General Dix was a military officer, a republican Politian, Governor of New York, and a Union major general during the Civil War. In January 1861, Dix was appointed United States Secretary of the Treasury by President James Buchanan. When the Civil War broke out, he sent a telegram to the Treasury agents in New Orleans ordering them if anyone dares to lower the American flag, shoot them on sight. Even though the telegram was caught by Confederates and never reached the Treasury agents, the media got ahold of the message eventually, publishing it for everyone to read. The public saw Dix as one of the first Northern heroes of the Civil War. Many people during that period had Civil War tokens with slightly different versions of that saying minted on them. See Ezra J. Warner's *Generals in Blue: Lives of the Union Commanders*. Louisiana State University Press, 1964.

<sup>43</sup> Freedman's Village and Reconstruction Collections Records, 1857-1996, RG 103 Box 1, Folder (1) "Freedman's Village: Arlington, Virginia, 1863-1900, 2nd ed., 1992."



their ambassadors abroad that this was not their aim. In his Inaugural message, President Lincoln again said much the same. On coming into Southern territory, commanding generals issued proclamations expressing the same sentiments. One even vowed to suppress any slave insurrection with an iron hand, while others took forceful steps to return escaped slaves who sought refuge within Union lines.<sup>44</sup>

As a result, the frailty of the South became its strength. The Southern slave population, unsupported by Northern pro-slavery advocates, stayed on the plantations to work in agriculture, freeing her entire white population for active military service, while at the same time, the military resources of the North were restricted by labor demands. The attempted combination of preserving slavery and putting down the rebellion was quickly abandoned as too difficult. Slaves continually sought their freedom as the Union armies marched, despite all obstacles. The soldiers often were unwilling to help and returned fugitives.

The policy of the government was, therefore, quickly changed. Now, instead of supporting slavery, every effort was made to undermine and destroy it. The first step in this new policy was the issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation by President Lincoln on January 1, 1863. Although this did not free all slaves in America, it was a strong step in the right direction and helped to change the course of the Civil War. After the Union army began to enforce the proclamation with military might, thousands of slaves escaped to their lines for protection. The Union army initially refused to accept them as soldiers, but by early 1864, the policy was reversed, and African American men were recruited in large numbers. The addition of African

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<sup>44</sup> American Freedman's Union Commission, and African American Pamphlet Collection. The results of emancipation in the United States of America. (New York City etc. American Freedman's Union Commission, 1867), 6.

American soldiers to the Union army helped to tip the balance of power in favor of the North and led to the eventual defeat of the Confederacy and the end of slavery in America.

In the absence of any clear policy, department commanders had free reign over the perplexing issue of what to do with runaway slaves. Some were welcomed and employed as laborers in the construction of fortifications, while others were armed and equipped; whereas others were denied access to the Union lines, driven back to their owners from whom they had fled, and those rebel owners were even permitted to search within Union camps for their missing chattels. In August 1861, General Fremont emancipated the slaves of Missouri in his first proclamation of emancipation.<sup>45</sup> However, substantial opposition from Democrats and border state politicians soon caused President Lincoln to revoke it. Nine months later, a similar proclamation by General Hunter freed slaves in South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida but was met with revocation from the Administration.<sup>46</sup> General Butler took advantage of the loophole that said slaves were property, and instead labeled them as "contraband of war." From then on, they were known by this title until later events changed it to Freedmen.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> General Fremont was an American explorer, first Republican nominee for President, and a U. S. Senator from California. Fremont became a wealthy man during the California Gold Rush. In 1850, he was one of the first two U.S. senators elected from the new state of California. At the beginning of the American Civil War in 1861, President Abraham Lincoln gave him command of the Department of the West. Though Fremont had some successes while he was there, he often made quick decisions without consulting President Lincoln or Army headquarters. Because of this behavior, he issued an emancipation edict without authorization and was eventually relieved of his command. See Donald Jackson and Mary Lee Spence's *The Expeditions of John Charles Fremont: The Bear Flag Revolt and the Court-Martial*. University of Illinois Press, 1973.

<sup>46</sup> General Hunter was a Union general who became famous for his unauthorized order of emancipating the slaves. He was a division commander in the Western Army under Maj. Gen. John C. Fremont took charge of the entire department on November 2, 1861, after Fremont lost his command due to an incident with emancipating slaves belonging to rebel slaveholders. Hunter quickly lost his position, and within two months was reassigned to the Department of Kansas. He saw little opportunity for excitement or adventure there and gracefully wrote a series of letters of complaint to the president. In March 1862, Hunter M finally transferred again to command over the Department of the South and the X Corps. See Ezra J. Warner's *Generals in Blue: Lives of the Union Commanders*. Louisiana State University Press, 1964.

<sup>47</sup> American Freedman's Union Commission, and African American Pamphlet Collection. The results of emancipation in the United States of America. (New York City etc. American Freedman's Union Commission, 1867), 7. General Butler fought in the Phillippe-American War, the Boxer Rebellion, and WWI.

A process of trial and error finally resulted in a system that worked. In May 1863, the government passed a law to compensate loyal U. S. slave owners for the loss of their slaves who had been set free by the Union Army. This helped to placate some of the more recalcitrant slave owners and made it easier for Union soldiers to convince slaves to come with them when they were fleeing. The Union army played a significant role in emancipation by providing a haven for slaves who escaped from their plantations, and by actively recruiting African American men to fight for the Union cause.

The tone of public sentiment against slavery kept increasing. At the beginning of the war, Congress passed a resolution (with hardly any dissenting voices) declaring that the government did not intend to interfere with slavery. Then, upon recommendation from the President, the legislature successively passed Acts providing financial aid to any states which gradually abolished slavery within their borders. Slavery was officially outlawed in the District of Columbia, slave owners there received millions of dollars in compensation. Furthermore, slavery was prohibited forever in all territories, and army officers were barred from returning fugitive slaves to their enslavers. The Act also allowed free colored men and the slaves of rebel enslavers to join the Union Army, declaring their mothers, wives, and children to be free forever. With these gradual changes, universal emancipation became achievable.

The government responded to the public's increasingly insistent demands for change by taking successive steps toward emancipation. Petitions from meetings, caucuses, and religious leaders flooded in; newspapers and speeches proclaimed the necessity and the duty of freeing all enslaved. Politicians lobbied and cajoled, with considerable success. In the end, Lincoln

combined all these pressures with his moral convictions to issue the Emancipation Proclamation, which changed the course of the war and set America on the path to true freedom for all.<sup>48</sup>

The war's changing fortunes made it even more difficult to quell the rebellion than anticipated; and, finally, in September 1862, President Lincoln announced his intention to proclaim slavery's abolition throughout all rebel states unless they laid down their arms and returned to allegiance within a limited number of days. On January 1, 1863, a day that will live on in history he issued a proclamation freeing all slaves within areas still in rebellion against the United States, with exceptions for specified localities. The proclamation had an electrifying effect on public opinion in the Northern states, and it was a factor in inducing Great Britain not to recognize the Confederacy. The proclamation also helped to ensure that African American soldiers would fight with greater determination for the Union cause.<sup>49</sup>

Of course, the full extent of this Act was only able to be executed in the areas that the Union army occupied and immediately surrounded. However, the slaves were invited to seek freedom within those lines, which caused great disruption and labor problems for Southern states. Unfortunately, since the prospect of future freedom for Black people had improved, their enslavement became even more tormenting. The rebel armies were not defeated until the Spring of 1865, which was when the proclamation of freedom finally took effect throughout the South. Furthermore, it was not until six months later that the South formally accepted emancipation under President Johnson's reconstruction measures only after they agreed to abolish slavery as a condition for readmission through the Thirteenth Amendment.

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid, 8.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, 8.

The Emancipation Proclamation was a turning point in the Civil War, as it transformed the goals of the Union army from simply restoring the Union to also include ending slavery. The proclamation also boosted morale among many Northern soldiers, who were now fighting not only for the Union but also for freedom. African American soldiers fought with greater determination, knowing that their efforts would help to achieve not only Union victory, but also their freedom. Although the proclamation did not immediately free all slaves, it was an important first step in the protracted process of achieving true freedom for all Americans.

Finally, on December 18th, 1865, the Secretary of State announced that two-thirds of the states had adopted an amendment to the Constitution of the United States that forever bans slavery in all areas under United States jurisdiction. Although slaves were no longer seen as property and were now legally free, they were not yet truly equal citizens. In other words, although their chains had been broken by the sword, they still felt the effects of slavery. They now knew that they deserved to be treated better than before but were unsure of what their new place in society was meant to be. The issue of what should be done about the Freedmen was a major topic throughout the United States. Some argued that they should be immediately granted all the rights of citizenship and political privileges. However, only a few people proposed anything as extreme as this, and it was generally considered revolutionary at the time. Many people even among those who genuinely wished well for Freedmen had serious doubts about their capacity to thrive as citizens, their eagerness to work hard, and their capacity to form an essential part of the nation.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid, 9.

Many people in the North who were sympathetic to the cause of abolition believed that the best solution was to encourage Freedmen to leave the United States and start their communities in other parts of the world where they would not have to coexist with whites. The American government even made offers of financial assistance to any Freedmen who wanted to leave the United States. This solution, however, was not satisfactory to the Freedmen, who had just fought for their freedom and were not about to give it up so easily. Most refused to leave the United States and instead demanded that they be given the same rights and privileges as other citizens. It took many years of struggle, but eventually, the Freedmen were granted full citizenship and equal rights under the law. They slowly began to gain economic and social equality, although there is still much work to be done in this area. The story of the Freedmen is an inspiring one, and their fight for freedom and equality is an important part of American history.

With regard to what to do with the Freedmen, the schemes were rehashed. Proposals were submitted to offer a place for the Freedmen to resettle in Africa, Mexico, and/or Central America. It was also purposed to settle the Freedmen in a state such as Texas or South Carolina, which would be exclusively set aside for their use. Some people believed that colonization was impossible and thus suggested that they should be kept under legal tutelage or serfdom. When Lincoln gave his second Inaugural message to Congress, no policy commanded general assent. It appeared to those who lacked faith in popular government and in Divine Providence that the United States, having been forced to liberate the formerly enslaved during the conflict, would be unable to accept the only honest answer to the problem. That was the complete equality of all persons before the law. Denial of this would leave the Freedmen in a worse position, if possible

than he had been in before being emancipated; he would be subject to tyranny from a superior class without the protection that his former master's selfish interests had provided.<sup>51</sup>

In republics, laws are good indications of the public's attitude. The bills passed by the Southern States shortly after the conflict provide an insightful view into the sentiments that prevailed there and the state the Freedmen would have been reduced to if left alone by their former owners. The slave's compulsory labor, according to the Southern ideology of the day, suggested that he had an unusual abhorrence to work and indicated the necessity of special legislation to prevent him from becoming a pauper supported by more industrious whites or an outcast who would only prey on others' property.

The civil status of the Freedmen was also to be determined. It was purported he could not be a citizen with all the rights and privileges that freedom entailed because he was racially inferior, as it was well unanimously believed, and had always been considered property with none of the rights of man. In some states, it was even proposed to brand him with a hot iron so that he could be easily identified and returned to his employer if he ran away. Thus, the Freedmen were to remain in a twilight zone with no defined status, with handicaps placed upon them that made it impossible for them ever to become first-class citizens or even approach equality with whites. Southern whites were determined to keep political power in their hands and to never be forced to accept Freedmen's equality. They did not want him as a citizen with all the rights that citizenship entailed, but they also did not want to see him reduced to a condition of pauperism where he would become a public charge. The answer that they found was to place him

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid, 10.

in a position of economic serfdom where he would be forced to work for the benefit of the white man with no rights and few if any protections.

In addition, there were several different types of class legislation: in certain states unjust and motivated by hatred and rancor that had built up during the conflict and had not dissipated with victory or forced emancipation; in others, possibly intended to promote justice, which was thwarted however owing to the fundamental mistake that lies at the heart of all such inequitable laws. In no part of the South was it considered acceptable for Freedmen to have an equal stake in civil and political rights. In most jurisdictions, they were not permitted to serve on juries or give testimony in any circumstance when white men were parties. They were forbidden from possessing or carrying firearms, leaving them defenseless against attack.<sup>52</sup>

They could not assemble in groups of more than five without a written permit from a white magistrate, and their religious meetings were often interfered with or broken up by whites. In some areas, they were required to have a special license to work for themselves and could be forced to labor for any white man who claimed them as an employee. They were also taxed at a higher rate than whites and were subject to a host of other discriminatory laws and regulations. These various pieces of class legislation intended to reduce the Freedmen to a position of economic servitude, with no rights and few protections, where they would be forced to work for the benefit of the white population at large.

In many states, vagrant laws were passed, which generally only concerned the Freedmen and rarely or never applied to white people. Individuals who were assumed to have no visible means of support which, in the case of a former slave, might imply that he was not working for

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid, 11.



anybody could be detained, fined, or indentured for a period to pay the fine. The Freedmen could be hired out at the court's discretion and put to work under overseers appointed by the government. To provide for and regulate labor contracts, special acts were passed that required them to be made in writing with defined hours of labor, and duties of master and servant. If a servant abandoned his plantation before his labor contract expired, he would be guilty of a misdemeanor and might be arrested and returned to his employer like a fugitive slave. If the employer breached the agreement, however, the Freedmen must pursue his claim through the time-consuming process of a lawsuit. White judges and juries were unlikely to award the Freedmen the relief they sought.<sup>53</sup>

Employers were also allowed to deduct the cost of food, clothing, and medical care from workers' wages with impunity. In theory, these measures were designed to protect both employer and employee, but in practice, they only served to advantage the former while further oppressing the latter. The Freedmen were not given any real recourse if their rights were violated, and they were effectively reduced to a state of economic serfdom, with no real rights or protections. These racially discriminatory laws were motivated by hatred and fear, and this served to further oppress and exploit the Freedmen after the Civil War.

In South Carolina, if a Freedmen wished to pursue any trade or mechanical occupation, they were required to obtain a special license and pay an annual fee that ranged from ten to one hundred dollars. The only occupations that were available to them without restriction were agricultural work and domestic service. The apprenticeship laws, despite applying to all classes, were simply used to compel the labor of emancipated slaves. In some states, any local Justice of

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid, 11.

the Peace could bind out to employment a black youth under the age of 18 without his or his parents' consent.

The rights and privileges enjoyed by Freedmen were not far removed from of those their former condition when enslaved. The whip, for example, which in some states disenfranchised the individual beaten and branded him a criminal for life, was made the penalty for the most minor infraction. In a word, it appeared that no measure was left untried to demonstrate former slave holders' hatred towards those who were required to grudgingly accept their nominal freedom while under duress and made to remember their former subjugation as slaves.

Nevertheless, with all these odds against them, the Freedmen did not give up. They toiled in the fields with a will, they rebuilt their homes and churches, and with the help of Northern philanthropists, they opened schools for their children. They also organized themselves politically and began to demand their rights as citizens. Over time, they slowly but surely made progress, and eventually, they were able to overcome the obstacles placed in their path by the ex-slaveholders. The fact that they were able to do this despite all the odds is a testament to their strength of character and determination.

The freed people not only faced legal disadvantages but also formidable social and economic obstacles. Their aspirations for education aroused the most vehement opposition among white Americans, who saw such efforts as a threat to their position in society. In many places across the country, African American churches and schools were destroyed by angry mobs. And in remote areas where there was little outside supervision or accountability, former

slaveholders felt free to continue their cruel treatment of African Americans without consequence.<sup>54</sup>

In addition to the hostility of white Americans, freed people also had to grapple with the challenges of poverty and illiteracy. Many of the formerly enslaved had never learned how to read or write, and as a result, they were at a severe disadvantage when it came to competing for jobs or negotiating contracts. As they were often the lowest-paid workers, they had little saved up to fall back on when times were tough. As a result, freed people were often forced to take whatever job they could find, no matter how poorly paid or dangerous it was.

In a single district, within one month, 49 cases of violence, ranging from assault and battery to homicide, in which Whites were the attackers and Blacks were the victims, were recorded.<sup>55</sup> Much of this violence was perpetrated by the lower class of poor whites. Other than the limited Freedmen's Bureau oversight, there was no effective civil authority available to maintain order or punish crime during such a chaotic period as the war caused. But, in addition, many Southern people maintained that slavery was correct and a blessing, whereas emancipation was considered wrong and a calamity. They had resigned themselves to the latter because they could not prevent it; nevertheless, their opinions stayed unaltered.

And with these facts in mind, one can imagine the kind of world that the newly emancipated freed people were faced with when they stepped out of their former enslaver's bondage for the first time. The first step that the Freedmen took was to secure employment and a place to live. Many of them were able to find work on the plantations where they had formerly been enslaved. Others went to the cities in search of employment. But whether they stayed on the

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid, 11.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid, 11.

plantations or went to the cities, they faced many difficulties. They were often cheated out of their wages, and they had to work long hours for little pay. In addition, they were not used to being independent and having to fend for themselves. As a result, many of them became homeless and destitute.<sup>56</sup>

The next step that the Freedmen took was to try to get an education. This was exceedingly difficult because there were few schools for Black people and the ones that did exist were often of inadequate quality. In addition, many whites opposed black education and did everything they could to prevent it from happening. But despite all the obstacles, some Freedmen were able to get an education and use it to improve their lives. The last step that the Freedmen took was to try to get political rights. This was also difficult because most states had laws that prevented blacks from voting. In addition, the Ku Klux Klan and other white supremacist groups used violence and intimidation to keep the Freedmen from exercising their political rights. But despite all the obstacles, some of them were able to get involved in politics and use their voices to make a change. The Freedmen's journey was a long and difficult one, but it was also a journey that led to progress and change. Despite all the obstacles, the Freedmen were able to gain some ground in the areas of education, employment, and political rights. And although they still faced many challenges, they had made some progress toward equality.<sup>57</sup>

The South's politicians and press favored the expression "overpowered, but not subdued," and all their legislative and social action was an attempt to treat freedom like slavery. The Southern states were filled with acts of violence and injustice against the black population, which led to bloody riots in Memphis and New Orleans. The excitement caused by these riots in

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid, 11.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid, 12.

the North, combined with the outrage of those in the South who disagreed with such treatment of blacks, eventually led to a purposed resolution for change.<sup>58</sup>

To put it briefly, this was the state in which Freedmen were left in after slavery was abolished. They had very few legal or social rights and were treated like serfs. Because they had no civil or political rights and few allies in the South to help them become citizens or get an education, they remained trapped in a cycle of poverty and discrimination. Inevitably, when the opportunity arose, they sought to meet their demands and improve their position. The methods used to help and advance the Freedmen's freedom and equality were both voluntary and governmental. It may be beneficial to reflect on the powerful influences that have been brought to bear on this issue the impact of natural causes and political changes. The Freedmen were elevated by non-governmental organizations as well as government agencies. In a democracy, the people came first before their government.<sup>59</sup>

Throughout the conflict, the Freedmen and sympathetic White people demanded greater stringent and more energetic measures than the government was prepared to take. They called for freedom before it was declared, a Freedmen's Bureau before it was established, a Civil Rights Act before it was passed, and impartial suffrage before it was finally secured by Federal legislation. In all these instances, public opinion forced the government to take action that it might otherwise have delayed or avoided altogether. The same is true concerning private religious and benevolent organizations acting on behalf of the Freedmen. In almost every instance, they were in advance of the government in their plans and methods, and many of them accomplished more than the government agencies established for the same purpose.

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid, 13.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid, 13.

The voluntary activities of a portion of the people in benevolent, philanthropic, and Christian efforts have always preceded, prepared for, and aided in the implementation of governmental action that has largely contributed to the present condition and well-founded expectations of African Americans. These private agencies and individuals have not only helped to make emancipation a reality but have also done much to make it a blessing. It would be difficult to overstate the value of their work in this respect. They labored when none, but slaves were interested in the cause of freedom; they persevered when even many friends of the slave despaired of his ever becoming a free and useful man. They gave their time, their labor, and their money when even the government was loth to make any great sacrifices for the emancipated slave. They went into the South with the Gospel of Christ and with helpful agencies of every kind when none, but enemies of the Freedmen were found there.<sup>60</sup>

The war led to a wave of initiatives aimed at helping and educating freed slaves. One of the first major public movements came in February 1862, before President Lincoln issued his Emancipation Proclamation when Generals Fremont and Hunter emancipated slaves in their territories (though these orders were later rescinded). At this point, national policy on slavery had not yet been established. General T. W. Sherman, who played a crucial role in the defeat of the Confederacy, and Commodore Dupont captured the forts at Port Royal's entrance and took possession of the Sea Islands, only to be surrounded by a crowd of uneducated, starving black people.<sup>61</sup> Horace S. Paine Chase, who was Secretary of the Treasury at the time, found out that

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid, 14.

<sup>61</sup> During the Mexican American War, DuPont captured San Diego. He played a critical role in making the Union blockade of Confederates effective but was blamed for the failed attack on Charleston in 1863. When communication was cut off with Washington at the start of the Civil War, Du Pont took the initiative and sent a fleet to protect Union troops landing at Annapolis, Maryland. In June 1861 he became president of a board in Washington formed to develop a plan of action against the Confederacy. See James M. Merrill's *Du Pont, the Making of an Admiral: A Biography of Samuel Francis Du Pont*. Dodd, Mead, and Company, 1986.

there was a lot of cotton on the islands and chose an Army officer to go there as an agent of his department so they could gather it. The report that the agent prepared showed that it was necessary to not only collect the un-gathered cotton but also to provide for the welfare of the Freedmen laborers and the culture of the land. Congress had not made any provisions for this beforehand.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> American Freedman's Union Commission, and African American Pamphlet Collection. The results of emancipation in the United States of America. (New York City etc. American Freedman's Union Commission, 1867), 18.

## **Freedmen's Bureau**

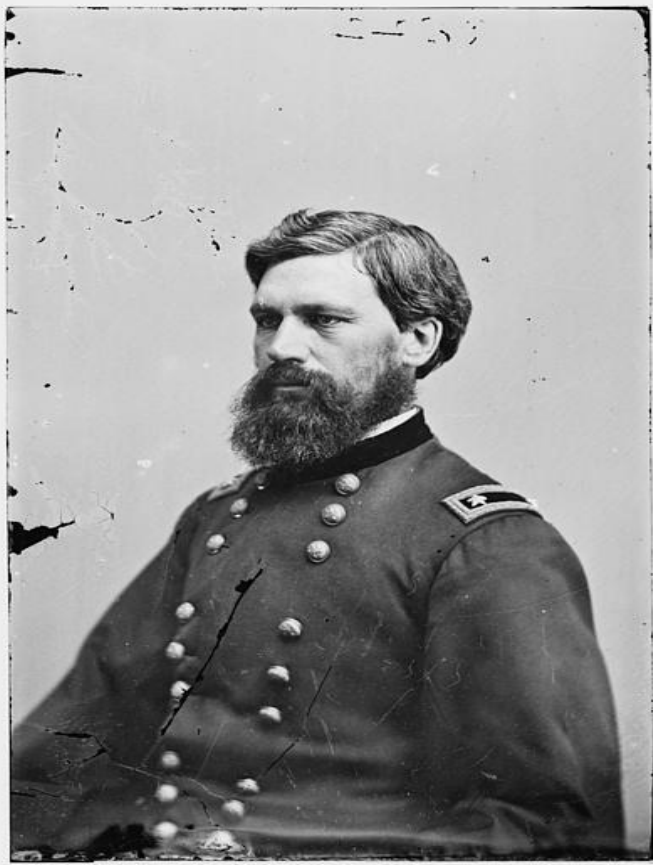
Government aid for freed slaves was initially provided by the Treasury Department, but as the War Department was better equipped to offer protection and assistance, responsibility later shifted. Even before emancipation was finalized, supporters of freed slaves realized that special governmental support would be required to protect their rights and address their needs. A bill establishing a Freedmen's Bureau, an organization specifically designed to help the formerly enslaved was proposed early on in this process.

The bill initially failed because of the prejudice that still existed, but it was later passed by the House of Representatives after being broadened to include poor white refugees who had fled from Southern persecution because of their union sentiments. The Senate and President then approved the bill. It was safe to say that the creation of the Freedmen's Bureau, which followed long after the organization of the Freedmen's Associations, was largely due, indirectly, to their influence in awakening a public interest on behalf of the Freedmen, and directly to their labors with the public authorities in Washington. This bill created a "Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen and Abandoned Lands" under the War Department. The President appointed a commissioner to manage the Bureau, with up to ten Assistant Commissioners appointed for States declared to be in insurrection.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid, 19.





General Oliver Otis Howard (pictured between 1855 and 1865)  
Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

After emancipation, most people in the South refused to admit that any government intervention was necessary to help Freedmen as they transitioned from slavery to freedom. However, there was a clear need for some sort of agency to provide guidance and supervision during this difficult transition period. Many Freedmen were left without the basic necessities of life after being liberated. They came to cities in large numbers, hoping to enjoy their new-found freedom, only to realize they had no way to support themselves. The labor system in the South was just changed drastically, and many Southerners were unsure if a free system relying on Freedmen labor would work. Slavery had been holding up the social order, and now there was the difficulty inherent in two groups of people who were forced to live together in an entirely new way caused great concern. By 1865, the Freedmen's social status had not yet been

determined. Some Southerners were optimistic for a system to emerge that, while different from slavery, would secure ex-slave owners a labor force and keep the Freedmen beneath them socially.<sup>64</sup>

Many questions remained unanswered, such as whether the Freedmen would become independent farmers or continue to work in gangs. Additionally, it was unclear if they would be allowed to testify in court and receive public education. These were important concerns that General Oliver Otis Howard needed to address under the authority granted by Congress when they created the Bureau. The Bureau's primary responsibilities included providing emergency resources like food and clothing for the destitute, administering control of abandoned lands in the South, and handling all subjects related to refugees and the Freedmen. The Bureau was responsible for the relief, land matters, and working conditions of Freedmen. It also supervised the negotiation of labor contracts and had control over judicial matters involving Freedmen. The bureau would also facilitate Freedmen education through cooperation with Northern philanthropic societies. Although this view of Southern white people may be inaccurate, the abolitionist-Radical group in the North still believed that Southern whites planned to keep slavery going in some way. After fighting for four years to save the Union and free the slaves, only to see some of that success undone by those they blamed for causing the crisis in the first place was too much to accept.<sup>65</sup>

Many believed that since the federal government took on the job of freeing slaves, they now had the responsibility to ensure slavery was truly over and provide support to Freedmen

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<sup>64</sup> Carpenter, John A. *Sword and Olive Branch: Oliver Otis Howard*. (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1964), 87.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid*, 89.

during this difficult time. The Bureau's establishment was fought for by abolitionists who believed that the government had a duty to help former slaves adjust to their newfound freedom. Since its conception, the Freedmen's Bureau has been integral in furthering Reconstruction efforts across America. By the 1870s, support for the cause had decreased significantly in Congress and throughout the Northern states. The Freedmen, after that point, were left to fend for themselves most of the time. The Bureau's existence was short-lived, but it served an essential purpose in America's history during Reconstruction and for African Americans.<sup>66</sup>

In March 1865, the bill was passed, and General O. O. Howard took over duties as Commissioner. According to the terms of creation, the Freedmen's Bureau was originally established to only be active for one year after the war's expiration. After a while, by order of a special act, the Bureau's authority was prolonged and strengthened. General O.O. Howard was often credited with running the Bureau smoothly and efficiently. Before the Bureau's establishment, the Freedmen received aid from the department commanders, treasury agents, and other government officials.<sup>67</sup> There was no organization to their methods. Many people had been gathered in camps and barracks where they were forced to do nothing, which caused much suffering. Also, the labor that had been given voluntarily to help establish schools had gone to waste because no one in charge could direct it properly.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid, 90.

<sup>67</sup> American Freedman's Union Commission, and African American Pamphlet Collection. The results of emancipation in the United States of America. (New York City etc. American Freedman's Union Commission, 1867), 19.

<sup>68</sup> There are three men with the surname Howard that will be discussed. Dr. Howard oversaw medical care the of the Freedmen and he also assisted with the logistical component of the Freedmen's Village. General Charles Howard supervised the Freedmen's Village and was an active newspaper editor and publisher. He also served as a Union Army officer during the Civil War. His older brother, Oliver Otis Howard, was also a Union general. See Letter, M. Clark. to Gen. C.H. Howard, May 31, 1866. National Archives RG 92: M1055, roll #6, Records of the Assistant Commissioner for the District of Columbia, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen and Abandoned Lands, 1865-1869, Letters Received, May-Oct. 1866. General Oliver Otis Howard was marked as the "Christian general" because he always tried to let his evangelical piety guide his policy decisions. In mid-1865, he was given control of the

The Freedmen's Bureau was created with the intent of putting all this work under one head and making sure it was carried out effectively. The Bureau's main goal was to provide educational opportunities, medical assistance, and job training to the Freedmen so that they can become productive citizens. It also helped them find places to live and work and ensured they got fair treatment from their employers. The Bureau had been remarkably successful in its work, and it helped many freed slaves to start new lives.

On May 19, 1865, General O. O. Howard issued his first order defining the Bureau's general approach. General O. O. Howard was often referred to as the "Christian General" at the end of the Civil War. General O. O. Howard earned this nickname during the war because of his intense religious devotion with which he carried himself daily. General O. O. Howard attended the prestigious West Point Military Academy and graduated from the program in 1854.<sup>69</sup> He appointed his assistant commissioners right away and began the work assigned to him. By the lack of any government spending for his Bureau, by Southern resistance to any measures aimed at elevating the freed people, and by widespread Northern skepticism about their capacity for improvement, he was greatly hampered in this endeavor. Through the Bureau, in conjunction with the voluntary organizations, labor had been reorganized, justice was being attained, systems of education were established and enforced, the transition period from slavery to freedom had

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Freedmen's Bureau, with the intent of helping the formerly enslaved transition into Southern society and politics during Reconstruction. Howard formulated a labor policy, instituting a system in which freed people would work on former plantation land under remuneration schedules set by the Bureau. The terms of such work were to be negotiated by the Bureau with white landowners. Howard's Bureau was chiefly in charge of legal affairs for Freedmen. He continuously tried to shield freed blacks from dangerous conditions, but constantly struggled because he had inadequate power. This inability was largely due to President Andrew Johnson's White House policies. See David Thomson's, "Oliver Otis Howard: Reassessing the Legacy of the "Christian General"." *American Nineteenth Century History* 10, no. 3 (2009).

<sup>69</sup>David Thomson, "Oliver Otis Howard: Reassessing the Legacy of the "Christian General"." *American Nineteenth Century History* 10, no. 3 (2009), 273.

been safely completed, free Black people had emerged from their state of bondage and were closer than they ever been to realizing American citizenship.<sup>70</sup> During General O. O. Howard's tenure as the head of the Freedmen's Bureau, he often received a lot of criticism from Southern white citizens and Southern sympathizers. President Johnson became a chief antagonist of General O. O. Howard and the Freedmen's Bureau. On May 5, 1874, he was brought up on charges of fraud and misappropriation of Freedmen's Bureau's funds. During the special court inquiry of the charges against General O.O. Howard, it was discovered that the charges were without merit. The general was cleared and vindicated of any wrongdoing.<sup>71</sup>

This study will now describe the methods used by the War Department and the Freedmen's Bureau to improve the condition of the freed people, which can be classified into four categories: providing for their basic needs, promoting justice, reorganizing labor, and giving them access to education.

### **Special Relief**

The transition period for the liberated persons was extremely difficult. Many, without a doubt, perished from exposure and starvation. In addition to the other reasons, this has certainly caused a decrease in the population of African Americans in the South. With their old labor systems broken, their former dependence on their masters gone, and no system of free labor yet established and with currency destroyed, crops swept away by war, and few tools or resources

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<sup>70</sup> American Freedman's Union Commission, and African American Pamphlet Collection. The results of emancipation in the United States of America. (New York City etc. American Freedman's Union Commission, 1867), 20.

<sup>71</sup> George W. Dyer, and Oliver Otis Howard. *The Special Court of Inquiry Upon Charges Against Brigadier General O.O. Howard Argument for General Howard by George W. Dyer of Washington D.C., of Counsel, May 5, 1874.* (Washington, D.C: Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1874), 12.

remaining, their distress was made worse by droughts that occurred after the war in many Southern states.

The able-bodied men were gathered in camps, barracks, and colonies, many of them enlisting in the Union Army or being carried away by their masters further south, unable to return and seek out their abandoned families even if they made the fatal mistake of attempting to do so against their master's will. They were absolutely and necessarily reliant on the public for the means of bare existence. Many of the Freedmen were kept in bondage after the war and emancipation because their masters kidnaped them and fled deeper into the rural South to evade the Union forces who would enforce the Emancipation Proclamation.

The women and children, with no one to protect or provide for them, were left to fend for themselves as best they could. They gathered up what little they could find and went begging from door to door and camp to camp. They eked out a miserable existence in the fields and woods, living on roots, berries, and any scraps of food they could find. Many of them perished from cold, hunger, and exposure to the elements. The first duty of the Bureau, then, was to provide for the immediate needs of these destitute people. This was done in two ways: by establishing colonies on abandoned farms, and by building camps and barracks to house the people until they could be placed in more permanent homes. In the colonies, the people were given a plot of land to farm, with seeds, tools, and other supplies furnished by the government. They were also given food and clothing until their crops could be harvested. In some cases, they were given livestock as well.

The colonies were intended to be self-sufficient, with the residents able to support themselves and their families without assistance from the government. Furthermore, there were no available resources to meet their needs. The people in the South lacked both the money and

desire to take care of them even if they had been disposed to do so. It was a commonly held belief, maybe not an unreasonable one, that since it was the North that freed them from slavery, it should also be the responsibility of the North to provide for their continued care. As already noted earlier, congress failed to set aside any funds specifically for this purpose.



General Charles Henry Howard on horseback at the Army of the Potomac headquarters. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

General Charles Henry Howard was the younger brother of General Oliver Otis Howard. Like his older brother, General C. H. Howard was also a West Point graduate.<sup>72</sup> Towards the end of the Civil War, General C. H. Howard was in command of the 128<sup>th</sup> United States Colored Troops (USCT).<sup>73</sup> General C. H. Howard worked for the Freedmen's Bureau and he oversaw the

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<sup>72</sup> Charles H. Howard and David Ker Thomson. *We Are in His Hands Whether We Live or Die the Letters of Brevet Brigadier General Charles Henry Howard*. (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2013), xviii.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid*, xix.

activities of the Freedmen's Village.<sup>74</sup> General C. H. Howard was entirely responsible for being properly supplied with clothing, food, and fuel. He issued a standing order that allowed him to requisition any supplies which were surplus or unusable by the troops. In addition, he could request emergency rations through the Commissary Department in cases of pressing need. However, he needed to use discretion when distributing these limited resources.<sup>75</sup> The last thing he wanted to do was encourage people to become permanently idle and destitute as this was a public concern.<sup>76</sup> He considered this risk, and it was guarded against from the start. In his first order, he stressed the importance of shutting down relief operations as rapidly as possible after the war ended and people returned to work, ensuring that no one not needy and destitute was assisted.

The camps and colonies established by the Bureau were never intended to be permanent solutions. They were stopgap measures, designed to meet the immediate needs of the people until they could be placed in more permanent homes. In many cases, this was accomplished by reuniting families that had been separated during the war. In others, it was done by finding employment for able-bodied men and women and placing them in homes with families who were willing to take them in. The goal was always to get the people back on their feet and self-sufficient as quickly as possible. The Freedmen's Bureau was a vital part of the post-war Reconstruction effort, aiding hundreds of thousands of Freedmen as they adjust to their new

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<sup>74</sup> Letter, M. Clark. to Gen. C.H. Howard, May 31, 1866. National Archives RG 92: M1055, Roll #6, Records of the Assistant Commissioner for the District of Columbia, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen and Abandoned Lands, 1865-1869, Letters Received, May-Oct. 1866, 14100-2419.

<sup>75</sup> American Freedman's Union Commission, and African American Pamphlet Collection. The results of emancipation in the United States of America. (New York City etc. American Freedman's Union Commission, 1867), 21.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid*, 21.



lives. Without the help of the Bureau, many of them would have perished from hunger and exposure.

General C. H. Howard also emphasized that every effort must be made to ensure that the Freedmen were self-supporting. Rows of dark barracks were built near each site for the temporary shelter of liberated slaves; however, as soon as possible, the colonies formed in this manner were disbanded, and individuals were encouraged to form individual contracts for labor on neighboring plantations. Farms were cultivated to assist with expenses in connection with the colonies.

Hospitals were built at various times for the ill, many of whom there were. The war disrupted family relationships and resulted in an enormous number of children being born into an orphanage. Orphanages under the Bureau's authority, however, were supported in part or whole by Northern voluntary groups.<sup>77</sup>

Before the war, in most States, there were no provisions for the caretaking of “colored” people in asylums. And none of these provisions could cater to the great increase in demand brought about by the war. Many of the Freedmen's farms and colonies were shut down and food rations decreased considerably. There were even times when it was completely stopped, though later authorities found that they had to revive it partially in many places.<sup>78</sup>

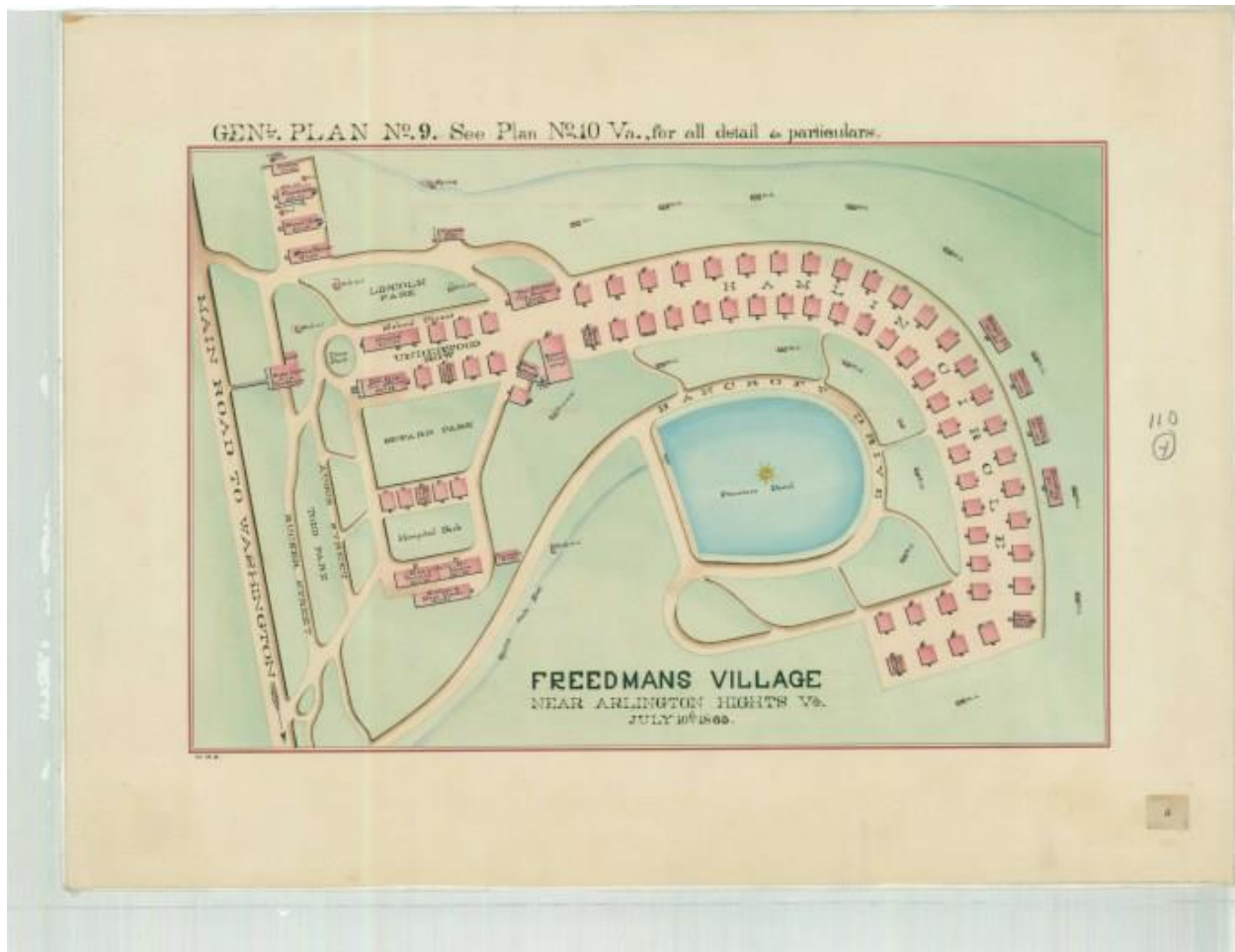
The entire system was one big experiment, with many people both for and against it. Some thought that the Freedmen's Bureau was doing a lot of good, and then others thought that it was not doing enough. Some critics thought that the whole idea of the government taking care of

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid, 22.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid, 22.

freed slaves was a bad idea. What is certain, however, is that without it, many freed slaves would have perished. It was an essential part of the Reconstruction effort and helped to ensure that the Freedmen were able to make the transition to their new lives.



*Freedman's Village near Arlington, Heights Virginia, July 10, 1865. RG 92, Post and Reservation Maps, Map 110-A-5. NAID 305826. Courtesy of The National Archives.*

### **Logistics of the Village**

The illustration above depicts the Freeman's Village, which was created during the Civil War on Confederate General Robert E. Lee's estate. The Village served as a camp for emancipated slaves, and it was located half a mile from Arlington House (which is now situated in Arlington National Cemetery). While the initial concept was to provide recently freed people with a place to stay while they transition and gain the necessary skills for work and independence, many residents stayed on because they felt at home. The community gradually supported several thousand Freedmen.

In 1863, Lieutenant Colonel Elias M. Greene established a camp at Arlington for self-emancipated slaves who fled during the Civil War.<sup>79</sup> All who arrived were given contented clothing, rations, and the best accommodation that could have been provided by the camp. While men and women worked on-site businesses or on government farms, children went to school. Lastly, those who were too old or sick for labor were given housing at the camp hospital. The Freedmen's Village was one of many communities that the Bureau created across the South as a haven for emancipated slaves. These communities provided the Freedmen with a place to live and work as they transitioned from slavery to freedom. The Freedmen's Bureau was responsible for operating the Village, which provided Freedmen with food, clothing, employment opportunities, and other necessities. In addition to housing, the Village also gave residents access to education and medical care.<sup>80</sup>

On August 15, 1864, General Montgomery C. Meigs ordered a special inspection of the Freedmen's Village and the government farms located in the Village.<sup>81</sup> Maj. E. H. Ludington provided a report regarding the operation and conditions of the Village after the inspection.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> In 1863, Lieutenant Colonel Elias M. Greene created a community for some of the many Freedmen who managed to escape slavery during the Civil War. As Chief quartermaster of the military department of Washington, D.C., Greene established this haven for those in need. See "Regulations for the Government of Freedman's Village, Greene Heights, Arlington, Va.," *Remaking Virginia: Transformation Through Emancipation*.

<sup>80</sup> Elias M. Greene, "Regulations for the Government of Freedman's Village, Greene Heights, Arlington, Va.," *Remaking Virginia: Transformation Through Emancipation*.

<sup>81</sup> General Meigs was also a key figure in the founding of the Arlington National Cemetery. He was a career United States Army officer and civil engineer, he served as the Quartermaster General of the U.S. Army during and after the war. Meigs opposed secession and spoke out in favor of the Union; he was considered an excellent Quartermaster General, both practically and ethically. Secretary of State William H. Seward thought Meigs contributed importantly to the Union's eventual victory. Meigs was one of the masterminds behind Arlington National Cemetery; he chose its location on Robert E. Lee's family estate, Arlington House, as a way to get revenge on Lee for siding with the Confederacy. On December 27, 1891, Meigs contracted a cold. Shortly thereafter, it developed into pneumonia. On January 2, 1892, at 5:00 pm., Meigs passed away at home surrounded by his loved ones. He was buried with full military honors at Arlington National Cemetery. See Byron Farwell's *The Encyclopedia of Nineteenth-Century Land Warfare*. New York: Norton, 2001.

<sup>82</sup> Maj. E. H. Ludington also served in the Spanish-American War, he started his career as a volunteer during the Civil War and was eventually commissioned to the Army in 1862. Ludington enlisted in the army during

Many destitute Freedmen coming into Washington led to the establishment, upon the Arlington estate, of Freedmen's Village for their reception in the summer of 1863. Its organization and management were placed in the hands of Lt. Greene, Chief Quartermaster of the Department. As a provision for its support, it was ordered that five dollars per month be deducted from the pay of each Freedmen employed by the Union army or any department within the government. From the Freedmen's Fund that accrued, a village was built, affording adequate homes for two thousand persons. An ample supply of water was furnished from a reservoir, through pipes laid in all the streets, stoves and cooking utensils were provided for all families, a home for the infirm was established, and a school for children and adults was opened by the American Tract Society.<sup>83</sup> The American Tract Society was an organization whose primary function was the publication and dissemination of Christian literature. The emancipation of slavery and the overall status and education of the formerly enslaved became one of the organization's core functions. The American Tract Society provided the Freedmen with literature such as the Freedmen's Reader and Speller, which were distributed through various Sabbath Schools. The mere promise of receiving books from the American Tract Society caused increased attendance at church and Sabbath Schools.<sup>84</sup>

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the American Civil War in 1862 and was assigned as an assistant quartermaster of volunteers with the rank of captain. He was then placed as quartermaster of the 2nd Division, II Corps. He was assigned to the Army of the Potomac and fought in the battles of Fredericksburg, Chancellorsville, and Gettysburg. In the fall of 1863, he became quartermaster for II Corps' Cavalry Division and participated in both the Battle of Wilderness and the Siege of Petersburg. Ludington was appointed quartermaster of the 1st Division, II Corps in July 1864 and he held onto this post until 1865 when the war finally ended. See "Brigadier General Marshall I. Ludington, 21st Quartermaster School Commandant, February 1898 – April 1903". Previous Quartermaster Commandants. Ft. Lee, VA: U.S. Army Quartermaster Corps.

<sup>83</sup> Freedman's Village and Reconstruction Collections Records, 1857-1996, RG 103 Box 2, Folder (18) "Copies and Transcripts from the Freedom and Southern Society Project, 1864."

<sup>84</sup> Fifty Third Annual Report of the American Tract Society. (Boston: Cornhill, 1867), 6.

Every provision was made for the comfort of the Freedmen. No special effort was made to economize because the War Department used the Freedmen's money for the benefit of the Freedmen and despite the liberal expenditure needed to establish the Village, the fund still accumulated. Items that were not provided by the Quartermaster's department were purchased out of the Freedmen's fund. All rations were regularly issued by the Subsistence Department and medicine and medical attention were supplied by the Medical Department. It was assumed that the great demand for labor throughout the country would secure employment for the Freedmen immediately after their reception and that thus the Village would prove merely, a temporary stop on their journey from slavery to freedom. Lt. Green authorized the Freedmen to cultivate the abandoned farms of Confederate owners. The ideology was that through the ample supply of Freedmen's labor at minimal wages, the crops would yield profitable returns. Accordingly, five farms, comprising 1270 acres, were fenced, and cultivated in the season of 1863, and fully cultivated in 1864.<sup>85</sup>

### **Condition of the Village**

At the time of initial inspection, the Village population consisted of 411 Men, 658 women, and 1097 children, making a total of 2166 Freedmen. It was reported that they had comfortable houses, a bare sufficiency of clothing, plenty of food, and appeared healthy. The Village was well-located and kept clean. The schoolhouse was built by the American Tract Society which supplied teachers and directed the school. It was reported that four hundred children were in attendance, their improvement was evident, and pleasure was taken in pronouncing the school's excellence. At the House for the Infirm were several decrepit and disabled persons, very comfortably cared for. The Freedmen kept themselves and their houses

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<sup>85</sup> Freedman's Village and Reconstruction Collections Records, 1857-1996, RG 103 Box 2, Folder (18) "Copies and Transcripts from the Freedom and Southern Society Project, 1864."

clean. The Village had a Tailor Shop, where several women were employed in manufacturing clothing. They were paid fair wages and the clothing was sold at cost. This practice allowed the Freedmen to benefit from their labor, much like the provision that mandatorily deducted five dollars from the pay of Freedmen employed by the government. This practice established a fund for the benefit of the Freedmen, which was later used to establish the Village.<sup>86</sup>

Necessary clothing was provided to dependent Freedmen or the non-working population of the Village. The Freedmen who had jobs had a portion of their pay withheld monthly to pay for the needs of dependent Freedmen. Children were each allowed one-half of a ration. The adults received one full ration. These rations were issued only once per day. The entire Village was administrated by the Government which procured rations, transportation, hospital expenses, and payment of officers and guards. It was an expenditure upon the Freedmen's fund for clothing, expenses of building, and repairs made throughout the Village. The Freedmen's fund was used to pay the salaries of White employees.<sup>87</sup>

### **Mason's Island**

The Village was not sufficient to accommodate the rapidly increasing numbers of Freedmen, so the Mason's Island barracks were assigned to Lt. Greene to accommodate that increasing population. The island housed 149 Men, 418 women, and 615 children, making a total of 1182 persons. Upon Maj. E. H. Ludington's initial visit to Mason's Island, he noted that he found that disorder reigned supreme. The people were tumbled into barracks without classification, and this, too in face of the theory that only those kept on the Island were candidates to go out to service in the Union Army. The infirm, disabled, sick, and children on the island were in substantial numbers. Men and women were housed in the same barracks and slept

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

on the floor indiscriminately. The Freedmen there complained mostly about the lack of clothing and not being paid for their labor. Maj. E. H. Ludington noted that much of the Freedmen's time was spent in idleness; they were not well situated as those in the Village. Their barracks were crowded, and they were in grave need of a hospital to address their medical needs. Lt. Greene refused to provide them transportation to visit their friends in the Village and other areas.<sup>88</sup> After Ludington's initial visit, the Friends Society of Philadelphia was in the planning stages of establishing a school on the Island and teachers were already on the Island to educate the Freedmen population.<sup>89</sup>

### **Farms**

At the time of inspection, five Government Farms comprising 1270 acres were under cultivation and were situated in the vicinity of Arlington and the Village. The proceeds of the sale of all crops were turned over to the Quartermasters Department. The land was the abandoned property of Confederate owners and was of poor soil, for the most part. It was without fencing and the land had been overgrown with brush. It was necessary to clear and fence the land at considerable expense. The Quartermasters Department built two buildings, one was for the residence of the Superintendent and the other was a barn. The employees built adequate log huts at a very slight expense for themselves. With the exception of the Superintendent, many of the employees were Freedmen, who received wages ranging from \$2.00 to \$10.00 per month and one ration per day.<sup>90</sup>

On January 9, 1864, Col Green informed General Meigs that the American Tract Society without charge has erected a schoolhouse and chapel at Freedmen's Village on the Arlington

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<sup>88</sup> This study thought their two well-founded complaints were those about the barracks and the hospital were warranted.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.



Estate and a home for the aged and infirm. The school was operated as a complement to the workshop. Only the most intelligent boys were selected for employment in the workshops where they would be enabled to acquire knowledge of carpentry work, blacksmithing, wheelwrighting, harness making, and other mechanical occupations. Women and girls were profitably employed under competent instructors in the manufacture of clothing and at the same time learning the use of the needle and sewing machine. There was a hospital for the sick. The aged and infirm were in the Home provided for them and all were properly taken care of.<sup>91</sup> Many of the Freedmen lived in Sibley tents which were meant to serve as temporary shelters until quarters were erected for them.



Sibley tent photo was taken during the Civil War 1861-1865  
courtesy of the Library of Congress

The text below was printed on a broadside that described the government regulations for Freedmen's Village at Greene Heights, Arlington House plantation grounds. The Superintendent of Freedmen had charge of Freedmen's Village and contrabands' interests on various

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<sup>91</sup> Freedman's Village and Reconstruction Collections Records, 1857-1996, RG 103 Box 1, Folder (1)  
"Freedman's Village: Arlington, Virginia, 1863-1900, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 1992."

Government farms under the direction of Lt. Col. Elias M. Greene, Chief Quartermaster Department of Washington. As soon as the ex-slaves reached camp, they needed to be cleaned and clothed in serviceable clothing. They were also given food rations and what quarters were available. After careful selection, the Superintendent of Freedmen assigned the most intelligent young adults to work in the available workshops. He then sent able-bodied field hands to work on government farms under another superintendent. The children were sent to school while those who were sick went to hospitals and nursing homes for care. Those who were able-bodied, and could labor received clothing that would be deducted from their future earnings.

The Superintendent of Freedmen compiled a monthly report for the Chief Quartermaster that included information such as the names of all Freedmen arriving and departing from camps, their age, sex, former place of residence, condition on arrival, intended destination(s) upon leaving the village or farm, date of departure and reasons for doing so and details regarding any deaths such as ages, cause, and disease. The Freedmen were subjected to an inspection by the Quartermaster General and his staff. The Superintendent was informed of all complaints, which were placed on file for the Chief Quartermaster's review. The Superintendent kept individual accounts for every Freedmen who worked on Government farms or in the workshops. They were debited for whatever they received clothes, rations, quarters, and fuel. They were credited for the number of days of labor they worked each month. A summary statement was reported to the Chief Quartermaster monthly with any suggestions.<sup>92</sup>

The Superintendent made weekly reports of all stores, tools, materials, and other property received, issued, and expended under his direction. These reports were delivered on printed

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

forms that the Chief Quartermaster provided. If any supplies were running low (likely to become exhausted in fifteen days or less), the Superintendent highlighted this by drawing a red circle around it. Every week, the Superintendent of government farms sent a report to the Chief Quartermaster detailing how much time each employee worked. The employees were categorized as white or “colored,” and if they were “colored,” further described as man, woman, or child. The report also noted what the employees did during their shift: farming or other tasks. The Superintendent of Government Farms instructed the farmers in charge of each farm to follow his instructions and report to him. The hospital was run by the surgeon or surgeons appointed to that duty by the Medical Director of the Department of Washington. These surgeons were responsible for creating regulations for how the hospital should be run.

The Superintendent of Freedmen always had additional supplies on hand, outside of what the Medical Department provided, that were necessary for the care and comfort of those in hospitals or at home, as well as for funerals. They would report back about said needed supplies and take measures to make sure they would not run out. The farmer in charge oversaw the laborers on each farm, while still under the jurisdiction of the Superintendent of Government farms. Every able-bodied man and woman had to work every day, either on farms or in one of the many mechanical shops. All people who said they could not work because of a disability had to give the Superintendent a written statement from the Surgeon in Charge documenting such disability. During the winter months, from 7 a.m. to 12 p.m., and 1 to 5 p.m., farm laborers worked; in summer, they worked from 7 a.m. to 12 p.m., and 1 to 6 p.m."<sup>93</sup> If any physically able men or women refused to work, the overseers of labor would promptly report their cases to the

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

Superintendent. The Superintendent was then responsible for taking measures to ensure that these individuals obeyed the regulations.

The American Tract Society supervised the educational and religious interests of the Village, including their schools which were run by professionals. These teachers instructed children under 14 during daylight hours; school started at 10 a.m., with a lunch break from 12 noon until 1 p.m., and classes ended at 4 p.m. The Village Ordinance stated that no child under fourteen years old shall be kept out of school in the winter unless they were ill. The local evening school was open to all adults, regardless of whether they worked on farms or in shops. To attend the day school, each boy over 16 and girl over 14 needed a permit from the Superintendent. The Supervisor was not allowed to give out permits if the person's services were still required for labor.

It was unlawful for any person, other than the Superintendent of Freedmen and his assistants, to enter that school without a pass from him. It was also unlawful for any minor who can benefit from school education to be absent from it without written authorization from the Superintendent of Freeman and if a youngster were discovered out of school during school hours without such authorization, the guard would apprehend and transport the offender to school. The Superintendent of Freedmen included a report on the schools' status, number of pupils accepted and dismissed during the month, average attendance, and such other information as he judged to be required to communicate with the Chief Quartermaster in his monthly report. The police routinely patrolled the camps and Village, under the direction of the Superintendent of

Freedmen. The Superintendent was required to submit inspection reports to the Chief Quartermaster, with his regular monthly report.<sup>94</sup>

Additionally, residents could not leave the Village without a pass, and camp officials used their control over necessities to promote regular and industrious labor. Those who did not work might not receive food, clothing, or shelter, while those who paid house rent and other taxes received necessities. But the irregular pay schedules of military contractors and the Army often made meeting these basic financial obligations a demoralizing challenge.<sup>95</sup> Regarding concerns about peddlers and pilfering on December 3, 1864, Capt. J. M. Brown, the Assistant Quartermaster instructed the guards to arrest any peddlers at Freedmen's Village who sold or bought any rags or old clothing from the contrabands at the Freedmen's Village. The guards were also instructed to be diligent in their attempts of preventing Freedmen from leaving the camp and carrying off government property such as stoves, pipes, bed mattresses, and bedsteads without a written permit from the Superintendent.<sup>96</sup>

All public buildings and property must be kept tidy and undamaged; no one was allowed to damage the walks, fencing, or plants. Anyone responsible for the accumulation of filth near the camps would be dismissed immediately, according to the Surgeon in Charge. Proper precautions had already been taken to remove filth from the vicinity of the camps, and any accumulation would endanger the health of those staying there. Freedmen who left the Village of their own accord to work elsewhere were not allowed to return unless they could provide

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Rick Beard, "Fifty houses of freedom: though the Freedman's 'Village at Arlington was founded in good faith, it remained a troubled enterprise." *Civil War Times*, April 2016, (Vol. 55, Issue 2), 48.

<sup>96</sup> Freedman's Village and Reconstruction Collections Records, 1857-1996, RG 103 Box 2, Folder (18) "Copies and Transcripts from the Freedom and Southern Society Project, 1864."

evidence to the Superintendent that their employer had been cruel or unfair to them, or that they had been defrauded of their earnings.

Punishments were divided into three categories. In the case of a minor infraction, such as tardiness or reluctance to work or unkept premises or person, the transgressor would lose his or her sugar rations for five days and be denied access to leave the camp for five days. A commission consisting of the Superintendent, the Captain commanding the guard detachment, the Superintendent of Educational and Religious interests, and the Surgeon in Charge would try a person guilty of drunkenness, theft, or any other gross offense. They would then submit their sentence which could be deprivation of privileges, fine, or imprisonment in the guardhouse to the Chief Quartermaster for approval. No Freedmen of the camp would be subjected to brutality or violence, and no punishment will be administered except as provided for by ordinance or regulation.<sup>97</sup>

The regulations were posted in prominent locations throughout the Village, government Farms, and Camps, and no one who was subjected to these regulations was allowed to claim ignorance as an excuse for misbehavior. All visitors to the Village must be treated with courtesy and attention. Villagers had to make it a priority to be hospitable to newcomers and make them feel comfortable and welcomed. Visitors should feel like they were valued members of the community and leave the Village with positive impressions of all residents.

### **Henry Watson's Appeal**

Before more generally addressing the daily lives of the Freedmen, this study will briefly examine the specific life of a fugitive slave named Henry Watson. Watson had been a slave for

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

twenty-six years. He was born thirteen miles from Fredericksburg, Virginia, in 1813. Watson's story will set the context for the Freedmen. His story will provide an introductory understanding of the Freedmen's status before being emancipated. Watson's story also illustrates the physical, mental, and emotional hardships that were endured by slaves. Watson was frequently beaten and received little food or clothing from his enslaver. Despite the harsh conditions, Watson was content because he knew no other life. Watson's story provides us with an understanding of the physical, mental, and emotional hardships that were endured by slaves. It also serves as a reminder of the courage it took for the enslaved to escape from their captors. The Freedmen's Village residents were faced with many of the same challenges as Watson, but they also had to grapple with the challenge of starting their lives anew after years of slavery.<sup>98</sup>

In his autobiography, he described the harshness of slavery and his escape from it. Watson described two pairs of punishment stocks, the instrument of torture for slaves. He wrote about the stocks on farms being different from those used in cities because they were made differently. They consisted of two rough logs, usually around twelve feet long, one of which was placed on the ground and notches cut into it to fit the neck and arms; the second log with corresponding notches installed upon the victim to keep him in his place. For crimes such as running away or stealing, the punishment was being locked in iron stocks. The stocks were secured by a large padlock at one end, and the other end was attached to a massive hinge. There were other methods of punishment, but stocks were reserved for extreme cases.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Henry Watson, *Narrative of Henry Watson, a Fugitive Slave*. (Boston: Bela Marsh, 25 Cornhill, 1849).

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid*, 15.

Watson was required to be present whenever the enslaved were whipped and had to apply salt to their bleeding backs after every hundred lashes to stop the bleeding. This process would then be repeated until the enslaved received four or five hundred lashes. Most of these cruelties were committed by the overseer who was a drunk and quarrelsome man that could not be pleased, and he took great sadistic joy in punishing the enslaved. Alongside the supervisor, there was a slave driver, one of the enslaved, named Harry. He had a wife and children, which he would have to lash mercilessly if they were slightly at fault; no mercy or leniency was allowed between husband and wife.

Watson described an event he witnessed that made a great impression on him. Jo was a slave on the farm who got into trouble with the overseer. The overseer threatened to punish Jo severely, so Jo ran away. When his master found out, he ordered the overseer to shoot Jo on sight. The overseer was just as merciless as Watson's master. So, he kept a watchful eye out for Jo. The second night, he saw him lurking not too far from his cabin, probably because he wanted to see and embrace his wife and children again or get something to eat. However, Jo never got the chance to relish those last moments of happiness. In an instant, he was shot dead by the incarnate fiend who always aimed true.<sup>100</sup>

Without the opportunity to utter a prayer, Jo was ushered into the presence of God. When his severe command was reported, the master gave orders that Jo's body should not be taken from the place where he had been shot dead. The master wanted Jo's body to serve as a warning to the other slaves and it remained there. The vultures were rioting and feasting on this man's remains, whose only crime was being black. Watson vividly recounted the harrowing sensation

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid,



that coursed through his veins as he gazed upon Jo's mutilated body. He and all the other enslaved were fully aware of their inability to intervene. Watson's heart grew heavy with sadness and tears welled up in his eyes. All of this transpired only several yards away from where Jo's wife and children watched, safely ensconced. Before his family, a husband and father were shot like a dog. His body was crimson with blood, and his sightless eyes glared at them. They were afraid to come near Jo to straighten his rigid limbs or close his sightless eyes out of concern for their safety.<sup>101</sup>

Watson described the slaves' daily routine, which was as follows: The first horn was blown half an hour before dawn, at which time the slaves got up and prepared for work. Another horn was sounded at daybreak, when they all set out in a hurry for the field with the driver close behind them, carrying their provisions for the day in buckets. The overseer would soon show up to give the driver his orders, who in turn would relay them to the slaves. They then went to work and labored until the time that the driver saw fit. At that point, when he cracked his whip a couple of times, they break for their meal. This consisted of unhealthy pork, cornbread that was not cooked using proper ingredients, and water brought to them by small children who were also enslaved laborers.<sup>102</sup>

The slaves began work as soon as Harry, the driver, had completed his breakfast and hung up their buckets on the fence or trees. They went to work without stopping until noon when they took their dinner in the same manner as their morning meal. Once dinner was finished, they returned to work once more, working till dark. Then they would return to their cabins and have a half hour to prepare for the following day's dinner. Shortly after that, a horn was blown signaling

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid, 16.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid, 16.

it was time for the enslaved to go to sleep. Those who were found outside of their cabins after the specified time would be put in the slave jail and kept there overnight. In the morning, they would generally receive twenty-five or thirty lashes for their misdemeanor.

So, it goes on for the week, culminating on Sunday, when the women carried their tubs and blankets down to the streams where they disassembled and clothed themselves in their blankets. They washed and dried their clothing again before putting it back on. The men handed over their shirts to the women to wash while they went out into the fields with their baskets or hoes. Sunday, which was set aside as a day of rest and prayer, was hardly any different from the other six days for enslaved laboring under Watson's "master." In fact, his enslaver believed that the enslaved were lazy if they chose not to work on Sundays and would whip them as punishment.<sup>103</sup>

Regarding Watson's escape, he met a white man who decided to help him. The man asked if he was a slave, to which he replied yes. The man encouraged Watson to run away. Watson responded with a laugh and said he did not know where to go. The man explained to Watson that the Northern states were much safer for runaway slaves and free people of color. Like most slaves, Watson was completely unaware of the situation in the North and the help that was available to freed slaves. The man arranged for Watson to board a ship bound for Boston the following day.<sup>104</sup>

Watson was aware of the hazardous consequences of fleeing. Jo, for example, was a runaway slave who was captured and shot dead for attempting to attain freedom. But he resolved to take risks to gain his freedom. After he boarded the ship, he arrived in Boston as a free man.

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid, 17.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid, 33.

Once there, other free people pointed Watson toward an abolitionist named William Lloyd Garrison. He helped Watson adjust to society and get adjusted to life as a free man.<sup>105</sup> Watson's experiences were typical of those enslaved who came to the Freedmen's Village seeking a new life or personal dignity, freedom, and opportunity.

### **Freedmen's Village at Arlington – Challenges and Impacts**

As previously detailed, Freedmen's Village was a village in Arlington, Virginia that was established in 1863 by the Freedmen's Bureau. The Village was home to Freedmen or former slaves who had been freed during the American Civil War. The Village was located on land that had been confiscated from General Robert E. Lee and his wife. The Village had its own school, church, and post office. The Village was self-sufficient, and the residents were able to farm and sell their produce. The Arlington Freedmen's Village was a place where people could go to rebuild their lives after the Civil War. It was a place where African Americans could develop a community and work toward economic stability.

The Village was not perfect, but it did aid those who needed it most. It is important to remember the impact that the Village had on the development of the African American community in Arlington, Virginia when looking at the history of the area. The Freedmen's Village was a place of hope for many newly freed slaves. It provided them with food, clothing, shelter, and education. Unfortunately, the Village was also beset with problems from the beginning. There were never enough resources to go around, and the living conditions were often cramped and unsanitary. In addition, there was tension between the Bureau officials who ran the

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid, 35.

Village and the Freedmen who lived there. Despite these challenges, the Freedmen's Village was a crucial step in helping the Freedmen adjust to their new lives as free citizens.

The Freedmen's Village was a self-sufficient community. The Village had a bakery, carpenter shop, blacksmith shop, shoe shop, and farm. The Village also had a sawmill and gristmill which were used to process lumber and grain. The mill was originally built for the use of the Union Army during the Civil War, but after the war ended, it was turned over to the Freedmen's Bureau to be used by the residents of the Freedmen's Village. The Freedmen who resided on the farm cultivated various crops such as wheat, oats, barley, rye, potatoes, sweet potatoes, vegetables, tobacco, and cotton. In addition to farming, the Freedmen also raised livestock such as cows, pigs, chickens, and turkeys.

Ultimately the Freedmen's Village was closed. The buildings of the Freedmen's Village, with their several acres of ground and water frontage on the Potomac, would have made an excellent site for an agricultural experiment station. The Freedmen had been accustomed to raising vegetables there for the market, and with a little assistance from the government in providing seeds, fertilizers, and implements, they could be induced to continue this work with excellent results. There was a small sawmill on the premises which could be utilized in preparing lumber for building purposes or fuel. The Village blacksmith shop was still standing and could easily be put in repair and made available for use.

In 1900, the Village was disbanded, and the residents were relocated to other parts of Virginia. However, the legacy of Freedmen's Village lives on in Arlington, Virginia. In the years following the Civil War, Freedmen faced many challenges as they sought to build new lives. One obstacle was a lack of affordable housing. In response, the Freedmen's Bureau established Freedmen's Village in 1863. The Village was situated on 1,100 acres of land in Arlington,

Virginia, and it provided Freedmen with access to housing, education, and medical care. More than 1,000 Freedmen eventually called the Village home. While Freedmen's Village did not last long, it played a significant role in the lives of Freedmen during Reconstruction. After the Village was closed, many of its residents moved to different areas within northern Virginia, Maryland, and Washington, D.C., where they helped to establish the city's first African American neighborhood, known as Shaw.

The Village was made up of square-shaped wooden homes, some one and a half stories. In the center of each double-family dwelling was a wall so that two families could live in one building as duplex houses. All the houses had the same number of windows and doors. The houses had two front doors placed side-by-side so each family could have a separate entrance and some privacy from the other families sharing the joined dwellings. The houses also had two back doors that were arranged in the same way as the front doors. The houses were positioned in a semicircle around the pond, facing each other. There was a wide dirt street that ran about one-quarter mile between them. Each house had four double-paned windows placed in the same areas on both sides of the house. The houses were numbered.<sup>106</sup>

The goal of the Freedmen's Village at Arlington was to be a self-sustaining community that would serve as a model for other ex-slave communities. To that end, the government insisted that all adults be employed in some way. Various private agencies that work with the Village, as well as the Federal Bureau of Labor, sought to find jobs for its residents outside of the facility. Some of the Freedmen had already been trained in various skills such as blacksmithing, tailoring,

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<sup>106</sup> Bethea-Sholly, Ruthie. "Freedman's Village at Arlington Nation Cemetery: Overcoming the Restrictions of a Second Bondage after the Emancipation Proclamation," 25.

and barbering. They were also given apprenticeship opportunities in other areas. The women in the Village worked as housekeepers, cooks, and maids.<sup>107</sup>

The residents of the Village were also employed by the military and the government. They were able to work on various government farms located outside of, and within the sprawling 1,100-acre Arlington estate. Residents at the government farms produced a variety of vegetables and grains, including potatoes, livestock feed, buckwheat, and corn. During the first year of living at Freedmen's Village at Arlington, the residents grew 191 tons of corn.<sup>108</sup>

The Freedmen's Bureau was key in helping ex-slaves locate and reunite with family members who had been sold during their captivity. The Bureau was also supportive of obtaining legal marriages for the residents of Freedmen's Village. Slaves desired the security of legal unions in which they could raise their children and be spared from separation. To settle a debt and maintain control slaves were frequently split up by their owners or marched to the auction blocks to be sold so owners might have ready money; many never saw their families again.<sup>109</sup>

The main religion of the residents living in Freedmen's Village at Arlington was Baptist. This is because, in the Southern states, the Baptist denomination was the most common. The ex-slaves were very spiritual. There were two Baptist churches and one Methodist church in the Village. The Old Bell Baptist Chapel was the first church structure to be erected in Freedmen's Village, which was founded in 1863. A second church, the Little Zion Methodist Church, was established in 1866 with members from the Old Bell Chapel.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid, 26.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid, 27.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid, 30.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid, 39.

The Union Army recruited members for the 107th USCT from Freedmen's Village at Arlington. They were mistreated from the very start. The Union's black troops were given the least desirable jobs, sent to terrible outposts, and made to perform duties such as cleaning and latrine maintenance. They were unpaid or underpaid for their work, lacking in supplies and health care, and often not professionally trained for combat. The families of these black soldiers, as well as local African churches, supplied the necessary goods and especially food because the black troops were initially only given half rations. Nonetheless, approximately 189,000 African American troops served bravely in the USCT. They were frequently deployed for the first attack of a battle, where they suffered substantial losses; the most notorious was the Battle of Fort Wagner in Charleston, South Carolina. The USCT was involved in over 400 battles, of which 39 were major engagements. They fought so valiantly that 24 members of the USCT received The United States Congressional Medal of Honor for their bravery.<sup>111</sup>

The fugitive slaves who lived at Freedmen's Village in Arlington were even more vulnerable to re-capture by slave hunters and slave owners, as the nation's capital was still a considerable distance from their newfound freedom. To maintain order and safeguard the residents, Federal authorities stationed members of the 107th USCT in the Village. Marriages between the USCT men and women from the Village were common after the troops were discharged from military service. Many of them applied for and were approved for residency at the Village if they did not establish a home in other areas of the country.<sup>112</sup>

Abbott Hospital was a hospital for freed slaves that operated from 1863 to 1865, located at Freedmen's Village in Arlington. The Virginia and Washington D. C. area had few hospitals

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<sup>111</sup> *Ibid*, 46.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid*, 50.

that served blacks, but one of those was Freedmen's hospital in Washington D.C., which later became part of Howard University, a historic black college, and university that still exists today. Abbott Hospital was created with fifty beds to help the residents of Freedmen's Village. As time passed, it became a community hospital that assisted more than 3,000 people who came and went from the Freedmen's Village. Some of the residents who had been trained as nurses worked at Abbott Hospital and were paid forty cents a day. The establishment of the hospital no doubt added to the mystique and prestige of Freedmen's Village, especially with many black nurses and staff serving there.<sup>113</sup>

With the opening of Abbott Hospital, the Village had truly become a self-contained community, with all the trappings of the ideal free men's city as planned by Federal civilian and military authorities. When other contraband hospitals outside of Freedmen's Village could not handle the strain at their sites, the hospital was eventually utilized for overflow patients. An ambulance service was engaged for transferring patients to or from Abbott Hospital. The Village at Arlington residents were charged \$0.25 per month for health insurance coverage, which was deducted from their salaries. The charge helped cover the expenses of maintaining Abbott hospital, purchasing medicines, and paying the salaries of the physicians.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid, 54.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid, 56.





Dr. Anderson Ruffin Abbott 1863  
Courtesy of the National Museum of Civil War Medicine

Abbott Hospital was once home to fourteen physicians, including the first recognized African American licensed physician in America, Alexander T. Augusta.<sup>115</sup> The hospital in Freedmen's Village at Arlington was named after Anderson Ruffin Abbott, a black physician from Canada. Dr. Abbott was a historical pioneer; he was the first black Canadian physician to be licensed in Canada and the first to serve in the American Civil War. During the American Civil War, Abbott served in combat with black regiments, experiencing the same prejudice and, at times, the same disregard as Black enlisted men.<sup>116</sup> Dr. Abbott was also a remarkably close

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<sup>115</sup> Dr. Alexander Thomas Augusta was the Union Army's highest-ranking black officer during the Civil War. He was also Freedmen's Hospital's first African American head, as well as Howard University's first black professor of medicine in Washington, D.C. Besides the white violence he encountered when people saw him in his officer's uniform in Baltimore, Augusta also faced discrimination from his own assistants. His white subordinates complained about being lower ranked than a black man, so President Lincoln decided to place Augusta in charge of the Freedman's Hospital near Washington D.C. See Joseph T. Glatthaar's *Forged in Battle: The Civil War Alliance of Black Soldiers and White Officers*. New York: Free Press, 1990.

<sup>116</sup> Bethea-Sholly, Ruthie. "Freedman's Village at Arlington Nation Cemetery: Overcoming the Restrictions of a Second Bondage after the Emancipation Proclamation," 57.

longtime friend of President Lincoln. In February 1864, African American Army surgeons Alexander Thomas Augusta and Anderson R. Abbott showed up unannounced to Lincoln's weekly public reception at the White House dressed in their military uniforms. The two physicians who were close friends during the civil war remained close after the war. Some people at the reception wanted them escorted out, but Lincoln refused and went eagerly to greet them with a handshake.<sup>117</sup> This was the beginning of a long-term friendship between all three of the men. "Some Democrats publicly cursed Lincoln in the streets for having admitted black guests" to the White House.<sup>118</sup> Following the President's assassination, Dr. Abbott was amongst the mourners who paid their respects to the late President in the east room at the White House.<sup>119</sup>

The military's harsh restrictions as well as government rules and regulations made the people at Freedmen's Village at Arlington feel like they were still in bondage. Perhaps the most galling regulation was one that required residents to get permission before entering or leaving the village grounds. If you wanted to go into the village, you needed to get permission first. This included members of the U.S.C. T when they attended church services there. The deduction of pay was also a subject of resentment. The United States Secretary ordered Brig. Gen. Meigs to deduct \$5 per month from the pay of all men employed as construction workers, teamsters, and laborers at Freedmen's Village. These men earned around \$25-\$30 a month much more than most other residents. The charge for this item was to assist people in the village who were unable to help themselves, such as those who were elderly, disabled, or unable to work due to sickness.

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<sup>117</sup> Jonathan White, *A House Built by Slaves: African American Visitors to the Lincoln White House*. (Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2022), 73.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid*, 83.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid*, 188.

Of course, youngsters under a certain age were excluded.<sup>120</sup> Despite the beneficial application of such deductions, the lesser net compensation for a subject of contention.

The residents of Freedmen's Village protested their unfair treatment, including random evictions, strict military control, high rent, and limited rations. They also addressed the harsh treatment of residents who could not find employment, some of whom were honorably disabled USCT veterans of the Civil War.<sup>121</sup> This story focuses on African Americans who were able to overcome the second period of bondage after they gained their emancipation.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, Arlington was a community in flux. Following the Civil War, Arlington County, Virginia moved from a rural backwater to a suburban enclave. Freedmen's Village was one of the first successfully planned communities in Arlington. The Federal government built it as a contraband camp for formerly enslaved persons before turning it into a village. Many Freedmen moved to the area, including many from neighboring Virginia and Maryland, greatly swelling the county's black population from around a third to well over half of the total population. The War Department established the Village as a social experiment to provide the formerly enslaved and their families with the social, educational, occupational, and domestic skills they would need to thrive in liberty. Residents embraced these ambitions and tailored the Village to better their situation in other ways.<sup>122</sup>

The first post-war years were a time of great ferment and creativity in Freedmen communities as they experimented with diverse ways to achieve their goals. Freedmen created

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<sup>120</sup> Bethea-Sholly, Ruthie. "Freedman's Village at Arlington Nation Cemetery: Overcoming the Restrictions of a Second Bondage after the Emancipation Proclamation," 61.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid, 64.

<sup>122</sup> Lindsey Bestebreurtje, "Built by the People Themselves: African American Community Development in Arlington, Virginia, from the Civil War through Civil Rights," 48.

lasting communities that met their own needs and reflected their preferences, when possible, within the context of white domination in a Jim Crow society. Freedmen were able to quickly create their own church congregations as well as social and political organizations. For example, Rev. Robert S. Laws worked as both a clergyman and an employment agent for the Village, assisting his fellow Villagers in finding employment. Rev. Laws had a large amount of power over the community; he was known as the leader of public opinion in the Village. This sort of spiritual leader's impact on communal issues was not unique to him.<sup>123</sup>

The Village was a refuted new community built on what had been Robert E. Lee's Arlington plantation. Though residents benefited from the overall central planning of the Village's buildings, layout, and services undertaken by the War Department, they also took matters into their own hands to make the Village a livable and vibrant community. In many ways, the Village was a product of the residents' labor, ingenuity, and creativity as they carved out a space for themselves in Arlington County. Though always situated within the larger context of white supremacy, Freedmen residents of Arlington County used what agency they had to create communities that met their needs on their terms.

The community's founding in 1863 prompted residents to establish churches, schools, and political and social institutions, rapidly turning the Village into a force that would have a considerable influence on Arlington's growth. Local white Arlington residents were distressed during and immediately following the Civil War. The destruction caused by the war and subsequent lean years damaged their economic status, while Federal occupation during the

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<sup>123</sup> Lindsey Bestebreurtje, "Beyond the Plantation." *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 126, no. 3 (2018), 347.

period harmed their social and political influence. Many white Arlington residents were driven to subdivide and sell their land because of economic difficulties, turning the formerly agricultural community into a more densely populated area. At the same time, rail systems grew in the county. The prospect of easier commuting caused suburban growth in Arlington. Freedmen were attracted to Arlington by Freedmen's Village, employment opportunities, the opportunity to create new communities, and a history of Freedmen settling near southern antebellum cities. Early Freedmen residents of Arlington were strongly motivated to develop their communities and connections after experiencing the horrors of slavery. In contrast, white Arlington residents did not take as active a role in shaping the county's suburban growth immediately following the Civil War, which allowed Freedmen communities to form and expand.<sup>124</sup>

The Federal government's contributions to the Village helped provide a foundation for later Freedmen's successes in Arlington. The War Department's initial goals for the Village were to house emancipated enslaved people and provide them with the opportunity to gain new work skills. The Village was also intended to be a model of how the Federal government hoped the Freedmen would live post-emancipation. The Freedmen's Bureau, which was established in 1865 to assist the Freedmen, played a role in the Village's founding and oversaw its development. The Bureau helped finance the construction of homes and other buildings, provided residents with food and clothing, and helped establish schools. Though the Federal government's involvement in the Village lessened over time, its early contributions provided a foundation for later successes by Arlington's Freedmen community.

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<sup>124</sup> Lindsey Bestebreurtje, "Built by the People Themselves: African American Community Development in Arlington, Virginia, from the Civil War through Civil Rights," 49.

Beginning in the 1880s, a renewed white community exerted social and legal pressures against Freedmen's Village and Arlington's black inhabitants. Individual citizens, Arlington's officials, land developers, and the Federal government who all desired county lands for themselves mounted intense pressure on Freedmen's Village and its occupants. As whites began to express their vision for the county, it became obvious that they did not want African Americans to play a significant role in it.

The Freedmen and their social institutions were not pushed out of the county; they would be dispersed throughout it. In the 1890s, the people, institutions, and resources of the Village began to spread across the county. This expansion led to other existing neighborhoods being populated and established, such as Green Valley and Hall's Hill. Johnson's Hill, Queen City, Butler-Holmes, and other smaller communities were established throughout the county in these new areas. These new and expanded black communities had unique objectives and aesthetics that represented the aspirations of the people who lived there. Each community displayed residents' opinions about what made a wonderful place to live. Because of this, their environments ranged from lower-class and unappealing, to middle-class and desirable, to upper-class. The types of homes and communities created were tied to socioeconomic class. Working-class neighborhoods used their homes' lands and locations to generate income. This was accomplished either by creating small farm communities in less populated areas, as was the case in Hall's Hill, or by establishing themselves along main roads with easy connections to employment opportunities and customers, as in Queen City. The choices and aesthetics of middle-class communities were

based on hopes and dreams for themselves and their children, whereas working-class communities were merely focused on meeting needs.<sup>125</sup>

The District of Columbia was in crisis by the winter of 1863. An enormous number of African Americans were fleeing to the capital city. War generally causes displacement, but it was heightened during the Civil War as enslaved Africans escaped their bondage and fled to Federal lines because of the war's turmoil. This was particularly true in Washington, D.C., where slavery was first abolished in 1862, and later the general Emancipation Proclamation was enacted in 1863.<sup>126</sup>

This created a massive population increase in Washington, D.C. as both freed and runaway slaves came to the city in hopes of finding safety and freedom. The Federal government was not prepared for this population increase, which put a strain on the city's resources. The Union Army then began to look for places to relocate these African Americans outside of Washington, D.C. One such place was Arlington, Virginia. At the time, Arlington was a rural county bordering Washington, D.C., with a population of only about 1,500 people. The county had been home to many plantations and slave owners before the war, but by 1863 most of the white residents fled Arlington due to fear of Confederate attack or to relocate to Southern-held territory. This left the county largely abandoned, except for a few African American families who had been living there before the war. In January of 1863, Union Army General Montgomery Meigs proposed that Arlington be used as a site for new Freedmen's villages, which would be home to the African Americans being relocated from Washington. The proposal was approved, and by March of that year, the Village was established.

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<sup>125</sup> *Ibid*, 50.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid*, 51.

In the District of Columbia, the black population rose from 19% of the city's population in 1860 to more than 30% by mid-war. Many, if not most, of these people and families, arrived in poor health and with no place to live, putting a strain on Washington's resources. To accommodate these people, several camps, known as contraband camps, were established in Washington. Two camps were established in southern Anacostia, and one was erected near the Capitol Building. However, camps became overcrowded and unsanitary very quickly. In 1862, a smallpox outbreak occurred in the Capitol Hill contraband camp. Colonel Elias M. Greene realized that so many people could not safely stay within the city limits and suggested that another camp be built outside of the city where there was "pure country air." Nestled uncomfortably between Union and Confederate lines, Arlington existed in limbo during the war. Full secession was never realized here because Federal troops occupied Arlington at the start of hostilities in 1861.<sup>127</sup>

The Union Army used Arlington as a base of operations throughout the Civil War, and by the war's end over 100 forts and batteries had been built in the county. Though the physical landscape of Arlington changed dramatically during the Civil War, the social landscape remained relatively unchanged. Before the war, Arlington was home to only a few thousand people, most of whom were white plantation owners and the enslaved. After the war, many of these white residents had fled, leaving behind a largely African American population. It is estimated that by 1865, African Americans made up 70-80% of Arlington's population.

The Federal government built twenty-one forts in Arlington County to protect Washington D.C. and Union Army logistics in Virginia. The War Department needed to expand

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid, 52.



contraband camps beyond Washington, D.C., so this existing military infrastructure made Arlington a good option. When it came to selecting a site for the camp, government officials picked Arlington House - one of the county's few large plantations - because of its panoramic views of the National Mall. With views of the National Mall from across the Potomac River, Arlington House is in eastern Arlington County, immediately adjacent to Washington, D.C., with sweeping vistas over the city. The farms were among the most productive and beautiful in the county, with easy access to Washington. Arlington House was owned by Robert E. Lee's family, who were among the area's most famous residents. The Custis-Lee family departed from Virginia in April 1861 following Lee's resignation from the Federal army to join the Confederacy. In 1862, Congress imposed land taxes on states that had seceded, requiring payment in person. Mary Custis Lee defaulted on her tax payment of \$92.07, and the plantation was seized by the Federal government. She was unwell and sent her cousin Philip R. Fendall to pay the bill in her stead, but he was informed that taxes must be paid in person by Mrs. Lee alone. As a result, Arlington House was taken by force. The movement of the formerly enslaved to Arlington House had both practical and symbolic benefits.<sup>128</sup>

From a practical standpoint, the house was large and had rooms that could be used to house contraband. The symbolism of taking Arlington House was also important. In essence, it was a way for the Federal government to thumb its nose at one of the most famous slave-owning families in Virginia while providing a much-needed service to those who had been enslaved by them. Arlington Cemetery was established in 1864 on the grounds of Arlington House. It was one of the first national cemeteries, and it served as a burial ground for Union soldiers who died during the Civil War. Though it is now open to all, it originally only buried white Union soldiers.

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<sup>128</sup> Ibid, 53.

In 1866, an act of Congress designated that the cemetery should be open to all who served in the armed forces, regardless of race. Arlington Cemetery became a final resting place for many African Americans who served in the Union Army during the Civil War, as well as Freedmen who lived, worked, and died at Arlington Village.

After the war, many Freedmen chose to stay in Arlington because of the opportunities that were available to them. The Federal government was one of the largest employers in the county, and many Freedmen found work there. In addition, Arlington offered a level of safety and security that was not always present in other parts of the country. The Freedmen's Bureau also had a presence in Arlington, and it helped many Freedmen get on their feet after the war.

One of the most important things that Freedmen did after the war was to establish their own churches. This was a way for them to maintain their own cultural and spiritual traditions while also coming together as a community. African Americans also formed their own social and political organizations in Arlington. These organizations gave Freedmen a voice in their community and helped them to advocate for their rights. One of the most important organizations was the Union League, which was established in 1867. The Union League worked to promote Freedmen's voting rights and to educate African Americans about the political process.<sup>129</sup>

On December 4, 1863, the Freedmen's Village contraband camp opened. The Union army held territory in numerous parts of the south, and contraband camps sprang up everywhere they did. Many of these camps were hastily established. They served only as temporary holding grounds, "adjuncts to the plantations," or later as recruiting stations for African American soldiers for the Union army. Freedmen's Village, on the other hand, was built with a more

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid, 53.

deliberate goal in mind. The Village covered 1,100 acres of beautiful land in the northeastern portion of the county that afforded spectacular views of Washington below.<sup>130</sup>

The U.S. government founded a planned community with houses, roads, and institutions here. Freedmen's Village was a showcase for government officials who were eager to show off the progress of the Freedmen to foreign visitors and other dignitaries wanting to witness it. The War Department created a physical depiction of Federal goals for moral uplift among the formerly enslaved population. As such, the government erected an impressive number of frame houses. One hundred duplexes, all white-washed and one-and-a-half stories tall, were built along a busy street that stretched for a quarter of a mile through the Village. These clapboard houses used a more simplistic style derived from Classical Revivalism; popular in the 1800s, this grand representation often utilized symmetry and columns to mirror Greek temples. In doing so, America symbolically connected itself to Ancient Greece's democracy and its ideals via architectural style. The Classical Revival style was used at Freedmen's Village to express the movement's principles in its vernacular form. External symmetry of the house was intended to promote social peace and calmness. The white color of the dwellings was intended to encourage purity, piety, and order. This housing type was initially chosen by the War Department, which led Black people from Arlington to embrace it. They took great pains in their upkeep and maintenance. After creating their own houses later residents frequently reused this design.<sup>131</sup>

A central administration building, and a church also graced the well-manicured streets. In total, Freedmen's Village housed around 1,200 people at its peak. The Federal government oversaw all aspects of life in Freedmen's Village. It provided employment, food, healthcare, and

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<sup>130</sup> *Ibid*, 55.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid*, 55.

education to the residents. The War Department ran the village like a military camp with rules and regulations that everyone had to follow. Even though residents benefited from the overall central planning of the Village's buildings, layout, and services undertaken by the War Department, they still had to adhere to a strict set of rules. For example, bedtimes were early (9:00 pm), and lights had to be out by 10:00 pm. There was also a curfew in place from 11:00 pm until 6:00 am. Visitors had to be approved by the camp's superintendent, and residents were not allowed to leave the village without a pass. Freedmen's Village was intended to be a temporary stop for the formerly enslaved on their way to becoming free citizens. The War Department envisioned that residents would eventually move out of the village and into their own homes. To help with this transition, the government provided education and job training opportunities at Freedmen's Village. It also set up a savings program so that residents could save money for their future. The village was one of the first places in the country where African Americans had the chance to live, work, and learn without the threat of violence or intimidation from whites. For many, it was a taste of what freedom could be like. Unfortunately, the promise of Freedmen's Village was not fully realized. While some residents did eventually leave the Village and find success, others were forced out or remained there for the rest of their lives.

The War Department did not just construct homes in Freedmen's Village. With the assistance of religious and aid societies from the North, they set up institutions to educate the Freedmen in both useful skills and how to get paid for their work. Women were given lessons on household chores while there were vocational schools for men where they could learn occupations such as carpentry, tailoring, woodworking, shoemaking, harness making, and more. Although some may have seen these programs as forcing assimilation, they overall improved the lives of those enrolled. For example, at the Village blacksmithing was among the trades taught.

With slavery ended, it became increasingly difficult for African Americans to practice skilled trades such as this due to both new prejudices and restrictive policies across Virginia and the South.<sup>132</sup>

As a result, blacksmithing became one of the first trades to die out in the region. However, because of the training received at Freedmen's Village, there were still some Freedmen who could work as blacksmiths in Arlington well into the 20th century. The schools at Freedmen's Village not only taught useful skills but also literacy. This was extremely important since Virginia had some of the lowest rates of literacy for both Whites and Black people in the country. In 1860, just over half of white adults in Virginia could read and write while less than a quarter of African Americans could do the same. By 1870, thanks in part to programs like those at Freedmen's Village, the literacy rate for the Freedmen had more than doubled. While African Americans in Arlington and across the country still faced many obstacles, literacy gave them a chance to improve their lives and participate in society in new ways.

The War Department did not just provide education and job training at Freedmen's Village, they also helped residents find work outside of the Village. In some cases, this meant working for the government on projects such as building roads or bridges. Others found jobs with local businesses or farms. The pay was not always highly remunerative, but it was a start. For many of the formerly enslaved, the Freedmen's Village was the first time they had ever received regular pay for their work.

In addition to finding employment, the War Department also helped residents of Freedmen's Village buy land and build homes of their own. The government wanted residents to

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<sup>132</sup> Ibid, 56.

eventually leave the Village and become self-sufficient. To help with this, they set up a savings program so that residents could save money for their future. They also provided low-interest loans to those who wanted to buy land or build a home. While not all residents were able to take advantage of these opportunities, those who did found it much easier to transition out of the Village and into their own homes.

The pay and prominence their education and skilled jobs provided allowed many skilled workers, such as William A. Rowe, who was a blacksmith, to become leaders in the community. Many people within the Village took employment with the Federal government as a result of their new or enhanced skill sets. During the Civil War, the Federal government hired Freedmen as laborers, teamsters, and fortification builders. Thomas Owens and his wife Hannah worked for the Federal government in Village restaurants, he was a cook, and she was a housekeeper. Living in Arlington offered additional advantages to African Americans: they were able to work for the Federal government. In the context of the times, these employment possibilities provided a much-needed alternative to farm labor, which was the most valuable job for African Americans at this time. Others worked in the Village's hospital or old people's Home. Hospital workers were paid \$0.40 per day in 1864, while teamsters and skilled laborers earned \$1 per day plus rations. These salaries were comparable to those received by white employees.<sup>133</sup>

Many people would transition between the several types of employment available to them in the region, such as Village resident Harry W. Gray, who transitioned from a job as a skilled mason to becoming a messenger for the Department of the Interior. The Freedmen's Village greatly benefitted from the War Department's central planning of its buildings, layout, and

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid, 57.

services; however, it was the Freedmen residents themselves who took charge of developing it into a thriving community. The camp was home to Freedmen of all ages and family types. Some families escaping bondage were able to bring extended kin networks together in the Village, which became a haven for them.<sup>134</sup>

The Parks family was able to keep their entire thirteen-person household together. Lawrence Parks, the head of the family, was in his 70s when he tried to establish a new life for himself and his family in the Village. In 1865, Mary Pollard arrived at the Village with her 15-year-old son James. Other individuals came to the Village, including 14-year-old Nancy Jackson who resided there in 1865. The individuals and families who lived in the Village were bound by their common goal of creating a close-knit community free from oppression. These villagers took pride in keeping their homes well-maintained. With assistance from northern missionaries, residents established religious and educational institutions within the Village. Freedmen's Village had primary and secondary schools for the children of the Village, educating from 250 to 900 pupils as early as 1864. Adults in Freedmen's Village needed education so badly that a night school was set up to meet their demands. Residents stressed the importance of lifelong learning for themselves and their children.<sup>135</sup>

The Village residents were heard singing the refrain of "Uncle Sam's School," which went, "come bring your books and don't be a fool, for Uncle Sam is rich enough to send us all to school." Literacy rates in the Village increased from 20% in 1870 to 56% by 1890 as the community expanded. In April of 1865, at Appomattox Courthouse in Virginia, Confederate General Robert E. Lee surrendered to Union General and future President Ulysses S. Grant.

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<sup>134</sup> *Ibid*, 58.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid*, 59.

During the same time that spring, the management of Freedmen's Village transitioned from the War Department to the newly formed Freedmen's Bureau. Congress created the Bureau to provide the Freedmen with social, political, and legal aid so they could transition into freedom successfully. The Bureau's Arlington branch was run by General Oliver O. Howard, who had served as the Commissioner of the Freedmen's Bureau since its creation. Though many of the residents of the Freedmen's Village were able to find work with the Federal government, they still faced difficult working and living conditions. The Freedmen needed permanent homes and land. The same year, an investigation into labor practices on plantations in Virginia revealed that some African Americans were still being held in involuntary servitude. As a result of such findings, Congress passed legislation making it a felony to deprive any person of their liberty without due process of law. Though this was a major victory, the legislation did not put an immediate end to the practice of involuntary servitude.<sup>136</sup>

The Bureau's Arlington branch was run by General Oliver O. Howard, who had served as the Commissioner of the Freedmen's Bureau since its creation. Though many of the residents of the Freedmen's Village were able to find work with the Federal government, they still faced difficult working and living conditions. The Freedmen needed permanent homes and land. The same year, an investigation into labor practices on plantations in Virginia revealed that some African Americans were still being held in involuntary servitude. As a result of such findings, Congress passed legislation making it a felony to deprive any person of their liberty without due process of law. Though this was a major victory, the legislation did not put an immediate end to the practice of involuntary servitude.

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<sup>136</sup> Ibid, 60.



The community of Freedmen's Village was established on prime real estate. It was unusual for African American settlements to be in such sought-after locations. Instead, most African American communities were built in areas far from cities or beautiful vistas. The residents of Freedmen's Village were able to create and expand schools, churches, institutions, and fraternal and mutual aid societies after the Federal agency was established to protect their rights. These new organizations gave the men in the Village a way to socialize and practice their political rights. The Village became a place where African Americans could gather and create their own organizations, such as the Grand United Order of Odd Fellows. These organizations met many needs within the black community from hosting social gatherings to being a meeting ground for politics, serving as a credit union, helping to establish leadership positions, and supporting black churches and schools.<sup>137</sup>

After the Civil War, many Freedmen came to Arlington looking for a new life, helped by the War Department. This allowed Freedmen in Arlington to be more forward-looking than whites when it came to carving out communities throughout Arlington. Immediately following the war, those looking to buy land in Arlington were Freedmen.<sup>138</sup> Although Freedmen's Village had the support of the government in its early days, that enthusiasm faded as time went on. The goals of the Freedmen and those in charge began to diverge, and nationally speaking, people were growing tired of Reconstruction programs. Eventually, this led to radical reconstruction becoming abandoned entirely as social and political reunions became more appealing than fighting for African American rights. Aid to former slave families began to lose favor because of these developments. The type of social innovation attempted on a grand scale in government

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<sup>137</sup> *Ibid*, 61.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid*, 66.

initiatives such as the one at Freedmen's Village was particularly susceptible to criticism. Even among the Village's leadership, cracks were beginning to show. Reverend Laws fought for the rights of Freedmen in the Village and quickly gained some enemies because of it. One Village administrator even called him an agitator and pushed for him to leave. According to the Freedmen, who had previously been regarded as pioneers, they were now known as squatters. This identification was untrue, slanderous, and defamatory, and had nothing to do with the real living situation created by the Villagers.<sup>139</sup>

While some, such as General O.O. Howard, the Commissioner of the Freedmen's Bureau, continued to see the Village as a success that should be emulated elsewhere, others were growing disillusioned. A report by the Joint Committee on Reconstruction in 1866 was extremely critical of the Freedmen's Bureau and the Freedmen's Village. The committee members were not impressed by what they saw as a "rude and ill-contrived" Village and criticized the use of government funds for what they saw as an experiment in social engineering. They also took issue with what they saw as the Bureau's preferential treatment of African Americans over poor whites.

The villager's original homes, built by the War Department, were comfortable and well-kept. Some residents even added on to their houses or improved the land around them, spending up to three times what they initially paid for their homes. Beyond these improvements, residents of the Village were also compelled to pay land rents as well as local, state, and Federal poll, road, school, and private property taxes. Residents were not "squatters," but rather individuals and families who purchased land, improved it, paid rent, built houses, and expanded their

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<sup>139</sup> Ibid, 76.

community institutions.<sup>140</sup> What this description of "squatter" really reveals is racialized resistance to the Villagers and other forces who were trying to find a pretext to seize lands they wanted for other reasons. The push to reclaim the land from the Villagers was a lengthy process. In 1868, Congress debated the Freedmen's Bureau's continued existence. Though it did not shut down, the Bureau lost most of its power until it could only petition and offer education for African Americans. In 1868, the government tried to shut down Freedmen's Village. To prepare for this, they destroyed all the homes between Arlington House and the Potomac River so that residents would be forced to move elsewhere on the property. In the winter, with such little notice, thousands of farm families were relocated. Some workers returned home from work to discover that their wives and children had departed. But Villagers opposed this village's shutting down and they began to organize. As a result, these early attempts to shut down the Village were fruitless.<sup>141</sup>

The government allowed residents to purchase their homes to quell the discontent and established a rent-town system for their land. Villagers beyond the central avenue constructed by the War Department built their own homes. Most were decent-quality painted frame houses with fenced-in yards. The villagers also created a farming community of five- to ten-acre plots called Arlington Tract Farms. Thomas and Hannah Owens initially lived in the central Village until moving to an Arlington Tract farm in 1868. Owens and his neighbors, including John B. Syphax, built homes for themselves and improved the lands by farming. Residents were optimistic that those purchase contracts will keep them secure in their ownership of their property and lands. Six years after the first attempt to close the Village, in 1872, the Freedmen's Bureau was abolished.

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<sup>140</sup> *Ibid*, 76.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid*, 78.

This meant that there was no governmental body to lobby on behalf of the Village, so in the 1880s the War Department restarted its efforts to close it by calling for Congressional action. By 1889, the Department of Agriculture had joined in on the government's land grab for Freedmen's Village by requesting from military authorities 400 acres for an Experimental Farm. The military wanted the land to expand Fort Myer and Arlington National Cemetery, as well as establish a parade ground. Others in the Federal government hoped that the property would lead to the creation of a new road network from Georgetown to George Washington's Mount Vernon. By 1890, 400 acres had been allocated by the United States Department of Agriculture to develop an experimental farm at Freedmen's Village.<sup>142</sup>

In addition to the Federal government, white Arlington residents who wanted to reform voting to reduce black political power also desired to close Freeman's Village. After regrouping following the Civil War, whites were now keen on reasserting their control by taking away rights from African Americans. Local whites stated that Freedmen controlled the county and cast the votes that elected their Board of Supervisors. The presence of the Freedmen in the Village was viewed as idle people living carelessly on a government-run reservation. A Federal report found that only one Village resident, a twelve-year-old orphan girl, was on long-term welfare. They felt that the Freeman's Village residents had a peculiar effect on politics.<sup>143</sup> Nevertheless, it would be wrong to overstate African American political power. Not all African Americans met the minimum requirements for voting. Of those who could vote, only 140 taxpayers from Freedmen's Village voted in the 1888 Presidential Election. Though there was an African

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<sup>142</sup> *Ibid*, 79.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid*, 80

American presence on the Board of Supervisors, they were never the majority, which kept whites in control of county affairs.<sup>144</sup>

There were also numerous plots targeting the Freedmen's Village. Land developers, in addition to people from the Federal government seeking to utilize Village property and those trying to reverse black enfranchisement, were denouncing Freedmen's Village. Arlington was rapidly becoming a streetcar suburb of Washington in the last years of the nineteenth century. To gain more territory where they could develop and subdivide as suburban neighborhoods, white real estate speculators mobilized politically. At the turn of the century, it was estimated that county wealth had increased tenfold. Property values had similarly skyrocketed, and developers saw an opportunity. The property was worth ten times its assessed value. They began marketing the county to Federal workers as a peaceful retreat from city life – a haven where people could live quiet, prosperous lives.<sup>145</sup>

Freedmen's Village was valued at \$27,162.95 on land and crops combined as early as 1864. Land developers lobbied for the eviction of residents of Freedmen's Village to acquire that property for themselves since so much money was on the line. The builders had powerful supporters in their corner. Virginia U.S. Senator John W. Daniel spoke in favor of the developers. With land titles in dispute, former Confederates litigated to regain land or secure compensation.<sup>146</sup> George Washington Custis Lee, Robert E. Lee's son, demanded reasonable compensation for his family's domain. After a five-year-long legal dispute, the Supreme Court ruled in his favor in 1882. Subsequently, the US government bought Arlington estate from Lee for \$150,000 three years later. Even though there was no mention of expelling Village residents

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<sup>144</sup> Ibid, 81.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid, 82.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid, 83.

in the purchase agreement itself, given the extreme racism targeting African Americans at large and Village dwellers specifically during that period, forceable removal gained momentum. Residents who had previously benefited from Village administration were now cast as nuisances.<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> *Ibid*, 84.

## Daily functions and Village life

The Freedmen's Village addressed nearly every aspect of the daily lives of the Freedmen, and this extended beyond schooling. The Village made provisions to provide general clothing to those who were in need within the Village. For example, on March 1, 1868, Captain Carse received two hundred striped shorts and one hundred and forty pairs of woolen socks. When we take into consideration the season when the captain took possession of these items, we realize that Captain Carse received a total of three hundred and forty-four dollars' worth of clothing at the height of the winter season. In addition to the March 1<sup>st</sup> parcel of clothing that Captain Carse received, on March 22<sup>nd</sup> he received three hundred and eight yards of brown denim. This could be used to make denim pants, skirts, and shirts, by the most probable use would have been denim pants. The material was forwarded to George McKay, Superintendent of Tailor Shop.<sup>148</sup> Additionally, McKay received eighty-seven and one-quarter yards of sheeting and approximately two-hundred seventy-two yards of red flannel.

The Freedmen's Village and the Freedmen's Bureau made sure to find rich soil for the Freedmen to live on and cultivate. On May 19, 1866, an inquiry into the conditions of the lands within the Village by Lieutenant Lomas revealed that there were no Freedmen who were suffering or destitute and there was no need for increased seed planting.<sup>149</sup> The homes were in good condition, and no one was without food. All the Freedmen had clothes and there were plenty of tools to go around. The health of the people in the Village was also good. There were no reported cases of smallpox, malaria, or any other serious diseases. Lieutenant Lomas's report provided a snapshot of what life was like for residents of the Freedmen's Village during its early

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<sup>148</sup> District of Columbia Field Offices, Freedmen's Village, Letters Received, (Dec. 26, 1864–Dec. 9, 1868, Part 1), 12.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid*, 50.

years. While conditions in the Village were not perfect, it appears as though residents were generally content with their situation.

The duties of the staff who worked directly within the Freedmen's Village and those who made decisions from the Freedmen's Bureau headquarters located in Washington were very complex. Their roles and duties vary from day to day. Each day presented its own challenges. The rank-and-file staff and high-ranking officials were tasked with dealing with virtually every aspect of the lives of the Freedmen who resided in the Village. There were successes and failures but overall, the evidence revealed that the collective whole worked diligently to integrate the newly freed slaves back into society. The staff there made every effort to accommodate many of the various requests that they received daily from the residents of the Village.

Complaints about the lack of heating accommodations at the Freedmen's Village were not without foundation. "There are 231 dependent people, 98 of them have 18 stoves; 17. One stove...Two stoves and two drums; these latter being supposed to warm two large rooms in the upper story of one building. Almost every one of those stoves is broken and worthless."<sup>150</sup> When Lt. Rogers visited the Village during his investigation, he witnessed Freedmen who were huddling over the fires, and none of the rooms were comfortably warm. On that same day, he made a requisition for ten new stoves.<sup>151</sup> The conditions of the Freedmen Village were not up to standard. The living quarters were overcrowded, and the residents did not have access to adequate heating. A single stove even if functioning properly, was inadequate to warm two large rooms in the upper story of one building. When the new stoves arrived, they were placed in the most needed places. This did not solve the entire problem, but it helped to improve the situation.

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<sup>150</sup> *Ibid*, 147.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid*, 147.



With regard to the allegations of the Freedmen receiving improper rations of food, Lt. Rogers initiated an investigation. The regular rations that were provided in the Freedmen's Village were the same as those that were used in hospitals. The ratios were reportedly designed based on a diet table. During his visit to the Village, Lt. Rogers did witness a lack of supervision and cleanliness. He cited that the Freedmen did not seem to receive adequate attention. The comfort of the residents could have been greatly improved by making repairs and alterations to the buildings. He noted that most of the buildings, structures, and inhabited dwellings within the Village were not used for their intended purpose, but instead had been adopted and repurposed to serve a unique function within the Village.<sup>152</sup> The food that was given to the Freedmen was far from wholesome and sufficient. The only time when the rations were different was when there were special occasions, such as holidays. It is clear from Lt. Rogers' report that the Freedmen in the Village were underfed and, in some cases, malnourished.

On April 10, 1867, the Bureau sent a plumber sent to Freedmen's Village to perform the work that was outlined by the Superintendent. General C. H. Howard ordered the plumber to address several duties but highlighted the importance of having repairs made to the pipes and fire plugs were necessary to give a supply of water and protect the buildings in case of fire.<sup>153</sup>

The use of Freedmen's Village as a place of refuge and healing was not without its challenges. There was a great deal of overcrowding, and the living conditions were far from ideal. However, with the help of the Freedmen's Bureau, the residents were able to make do with what they had. The plumber who was sent to address the water issue did improve the water supply in the Village, but the residents still did not have access to clean water. The comfort of

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<sup>152</sup> *Ibid*, 148.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid*, 248.

the residents could have been greatly improved by making repairs and alterations to the buildings.

There existed a need for more flooring because many of the buildings were being used for multiple purposes. For example, one building that originally served as a schoolhouse was now being used as a church and a dwelling for families. On May 7, 1867, Major Brown of the Quartermaster's Office informed the Assistant Superintendent of Freedmen's Village, Lt. Bergerin, that his requisition of eight thousand feet of flooring lumber was approved by Assistant Commissioner. He further inquired if the lumber could be obtained more easily at Alexandria, rather than in Washington, Lt. Bergerin was encouraged to purchase there instead.<sup>154</sup>

On May 14, 1867, Lt. Rogers noted that the Assistant Commissioner had been instructed to make a list of the dependents at the Freedmen's Village and send it to the headquarters. A monthly report was made regarding the changes in the status of the resident's employment and dependency. He also ordered that a copy of the list be provided to the Matron of the Home so that she can keep track of all changes in the status of the freed people. However, the draft of the rules for the government of Freedmen living in the Village was not received by the headquarters for approval, as directed.<sup>155</sup>

The Matron was responsible for maintaining proper discipline among the Freedmen and those under her charge. If she was unable to do so, she called upon the person or group acting in her place. Policy prevented the Matron and her staff from making threats of force against that Freedmen, and a guard was only summoned to a freedman's quarters if required. The Matron's assistant was often relieved, and his duties were carried out by another person. The

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<sup>154</sup> *Ibid*, 261.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid*, 267.

Superintendent explained to the residents that although the Matron was under his orders, he left the management of details to her. The Superintendent believed that the best interests of all the residents were served by this process. Care would be taken to work in harmony by all, that being deemed very essential for the interests of the Freedmen would be required by the Assistant Commissioner.<sup>156</sup>

The rules for the government of Freedmen living in the Village were designed to promote order and cleanliness, as well as to protect the property of the United States. The rules required that all residents maintain a clean and orderly appearance, refrain from loud and disorderly conduct, and respect the rights of others. Freedmen were also required to obey the orders of the Village officials and to perform their assigned tasks in a timely and efficient manner. Those who failed to comply with the rules were subject to disciplinary action, up to and including expulsion from the Village. The Freedmen's Bureau made responsible efforts to provide for the needs of the Freedmen living in the Village. However, there were many challenges that the Bureau. The lack of adequate funding and resources made it difficult for the Bureau to meet all the needs of the Freedmen. The conditions at Freedmen's Village were far from ideal, but with the help of the Freedmen's Bureau, the residents were able to make do with what they had. The Village provided Freedmen with access to education, medical care, work, and housing.

General C. H. Howard made a requisition in May 1867 for seven and a half cords of wood and four thousand and forty-five hundred pounds of coal for use of the Hospital, after the Quartermaster Department refused to issue any more fuel to the Bureau for the month. Seven and

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<sup>156</sup> Ibid, 270.

a half cords of wood were delivered to deliver to the Village. Coal was purchased locally in Alexandria and delivered to the hospital.<sup>157</sup>

On May 23, 1867, Lt. Rogers was able to get approval from General C. H. Howard to make repairs and additions to the Home for the elderly. He requested permission to take down and remove the six buildings from Camp Todd and relocate the buildings to the Freedmen's Village. He planned to complete the alterations of the "Home" building.<sup>158</sup> Camp Todd was a contraband camp that was near the Village, and it was later annexed and became a part of the Freedmen's Village.

On June 17, 1867, Lt. Rogers forwarded temporary rules and regulations that were to be observed at Freedmen's Village. The Assistant Commissioner of Freedmen's Village instructed Lt. Rogers to disseminate orders and to ensure that a copy of the orders was forwarded to Captain Gates, Superintendent of Freedmen's Village. The Assistant Commissioner of Freedmen's Village directed that the rules were observed to maintain good order and discipline in the Village. The rules and regulations also stated that no fires were to be built in any of the buildings without the permission of the Matron or Superintendent. All stoves and fireplaces must be kept clean and in good repair. No person was allowed to throw any garbage, rubbish, or ashes into any of the streets or yards. All refuse must be placed in the garbage pits that were provided for that purpose. The rules and regulations also stated that no person was allowed to keep any pigs, cows, goats, or other animals in the Village. All residents of the Village were required to respect the rights of others and behave in a peaceful and orderly manner. Any person who broke the rules and regulations would be subject to punishment by the Freedmen's Bureau.

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<sup>157</sup> Ibid, 272.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid, 276.

The attendants of the Freedmen's Village Home were under the supervision of the Matron, and they were expected to perform their duties under the direction of the Hospital's surgeon and superintendent. Additional Freedmen were also assigned to perform their duties, depending on the circumstances. The Freedmen will be detailed for duty, as attendants, subject to the discretion of the Surgeon in charge. The information about the materials that have been purchased for the sewing room will be furnished to the Matron.<sup>159</sup>

The Matron was responsible for the distribution of the material. The Matron was also responsible for the care of the patients in the Home. She will be required to keep a daily record of the patients under her care. The Matron had to make a report to the Superintendent at the end of each month, which included a list of the patients that were under her care during the month, the number of deaths that occurred, and the cause of death. The Matron was responsible for the cleanliness of the Home. She was required to see that all the patients were clean and that their beds were made. The floors and walls of the Home were to be kept clean and free from dirt and dust. The cuisine of the Home was under the direction of the Matron. She was required to see that all the food was properly cooked and that it was wholesome and nutritious. The Matron was required to see that all the patients were given their meals at the proper time. The clothing of the patients will be under the charge of the Matron. She was required to see that all the patients were properly clothed and that their clothing was clean and in good repair. The laundry of the Home will be under the charge of the Matron. She was required to see that all the laundry was properly done and that it was returned to the patients in a clean and orderly condition.

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<sup>159</sup> District of Columbia Field Offices, Freedmen's Village, Letters Received, (Dec. 26, 1864–Dec. 9, 1868, Part 2), 5.

A Board composed of three members, of which the Matron was a member, was established by the superintendent to inspect and determine the appropriate clothing for each dependent. There was to be an immediate inspection of the clothing that was in the possession of Freedmen and determine what was unfit for use, such clothing was cleaned and stored by the Superintendent, or otherwise disposed of as recommended by the Board. All the proceedings of the Board were reviewed and approved by the Assistant Commissioner. The members of the Board were expected to provide the Assistant Commissioner with a list of the most appropriate clothing for each dependent.

There was to be no sale of any kind of intoxicating liquors within the limits of the Freedmen's Village. The Freedmen's Bureau would punish any person who was found to be selling or giving away any intoxicating liquor within the limits of the Freedmen's Village. All residents of the Village were expected to respect the rights of others and behave in a peaceful and orderly manner. Any person who broke the rules and regulations would be subject to punishment by the Freedmen's Bureau. The Matron kept a record of all the clothing that was received, cleaned, mended, or otherwise disposed of by the Board of Survey. The Superintendent would provide the Matron with a list of materials that have been purchased for the sewing room. The Matron made reports to the Superintendent on the condition of the Freedmen's Village and the progress of the work that was being done.

The shoe shop was removed from the sewing room to a more convenient adjoining building. The Matron was responsible for maintaining proper discipline among the Freedmen and those under her charge. If she was unable to do so, she called upon the person or group acting in her place. Policy prevented the Matron and her staff from making threats of force against that Freedmen, and a guard was only summoned to a Freedmen's quarters if required.

The Matron's assistant was often relieved, and his duties were carried out by another person. The superintendent explained to the residents that although the Matron was under his orders, he left the management of the details in her department to the Matron. The superintendent also believed that the best interests of all the residents were served by this process. Care was taken to work in harmony by all, that being deemed very essential for the interests of the Freedmen as required by the Assistant Commissioner.<sup>160</sup>

On June 28, 1867, Major Clark informed Lt. Rogers of the Assistant Commissioner's orders regarding garments. Clark stated in his judgment some measures were necessary to prevent the wastage of material used in the sewing school at Freedmen's Village. He noted that such measure was not in place, and this was under the charge of Mrs. Stull. Many of the garments, especially sheets and other under-clothing, several articles that Clark examined seemed to have been cut without reference to the size or shape of the human form. Unless some amendment can be immediately made, Clark earnestly recommended as a measure of the economy, that readymade garments were purchased and issued to the dependents at the "Home."<sup>161</sup>

Lt. Rogers' evaluation of Mrs. Stull was included in his report to the Assistant Commissioner dated August 2, 1867. In his opinion, Mrs. Stull was not competent to take care of the Freedmen in her charge, and she should be removed from her position as Matron at the Freedmen's Home. He based his opinion on the following observations: Mrs. Stull did not understand how to properly take care of the Freedmen in her charge. She was often rude and

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<sup>160</sup> Ibid, 6.

<sup>161</sup> District of Columbia Field Offices, Freedmen's Village, Letters Received, (Dec. 26, 1864–Dec. 9, 1868, Part 2), 12.

insulting to the Freedmen under her care. She was not capable of providing the necessary care and supervision for the children in her charge. She often left the children in the care of other Freedmen while she went off to attend to her personal business. She did not keep the Home clean and orderly. The food that she served was often of inadequate quality and there was not enough of it. The clothing that she provided was often of inadequate quality and it did not fit well. She was not capable of managing the finances of the Home properly. In conclusion, Lt. Rogers recommended that Mrs. Stull be removed from her position as Matron at the Freedmen's Home and that someone else be appointed in her place. He also recommended that the Home be placed under the supervision of the Freedmen's Bureau until a new Matron could be appointed and that the Home should be inspected regularly to ensure that it was being properly run.<sup>162</sup>

On July 5, 1867, General C. H. Howard petitioned Surgeon R. Reyburn regarding the following inventory of articles that were worn out and unfit for use and inquired how to dispose of the items. There were fifteen cotton pillowcases, ten sheets, ten drawers, four dressing gowns nine shirts, fourteen slippers twelve woolen socks, seven basins, a tin wash hand, and two tumblers glass. The pillowcases, sheets, drawers, dressing gowns, shirts, slippers, and socks were worn out and the garments were destroyed by the wearers before being brought to the attention of the general. They were furnished to Freedmen living in houses and consequently not under the immediate charge of any attendant, who would have been responsible for the safekeeping and return of such articles. The wash basins and tumblers were produced in fragments for inspection when requested.<sup>163</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> Freedman's Village and Reconstruction Collections Records, 1857-1996, RG 103 Box 2, Folder (18) "Copies and Transcripts from the Freedom and Southern Society Project, 1864."

<sup>163</sup> Ibid, 20.



On July 26, 1867, the Assistant Commissioner's Office received information regarding Mrs. Stull's poor behavior and the negative impact she had on the Freedmen while entrusted to properly discharge her duties. The allegations levied against the Matron of the Home, Mrs. Stull, came from two different sources. Each of the sources provided their information directly to the Bureau Head of the Quartermaster's office and Assistant Commissioner's Office in Washington. It was alleged that Mrs. Stull, had been peculiarly obnoxious to the Freedmen at the Village and that she was not admirably adapted to honestly the work alongside or close approximately with the Freedmen she has been entrusted. Assistant Commissioner Office forwarded the allegation to General C. H. Howard and requested that the claims be thoroughly investigated. General C. H. Howard was instructed to provide a full report to their office at the conclusion of his investigation and a complete file on Mrs. Stull.<sup>164</sup>

On August 28, 1867, General C. H. Howard was informed that there had been losses in material furnished at Freedmen's Village. It was noted that pieces were falling short in several cases. He was instructed to investigate the matter. Mrs. Lydia Stull was ordered to present her testimony regarding the losses. The rent account had not been honestly kept and there was reason to believe that the money was not appropriately accounted for by the officer in charge of the collection of the rent. The general was instructed to investigate the matter at once and thoroughly take Mrs. Lydia Stull's testimony into account.<sup>165</sup>

All the shops, stores, buildings, and products of the Village were regularly inspected as with all other military holdings. On October 8, 1867, General C. H. Howard noted that following the inspection of the facility's horses, wagons, and harnesses, the Assistant Commissioner was

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<sup>164</sup> Ibid, 30.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid, 53.

ordered to take efficient means for their better care and preservation of the holdings within the Village. He further stated that all persons who had responsibilities under his supervision be held accountable for their actions.<sup>166</sup> The general's measures to increase the safety and well-being of the Freedmen while they were under his care were ordered with pure intentions. He wanted to provide them with the best possible chance at success in their new lives, free from slavery. In 1868, General C. H. Howard was earning a monthly income of \$150.00 per month, so his attention to duty took priority over monetary gains.<sup>167</sup>

An adequate supply of wood for cooking, heating, and cleaning clothes was essential. The Freedmen's Village hired P. Campbell and George Creveling to furnish the Village with wood. P. Campbell was contracted to provide the Village with eight hundred and forty-nine cords of wood. He was compensated \$2200.00 for the supply of wood he provided to the Village. George Creveling was contracted to deliver the cords of wood to Freedmen's Village and was compensated \$800.00 for his service and the wood he supplied to the Village.<sup>168</sup>

On February 7, 1868, General C. H. Howard informed the Freedmen Bureau that the Village's animals were in better shape than they were a month ago. However, they were still lacking in number and quality. In June and July of the previous year, fifteen horses were allowed to live in the Village to accommodate a population of four hundred and fifty people. However, with six hundred and sixty residents, only twelve horses were available within the facility. He noted that Captain E.B. Gates took one of the horses and General Blunt took possession of two horses. This left the Village with twelve horses. General C. H. Howard further noted that "of the

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<sup>166</sup> Ibid, 83.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid, 116.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid, 119.

twelve now in service here all but three or four are unsound, most of them having been broken down by age and hard work.”<sup>169</sup>

It was clear that the Village needed more horses, mules, and donkeys. General C. H. Howard requested that the Freedmen Bureau provide the Village with more horses. In addition, he requested that the quality of the horses be improved. He noted that the current horses were “old and broken down” and not suitable for the work that needed to be done at the Village. The Freedmen Bureau did not respond to General C. H. Howard's request for more and better-quality horses. As a result, the Village continued to operate with a shortage of animals. This made it difficult for the residents to complete the tasks that were assigned to them.

The horses in the Village were overworked and unable to keep up with the demands of the Freedmen. The Freedmen were also tasked with farming the land surrounding the facility. The crops that they planted and harvested were used to supplement the food supplies that were given to them by the government. The animals were in poor condition due to the lack of forage issued from Washington and the excessive work that has been carried out on them over a course of years. The general noted that the forage was persistently short and of inferior quality. A new feeding facility had been established and it was hoped that it would result in improving the poor condition of the horses. The harnesses and wagons that were used at the Village were in harsh conditions and had been repaired without adding a single new article. The Village petitioned the Bureau for more horses that were of a better quality and an appropriate quantity of forage that was of a decent quality to feed the animals.<sup>170</sup>

In response to the concerns raised by the Village regarding the quality and quantity of forage that was being delivered to the Village to feed their animals, the Bureau directed that a

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<sup>169</sup> *Ibid*, 126.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid*, 123.

responsible inspector be appointed to inspect all the feed products and to ensure that the horses were properly fed. The inspector was required to regularly check the horses to ensure that they were being properly groomed twice a day and fed adequately. The number of horses that the Village should have been more than twelve. At a time when there were more than two thousand people in the village, six horses were found to be insufficient. Dr. Howard was instructed to report the name of the inspector who was responsible for overseeing the inspection.<sup>171</sup> The Bureau delivered a crushing blow and did not provide the Village with additional horses. The six horses were worked to death. The Freedmen's Bureau did not provide the Village with additional animals or with quality forage to feed the animals that they had. As a result, the condition of the animals rapidly deteriorated.

In many ways, the Bureau and the Freedmen's Village sought to cut costs and secure revenue for the operational cost of the Village. On November 5, 1867, the Assistant Commissioner ordered the termination of all Village employees who were engaged in cultivating the vegetable garden for dependent Freedmen. He stated that the work should be done by the dependent Freedmen themselves.<sup>172</sup> Additionally, the Assistant Commissioner ordered that all idle and able-bodied Freedmen within the Village should be employed in cultivating the vegetable garden. The revenue generated from the sale of vegetables would be used to support the village. The Village reported to the Bureau every week the number of employed Freedmen, dependent Freedmen, those who were discharged or evicted, the number of Freedmen who were admitted into the Village, birth, and death rate.<sup>173</sup>

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<sup>171</sup> *Ibid*, 123.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid*, 192.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid*, 200.

In many instances, the Freedmen Village helped the surrounding communities of Freedmen, those living in Washington and Virginia especially. On November 18, 1867, the Bureau headquarters requested the use of one of the Village's two ambulances. The Bureau noted that the Village could make applications for repairs to their other ambulance. Headquarters also raised concern regarding reports of the teams, horse bridles, and wagons being in extremely poor condition. Headquarters noted that Mr. O'Neal should be tasked with ensuring that the teams were put in better condition. Dr. Howard responded by approving the request. Dr. Howard noted that their wagons did need covers to protect any goods or items from mud and other debris. Moreover, the mud covers were especially important when transporting sustenance stores from Washington to the Freedmen's Village in stormy weather. He also added that he had two horses that he could provide to headquarters, but one of the horses was in poor condition. Dr. Howard provided the horses and teams, and they gave the Village mud covers for their remaining team.<sup>174</sup>

The Freedmen Bureau was able to accomplish a great deal in its short existence. In March 1867, the Bureau completed a survey of the Freedmen's Village and the land surrounding it with regards to continued rental or sale of small lots to Freedmen. "Sixty-six subdivisions were made averaging about 10 acres each. There were also 44 acres occupied until recently by the village, and a reservation of 38 acres for Fort Whipple, with some small lots not comprised in the subdivisions, making altogether, besides the National Cemetery, some 750 acres of available land."<sup>175</sup> The cultivatable areas of land were rented to the Freedmen living in the tenements in the Village. The Bureau also decided to sell some of the larger tracts of land, by this means it was hoped that several of the Freedmen then supported in part by the government may be enabled to become owners of small farms which they can cultivate with profit. The sale

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<sup>174</sup> Ibid, 211.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid, 52.

of these small lots of land was a key step in helping Freedmen to become self-sufficient. It provided them with an opportunity to own and cultivate their own lands. This was a significant accomplishment of the Freedmen Bureau and it helped to improve the lives of African Americans during Reconstruction. Mainly the heads of families rented five or ten-acre lots of cultivatable areas of land. The renters were glad to continue to rent and some of them were able to purchase lots when the infrequent opportunity was given.

The asylum, which had been operational at the Village since the war, was removed in 1867, and patients there were relocated to the Freedmen's Hospital in Washington. Dr. Howard noted that the Agriculture Department could have used the estate. According to him, the estate had various characteristics that could have been used for an experimental farm. The location, which was close to Washington, had varied soil and extensive deposits of peat. It could have been used to produce fertilizer. The land was near the Potomac River as well.

Barry Farms was the designation of an estate of some 375 acres, situated north of Saint Elizabeth Insane Asylum. Barry Farms was purchased by the trustees of a certain Freedmen's educational fund for the purpose of selling small lots to the Freedmen. The fund that the trustees used to pay for Barry Farms was approved by Special Order No. 61, of the War Department, Bureau Refugees, Freedmen and Abandoned Lands, on April 23, 1867. The funds were to be used for the sole purpose of relieving the immediate necessities of the Freedmen within Washington, "by rental of land, by sale with deferred payments, or in such other way as their judgment shall direct for this purpose; provided, all proceeds, interest, or moneys received from rental or sale over and above necessary expenses, shall be annually transferred to the said institutions."<sup>176</sup> The land was surveyed and subdivided into one-acre lots. Barry Farms consisted

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<sup>176</sup> Ibid, 52.

of a total of 359 lots and 300 of those lots were sold. By October 1, 1868, 59 lots were conveyed and 40 were forfeited for nonpayment. The conditions of the Barry Farm were not particularly good. The roads were in a state of disrepair and there was no water or sewer system. There was also no fencing around the property. The Freedmen who purchased the land was responsible for making all the improvements to the property and paying all the taxes on the property.

The plan pursued under the authority of the trustees was to sell contracts that required equal monthly payments and stipulated forfeiture of the lot on failure to pay as agreed within two years. A substantial amount of funds was used in efforts to expand and widen the roads to sufficiently enable the Freedmen to transport lumber for their houses to their respective lots. The Bureau furnished a limited amount of lumber to each Freedmen who purchased a lot, and they prearranged a carpenter to supervise the construction of the houses. The carpenter's job would be to instruct the Freedmen, when necessary, during the construction of their home. Furthermore, the carpenter was to ensure that the homes being constructed had a neat appearance.

The Bureau provided lumber for 185 houses and issued it to the Freedmen. The Freedmen purchased the lots with eagerness and most of their payments, only with a few exceptions, were punctually and regularly made. The Freedmen were greatly encouraged by the prospect of owning a homestead and being relieved of the demands of the rent landlords. Luther E. Sleight, former superintendent of the enterprise, said that the Freedmen had peculiar difficulties to labor under but prevailed in purchasing homes for themselves. The Freedmen had limited means to improve the lots, but despite this, they were able to make improvements. Sleight noted that they exhibited both good taste and industry. They also demonstrated a praiseworthy public spirit in the erection of a church for the Baptist denomination. Additionally, they purchased a lot to erect a church for the Methodist denomination. The Freedmen established their

own fund amongst themselves that was allocated for educational needs and to purchase land. They built a large schoolhouse on the lot; the building was large enough to accommodate 150 students. The school was completed within a one-year period. The Freedmen who purchased lots at Barry Farm also exhibited a desire to have their families with them. They also wanted their children to be with them so that they could receive an education. The Freedmen of Barry Farms had developed into a prosperous community, one that was filled with hopefulness.<sup>177</sup>

The facilities of the Bureau at Arlington Village included government barracks, which were used as residences for freed people, families out of some of the city's most hazardous locations in Washington and Georgetown, where they were living in unsanitary huts, subject to sickness and crime. Large tenement residences were preferred over the barracks and tenements were being erected to accommodate all the Freedmen families who have been housed in the barracks. As a result, because of this measure, the number of barrack buildings utilized decreased from 19 to 7, as well as lowering ground rent; Freedmen were able to relocate into better homes and did not risk eviction because of the Bureau's closings. Tenements were leased for a rate that covered six percent of the total cost or was sold monthly in the manner of Barry Farms lots. They were well-situated, comfortable houses with city water from the aqueduct and were considerably superior to what any private landlords could offer at the same price, so they did not have any problems filling them. Strict sanitary rules were enforced on tenants. Each group of tenements was supervised by an officer from the Bureau, who checked them every day.<sup>178</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> *Ibid*, 52.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid*, 53.



## **Educating the Freedmen's Village**

Many factors hinder successful learning environments and lack of opportunity is one contributing factor. Learning experiences that do not allow students to ask questions or to have their questions answered hinder learning. Some students view learning sessions in which the lecture style is heavily used as being ineffective due to the lack of interaction and the limited opportunities for questions. Bad learning experiences often occur due to poorly trained teachers. Outside influences and learner behaviors also negatively impact the student's ability to learn. A negative learning environment with negative student behavior and outside influences creates a bad learning experience.<sup>179</sup>

In the Freedmen's Village, Freedmen were offered a wide range of educational opportunities. This included access to schools, churches, and other organizations that allowed them to learn and interact with others. They were also provided with access to resources, such as books and other materials that could help them in their educational pursuits. Additionally, Freedmen were given the opportunity to take part in social and political activities that provided them with knowledge and experience. The combination of educational opportunities, resources, and activities allowed Freedmen to develop the skills and knowledge necessary for successful community development.

In order to create a successful learning experience, there needs to be access to quality instruction and resources, a positive environment, and appropriate student behavior. Freedmen's Village provided Freedmen with the opportunity to learn and access quality instruction and resources, therefore creating a successful learning experience. In addition, Freedmen were able

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<sup>179</sup> Nicole Boatswain-Harrell, "A Study of Students' Perceptions of their Experiences in a Community College Mathematics Course with Attached Supplemental Instruction." Order No. 28155406, (Grambling State University, 2020), 88.

to create their own social and political organizations which provided Freedmen with many more opportunities for success. By creating a robust Freedmen community, they were able to create a successful learning environment that enabled them to grow and thrive. Freedmen's Village provided them with access to education, social services, and an overall sense of community. It was a place where Freedmen could build a new life, free from the oppression of slavery.

In December 1864, the National Freedmen's Relief Association commissioned Sojourner Truth to work as a counselor at Freedmen's Village.<sup>180</sup> Later, she told a journalist that President Lincoln wanted her to visit Arlington Heights and Mason's Island where many freed slaves had recently settled. Some people who saw what was happening thought it was ironic that Sojourner Truth ended up working on General Lee's confiscated estate. While she was there, she taught the Freedmen values such as being clean, organized, and hardworking. She also showed them how to live-in freedom. Through her efforts, she quickly became liked by the white Union officers who ran the Freedmen's Village. She was described as an exceedingly kind female aide. She held a close relationship with President Lincoln. During a visit to the White House, President Lincoln affectionately called Truth the Book of Life and at times referred to her as Aunty Sojourner Truth. The President regularly had leading black figures frequent the White House during a time when the Freedmen were not permitted to enter most buildings, let alone such a prestigious one. His close friend Frederick Douglass was regularly present at the White House. President Lincoln invited one of his most well-known critics, Harriet Tubman, who later regretted not attending when she heard about Sojourner Truth's visit.<sup>181</sup>

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<sup>180</sup> The National Freedmen's Relief Association was an organization that was established to improve the lives of African Americans following the Civil War.

<sup>181</sup> Jonathan White, *A House Built by Slaves: African American Visitors to the Lincoln White House*. (Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2022), 147.

Mr. E. L. Pierce of Massachusetts was sent to survey the area and report back his findings. The reports showed the North the needs of the freed people which resulted in public meetings being held in Boston, New York, and Philadelphia not long afterward. These societies were organized for relief efforts promoting education and labor reorganization. In Washington, D.C., attempts to establish a similar society were authorized and promoted by the Government, which first undertook its special attention to the contrabands in the District of Columbia, but subsequently expanded its operations to Fortress Monroe and the adjacent area. Shortly afterward in Cincinnati, the "Contraband Relief Association" was established, which then reorganized as the Western Freedmen's Aid Commission. In the fall of 1863 in Chicago, "The Northwestern Freedmen's Aid Commission" came into existence, and eventually, others followed suit throughout the West.<sup>182</sup>

Initially, the goals that were to be achieved and how to go about achieving them were only vaguely understood. Yet from the beginning, along with providing food and shelter for those who desperately needed it, the Christian faith saw that there were deeper needs. The first missionary teachers who went out not only carried clothes and provisions but also a primer and a Bible. They realized that to make the transition from slavery to freedom, the Freedmen needed not only their physical needs met, but their minds and hearts as well.

The founders of the New York society had originally intended for a limited form of labor regulation. The name "Educational Commission" indicated one of the group's aims, as the first name of the New England Society, the Educational Commission, did. Without an effective

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<sup>182</sup> American Freedman's Union Commission, and African American Pamphlet Collection. The results of emancipation in the United States of America. (New York City etc. American Freedman's Union Commission, 1867), 15.

organization, and with six months of ineffectual and unorganized but earnest effort, the entire number of teachers and missionaries operating in the area, as reported to the Treasury Department, under whose watch they were at the time, was only 70 men and 16 women.<sup>183</sup>

Although these figures do not show the tangible results of that first six months' work, they did prove the need, enthusiasm, and aptitude of the Freedmen for free labor and education. This influenced President Lincoln's later policy of emancipating all slaves. From the beginning, those who wanted to help Freedmen hoped to achieve unity so their efforts would be more effective. In 1862, at the request of the Secretary of the Treasury, representatives from New England, New York, and Philadelphia held a meeting to form a union. They cordially cooperated in their common work; however, they were not organically united in one society until 1865 when the American Freedmen's Aid Union was finally formed. In the fall of 1865, Western Associations joined the Union, constituting what is now known as the American Freedmen's Aid Commission.<sup>184</sup>

Later, the organization expanded its goals and merged with the American Union Commission. This was a society created near the end of the war to help establish free republican institutions in southern states. In May 1866, representatives from all the different Freedmen's Aid societies met at a convention. They finalized the structure of what is now called the American Freedman's Union Commission and chose "No distinction of race or color" as their motto. The Commission included nearly every kind of organization involved in the education of black

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<sup>183</sup> Ibid, 15.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid, 16.

people. However, from the beginning of the war, religious groups have also been working to not only evangelize but educate freed people.<sup>185</sup>

Various religious organizations, including the Friends, Old School Presbyterians, United Presbyterians, Methodists, and Congregationalists or Independents had all sent missionaries and teachers (through special Freedmen's organizations) to preach and educate. Additionally, one of the tract societies had focused its efforts on the colportage of Christian literature among Freedmen. Since the emancipation of slaves in the South, the Bible Society has distributed over a million copies of Scriptures to the Freedmen and others. Consequently, nearly every philanthropic Christian and religious organization had channeled its energies towards this new opportunity in the Southern field. With the American Freedmen's Aid Commission, they formed a grand army of teachers and missionaries, who were laboring to evangelize and educate the millions of emancipated slaves. The work that was done by these organizations was important not just for the people they were helping but also for the future of America. The Freedmen, who had been freed from the bonds of slavery, were able to take their rightful place in American society. They were able to learn, grow, and contribute to the social fabric of this great nation. Thanks to the efforts of these organizations, America was slowly but surely becoming a truly united country.<sup>186</sup>

The American Missionary Association was one of the oldest and largest missionary agencies, chosen specifically by the Congregationalists. Its work consisted of a combination of missionary support, educational resources, and physical relief aid. They contributed significantly

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<sup>185</sup> *Ibid*, 16.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid*, 17.

to the establishment of schools for the Freedmen and employed nearly as many teachers as the American Freedman's Union Commission.

The difficulties faced by the camps, and in particular, the difficulties of running them on a large scale, were considerable. Each department had its own set of problems. The entire task of education had been carried out using benevolent and religious organizations as tools. The Government had done its part in providing schoolhouses, transportation, and rations for teachers during the war. In some areas they even had special military taxes to provide salaries; however, this was not the norm. Local commanders played a much bigger role than the government when it came to supporting educators. Of the thirteen hundred generous teachers who had been sent to the South, nearly all of them were given support by voluntary societies.<sup>187</sup>

To provide for the needs of the Freedmen, local organizations were formed in many northern towns, cities, and villages. These groups were primarily composed of women who used various methods such as sewing societies and church contributions to raise money. The goal of these groups was to help with the relief effort and to promote education among the Freedmen. One of the most important things that these organizations did was provide financial support to missionaries and teachers. They also sent down much-needed supplies, such as clothing and books. In some cases, they even helped with the construction of schools and other buildings. The work of these organizations was crucial to the success of Reconstruction. They were the ones who were helping to educate and uplift the newly freed slaves. Without their support, it would be exceedingly difficult for the freed people to make the transition from slavery to freedom.

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<sup>187</sup> *Ibid*, 17.

Generally, it costs from three to six hundred dollars per year to support a single teacher. In many cases, local societies had become involved and selected a known teacher whose correspondence had demonstrated interest and ability. Sometimes an auxiliary society would take on responsibility for establishing and carrying on an entire school; other times Northern churches were represented by their members through contributions both spiritual and monetary. The system was therefore a variety of individual and organizational support that had come into being to meet the needs of the time.

It is important to note that these philanthropic efforts were not government-sponsored, but rather they were private initiatives driven by religious groups and concerned citizens. The American Missionary Association, for example, was one of the oldest and largest missionary organizations in the country. It was founded in 1846 with the express purpose of helping Black people. The organization was continually active during Reconstruction, sending hundreds of missionaries and teachers to the South. Another important organization was the National Freedman's Relief Association, which was founded in 1865. This group was also responsible for sending supplies and teachers to the South. These organizations are just two examples of the many groups that were working to help The Freedmen during their transition to freedom. Reconstruction would not be possible without their support. One decisive point to note is that these efforts were not limited to the United States. Many private organizations in Europe were working to help with the reconstruction effort.<sup>188</sup>

It is impossible to accurately estimate the total amount contributed from all sources since the beginning of relief and education efforts for Freedmen. However, one officer of the Bureau

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<sup>188</sup> Ibid, 18.

provided an estimate of \$5,278,363 spent by the societies on Freedmen in just two years ending July 14, 1867. The total amount in money and in-kind donations made by the various Freedmen's missions, and church organizations, as well as private benevolence, from the start of the movement in February 1862, up to July 1st, 1867, exceeded \$5.5 million. Of these five million five hundred thousand dollars, fully one-fifth had arrived from abroad. England gave £80 000, while France Germany, Switzerland, and other countries showed their support in a meaningful way.<sup>189</sup>

## **Schools**

There was no formal public education system, in the strict sense, in the Southern states before the abolition of slavery, except for in a limited sense North Carolina. In some populous areas, free schools were available; in other places, academies and colleges were established; but insufficient measures were taken to educate even the poor whites. The vast majority of both White and Black people were left in ignorance. The first step that was taken by the Federal Government, after slavery was abolished, to promote the education of the Freedmen, was the establishment of Freedmen schools for the formerly enslaved liberated by the Union army who fled to its lines for protection. These schools were opened in all parts of the country where emancipated slaves were to be found. Bureau agents were often tasked with locating the most densely populated area of Freedmen and establishing a school there.

The Freedmen's eagerness for education emerged as they ascended from slavery, and their intellectual hunger was met by a North that was prepared to make provisions for it. The Freedmen's physical deprivation impelled the first social organizations to be established, which

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<sup>189</sup> Ibid, 18.



sent instructors and publications as well as children and unemployed adults to schools. As a result, when General O. O. Howard was given command of the Bureau, he utilized many of the schools that had already been established in those regions that had been under the Union's military control for some time.<sup>190</sup>

The history of these schools was one long record of success. Despite their modest beginnings, they grew in number and became more important as portions of the nation remained isolated for extended periods during times of conflict or unrest. The same could be said about other branches that were established by benevolent organizations from the North without any official protection, with little or no support from military commanders, and without adequate facilities or school equipment.

In areas such as Louisiana, where Major-Generals Banks and Butler were in charge, school systems had already been put into place and funded by military taxation. In addition to these, the Freedmen organized private schools with African American teachers. However, many of these teachers lacked the appropriate skills, abilities, and knowledge that would make a teacher suited for the job. White Southerners neither cooperated with nor showed any sympathy for these educational efforts. On the contrary, they harbored deep-seated prejudices and hostility towards them.<sup>191</sup> The idea of educating the Freedmen was ridiculed as a ridiculous attempt to raise the African American race. In several cases, schools were burned, teachers assaulted and driven away, and even until late in the nineteenth-century teachers were unable to find boards in respectable white families and were subjected to every type of insult and derision.

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<sup>190</sup> *Ibid*, 29.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid*, 29.

The great mass of the Southern people, including many who were not prejudiced against the Freedmen, believed that it was quite unnecessary to educate them. They were content to let them remain in ignorance, thinking that they would be more manageable and docile if they were not taught how to read and write. The planters also thought that if the Freedmen were not educated, they would be less likely to desire their freedom, and would be content with the position of serfdom.

One of the most hurtful epithets in the Southern lexicon was "nigger teacher." Even among Northern supporters of emancipation, there was prejudice against persons of color. It is a notable fact that one of the first Freedmen's Aid Societies came crashing down over a disagreement regarding whether to collaborate in any effort aimed at educating minorities, even though they were ready to feed and clothe them to alleviate suffering and death.<sup>192</sup>

The educational need of the Freedmen was one of the Commissioner's first concerns. He has devoted considerable time to it, and under his leadership and that of his capable coadjutor, Rev. J. W Alvord, the Bureau Superintendent of Schools, a substantial change in education occurred. His first move was to appoint a local Superintendent in each State, whose duty it was to help organize and unify all the different agencies that were already working, and to collaborate with them in creating new schools.<sup>193</sup> In this way, the different organizations were able to work together more efficiently, to provide quality education for all black children in the South. Funds from Congress were requested and granted to pay for renting, repairing, as well as building new schools. Many of these buildings had been constructed on land owned by the Freedmen or given

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<sup>192</sup> Ibid, 30.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid, 30.

to them through individuals or organizations interested in their education. The cost of travel expenses for teachers was covered so they can get to their work locations.<sup>194</sup>

Industrial schools received specific aid, and a fund from the property once owned by the Confederate States was used for general school purposes. A system of regular school reports was put in place that all teachers were requested to send to the Bureau, and there was now a standard system for using textbooks. With all these measures in place, the number of schools increased rapidly and their quality improved. The first schools were held in abandoned churches, hospitals that had closed, private homes once occupied by military authorities, old sheds, beneath a tree, and even in one case a bombproof structure that had been demolished.<sup>195</sup>

There were never enough desks, blackboards, or other materials. The school buildings were in a bad state of repair and often lacked glass in the windows. In some instances, there were no doors. The children had no shoes. They came to class with empty stomachs, many of them did not have anything to eat since the day before. Despite all these difficulties, the teachers persevered. They were animated by a noble zeal, professionalism, and were inspired by a great love for their pupils. These teachers came from the North, except for a few who were from the South but had been educated in Northern schools.

The majority were women, but there were also some men. They were poorly paid and received limited reimbursement for their travel expenses. In addition, they had to endure the hostility of the white population. Despite all these challenges, they continued to teach because they believed in the importance of education for all children, regardless of race. The Freedmen's Bureau had been instrumental in helping the religious and benevolent organizations to provide

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<sup>194</sup> Ibid, 30.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid, 30.

quality education for Black children in the South. Thanks to the dedication of its employees and outside agency teachers, as well as the support of Congress, progress has been made despite the many challenges that have been faced. With continued effort, Black children in the South gained access to a basic education.<sup>196</sup>

In the early years, their schoolbooks were not in much better condition than the buildings, relying on donations of old and damaged school texts from the North. The Freedmen's schools were regularly graded, beginning with primary and working up to standard. A common grammar school course was taught, with the higher branches being included as the students' progress warranted. The great aim of the Freedmen's Bureau was not simply to provide education for Black children, but also to train them in such a way that they would be able to take their place as productive, gainfully employed citizens. This required teaching not only academic subjects but also trades and professions. Many of the schools that were established were industrial schools, with a focus on teaching trades such as carpentry, blacksmithing, and masonry. The teachers were, in many cases, among the best in the nation, and some of the schools were not far behind those found in Northern cities and towns. In Washington, D.C., Black institutions fostered and supported by humanitarian donations from the Freedmen's supporters were on par with any in the country.<sup>197</sup>

The influence of these institutions on modifying and coopting southern public opinion was significant. Many Southern church organizations had expressed their support for educational efforts at least to the point of issuing resolutions in favor of its continuation. Only a scarcity of resources keeps them from fully engaging in it. In several states, legislation was passed

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<sup>196</sup> *Ibid*, 31.

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid*, 31.

providing for the establishment of a free school system. The results of these years of toil and sacrifice were beginning to be seen. A generation of Black children had been educated and was starting to take its place in society. The school tax on the African American community in the District of Columbia was used to provide for their schools. The same may be said about Maryland and Florida. In Tennessee, Missouri, and Western Virginia, a free and fair education system was established by law but had not been put into operation owing to a lack of essential resources.<sup>198</sup> In the Carolinas, prominent men were working to establish a similar system. In Georgia, African Americans formed an educational association to establish schools in every county. In other sections of the South, individuals committed their own money to the education of Black children in isolated areas, and similar proposals were made in every state and community where Freedmen schools were previously despised. However, regardless of what the situation was, these educational institutions have always been most prevalent in the North, and the divide between the North and South was most severe. In addition, wherever such institutions had not yet emerged, sectional prejudice endured with potent vigor. It is impossible to overemphasize how important education was to Black people. The schools were packed; people were eager for more knowledge.

There were four different types of schools: a day school for youngsters, a night school (often run by the same instructors) for adults, an industrial school where women and children were trained in sewing and other home skills, and Sunday schools. The interest of the Freedmen was indicated by several factors: average attendance was equal to that of whites in Northern cities. Pupils begged that school was not intermitted for summer vacation; suspension from school privileges was often the only punishment necessary and, despite their poverty, the

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<sup>198</sup> Ibid, 31.

Freedmen made many contributions for land purchases, building erection, and teacher support. In the South, more than half of all schools were sustained in part by the Freedmen. Fifteen thousand pupils paid tuition amounting to a total of \$11,377.03 each month out of roughly 78,000 students.<sup>199</sup>

The primary educational need of the South was an adequate supply of normal schools for the education of Black instructors. The Freedmen needed to be taught to educate themselves. Normal schools were established in several major cities, and efforts were made to establish at least one normal school within every Southern state. There were numerous locations where a Black teacher might have successfully operated a school to which it was not feasible to dispatch a white instructor from the North; and many areas, such as these, where the prejudice against a local black teacher would have been less than that against academic instruction being provided by a Northern instructor.

On January 1, 1867, John Kimball, the Superintendent of Schools, informed Rev. J.W. Alvord that the work of education among the Freedmen was progressing finely. He noted that the number of schools had not increased but the quality was better than the previous years. The teachers were enthusiastic. Many attended the monthly teachers' meeting for consultation, to fill their reports, and for mutual acquaintance. He found the meeting useful. Northern Societies more thoroughly supported the education of Freedmen in the Village, more than any other part of the South. There was harmony among societies that sought to help the Freedmen and the Freedmen's Bureau supported this effort.<sup>200</sup>

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<sup>199</sup> Ibid, 32.

<sup>200</sup> Freedman's Village and Reconstruction Collections Records, 1857-1996, RG 103 Box 1, Folder (1) "Freedman's Village: Arlington, Virginia, 1863-1900, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 1992."

On December 26, 1864, Captain Geo Carse was assigned the duty of Superintendent of the Freedmen's Village, Virginia. Major General Augur had directed Captain Carse to assume the role of Military and Civil Superintendent of the Freedmen's Village, Virginia. He replaced Mr. J.J. Johnson. One of the first tasks that the new captain faced was overseeing the educational systems and buildings within the Village. The various stores and properties of the Village continued to be under the leadership of Mr. George Roscoe. Captain Carse was responsible for overseeing the various rations, resolving issues that were brought to his attention, and making sure that proper procedures were followed.<sup>201</sup>

The educational system was particularly important to the success of the Freedmen's Village. Several schools were in operation within the Village, including a night school, providing instruction to all the children who lived in the Village. To ensure that the quality of education was maintained, government officials conducted frequent inspections.<sup>202</sup>

The proposed building for the school at Freedmen's Village had been tasked to Captain Geo B. Carse, and the cost of the project was almost \$1,000. However, due to the current state of the funds, he was not able to assist in this outlay. He proposed to repair the "Long House" at Freedmen's Village. The Long House was fitted up at a small expense for a Primary School.<sup>203</sup> In many cases the Freedmen built the school themselves, African American community members

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<sup>201</sup> District of Columbia Field Offices, Freedmen's Village, Letters Received, (Dec. 26, 1864–Dec. 9, 1868, Part 1), 3.

<sup>202</sup> These inspections helped to identify any areas that needed improvement. In addition to the educational system, the Village also had several businesses and services that were important to the residents. These businesses included a barber shop, a bakery, a carpentry shop, and a laundry. The Village also had established churches that served the spiritual needs of the residents. The churches were an important part of the community and provided a place for people to gather and worship together.

<sup>203</sup> District of Columbia Field Offices, Freedmen's Village, Letters Received, (Dec. 26, 1864–Dec. 9, 1868, Part 1), 4.

who had been slaves just a few years before. They worked together to clear the land, build the schoolhouse, and fit it out with whatever they could afford. It was a true community effort, and it showed the determination of these formerly enslaved people and women to get an education for themselves and their children. The school at Freedmen's Village was one of many that were built by African Americans in the years after the Civil War. This was a time of profound change for African Americans, as they slowly gained more rights and opportunities. Education was seen as key to success in this new world, and so many African Americans worked hard to establish schools in their communities.

In response to the need for school building accommodations and repairs, H. E. Simmons informed Captain Carse that accommodation for at least two hundred scholars was needed. He stated that the school building should be about fifty feet long and thirty feet wide, and should be divided into two halves, one being built near the other, and the other being connected with a covered way. The rear portion of the building should have two rooms that were designed to provide adequate space for more recitation rooms. At that time, there were only two such rooms in the existing building.<sup>204</sup> The proposed plan for the school building submitted by Captain Carse called for 16,552 feet of lumber, 14,400 square feet of shingles, 150 feet of glass 10x14, 15 pounds of putty, 100 pounds of white lead, 1 Gallon of Linseed Oil, 1 Gallon of Benzine, 5 pairs of T hinges, 10 in. Rim locks, 7 kegs of assorted nails, 24 sash springs, and 2 gross springs, at a total estimated cost of \$983.75.<sup>205</sup>

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<sup>204</sup> Ibid, 5.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid, 9.





A Freedmen's Village school, 1862-1865, *Courtesy of the Library of Congress.*

The staff also had to deal with the issue of education. This was an especially important part of their duties because they wanted to make sure that the Freedmen were able to read and write. They also wanted to make sure that the children received an education so that they would be prepared for their future. The staff at the Freedmen's Village did an admirable job in trying to meet the needs of the residents. They were often successful but there were also times when they failed. Overall, the staff worked hard to make sure that the Freedmen were taken care of and that they had what they needed to live a good life. The Freedmen's Village school report for June 26, 1865, listed the school attendance for the current school week. According to H. E. Simmons, school attendance for that week was an average of two-hundred and forty-two students, which reflects a fifteen percent decrease from the previous week.<sup>206</sup>

On November 22, 1866, General C. H. Howard advised Captain Lawrence that the school building that the association used at Freedmen's Village was too large. He requested that the building be repaired and turned over to the association for use as a schoolhouse. The General

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<sup>206</sup> District of Columbia Field Offices, Freedmen's Village, Letters Received, (Dec. 26, 1864–Dec. 9, 1868, Part 1), 4.

mentioned that the repairs and work should be done at the best market rate.<sup>207</sup> The education of the Freedmen living within the Village was especially important and the Bureau took many steps to educate the residents. The Freedmen's Bureau helped with the construction of schools, provided school supplies, and hired teachers. The goal of the Freedmen's Bureau was to provide the Freedmen with the opportunity to learn how to read and write. This was done to empower them and help them become self-sufficient. Many of the Freedmen living in the Village were illiterate and had never had the opportunity to go to school. The Freedmen's Bureau saw education as the most productive means to level the playing field and give Freedmen tools to be successful in life.

According to a field agent, Edward Smith, the reduction of the Freedmen's Village population in Arlington required changes in the school building and the number of teachers. As a result, the aggregate number of students attending school had decreased to less than seventy-five. The school building, which was owned by the association was too large for the redressed situation and it was not practical for the small number of scholars. The expense of maintaining the large building during the winter was not considered a justifiable expense.

There were several schoolchildren from the former Lee & Curtis enslaved families. Their numbers were estimated to be forty to sixty. They were permanent residents, and their children were well-rounded and respected by their teachers. The children of those families were likely to need a permanent school. They were also likely to settle within the area even if they left the Village. One of the buildings in the Ward was used for this purpose. However, it is important to note that the building on the river flat near the Village was reportedly not structurally sound

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<sup>207</sup> District of Columbia Field Offices, Freedmen's Village, Letters Received, (Dec. 26, 1864–Dec. 9, 1868, Part 1), 112.

enough to be repurposed as a schoolhouse. To make the building more stable, it was suggested that it be repaired by laying a tight floor, dividing it into three rooms, and plastering the walls. The building was to be divided into three rooms by plastered partitions. An arrangement was made to place writing desks within the new rooms.<sup>208</sup>

The Freedmen's Village worked in conjunction with other organizations and individual activists who worked to aid the Freedmen. One example of the Village working in conjunction with individuals can be seen in their collaboration with Miss Emily Howland.



Emily Howland pictured in 1887, courtesy of the Library of Congress.

Miss Howland was born in 1827 and was the only daughter of a prosperous rural New York Quaker man. She invested her time, energy, and efforts into the antislavery and women's rights movements in the 1840s and 1850s. She was a skilled writer and became a teacher. Much of her teaching efforts were dedicated to the education of Freedmen. Miss Howland personally

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<sup>208</sup> Bid, 114.

financed the education of many Freedmen from her personal funds.<sup>209</sup> Miss Howland lived in the teachers' quarters at Camp Todd (Arlington) in 1865, the camp later became a part of the Freedmen's Village. Miss Howland was an advocate and activist who stood in support of the Freedmen. She often secured charitable donations from the various benevolent society that she was connected to for the benefit of the Freedmen's Village. On December 17, 1866, Miss Emily Howland requested that the Village donate eight wooden sashes which were stored at the Freedmen's Village. Miss Howard sought to use the wooden sashes at her schoolhouse that she was establishing on her land located in Northumberland County Virginia. She planned to educate Freedmen within the area.<sup>210</sup>

Miss Howland purchased land in Northumberland County, Virginia, and moved several families from Arlington. She followed them and became their teacher. A schoolhouse was necessary must be built to accommodate the growing number of students. The local Freedmen purchased land for building the schoolhouse. Since there were several unused windows available at the Freedmen's Village that were owned by the government, Miss Howland asked for help from the Village in donating eight sashes. Miss Howland noted if the Village granted her request, the shipping and removal of the sashes would be provided at her own expense.<sup>211</sup> Her request was immediately forwarded up to General C. H. Howard for approval. The Bureau granted the

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<sup>209</sup> Judith Colucci Breault, *The World of Emily Howland: Odyssey of a Humanitarian*. (Millbrae, California: Les Femmes Pub, 1976), vii.

<sup>210</sup> Judith Colucci Breault, *The World of Emily Howland: Odyssey of a Humanitarian*. (Millbrae, California: Les Femmes Pub, 1976), 63.

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid*, 123.

approval, with Captain Lawrence as the approving authority.<sup>212</sup> Emily Howland's record reflects that she was a faithful and efficient teacher of Freedmen.<sup>213</sup>

The Superintendent of Schools, John Kimball, contacted Captain Lawrence to inquire as to the number of Freedmen who lived in the Freedmen's Village. He noted that Freedmen Bureau wanted to learn the number for a fund allocation.<sup>214</sup> The value of an educated workforce was being realized and the Freedmen's Village schools were seen as a place where valuable resources were effectively utilized.

There were many occasions when the schools at the Village were used to support the educational goals of other schools that educated Freedmen within Washington D. C., Maryland, and Virginia. John Kimball, Superintendent of Schools in Washington, contacted Captain Lawrence and requested a donation of any number of small chairs that were not being used by the students at the Village.<sup>215</sup> In addition to loaning out or donating instruments, tools, items, and materials that were not being used, they would sell them to raise funds for the Village. The Assistant Commissioner of the Freedmen's Bureau authorized the Village to sell at the best conceivable rates the 'Hot bed Sash' which was no longer being used.<sup>216</sup> Once the Village sold the items, they would turn the proceeds of the sale over to the Assistant Commissioner to be accounted for.<sup>217</sup> The school at the Village was open to all residents, both children, and adults. The curriculum consisted of reading, writing, arithmetic, geography, grammar, and United States

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<sup>212</sup> Ibid, 122.

<sup>213</sup> *The Soldiers' journal*. (Rendezvous of Distribution, Va.), 21 Dec. 1864.

<sup>214</sup> District of Columbia Field Offices, Freedmen's Village, Letters Received, (Dec. 26, 1864–Dec. 9, 1868, Part 1), 144.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid, 212

<sup>216</sup> This was a wood framed window unit for a hotbed or greenhouse that could be raised or lowered for plant temperature control.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid, 216.

history. In addition to the regular school curriculum, the students were also taught trades such as carpentry, tailoring, and shoemaking. The Village had a library that was open to all residents. The library consisted of books donated by individuals and organizations within Washington, as well as books that were purchased with money raised by the Freedmen's Aid Society.

On March 25, 1867, concerning the safety of the schoolhouse at the Village, Dr. Wheeler petitioned Lt. Rogers for aid. He exclaimed that it was necessary to repair the water pipes at the school and extend them partly down the hill. He also expressed the need to put in a plug to safeguard against fire. Dr. Wheeler noted that the school building was connected to other buildings and stated that this could put other properties at risk of a fire. Lt. Rogers had a more cost-efficient approach to safeguarding against fire. He stated that the value of these structures would not justify the expense of maintaining them. Therefore, he felt that a fire bucket placed in these buildings would provide adequate protection against fire. There was also a running stream near the structures that could be used to put out a fire if one developed. The buildings that were occupied by the schoolhouse and those used as quarters did not justify the expense of an integrated internal waterline fire suppression system or hydrants.<sup>218</sup>

Dr. Wheeler offered a rebuttal to Lt. Roger's position regarding the possible installation of an additional fire plug and other safety mechanisms in the buildings. Dr. Wheeler stated that the Hospital did not have a fire plug near it and was unprotected. However, in his opinion, wooden buckets would not provide adequate protection against fire. A local contractor, Mr. Bryant, informed Dr. Wheeler that he found various plugs, and claimed that a pipe under the Guard House could reduce the cost of installing a fire plug to only one hundred dollars. Dr.

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<sup>218</sup> Ibid, 235.

Wheeler asserted that he had no interest in this matter, except to have the buildings protected from fire.<sup>219</sup> The Hospital was not the only building in need of protection against fires, as all the buildings were made of wood. To protect the Village against fires, Wheeler argued every precaution must be taken. The use of fire plugs would help to ensure the safety of the residents in case of a fire.

The Industrial School at the Freedmen's Village was an invaluable asset that served many functions for the residents of the Village. For instance, in November 1867, the Industrial School manufactured two hundred coats and two hundred pants. The Industrial School had a sewing room dedicated to the task. There were instances when the Bureau had to have Industrial Schools in Washington manufacture clothing for the Village and for some Freedmen who lived within the surrounding areas.<sup>220</sup> In contrast, the revenue generated from the sale of the clothing manufactured on-site at the Industrial School was used to support the Village. In some cases, the Bureau would use the money to purchase much-needed supplies for the Village. The Industrial School also served as a place of employment for some of the Freedmen within the Village.

On December 5, 1867, Major Brown requested that Dr. Howard prepare a room for a school to be taught by a Freedwoman named Miss Ellis. Miss Ellis taught a course of study at the Village and was hired at the Village by the recommendation of Reverend John Ellis. A schoolroom was outfitted with desks, seats, a blackboard, and a stove for heating. The major noted that if the Village was not able to prepare the room as required, with its own laborers the Village should have the work done and forward the invoice to the Bureau for payment. The

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<sup>219</sup> Ibid, 235.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid, 194.

major stated if the Village did not have a stove, he would have one sent along with an elbow and several feet of pipe.<sup>221</sup>

The Bureau appointed agents who were required to canvass their sub-district in attempts of locating an area that had enough children to warrant a school. The agents would stir up, if possible, interest among the Freedmen in every such community and make known to them the plan of the Bureau in assisting to build schoolhouses. One efficient Black agent named J. H. Butler had been constantly at work traveling from neighborhood to neighborhood throughout the lower Maryland counties. His services were especially required in obtaining a suitable site. Occasionally a parcel of land would be donated. “Whenever any colored person owned land in the vicinity this was almost certain to be done...”<sup>222</sup> There were also a few instances when benevolent white citizens donated land for the designation of a Freedmen’s school. It was extremely difficult to purchase a lot for such a purpose and in most cases, an excessive price was charged. Subsequently, the Freedmen were compelled to take a lot of land in undesired and obscure places. There was a locality of Prince George’s County, called The Forrest, where the Freedmen were not able to procure land of any description for a school building site. This was due to the bitterness and strong opposition to Freedmen’s schools. Generally, once a potential location was obtained the Bureau agent was tasked with confirming that a valid deed was produced and provided to resident trustees, who were usually Freedmen. The agent then had the deed officially recorded and sent a copy to be filed at headquarters.<sup>223</sup>

Large meetings were organized to increase the interest of the Freedmen in the establishment and maintenance of schools. These meetings were well attended by large numbers

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<sup>221</sup> Ibid, 228.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid, 228.

<sup>223</sup> Registers and Letters Received by the Commissioner, Letters Received, Unregistered Letters, (1865–1871, Part 3), 49.



of Freedmen who resided in different areas. Some of the enthusiastic Freedmen who attended the meetings walked twelve miles while others walked a distance of twenty miles. One of the meetings held in Frederick, Maryland, was attended by over five thousand Freedmen. The Superintendent of Schools had always been noticeably clear about the plans for the establishment and maintenance of schools. He invited the leading individuals from the community to participate in private conferences. In some cases, the people who attended the meetings were able to raise funds on the spot to start the school. In other cases, the old debts that were accumulated during the establishment of previously founded schools were cleared.<sup>224</sup>

Potential teachers for the Freedmen's schools were provided with various housing options, such as houses rent-free or government barracks. They were promised to be paid a salary, payment for the board, and other expenses. Several Freedmen's aid associations assisted the Bureau with compensating the teachers. The Bureau absorbed all costs associated with the transportation of the teachers to their stations. The teachers were allowed to travel on military and Government railroads.<sup>225</sup> Whenever a new school was established, the Superintendent of Schools applied to the Freedmen's aid associations for a teacher and in many cases, they would state the preferred race, and gender of the potential teacher.<sup>226</sup> The teachers who were chosen to work with the Freedmen were given a few days to rest and recuperate from their long journey before commencing with their duties. They were carefully selected for their teaching ability as well as moral character and religious faith. In some cases, the teachers had no prior teaching experience. The Bureau provided the teachers with a manual that outlined the best methods of

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<sup>224</sup> Ibid, 49.

<sup>225</sup> Freedman's Village and Reconstruction Collections Records, 1857-1996, RG 103 Box 1, Folder (1) "Freedman's Village: Arlington, Virginia, 1863-1900, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 1992."

<sup>226</sup> Registers and Letters Received by the Commissioner, Letters Received, Unregistered Letters, (1865–1871, Part 3), 49.

teaching illiterate students of all ages. The manual also contained lesson plans and other materials that would help carry out the teacher's duties.

The teachers who worked with the Freedmen faced many challenges. They were required to instruct students of all ages who had various levels of literacy. In addition, they had to deal with the language barrier as many of the Freedmen spoke broken standard English. Some of the teachers were not familiar with the local dialect which made communication with the students even more difficult. Despite all the challenges, the teachers persevered because they believed in the cause. They were motivated by the fact that they were helping to liberate an oppressed group of people. Except at the Freedmen's Village the schools that were established for the Freedmen were typically one-room buildings that were constructed of logs or boards. The floors were usually made of dirt and the windows were covered with oiled paper to keep out the frigid air. In some cases, the school buildings were converted homes or churches. The school buildings were usually located in remote areas where there was a reduced risk of them being disturbed by hostile whites.

The Freedmen's Bureau provided the schools with the necessary supplies such as books, desks, blackboards, and other materials. The teachers were responsible for creating their lesson plans. In some cases, the teachers had to improvise because they did not have access to the proper resources. The Freedmen who attended the schools faced many challenges. They had to deal with hostile whites who did not want them to be educated. In addition, they had to overcome their feelings of insecurity and inferiority. Despite all the challenges, the Freedmen were determined to get an education. They believed that education was the key to liberation.

Over the years, the trustees of Black schools in the District of Columbia had been taking care of various schools in Georgetown and Washington. These schools reported to the

superintendent. Additionally, there were several private schools in Washington, taught by Freedmen teachers, and several higher institutions of learning, which were established for the education of the Freedmen and their offspring. There were approximately 219 schools, 10,980 students, with an average attendance rate of 74 percent, and roughly 257 teachers who taught within the schools. In June 1868, the superintendent inspected schools in the District of Columbia and Maryland. He noted that there had been a marked improvement in the schools. He also talked about the construction of new schoolhouses and furniture. The superintendent stated that the children's appearance had improved. He also noted that the schools had been more organized and that there had been a better management system. During the last term, over 400 and 74 students were commended for their cleanliness.<sup>227</sup> The Freedmen's Bureau also provided the schools with the necessary supplies such as books, desks, blackboards, and other materials. The teachers were responsible for creating their lesson plans. In some cases, the teachers had to improvise because they did not have access to the proper resources. The Old Alexandria Academy on Whole Street was funded by a bequest from George Washington, attended by Robert E. Lee, and later taught Freedmen.

Local schools were able to obtain some of the money that was due to the Freedmen schools from the public fund. Also, Judge Sayles Bowen, the former Chairman of the School Board, was elected as the Mayor of the District of Washington. During that time, the city government and the school boards supported "colored" schools. The various benevolent organizations in Washington and Georgetown ultimately withdrew their contributions as public funding became more available.

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<sup>227</sup> Ibid, 50.

An African American, William Syphax, was appointed as one of the trustees, and he was in good standing with the predominantly white group. William Syphax, born in 1825 to Charles Syphax and Maria Carter, was nothing short of a product of his environment. His father was enslaved by George Washington Parke Custis - the grandson and adopted son of none other than George and Martha Washington. Similarly, his mother who was thought to be the daughter of Custis-Washington also held in captivity. As the first African American appointed to the Board of Trustees for Colored Schools in DC, William Syphax fought hard for equal educational standards and a unified public school system. He served on the board from 1862-1871, serving as chairman and later treasurer. He was responsible for the building of the Sumner, Lincoln, and Stevens Schools- which were designed to be equivalent to those meant for white students. While he oversaw this period, there was also a significant increase in African American educators in DC.<sup>228</sup>

One of the main advantages of having a single school board in the District of Columbia was that it allowed the schools to be run efficiently under one centralized governing body. However, both White and Black citizens should be represented under one board, so a bill passed into law would facilitate such implication.<sup>229</sup> The directors of the schools were incredibly pleased with the progress that had been made. They had expected a great deal of difficulty in getting the Freedmen interested in education, but they found that most of them were eager to learn. The attendance at the schools was steadily increasing, and it was hoped that eventually, all the Freedmen in the District would be attending school. It was also hoped that some of the Freedmen

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<sup>228</sup> "William Syphax School," DC Historic Sites, <https://historicsites.dcpreservation.org/items/show/911>.

<sup>229</sup> Registers and Letters Received by the Commissioner, Letters Received, Unregistered Letters, (1865–1871, Part 3), 50.

would go on to higher education and that they would become teachers themselves so that they could help educate future generations of Freedmen.

Regarding the public sentiment towards Freedmen and Freedmen schools in Maryland, the only allowance that was made by law for the support of public schools for Freedmen children in Maryland were funds that were derived from the taxes paid by “colored” people. This, of course, was exceedingly small, in consequence of the brief time in which the Freedmen had been able to accumulate compensation in exchange for their labor and acquire property. The Freedmen had to overcome many disadvantages post-emancipation. They were often faced with endless hostility, abuse, and prejudice that was akin to the treatment they received when they were held as chattel slaves. In Baltimore, there was less of a financial need than everywhere, resulting from the wealth of some of the Freedmen and local government support.

The school authorities had adopted ten Freedmen schools and provided enough financial support to pay the school’s expenses, including the salaries of white teachers. This movement of liberality deserved commendation from all the friends of universal education, not only for the satisfactory results in Baltimore but as an example for other cities and communities.<sup>230</sup> In Washington, D.C., the school board had to confront a unique set of issues with regard to educating Freedmen children. One issue was the physical plant and lack of resources. The school buildings were in a state of disrepair and there was a great need for more schoolhouses. Another issue was that there was a shortage of qualified teachers. To address these issues, the board decided to hire teachers from the North who were familiar with teaching African American children. They also decided to provide more training for local African American teachers so that they could be better prepared to teach in the classroom.

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<sup>230</sup> Ibid, 50.

In other parts of Maryland, bitter hatred was shown towards Freedmen schools, although this feeling had improved from previous years. Captain Von Schirach, the assistant to the Assistant Commissioner for Upper Maryland, shed light on a case of assault of a Freedmen teacher in Cecil County, and another Freedwoman teacher in Havre de Grace. The latter teacher was awarded one cent damages by an inferior court, but Judge Giles, of the United States Circuit Court, to whom the case was appealed, refused a new trial.<sup>231</sup> It was with a sense of great pride and accomplishment that the board reported that Freedmen children in Maryland were making progress in their education despite the many challenges they faced. They were hopeful that with continued support, the Freedmen would be able to overcome all the obstacles in their path and go on to lead successful and productive lives.

If the unfavorable public sentiment toward the Freedmen continued to be supported by high officials of the United States government, improvement for them would be slow. According to the Von Schirach report, though the facts indicated an improvement in public sentiment concerning the education of Freedmen, this was a sharp contrast to what the Freedmen experienced daily. There was no provision by law for the support of Freedmen schools, and this was not likely to be established unless the Freedmen population became represented in the legislature. The opposition from the white citizens to the education of Freedmen and their children was found to be much less than it was one year ago. At about that time one building was partially finished and repurposed as a schoolhouse and church. This building was spitefully burned down to the ground.<sup>232</sup> The board believed with a little more time, the feeling of goodwill and liberality toward the Freedmen would increase and result in their social elevation and

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<sup>231</sup> Ibid, 50.

<sup>232</sup> Ibid, 50.

intellectual development. They were hopeful that the day would soon come when all people, regardless of race or color, would be able to enjoy the same rights and privileges under the law.

Several of the Freedmen teachers were assaulted and otherwise ill-treated, during the late 1860s. There were heightened complaints of outrages committed against the Freedmen. An association in support of the Freedmen made it their practice to re-establish support for Freedmen teachers and students who were victims of such violence and aimed to triumph over all opposition in the localities where they operated within. Some Freedmen schools operated under a partial system of free tuition. Freedmen schools were required to be separate from white schools that were funded by the local government, but they were still forced to pay local property taxes. The school buildings were often in a poor state of repair and lacked adequate heating and ventilation.

In some cases, the Freedmen were forced to share their school buildings with churches or other organizations. The school boards also complained that they were not receiving enough money from the Freedmen's Bureau to adequately support the schools. They also noted that many of the Freedmen teachers were not professionally trained and that there was a shortage of qualified teachers. In some cases, the Freedmen had to leave their homes and seek safety elsewhere. The Freedmen were also afraid to send their children to school for fear that they would be assaulted or harmed in some way. Despite the challenges, the Freedmen continued to fight for their right to an education. They believed that education was the key to success and would help them to achieve equality in society. With the support of the Freedmen's Bureau, they were able to make progress in their fight for equality.

Despite paying taxes, the Freedmen schools were forced to finance the building of schoolhouses and compensated their teachers. Many white-only schools were tasked with the

same responsibility, but they were better equipped financially and had more resources to assist with fundraising, not to mention the government funds they received. Fundraising and financing a school of any standing white, only or a Freedmen school, was a challenging task. The negative treatment, physical abuse, and intimidation that the Freedmen and their children received only compounded the issue at hand.

There were instances when Bureau agents attempted to hold meetings in support of fundraising or building interest in a Freedmen school and were fired upon by hostile mobs who opposed any form of schooling for the Freedmen. Even when the Bureau agents did not resist the mob but instead fled for safety, the angry mob would still pursue the agents until they left town permanently. In some cases, the Freedmen's children would be attacked with impunity as they walked to their schools. It was said that anytime a Freedmen child was found on the road by themselves they were in danger of being abused or killed. These actions only proved how important education was for the Freedmen and how much resistance there was to keep them uneducated.<sup>233</sup>

The United States government did not make any concerted attempt, nor did they have any real desire, to enforce laws that would protect the Freedmen while they sought an education. The rights of African Americans were often violated with no legal repercussions for the offenders. Even with all these challenges, many Freedmen teachers persevered because they knew how important it was for their students to get an education. The Freedmen's schools were important not only because they educated the Freedmen's children, but also because they served as a community center. The schoolhouse was often the only building in the area that was large

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<sup>233</sup> Ibid, 50.



enough to hold meetings or host other events. The schoolhouses became a gathering place for the entire community, not just the children who attended classes there.

Those who were local supporters of Freedmen's schools were few and oftentimes they held little political or social influence. Many of the local school boards failed to take any steps to assist the Freedmen with the construction of a schoolhouse or starting one, despite the law requiring them to do both. Placing so much power and authority into the state's hands regarding the Freedmen's schools proved to be problematic. Southern States and local governments were not interested in facilitating the education of the Freedmen and their children, and in many cases, they stood in opposition to what they were charged to do.<sup>234</sup> The Freedmen Bureau did what it could to ameliorate the lack of support from the local school boards. The Bureau would sometimes purchase land and donate it to the community with the specific purpose of constructing a Freedmen schoolhouse. In other instances, they would provide materials and labor to assist with the construction of a schoolhouse. Despite these efforts, there were still many challenges that the Freedmen schools faced.

There was considerable violence surrounding the Freedmen schools, which resulted in many closures. White supremacy groups such as the Ku Klux Klan would target both the teachers and students at Freedmen schools. The Ku Klux Klan saw the education of African Americans as a threat to their way of life and their power structure. They would often attack and intimidate those who were involved with the Freedmen schools to discourage others from getting involved. The Freedmen Bureau did eventually get some assistance from the Federal government in the form of troops under the Civil Rights Act of 1866. The troops were used to help protect both the teachers and students at Freedmen schools. However, this was not a long-term solution

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<sup>234</sup> Ibid, 50.

and the schools continued to be plagued by violence. The Civil Rights Act of 1866, enacted the first civil rights bill in the history of the nation. The Civil Rights Act of 1866 declared that all persons born in the United States were citizens regardless of race, color, and the previous condition of slavery.<sup>235</sup> This Act made a significant contribution to the Freedmen as they transitioned from slavery to freedom. Federal Troops were initially tasked with enforcing the provisions of this Act and were ultimately withdrawn from the South.

It is important to note that despite all the challenges, there were many successes as well. In some communities, the Freedmen's schools thrived and served as a beacon of hope for African Americans. Located in the District of Columbia, Howard University was an institution that provided free education to Freedmen and their children from all parts of the country. It was opened in 1867 under the leadership of Amzi L. Barber, who served as the institution's principal.<sup>236</sup> The school's grade was higher than that of the Normal School offering more advance college-level study. In the year, the school was founded, there were 85 students enrolled and some of them were Freedwomen. The trustees retained Julia Lord as an assistant in its Normal Department. The Collegiate department was headed by Eliphalet Whittlesey, who used to be a professor at Bowdoin College, and W. F. Bascom, who was a professor of languages. There were two large buildings, which were adapted to the needs of the university. The establishment of the university's medical department paired well with the Freedmen's Hospital. The first course of lectures at the medical school took place on October 28, 1867. Besides being able to attend classes at the university's facilities, the medical students were able to enjoy the

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<sup>235</sup> John Hope Franklin, "The Civil Rights Act of 1866 Revisited," *Hastings Law Journal* 41, no. 5 (July 1990): 1135.

<sup>236</sup> Amzi L. Barber served as the principal of the Normal and Preparatory Department from 1867 until his resignation in 1873. Barber graduated from George Washington University in 1877. He developed the LeDroit Park community in D.C. He was better known for his work within the Asphalt industry.

advantage of being able to access the General Freedmen Hospital since it was close to the campus.<sup>237</sup>

The industrial school taught the Freedmen about various industrial skills such as needlework, straw braiding, shoemaking, housekeeping, and weaving. Aid and encouragement were given to the students at the industrial school. There were 20 industrial schools in Washington and the average attendance of these schools was 823. The destitute obtained clothing in exchange for their labor as opposed to receiving it as charity. Furthermore, partial employment was granted to Freedmen who was in infirm health and unable to secure regular employment. With partial employment, they were able to enjoy a certain level of self-dependence. Once the clothing that was manufactured in the schools under the authority of the Bureau would be distributed entirely to destitute Freedmen. In this way, they were able to keep their self-respect. The earnings from the industrial school went towards the support of the general school as well as providing for the needs of the students and teachers.<sup>238</sup>

Considerable revenue was derived from selling many of the items that the industrial schools produced. The Commissioner, a supporter, ordered the construction of a building that would permanently house an industrial school. The school operated under the supervision of Miss Susan Walker. Walker donated her time and services to the school and never received payment. This industrial school was in operation for several years and it was located near the Freedmen's Hospital in Washington. There was another industrial school, called the Colfax Schoolhouse, located at the intersection of 11th and R Street.<sup>239</sup> Freedmen were typically taught classes during the day, at night, and on Sundays in the industrial school.<sup>240</sup>

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<sup>237</sup> Ibid, 51.

<sup>238</sup> Ibid, 51.

<sup>239</sup> Ibid, 52.

<sup>240</sup> Ibid, 52.

The goal of the industrial school was to provide training that would enable Freedmen to become self-sufficient. The skills that were taught in the industrial school were meant to be applied in the real world so that Freedmen could support themselves and their families. Classes were open to all levels of students, from beginners to those who were more advanced. The school allowed the Freedmen to learn a new trade and earn a little bit of money. The skills that were taught in these schools were extremely useful and in high demand. The industrial department was one of the most successful and united aspects of the school.

## **Freedmen's Labor Market**

The reorganization of labor based on the principles of freedom was among the most essential and difficult tasks in the reconstruction movement. It was crucial because no special relief could cater to the laboring classes of the South without them becoming productive. A profound challenge was posed by the White Southerners who rejected free labor principles but owned the land and had access to investment capital. It was their basic belief that the Freedmen would not work unless they were compelled to do so. They not only established predatory apprentice and vagrant systems, but they also planned the creation of a general sharecropping system, in essence compelling the formerly enslaved to work for farm owners against their will.

In certain areas, Southern employers obtained military orders for the forced employment of Black people, defining the terms of contract and compensation to be paid, and immediately after the Bureau's creation, brought significant pressure on the Commissioner and his staff to continue this method of coerced contracts. They failed in their attempt. By his first order, issued in May 1865, General O. O. Howard stated that the Freedmen must be permitted to select their potential employers and be compensated for their work. Agreements should be free bona fide activities authorized by appropriate authorities and upheld by the parties on both sides. The old method of overseers handling involuntary, unpaid labor and acts of cruelty and oppression was no longer allowed. Regulations were put into place to preserve the re-organization of labor. These simple rules never prescribe specific wages; rather, they allow contracts between

employers and employees. If necessary, Bureau officers revised the contracts to protect the ignorant from being cheated by employers who were crafty.<sup>241</sup>

The first step was to break up the old plantations and establish a system of small farms. This was done by either selling pieces of land to the laborers or renting the land to them. The second step was to help the laborers become accustomed to working for themselves instead of for their former enslavers. For this purpose, various methods were employed such as paying them in kind for their work, giving them loans, or providing them with seeds and other necessary supplies. The third step was to establish a system of labor contracts between the laborers and the farmers. These contracts specified the amount of work to be done, the wage to be paid, and other conditions of employment. The fourth step was to protect the laborers from exploitation by their former enslavers or by other unscrupulous employers. For this purpose, the Freedmen's Bureau established labor agencies in each state. These agencies provided information about job opportunities, helped to resolve disputes between employers and employees, and inspected workplaces to ensure that they met basic standards of safety and cleanliness. The fifth step was to encourage the development of cooperative enterprises among the laborers. These enterprises enabled the laborers to pool their resources and purchase supplies in bulk, which helped them to save money and become more self-sufficient.

The last step was to help the laborers find markets for their products. The Freedmen's Bureau worked with businesses and industries in the North to find buyers for the products of southern farms and factories. In this way, the Bureau helped to create a market for southern

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<sup>241</sup> American Freedman's Union Commission, and African American Pamphlet Collection. The results of emancipation in the United States of America. (New York City etc. American Freedman's Union Commission, 1867), 25.

goods and to encourage the growth of the southern industry. The labor system that was established by the Freedmen's Bureau was based on the principles of freedom, equality, and justice. It helped to transform the lives of millions of former slaves and to lay the foundations for a new society in the American South.<sup>242</sup> To educate Freedmen about the value of free labor, public meetings were organized and led by generals O. O. Howard and his brother C. H. Howard, among others. In most areas of the South, labor was in such high demand that workers could command fair compensation for their efforts.

However, where there was an increase in people owing to the devastation of war, with surplus labor and reduced pay, a mechanism for moving people was implemented. Empty houses were turned into shelters for the unemployed; workers entered into contracts with employers before being transferred, and regular information offices were set up for their mutual convenience. To encourage them, Freedmen were offered the chance to open their own offices and to establish contracts with Southern plantation owners or secure land for themselves via purchase or public settlement provided by the 1866 Homestead Act.<sup>243</sup> The Act essentially allotted 46 million acres of southern public lands for the sole purpose of homesteading. The Act promised the formerly enslaved an opportunity to homestead on public lands. Very few Freedmen benefited from this Act, since most of them lived in extreme poverty, and most of the allotted lands were claimed by whites.<sup>244</sup>

The methods of labor thus organized were chiefly of three kinds. The end of slavery resulted in the establishment of agricultural estates that were either abandoned or sold to

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<sup>242</sup> Ibid, 25.

<sup>243</sup> Ibid, 26.

<sup>244</sup> Richard Edwards, "African Americans and the Southern Homestead Act." *Great Plains Quarterly* 39, no. 2 (Spring, 2019), 103.

Freedmen, often on favorable terms. In Davis Bend, Mississippi Freedmen formed their own organizations (without white assistance or leadership) and ran a successful large plantation, and the same approach was applied, on a smaller scale, in many other locations throughout the country.

Under the second system, the plantation owners would divide their land into sections, which they would then assign to the Freedmen and their families. In exchange for use of the land, the tenant farmers would give the plantation owner a share of their crops. The plantation owner generally provided animal stock and food for them, housing or quarters, fuel, seed as well as half of the necessary bagging and rope. Additionally, during planting season rations and clothing were often advanced to tenant farmers by way of credit with payment expected after harvest was gathered. This system became increasingly popular among not just plantation owners but also emancipated slaves themselves.<sup>245</sup>

The third method saw the planter hire the jobs in bulk, and he or she agreed to pay them a specific rate of weekly wages or, more generally, a certain share of the crop at the end of the season. They were once again employed in gangs, under an overseer, somewhat as they were before slavery was abolished. Under the system, Freedmen were extremely resistant to overseers, and the most severe treatment they receive. Planters established a store, the only one within the area. In some situations, planters charged workers such an amount that they remained in debt and earned nothing at the season's end. They would on occasion drive workers away at the end of the year or on some pretext or they would refuse laborers their share, which had been agreed by contract.<sup>246</sup>

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<sup>245</sup> *Ibid*, 26.

<sup>246</sup> *Ibid*, 27.



Consequently, the Freedmen were increasingly hesitant to sign long contracts. However, when they were assured of justice or used another system of contract, they not only showed readiness but eagerness to work, and if previously treated kindly by their previous enslavers, they usually preferred to stay with them. A written agreement between the parties was standard practice and a copy of it was kept on file in the office by the Bureau. If irregularities, inequalities, or an imbalance in contract terms were evident, then the Bureau would dismiss it or disregard, or modify the provisions.<sup>247</sup>

### **General Results**

The Freedmen experienced a general upsurge throughout the nation in favor of freedom, the right to self-government, and manhood suffrage. This was the goal of all the Freedmen's aid missions and societies. The Freedmen continued to grow and expand within the wider community in terms of productivity, intelligence, morality, and population size. That said, there have been enough noticeable changes, such as increased manufacturing output, that few people of the time could reasonably argue that the Freedmen were lazy and unfit burdens on American society.

In terms of the Freedmen themselves, their increased education and literacy rates, along with their moral and physical improvements, were all evidence that they were capable of leading successful lives as free men and women from the start, Jamestown, Virginia in 1609. In short, the Freedmen have been vindicated by history, and it is now up to the American people to continue the fight for equality and justice in America.

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<sup>247</sup> Ibid, 27.

If the planter had candidly and cleverly worked within the system of free labor, freedom always reaps a larger harvest than slavery ever did. The resultant effect upon freed people was beyond dispute. They successfully refuted Slavery's claim that they were idle and disabled. They have not only worked hard and effectively under white bosses who formerly enslaved them, but when opportunities have been given to them, they have shown themselves capable of independent and even self-organized labor. They were not generally extravagant or wasteful as critics claimed.<sup>248</sup>

The Freedmen learned the value of money and how to save. They were not shiftless or content with mere subsistence. They aspired to own their own homes, and they rapidly acquired the necessary means to do so. In short, they have demonstrated that they can be good and productive citizens in a free society. There was no reason to think that the freed slaves were not capable of improving their lot in life, given the opportunity. They showed themselves to be capable of much more than anyone ever gave them credit for. With education, hard work, and determination, they made progress that even many of them never imagined.<sup>249</sup> In little more than a year after its organization, the Savings and Trust Company for Freedmen received \$616,802.54 in deposits from the meager earnings of its clients. Furthermore, many of them have purchased homesteads.

The Freedmen had expressed a profound understanding of the political issues facing the nation, and an admirable amount of patience and optimism for the future. The most encouraging sign for the future was their demonstrated ambition and capacity for improvement. Many people, both those who support and oppose black enfranchisement, were surprised at how quickly the

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<sup>248</sup> Ibid, 34.

<sup>249</sup> Ibid, 34.

formerly enslaved population had developed under the influence of institutions like churches and schools. This progress did much to dispel lingering prejudice from slavery and helped achieve full equality for all.<sup>250</sup>

In addition to growing their own crops, the Freedmen's Village also assisted by often purchasing foods for the residents of the Village to consume. Major Brown of the Freedmen's Bureau sent correspondence to Captain Lawrence informing him that the Village had inquired about 3348 pounds of oats and 3906 pounds of hay for residents. The Village often purchased oats and hay at the lowest market prices.<sup>251</sup> The Village managed its overhead cost by closely monitoring the cost.

On November 2, 1866, the Assistant Commissioner advised the Superintendent of the Freedmen's Village of efforts to reduce the overhead cost associated with the Village. The Assistant Commissioner directed management to investigate ways to reduce the expenses of the employees. He believed that there were sufficient dependents in the Freedmen's Village to perform the work of the "Home." Therefore, he requested that the management cease paying the wages of the laborers. Instead, the dependents would perform the work and be given rations as compensation. The Superintendent was also directed to hire a matron for the girls and women in the Freedmen's Village who could teach them how to cook, clean, and perform other domestic tasks.

The Assistant Commissioner also requested that management stopped paying the wages of the laborers who were engaged in whitewashing and cleaning streets, and the wages of the

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<sup>250</sup> Ibid, 35.

<sup>251</sup> District of Columbia Field Offices, Freedmen's Village, Letters Received, (Dec. 26, 1864–Dec. 9, 1868, Part 1), 88.

drivers, as well as the other laborers who were involved in cleaning stables and the streets. The Assistant Commissioner felt that the carpenters who earned \$50.00 per month were too costly. The Assistant Commissioner also suggested that management consults with the other women in the facility to see if they could perform their duties without additional assistance. Management was instructed to make the necessary arrangements to provide the employees with employment opportunities after they were discharged from their duties at the Village. Those who were not able to find new jobs were encouraged to apply to the Local Superintendent at the corner of 7th and O Streets, Washington, for assistance in locating employment opportunities.<sup>252</sup>

The daily functions of the Village revolved deeply around education and the benefit of the children as it did for the betterment of the adults. In December 1866, the Assistant Commissioner of Freedmen's Village ordered nine double desks to be made for the day school at the Village. The desks were to be manufactured at the Carpenter's Shop located at the Village. The Bureau also offered to provide the Village with the necessary materials if they did not have them on hand. The Bureau also ordered thirty pairs of surplus men's shoes.<sup>253</sup> Actions such as employing the Freedmen and using their labor to furnish the needs of the Village served a dual purpose. This created opportunities for the laborers who sought work within the Village, and it allowed the government to procure items needed for the Village at a below market price. The Village, along with the assistance and oversight of the Freedmen's Bureau, was operated in an effective and self-sustaining way. The Bureau provided fuel, forage, straw, and stationary items to the Village as needed. These items were provided whenever an agent of the Bureau requested any of the aforementioned items on the corresponding forms.

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<sup>252</sup> Ibid, 93.

<sup>253</sup> District of Columbia Field Offices, Freedmen's Village, Letters Received, (Dec. 26, 1864–Dec. 9, 1868, Part 1), 129.

The forms were then to be approved by the officiating Commissioner of the Bureau. In return for the government's support, the Village was required to produce a profit every month. The Freedmen's Bureau expected that any money not used in the operation of the Village or in the support of its residents would be turned over to the government. This monthly report detailed all the income and expenditures for the Village. In some months, the Village was able to make a profit, while in others it ran at a loss. The self-sufficiency of the Village was dependent on many factors, such as weather conditions and crop yields. Despite these fluctuations, the Village was generally able to operate without needing additional support from the government.

The Freedmen's Village paid their mechanic a wage of \$50.00 dollars per month. Lt. Bergevin requested that a carpenter be employed at the Village, to make the repairs in and around the Village. The considerable number of homes within the Village made it necessary for a larger force of carpenters to be engaged. The houses needed regular repairs due to the substantial number of Freedmen coming from the various areas around the Village and Arlington. He recommended Mr. Lacombe, who worked in the Freedmen's Village, be given a monthly compensation of \$50.00 for the position of mechanic. He reportedly had excellent character and was a good mechanic.<sup>254</sup> It is noteworthy to mention that Mr. Lacombe was not a freedman. Very few Freedmen if any at all earned a monthly salary such as Mr. Lacombe.

There were many cases when Freedmen negotiated to the best of their abilities the wages and duties they were to perform when seeking employment. A freedman named Nicholas Reeves performed the humble and back breaking tasks of grave digging. But on February 6, 1867, Reeves communicated to Lt. Rogers and Lt. Bergevin that he was currently engaged in grave

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<sup>254</sup> Ibid, 172.

digging and the pair agreed to enter him into a contract to dig graves for the village and pay a wage of \$6.00 per month. This wage was on the high end of the spectrum of the compensation that the Freedmen normally received. Some Freedmen were paid as low as \$1.00 per month for unskilled labor such as cooking, cleaning, and performing random tasks as designated.

Several of Lt. Rogers's requisitions were forwarded to Lt. Bergevin for approval. For the month of February, ten cordwood employees and four wood office guards were all hired. During the winter months, there was an increased need for wood cords and wood guards to monitor the surplus of wood cords. It was the duty of Lt. Bergevin to oversee the operation and to ensure that the wood lasted throughout the winter and that there was no insufficiency.<sup>255</sup> After meeting with Reeves, Lt. Bergervin sent the following to General O. O. Howard. "General Nicholas Reeves (Col'd.) a dependent at this place, is engaged digging graves, he is industrious and obliging, and he respectfully recommended that he be hired at a compensation of Six (\$6.00) dollars per month."<sup>256</sup> There were many cases when this happened, but this sort of arrangement did not occur often.

On March 4, 1867, Lt. Rogers requested that John E McIvain be relieved from duty as commissary and be replaced by Gardiner Lacombe, who was originally employed as a carpenter. Lacombe was previously earning \$50 per month while employed as a carpenter. Lacombe was compensated \$75 per month for his new role. In addition to performing his duties as a commissary, Lacombe was also tasked with being the overseer of carpenter work and was responsible for the general policing of the Village. Lt. Rogers remarked that "Mr. Lacombe bears an excellent character, understands commissary business, and is a thorough mechanic. Has been

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<sup>255</sup> *Ibid*, 175.

<sup>256</sup> *Ibid*, 177.

in the employ of the Bureau for about three years, was formerly commissary under the direction of Maj. J. M. Brown at Mason's Island and at the Village. He has in his possession letters of recommendation from all officers by whom he has been employed since his connection with the Bureau.”<sup>257</sup> Lt. Rogers gave Mr. Lacombe an astounding recommendation in his address to General O. O. Howard requesting the approval of Mr. Lacombe’s new position and compensation. In addition to the pay that Mr. Lacombe received, he would also be provided with rations and a quarter to live. While Lacombe himself was not a freedman, his position was beneficial to the community of Freedmen who lived in the Village. It was important to properly pay the staff who were employed in the Village and those who worked in other areas.

There were many occasions when staff employed within the Freedmen’s Bureau complained of low pay, but they were not the only ones that complained. The Freedmen often complained of low wages as well and rightfully so. On March 6, 1867, Lt. Bergevin was faced with this problem and addressed the situation in a letter with Lt. Rogers. Principally, the Freedmen Village employed a freedman named R. S. Laws. He agreed to be compensated at a rate of \$15.00 per month. The dilemma occurred when Laws refused to receive his \$15.00 payment in February 1867. Laws stated that his pay had been increased to thirty dollars per month but there was no order published that supported his claim. General C. H. Howard and Captain Lawrence confirmed that such an increase never occurred.<sup>258</sup> During the nineteenth century as today, disgruntle employees were and are undesirable and in many cases problematic. Laws main complaint was with the amount of work that he was required to complete with the pay that he received. While it was true that some of the Freedmen were being paid more than

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<sup>257</sup> Ibid, 205.

<sup>258</sup> Ibid, 214.

what they could earn outside of the Village, it was also important to remember that the Freedmen were still in a transitional period. It was important to provide them with a livable wage, but it was also important to provide them with opportunities to learn new skills and trades that would enable them to be more competitive in the job market. In the end, it was decided that R. S. Laws would continue to be paid at the rate of \$15.00 per month with a promise that his pay would be reevaluated in the future.

Very few Freedmen received compensation at the rate described by Laws for the work that they did. But when considering the condition in which they were once held, receiving payment of any amount for their labor was a sure step forward. Typical was a Freedmen named John Peterson, employed by the Village as a general laborer, which meant he was obliged to perform any duty that was required of him. Peterson was recommended to be employed at a compensation of \$15.00 per month and have rations provided.<sup>259</sup> “General, I have the honor to request that John Peterson (Col’d) be employed at a compensation of Fifteen (\$15) dollars per month and rations, to assist in doing and to see that the work about the "Home" and Village is promptly done.”<sup>260</sup> Like many of the Freedmen who were employed at the Village, Peterson was not given a specific job title or description. He was simply a general laborer which required him to perform any duty that was required of him. This could include anything from cooking and cleaning to farming and carpentry. The work was hard, and the hours were long, but for many Freedmen, it was a step up. The Freedmen’s Bureau did its best to provide the Freedmen with fair working conditions and compensation, but they were not always successful. There were

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<sup>259</sup> Ibid, 207.

<sup>260</sup> Ibid, 208.



instances of abuse and exploitation, but overall, the Freedmen's Bureau made great strides in assisting the Freedmen as they transitioned to their new lives.

It is important to note several differences between a white laborer, Lacombe, and a freedman, Peterson, contracts. The first thing that stood out was that Mr. Lacombe received a much higher sum of pay when compared to Peterson. Now on its face, Mr. Lacombe receiving a higher pay can be explained by pointing out that he was a skilled laborer. But this skill does not justify him receiving five times the pay of Peterson. Furthermore, Lacombe was provided with his own quarter to live in, whereas Peterson would have to use a portion of his compensation to pay monthly land and tenement rent. The term tenement has varied meanings, but in the case of the Freedmen's Village, it amounted to canvas tents or shanty dwellings. The Freedmen's Village was not a model community by today's standards, but it was an excellent improvement over the conditions that many of the Freedmen were previously living in. Despite the complaints about the living conditions, the Village was still a vast improvement over life in slavery.

On July 9, 1867, Lt. Rogers informed Captain Gates that the compensation of Gardien LaCombe who worked as a carpenter should be increased from \$50.00 to \$60.00 per month by the order of the Assistant Commissioner.<sup>261</sup> General C. H. Howard requested in place of Jefferson Page that Augustus Edwards and Vincent Jones be employed as general laborers at the rate of \$5.00 per month, as authorized on July 15, 1867, by Robert Reyburn Lieutenant Colonial and Surgeon in Chief. The contracts of these two Freedmen were approved and returned for archiving. The general forwarded the annulled contract of Jefferson Page to Lt. Col. Reyburn. On the following day, July 16<sup>th</sup>, General C. H. Howard sent a follow letter regarding the contracts

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<sup>261</sup> District of Columbia Field Offices, Freedmen's Village, Letters Received, (Dec. 26, 1864–Dec. 9, 1868, Part 2), 23.

and compensation of the Freedmen. He stated his intent to hire Augustus as an ambulance driver for \$5.00 per month and rations. Edwards took the place of Henry Gant, who was disabled at the time due to a broken rib. Gant suffered his injury after getting into an accident while driving his ambulance. Vincent Jones and Launderer were hired as the caretakers of the ambulance for \$5.00 per month and rations. They took the place of Jefferson Page who was compensated \$8.00 eight dollars per month. Page was discharged from his duties on July 15<sup>th</sup>.<sup>262</sup>

For the employees of the Freedmen's Village to get paid for their services and labor, General C. H. Howard would have to review the payrolls and sign them. Once he reviewed and signed the payroll, he had to forward the payroll to the Quartermaster's office. The Quartermaster's Office was located at 132 Pennsylvania Ave Washington D. C., approximately four miles away from the Village. Once the Quartermaster's Office received the signed payrolls, they would send a check for the payment to the Freedmen's Village.<sup>263</sup>

In reply to a communication, General C. H. Howard received from the Quartermaster's Office on August 5, 1867, to make a report of employees who could be spared from the Village, he noted that while the "old Home" building was unfinished, he desired to retain all the present force. At the completion, of the renovation following "named persons could be spared Viz- John Hodgkins, Wm H. Hodgkins, and James M. Milten white carpenters; Stephen Jones (Watchman) and Robert Palmer Laborer colored (Freedmen)." General C. H. Howard maintained that a greater reduction of salaries could be made by discharging a few other colored, able-bodied men. Once the Freeman who received the higher recommended competition pay were discharged, the general stated that the Bureau could hire dependents to replace them at incredibly low wages.

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<sup>262</sup> Ibid, 24.

<sup>263</sup> Ibid, 33.

General C. H. Howard noted that this proposal would remove a sizable number of Freedmen from the payroll. The general stated that the Freedmen who will be removed from the payroll and will lose their jobs at the Village were amply able enough to support themselves by their labor anywhere. He noted by giving regular employment to the dependents they could earn partial support and that would provide a gradual reduction to the operational cost of the Village. This also allowed the Village to be a self-sustaining establishment. “With your permission, I will also suggest certain plans by which I believe more radical and efficient reduction of expenditures can be accomplished, than by the mere reduction of salaries.”<sup>264</sup> The general plans were thorough and would make a positive impact on the dependent Freedmen and the abled bodied Freedmen alike. His plan had an overall positive impact on the Village.

On August 27, 1867, General C. H. Howard requested that the compensation of a Freedmen shoemaker, Henry Chapman, be increased from \$6.00 to \$10.00 per month, to date from August 1, 1867.<sup>265</sup> In his attempts to employ a freedman named Henry Smith and two others, J W Scott sent Henry a letter on October 12, 1867. J W Scott noted that he heard that Henry wrote a letter to his wife regarding employment, but they never received the letter. The letter was taken from the Post Office by a freed woman identified as Ella Scott. Scott told J W Scott that Henry wrote a letter to J W Scott’s wife requesting employment. J W Scott stated that his wife wrote Henry back affirming that the Bureau would like to hire Henry and two other Freedmen named Jesse and Joe.<sup>266</sup> J W Scott stated that he had not heard from Henry but added that he requested that the Chief of the Freedmen’s Bureau assist him in ensuring that Henry received his follow-up letter. J W Scott enclosed his letter to Henry stating that he would like to

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<sup>264</sup> Ibid, 37.

<sup>265</sup> Ibid, 47.

<sup>266</sup> Ibid, 85.

hire Henry, Jesse, and Joe. He offered to give them good wages and a good home to live. He directed Henry to write him back immediately he if accepted the offer of employment and asked that Henry directs his letter to Ayletts King of William County Virginia under the care of R Haws esquire. J W Scott further stated that if Henry could not write the letter, to come to him as soon as he received J W Scott's letter. Scott also noted that he sought to engage "hands for another year but will give you all the preference."<sup>267</sup> He wanted to let Henry and the other Freedmen know that he sought to hire several men for a one-year period but would extend that opportunity to them should they be intrigued. It is evident from the letters that J W Scott was trying to help the Freedmen in any way he could. He was offering them employment and a place to live. The Freedmen's Village was meant to be a temporary place for Freedmen to live while they got back on their feet. However, many of the residents ended up living there for years. The Bureau did its best to provide for the residents, but the conditions were often poor and demanding.<sup>268</sup>

There were many occasions when the work and labor of the Freedmen, both adult and young, were procured for those living outside of the Freedmen's Village. On October 30, 1867, a white woman living in Georgetown, who desired to have a "colored girl" live with her family, was looking for a girl of approximately eleven to thirteen years old. The lady wanted to have the services of the girl in exchange for a term of indenture, which would allow the apprentice to earn reportedly a fair monthly wage. General C. H. Howard instructed the agents who worked at the Village to locate a girl who fit the description and secure consent from the parents of the child. The arrangement was for the child to live with the employing family for a term of years.<sup>269</sup> After

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<sup>267</sup> Ibid, 85.

<sup>268</sup> Ibid, 85.

<sup>269</sup> Ibid, 113.

the completion of the set period, the child would be returned to her parents with the accumulated wages. The young Freedmen were often put to work for families outside of the Village. This allowed them to learn new skills and earn money to help support their families. The apprenticeship was supposed to be fair and provide a way for the young Freedmen to improve their lives. However, there were some instances where the children were not treated well and not given the opportunity to earn their promised wages. Despite these challenges, many of the young Freedmen who participated in the apprenticeship was able to learn new skills and improve their lives.

On November 4, 1867, Mr. O’Neal, an agent employed at the Village, responded to the request for an apprentice. He noted that the lady in Georgetown request for a “colored girl” could not be furnished. He further expounded saying he did not see any chance for the lady to get a girl for the conditions specified as in indenture from the Village. He stated that “the people here look upon that mode of hiring as a species of Slavery, and no argument I could use would change the opinion they had formed. They will not bind their children.”<sup>270</sup> There were many children who were old enough to work in the Village who were seeking work and their parents supported them. But they did not gleefully seek apprenticeship or indentured services for their children. Instead, they looked at it with disdain as it was a form of slavery. The parents of the young Freedmen in the Village did not want their children to be indentured servants. They saw this system as a way for the rich White people to exploit the poor Black people and take advantage of their situation.

The Village employed many Freedmen and even awarded some of them with positions that would normally be held by whites anywhere outside of the Village. One example of this can

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<sup>270</sup> Ibid, 189.

be found in the case of a freedwoman named Pasty Laws. Pasty Laws was appointed to the position of a nurse. Laws worked in the Abbott Hospital which was located in the Village. Another freedwoman named Eliza Bowline was appointed to the position of laundress, a common position for Freedwomen. Bowline primarily worked as a laundress in the Abbott Hospital. On February 15, 1868, General C. H. Howard recommended the pair for the positions and Surgeon Chief Robert Rayburn approved his request within a week.<sup>271</sup>

The labor contracts detailed the term length of employment, compensation, and job duties. General O. O. Howard made these appointments because of the increased number of patients that the hospital received. The Freedmen's Bureau was not able to keep up with the demand for medical care. As a result, the Bureau had to recruit members of the Village to work in the hospital. The positions that were given to Pasty Laws and Eliza Bowline were not without criticism. Some people felt that these positions should have been given to white women instead. There were also concerns about whether these women were qualified for the positions. Despite the concerns, Freedmen continued to be given positions of authority within the Village. This was a key step because it helped to break down the barriers between races and promote equality.

On March 25, 1868, the Assistant Commissioner informed General O. O. Howard that the name Rhoda Reeves shall be placed on the Village's rolls as an assistant at the Industrial School, instead of Seamstress. She received a monthly compensation of \$20.00 instead of \$10.00.<sup>272</sup> Four days later, he was also instructed to place the names of Aaron Kelly, Job Moulton, Mathew Moulton, Samuel Howard, and Benjamin Roe, who were resident dependents, on the roll at a monthly compensation of \$5.00 and rations each, starting from March 1, 1868, due to a large amount of whitewashing that needed to be done. The men had reportedly been

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<sup>271</sup> *Ibid*, 189.

<sup>272</sup> *Ibid*, 135.

whitewashing for nearly a year without receiving any compensation. Situations such as this could directly cause Freedmen and their families to become destitute and perpetually reliant upon the government for aid. This was found to be a frequent occurrence within the Village. Many Freedmen worked and performed several job duties without receiving any form of compensation for their labor, only a place to stay.<sup>273</sup>

On April 27, 1868, General C. H. Howard wrote a letter to the Assistant Commissioner regarding the young Freedmen boys and girls who were able to work but whose parents refused the offers of employment, chiefly apprenticeships. General C. H. Howard asked the Assistant Commissioner if there was any way that they can assist young women with fatherless children in finding homes and places of service outside of the Village. He stated many Freedwomen fell into this category. He asked if there was any way to compel young boys and girls over fifteen years of age to accept good places of service when offered, in situations where parents would not allow them to do so.

General C. H. Howard observed that there were dependent Freedmen of all ages in the Village who were able to work and earn a living but were unemployed. The general considered if he should discharge them from the Village immediately, reasoning that this action would force them to work and support themselves.<sup>274</sup> There were cases of young Freedmen who were evicted from the Village for this reason, and entire Freedmen families who were met with the same fate.<sup>275</sup>

Assistant Commissioner Eldridge responded to General C. H. Howard's inquiry about the status and ability of the Freedmen within the Village who were able to work. He asked if there

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<sup>273</sup> Ibid, 136.

<sup>274</sup> Ibid, 148.

<sup>275</sup> Ibid, 148.

were any means at the command of the Bureau, where young able-bodied Freedwomen who had fatherless children, could locate homes for domestic service. He stated that many of the Freedwomen of the Village fell into this class. He again inquired what means, if any, he shall adopt to oblige boys and girls over the age of fifteen to accept good places of service or employment when offered. The Assistant Commissioner noted that many Freedwomen within the village who had several children refused to accept offers of employment and did not go into service. He stated that there were many dependent Freedmen of all ages who resided in the Village that was able to work and earn a living. He asked General C. H. Howard to consider how to address such concerns.

Assistant Commissioner Eldridge subsequently determined that sane young women of decent character should be encouraged to make applications to the Assistant Commissioners to be sent to work at the institution of Miss Lowell in Cambridge Massachusetts. If young boys who were able to work refused eligible opportunities for service, they would no longer receive rations. This meant quite literally that if they did not work, they did not eat. He stated that a similar course of action would be pursued toward the young women who were fifteen years of age and refused to go to Miss Lowell's school.<sup>276</sup>

On June 19, 1868, Assistant Commissioner Eldridge once again addressed concerns regarding Freedmen who lived in the Village and were able to work but refused work. The facility was able to provide a safe and secure environment for the destitute and the seriously crippled. He noted that that Village was intended as an asylum for "the superannuated, badly crippled, or imbecile and for no others, but at present contains a large number of persons having no claim whatever upon the Government either in charity or justice."<sup>277</sup> However, he maintained

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<sup>276</sup> Ibid, 146.

<sup>277</sup> Ibid, 169.



there were many individuals who had no claim to any of the benefits of the government. To ensure that the Village could provide adequately for the intended Freedmen who were residents, General C. H. Howard had conducted a thorough examination of every man, woman, and child to determine their ability to support themselves. Assistant Commissioner Eldridge informed General C. H. Howard that he was required to immediately discharge any Freedmen from the Village who refused work if they were physically able to work.

To address the issue, the Freedmen's Village was ordered to report the names of all its residents who were able to work to the Assistant Commissioner's office. The office would find work opportunities for the reported Freedmen and if they did not avail of the opportunity of employment, they would be removed from the Village. Orphans who were under twelve years of age would be provided for in the Orphan Asylums.<sup>278</sup> Assistant Commissioner Eldridge noted that "Justice to the Government and to the people themselves requires that this duty shall be executed thoroughly and firmly."<sup>279</sup> General C. H. Howard was required to furnish the necessary information that provides evidence of the proper execution of the orders.

A freedman named Elias Plummer performed a unique job function. He worked directly for Major Brown as a mail carrier and orderly. His job was to perform the duties of messenger for the Assistant Commissioner's Office, which was in Washington. Plummer carried messages to the Freedmen's Village from the Assistant Commissioner's Office, and he took messages to the Assistant Commissioner's Office from the Freedmen's Village. Additionally, he carried the daily mail to and from the Post Office to the Freedmen's Village. As a result, Plummer received the full benefit of those who resided within the Village. He received rations, fuel, and quarters.

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<sup>278</sup> *Ibid*, 169.

<sup>279</sup> *Ibid*, 170.

Plummer had been performing this task for about two years since the mounted messenger who was formerly employed was discharged in November 1865.<sup>280</sup>

On August 19, 1868, agent Abeel wrote a letter to Major Swaim regarding a freedman who was employed at the Village and had not been compensated for his labor. A freedman named Joseph Bean reportedly worked the entire month of June and had not received the payment due to him for his labor. Agent Hennessey, who was employed at the Village as a clerk, had reportedly received Bean's monthly \$10.00 payment but decided to keep the money for himself rather than pay Bean. Agent Abeel requested that Agent Hennessey be ordered to turn over the payment. At the time of the inquiry, it was believed that the agent still had Bean's money in his possession.

While all Civil War combatants had to face the standard dangers of battle, black soldiers also had to endure extra hardship due to racial bias. Even in Northern states, prejudice was rampant, and it infected every branch of the military. To try and fix this problem, segregated units were formed that consisted of black enlisted personnel with white officers and noncommissioned officers in charge. If captured, black troops during the Civil War faced worse conditions than their white counterparts. In 1863, the Confederate Congress even went as far as to say that they would severely punish officers of black troops and enslave black soldiers. The Fort Pillow massacre of 1864, in which black Union soldiers were captured and shot dead by Confederate forces, is potentially the most notorious example of abuse. General Nathan B. Forrest was present during the massacre and did not attempt to intervene.<sup>281</sup>

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<sup>280</sup> Ibid, 195.

<sup>281</sup> Elsie Freeman, Wynell Burroughs Schamel, and Jean West. "The Fight for Equal Rights: A Recruiting Poster for Black Soldiers in the Civil War." *Social Education* 56, 2 (February 1992), 120

Black carpenters, chaplains, cooks, guards, laborers, nurses, scouts, spies, steamboat pilots, surgeons, and teamsters all did their part in the war. There were close to 80 black commissioned officers. Although they could not join Army formally women served as nurses spies and scouts most famously Harriet Tubman who scouted for 2d South Carolina Volunteers. Although they were not used in combat as much as other units because of prejudice against them, black soldiers served with distinction in many battles. They fought gallantly at Milliken's Bend, LA; Port Hudson, LA; Petersburg, VA; and Nashville, TN. The July 1863 assault on Fort Wagner in South Carolina, which resulted in heavy casualties for the 54th Regiment of Massachusetts Volunteers, was later depicted in the film *Glory*. By the end of the war, 16 black soldiers had been awarded the Medal of Honor for their bravery. The 54th Massachusetts was commanded by Robert Shaw and the 1st South Carolina by Thomas Wentworth Higginson, both white. Black soldiers were initially paid \$10 per month, with \$3 automatically deducted for clothing, resulting in a net pay of \$7. In contrast, white soldiers received \$13 per month without any deductions for clothing.<sup>282</sup>

Regarding the United States Colored Troops (USCT) who served in the Union Army during the American Civil War, many of them served valiantly but during the post-war years found it difficult to collect the pensions or bounties owed to them by the Federal government. The Freedmen's Bureau, in many cases, assisted or attempted to assist USCT in securing any compensation owed to them. On September 23, 1868, E. D. Townsend, the Assistant Adjutant General sent a letter to General O. O. Howard. Townsend stated that his office could not provide the requested information to the Freedmen's Bureau regarding claims against the United States concerning a "colored" troop, Charles William Johnson, who sought compensation following the

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<sup>282</sup> *Ibid*, 20.

conclusion of the Civil War.<sup>283</sup> No further explanation on or justification was provided.

Interagency bureaucracy was to blame for nonpayment.



Photo of Benjamin Cohen  
USCT Pension File of Benjamin Cohen  
Courtesy of the International African American Museum.

General C. H. Howard was in command of the 128<sup>th</sup> United States Colored Troops and Benjamin Cohen was a private in Company F, 128<sup>th</sup> United States Colored Infantry during the Civil War. Benjamin enlisted on March 27, 1865 and was honorably discharged on October 10, 1866. Caroline Cohen was the widow of Benjamin. Rev. Philip Hartley married Caroline and Benjamin in 1868 in Sampit, South Carolina in a Methodist church called Secessionville Church. They were given a marriage certificate by the preacher, but it was lost. Caroline was previously married to Westbury Davis, who lived on a neighboring plantation, during slavery. However,

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<sup>283</sup> Registers and Letters Received by the Commissioner, Letters Received, Unregistered Letters, (1865–1871, Part 3), 17.

Westbury became separated from his family during the war. Caroline subsequently heard various stories of what happened to him afterward. Some said he was taken away by his slaveholder at the beginning of the Civil War and others said that he left in a boat many years before freedom. Caroline and Benjamin had eight children. They were poor and were never able to own a house. Benjamin was unable to sustain himself due to several respiratory and cardiac conditions, which caused him much pain over many years until his death at the age of 59 on July 12, 1902.<sup>284</sup>

On August 12, 1912, Caroline filed for a widow's pension. Caroline was born into slavery in Georgetown County, South Carolina, near Sampit. She had two children during her enslavement and remained a slave of John Anderson until emancipation. Caroline did not know how old she was. There was conflicting testimony about how Caroline and her first husband Westbury Davis were separated, so the claim was referred to a Special Examiner for clarification. In one affidavit, Caroline stated that Westbury was taken away during the war and never returned. However, in another affidavit, she said that he was believed to have died. Caroline's application for a widow's pension was approved, and she was pensioned at \$12.00 per month.<sup>285</sup> Caroline's health declined after the death of her husband. She never remarried and received the widow's pension until her death on September 10, 1916. Pictured below is a returned pension payment addressed to Caroline Cohen after her death.

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<sup>284</sup> International African American Museum, Center for Family History. Pension File Abstract, Benjamin Cohen, Company F, 128th United States Colored Troops, <https://cfh.iaamuseum.org/cohen-benjamin-usct-pension-file-abstract-f-128th-usct-sampit-georgetown-sc/>.

<sup>285</sup> Ibid.

*Paid @ \$1.2 to Dept* 4, 1916 DEC 19 1916  
 To the Chief, Finance Division:

You are hereby notified that check # *3136049* for \$ *36*<sup>00</sup>/<sub>100</sub>

dated *DEC 4-1916* in favor of  
 post-office  
 Certificate # CAROLINE COHEN,  
 GEORGETOWN, S.C.

Class *Act April 19, 1908* 754738 ACT APR.

Section *8* has been returned to this office by the Postmaster  
 with the information that the pensioner died *Sept 10 1916*  
 and said check has this day been canceled.

Very respectfully,  
 (D-3) GUY O. TAYLOR,  
 Disbursing Clerk.

PLATE DESTROYED

Disbursing Clerk Memo, USCT Pension File of Benjamin Cohen  
 Courtesy of the International African American Museum.

On September 14, 1868, General O. O. Howard wrote a letter to the Claim Division of the War Department. In the letter, the general requested that the Bureau be furnished with a statement of the names and last known post office addresses of the commissioned officers; Co. "K" 123rd USCT, Co. "E" 100th USCT, Co. "A" 124th USCT, and Co. "G" 62nd USCT. He also requested the last known post-office addresses of the Surgeons and Assistant Surgeons of the above-named commissioned officers. The general requested the names and whereabouts of the officers so that they may be addressed for the requisite certificates to complete the evidence in various claims for pensions sought by the Freedmen.<sup>286</sup> It was the duty of the Commissioner, officers, and agents of the Freedmen's Bureau to facilitate as far as possible the discovery, identification, and payment that were due to the Freedmen.<sup>287</sup>

On October 19, 1868, the Adjutant General's Office responded to General O. O. Howard's inquiry. F. D. Sewall of the Adjutant General's Office stated that his office would supply General O. O. Howard with the necessary information requested to facilitate the claims of

<sup>286</sup> Registers and Letters Received by the Commissioner, Letters Received, Unregistered Letters, (1865–1871, Part 3), 27.

<sup>287</sup> *Ibid*, 35.

the Freedmen who served in the USCT. F. D. Sewall stated every letter sent to General O. O. Howard would be sanctioned by him. The information desired by General O. O. Howard and those under his direction was the date and place where “colored” soldiers enrolled, died, discharged, or mustered out, and the cause and date of discharge on the Surgeon's Certificate of Disability. If the Freedmen were discharged because of wounds or injury, he requested to know when and how the injury was received. If a Freedmen was discharged because of disease, he desired to be furnished with information that detailed the character and cause of the disease, and whether it was contracted before or after enlistment. The general requested to learn of the civil status of “colored” soldiers before April 20, 1861, whether slave or free.<sup>288</sup> The amount of information requested by General O. O. Howard and his office was staggering, but it was necessary to process the claims of the Freedmen with accuracy. The Freedmen’s Bureau was established to help with the transition of the Freedmen into society and assisting with any claims for pensions or bounties owed to them was a part of that duty. Many of the Freedmen who served during the Civil War did not receive the compensation they were due, but with the help of the Freedmen’s Bureau, some were able to finally get what they deserved.

F. D. Sewall agreed to furnish General O. O. Howard with the last known post office address of late Regimental, Medical, and Company Officers of “colored” organizations in service of the United States. General O. O. Howard expressively requested the data, to enable the Freedmen's Bureau to verify and settle “colored” soldiers claims for pay, bounty, and pensions.<sup>289</sup> F. D. Sewall noted that the intentions and efforts of General O. O. Howard and his Assistants were commendable, but, unfortunately, the Congressional Resolution that governed the collection and payment of monies due certain “colored” soldiers, sailors, and marines, or

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<sup>288</sup> *Ibid*, 36.

<sup>289</sup> *Ibid*, 36.

their heirs, did not authorize the Freedmen's Bureau to obtain from the Adjutant General's Office and then furnish to claimant's, heirs, their agents or attorneys information relative to names, dates, and histories of "colored" soldiers. F. D. Sewall further stated that the law did not authorize or require the Freedmen's Bureau to verify or settle any claims but to simply assist the War Department to facilitate the discovery, identification, and payment of claimants or their legal representatives.<sup>290</sup> It was not intended for the Freedmen's Bureau to obtain information concerning claims for pay, bounty, pension, or other monies due to the Freedmen until such individual claims were acted upon by an auditor and the treasury approved each claimant's compensation and presented the payment to the Commissioner of the Freedmen's Bureau. After a check or treasury certificate for a certain amount of money awarded was received by the Commissioner of the Freedmen's Bureau, at that point became the duty of the Commissioner commenced to discover, identify, and pay the Freedmen the full amount awarded minus lawful fees and expenses of attorneys.<sup>291</sup>

It was the opinion of F. D. Sewall, that the most liberal legal interpretation of the Resolution did not contemplate any action on part of the Freedmen's Bureau, until the Adjutant General, Pay Master General, Commissioner of Pensions, and Second Auditor of Treasury have examined, verified, and finally acted upon applications filed by late "colored" soldiers or their representatives. General O. O. Howard had requested the information with the view of completing evidence in various pension cases such that certain Freedmen may be informed as to whether they were entitled to any further bounty from the United States, including the additional \$200 bounty that might have been due them.<sup>292</sup>

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<sup>290</sup> Ibid, 37.

<sup>291</sup> Ibid, 37.

<sup>292</sup> Ibid, 37.



The Adjutant General's Office, namely F. D. Sewall, considered the full implication and possible vulnerabilities that providing the requested information could cause. Sharing specific data as it relates to military service and the civil status of certain "colored soldiers" was intended to detect and check illegal claims. F. D. Sewall had concerns that by providing this information the virtual door to fraud would be wide open by giving all information necessary for the fabrication of claims. The Adjutant General's Office sought to safeguard against persons defrauding the government in this way.

According to F.D. Sewell, the Claims Division of the Bureau had experienced a steady increase in the number of letters from "colored" soldiers and their descendants. They were complaining that the settlement of their claims had been delayed, and they were asking the Bureau to intervene in their favor. The Commissioner instructed that the Adjutant General's Office provide the necessary information to enable the Bureau to act on the claims being made by the Freedmen in due season. Unfortunately, due to the limited information that was previously made available to the Freedmen, not a single claim had been adjusted in the twenty claims submitted by "colored" soldiers.<sup>293</sup>

From March 1866 to September 1867, memoranda and verbal information were given to the Freedmen's Bureau in support of facilitating legitimate payment petitions and pension applications addressed to the Commissioner's Office, but it was discovered that important and specific data relative to military histories, slavery, and freedom was being made known to claimants and ascertained by their attorneys and agents. It was deemed advisable to decline to furnish the Bureau with further information. This decision was damaging to any Freedmen who had hoped to recoup monies due to them. Before September 17, 1868, the Adjutant General's

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<sup>293</sup> Ibid, 37.

Office provided the Freedmen's Bureau with information about the settlement of the claims. However, that information was allegedly not given properly and was not consistent with the view of what General O. O. Howard believed the law required. This irregularity raised questions about the law that the Commissioner had to follow and the Adjutant General's office interpretation of the law. The Freedmen's Bureau should have been able to facilitate the discovery, identification, and payment of claimants without seeking cooperation or approval from the Adjutant General's Office before it was known who was entitled to bounty or pension. This could have been done before the second auditor made an award or after it was decided that a claim was legal.<sup>294</sup>

The government, evidently intended to prevent officers of the Bureau from aiding discharged "colored" soldiers, or the heirs of those deceased, in the recovery of the State bounties due them. But through the kind offices of Hon. H. L. Bond and a few other friends, in filing the claims already prepared, the bounty was saved for many deserving claimants. The settlement of "colored" soldiers' claims was put into the charge of the Bureau, but the government operated in the interest of a set of swindling claim agents. There was a systematic fraud scheme that had been perpetrated against the black soldiers.<sup>295</sup>

The Fourth Annual Report of Assistant Commissioner, Bureau Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandon Lands for the District of Columbia, West Virginia, Maryland, and Delaware was published on October 10, 1868. The report stated in part that the number of agents in each of the six Maryland counties was to be gradually reduced. This was done since the number of complaints of injustice had decreased, with the implementation of the Civil Right Act of 1866 and with the recruitment of "colored" apprentices significantly reduced. The Freedmen were also more capable of securing their rights in labor contracts. Before the local agents were relieved, the

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<sup>294</sup> *Ibid*, 41.

<sup>295</sup> *Ibid*, 19.

counties were thoroughly examined to see if they could be utilized for the construction of schoolhouses. The counties were also given aid in the purchase of a school site, as well as in paying for the construction. Due to the diminishing number of white residents opposing black schools, the work of these schools could be carried out more easily by sending agents from headquarters.<sup>296</sup>

The year was 1868, and the country was still healing from the Civil War. In Washington, D.C., there was a new type of slavery taking hold of the Freedmen called labor contracts. These contracts, which were created in response to the Black Codes, allowed southern whites to essentially re-enslave African Americans by forcing them to work for little or no pay. The contracts were often very unfair, and Freedmen were often forced to work in dangerous or unhealthy conditions. Despite the risks, many Freedmen saw labor contracts as their only option for finding work. With few other options available, they signed up for one-year contracts, hoping that things would improve by the time their contract was up. Unfortunately, things did not always improve. In some cases, Freedmen were forced to sign new contracts, effectively extending their period of servitude. In other cases, they were simply not paid for their work. And in some cases, they were outright abused by their employers. Despite the risks, many Freedmen saw labor contracts as their only option for finding work.

The Freedmen's Bureau worked to improve the conditions of Freedmen who were working under labor contracts. In some cases, the Bureau was able to negotiate better contracts for workers. In other cases, the Bureau helped workers to find new jobs with different employers. And in some cases, the Bureau provided financial assistance to workers who were not being paid for their work. Despite the risks, many Freedmen saw labor contracts as their only option for

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<sup>296</sup> Ibid, 47.

finding work. With few other options available, they signed up for one-year contracts, hoping that things would improve by the time their contract was up. Unfortunately, things did not always improve. In some cases, Freedmen were forced to sign new contracts, effectively extending their period of servitude. In other cases, they were simply not paid for their work. And in some cases, they were outright abused by their employers.

On January 1, 1868, a freedwoman, Mary Blake, entered into a labor agreement with Ellen Belt of Georgetown. The labor agreement was for a one-year period, from January 1, 1868, through January 1, 1869. During this period Ellen agreed to pay Mary a sum of \$40.00 if Mary complied with the following terms. Mary was responsible for feeding her own children, Leatha Charlotte, and her small baby. The children must be outside of Ellen's residence during the warm months or when there was mild weather. Mary was responsible for making sure that her children did not destroy any of Ellen's property and if this did occur then Mary would have to pay for repairs. Mary's duties included cooking for Ellen and her family, tending to the garden, milking cows, washing, ironing, and mending. One notable clause within the contract that was often included in Freedmen's contracts was for Mary to comply with any other demand that Ellen called her to do. If the terms were satisfied or met then both Mary and Ellen were bound to the contract.<sup>297</sup> If Mary did not comply with these terms, Ellen could withhold pay, dismiss her from employment, or extend the labor contract to recoup from the days that Mary had allegedly violated it.

This Freedwoman's contract was one of many within the Washington D.C. area and it reveals the types of work that freed slaves were required to do as well as their working conditions. The duties that were included in the contract were not only for housework but also

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<sup>297</sup> Ibid, 81.

for agricultural labor. This was common for the Freedmen who had experience with plantation work and other agricultural labor. The wages that were offered in this particular contract were considered average for the time and region. Wages for unskilled laborers in urban areas during this time averaged between \$1 and \$3 per month while skilled laborers could make upwards of \$20 per month. Given that many Freedmen did not have any formal education or job training, they were typically relegated to unskilled labor positions. But this did come with some exceptions, as there were a vast number of skilled Freedmen laborers.

Freedmen's contracts were not always as favorable as the contract Mary Blake signed. In some cases, Freedmen were required to work for no wages at all. And in other cases, they were paid only a portion of their earnings, with the rest being kept by their employer. Moreover, many contracts did not include provisions for food or housing, leaving Freedmen to fend for themselves. As a result, many Freedmen ended up living in substandard housing and suffering from malnutrition. The working and living conditions of Freedmen improved somewhat after the Civil War. But even then, they were still far from ideal. With few other options available, many Freedmen continued to sign labor contracts, hoping that things would get better. But for the most part, things only got worse. Freedmen were often cheated out of their wages, and their working and living conditions continued to deteriorate. It was not until the late 19th century that conditions began to improve for Freedmen in the United States.

The terms of the contract also revealed the power dynamic between the Freedmen and their employers. The clause that states that Mary must comply with any other demand that Ellen called her to do was indicative of the control that Ellen had over Mary. This clause essentially allowed Ellen to dictate what Mary did on a day-to-day basis and prevented her from seeking outside employment. The contract also required Mary to pay for damages if her children caused

any damage to Ellen's property. This was a widespread practice among slaveholders, and it served to keep slaves in line by threatening them with financial penalties. The contract between Mary Blake and Ellen Wilson is just one example of the many Freedmen's contracts that were signed in the years after the Civil War. These contracts reveal the working and living conditions of Freedmen during this time.

Freedmen contracts such as this one provides valuable insights into the lives of African Americans in the years immediately following the Civil War. They offered a glimpse into the type of work that freed slaves were performing as well as the working conditions they faced. Additionally, these contracts reveal the power dynamics between the Freedmen and their employers. Despite the challenges they faced, many freed slaves were able to find work and provide for themselves and their families. These contracts offer a glimpse into the lives of Freedmen during a pivotal time in American history.

The residents of the Village at the center of the War Department's original building continued to maintain the homes that were originally constructed there. They also improved their properties through land beautification and additions. Some of the homeowners spent several times their initial investment on improvements. In addition to these, residents also paid taxes on various forms of property, such as land rents, state, Federal, and local poll taxes, as well as school, road, and private property taxes. These were all individuals and families who were making improvements to their homes and communities. The Freedmen's Bureau provided the Freedmen with an opportunity to purchase land that they could then use to grow crops or build homes. Many Freedmen took advantage of this opportunity and purchased land in Arlington. They often paid for their land with money they had saved while working as laborers for the War

Department. Some of the first African American landowners in Arlington were freed slaves who had purchased their land from the War Department.

## Medical Needs and Housing Conditions

The staff also had to deal with health issues. There were always sick people in the Village, and it was up to the staff to make sure that they received the medical attention that they needed. The staff also had to deal with the issue of housing, which closely correlated to health concerns. This was a constant challenge because the Freedmen's Village was always overcrowded. There were times when the staff had to put three or four families in one house. This was often done out of necessity because there were not enough houses for all the residents.

The Village was tasked with housing numerous Freedmen, even the old and disabled. Ideally, the main goal was to house those who were willing and able to be employed, but this did not always occur. On July 26, 1866, a woman named Ellen Humby was admitted into the Village and placed in a home for the elderly. This highlighted that the Village worked to cover every aspect of the lives of the resident Freedmen.<sup>298</sup> The staff did their best to provide for those who were in the Village, even if they were not able to work. The staff had to deal with these problems as they arose. Overall, the staff at the Freedmen's Village did a commendable job in trying to meet the needs of the residents. They were often successful but there were also times when they failed. Overall, the staff worked hard to make sure that the Freedmen were taken care of and that they had what they needed to live a good life.

The Freedmen who lived at the Freedmen's Village had access to an ambulance when needed and physician care. Whenever one of the two ambulances they had at the Village went down for repair, the Village staff would make sure a second ambulance was readily available. On December 17, 1866, Major Brown contacted Captain Lawrence regarding the ambulance

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<sup>298</sup> Ibid, 70.



situation. Major Brown informed Captain Lawrence that he had a decent workhorse that was given to the Freedmen's Bureau by Captain Lee. He further stated that the horse was to be used in support of the Ambulance Service at the Village. The horse should be used alone with a cart or wagon to serve as an ambulance.<sup>299</sup> The horse and wagon would be used to transport the sick from their quarters to the Freedmen's Bureau Dispensary or Hospital as needed. When an individual was admitted into the Freedmen's Bureau Dispensary or Hospital, they were required to have an examination by the doctor on staff. The individual's case history was also required to be completed.

The Freedmen's Hospital was the present-day Howard University Hospital and is still in operation today. The Freedmen's Hospital often transferred elderly and disabled patients to the Freedmen's Village to clear space for newly arriving patients. This was an interchangeable arrangement that was established by the two entities. There were many times when the Village sent the elderly and sick to The Freedmen's Hospital to make room for new arrivals to the Village and to manage overhead or operational costs. The Freedmen's Village had a home designated for the aged and infirmed, often referred to as the "Home."<sup>300</sup>

On February 4, 18667, G. A. Wheeler, the surgeon in charge of the Abbott Hospital, informed Lt. Bergevin that General O. O. Howard informed him that the lieutenant would no longer had any duties to attend to regarding the Home Long Houses apart from attending to their sanitary condition. Dr. Wheeler stated that he would not be able to provide the residents of the Village with any supplies, such as fuel or rations. Unless he received an order to the contrary, he would not approve any requisitions or ration returns. Dr. Wheeler stated that he would collect the

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<sup>299</sup> Ibid, 125.

<sup>300</sup> Ibid, 157. As a veteran police officer who has worked in Washington D. C. for well over a decade, I have visited the hospital numerous times.

bedding that had been scattered outside of the Hospital.<sup>301</sup> He said that it was important to do so to prevent any potential spread of infection. Dr. Wheeler stressed the importance of cleanliness and said that this was a necessary step in ensuring the safety of everyone involved.

Dr. Wheeler noted that he did not desire to cause trouble. He further stated that he believed that the hospital should be kept separate from the rest of the Village. This was also for their own protection from illnesses that could have spread from the hospital. He explained that the ration returns often did not list the whereabouts or the existence of the people who were supposedly receiving the rations, nor did he receive a daily list of the Freedmen who were admitted into the Village. Dr. Wheeler stated that he did not know where any of the food went. “The same reason applies to the wood, with still stronger force, as I am confident I could, without trouble, make the amt. due the Hospital alone, if properly measured, last the specified time.”<sup>302</sup> The reason he did not keep track of the wood's condition was that he was confident that it would last the specified period. The situation regarding the bedding and other articles was dire, as those were essential items. However, since Dr. Wheeler had no other means of preventing them from being carried off, he made the adjustments from a sense of imperative duty.<sup>303</sup>

In response to the letter that Dr. Wheeler sent to the Freedmen's Bureau, he received the following response from General O. O. Howard. The Home and Long Houses were not wards of the Hospital and Dr. Wheeler's authority over them only extended to keeping them in a good sanitary condition. The Hone and Long Houses were homes that were designated for the elderly, disabled, and sick. General O. O. Howard stated that Dr. Wheeler had control of the admissions into the Hospital and highlighted the fact the Superintendent had control of the dependent

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<sup>301</sup> Ibid, 170.

<sup>302</sup> Ibid, 171.

<sup>303</sup> Ibid, 171.

Freedmen. Dr. Wheeler's certificate as to the disability of anyone would be final and satisfactory to the Superintendent.<sup>304</sup>

On February 14, 1867, Dr. Wheeler provided Captain Lawrence with a weekly report of the sanitary condition of the Freedmen's Village. Dr. Wheeler noted that to maintain a sanitary and healthy environment, he suggested that the private rooms in the Old Home Building be removed. He stated that this would yield a twofold advantage. Tearing down the partitions would allow the whole building to be warmed up and provide better ventilation. Another advantage of this measure was that it could prevent people from getting sick by improving the overall health of the building.<sup>305</sup> One of the most important advantages of this plan was that it would allow the building to maintain a more orderly and healthier environment. It would also help minimize the probability of the patients in the building receiving the wrong medicine. Having their beds numbered and arranged in a manner like a hospital ward would also make it easier for the staff to inspect and preserve the bedding. Besides maintaining a clean environment, this plan would also help improve the appearance of the building.

Despite the advantages that this plan would offer, there were also some drawbacks. One of the main disadvantages was that it could potentially overcrowd the building. This would ultimately defeat the purpose of having private rooms in the first place. Another potential drawback was that removing the partitions could make it more difficult to heat the building during winter months. Dr. Wheeler noted many other considerations that could be addressed in favor of the changes, but those additional considerations did not fall within the purview of a sanitary character and extended beyond the scope of his duties. In offering suggestions, Dr.

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<sup>304</sup> Ibid, 178.

<sup>305</sup> Ibid, 178.

Wheeler made it clear that he did not intend to make the Home a part of the Hospital because he understood that more could be accomplished by keeping it entirely distinct. Dr. Wheeler consistently maintained that the health and comfort of the Freedmen would be significantly increased by the measures that he proposed.<sup>306</sup>

The Freedmen's Village took many steps to ensure that the residents health was attended to appropriately. There was a freedman named James Smith, twenty-two years of age, and he needed an artificial leg. The Village Administration requested that the Freedmen's Bureau granted approval for Smith to receive the leg and authorize payment for the leg out of the Freedmen's fund. Smith was a single man and did not have much family support. Smith had been employed by the government and had his leg amputated at the upper third in 1864 resulting from a 'Jigger' insect bite and subsequent infection.<sup>307</sup> The Village noted that Smith had been a good worker and was anxious to resume employment if he could get an artificial leg. The government approved the request, and Smith was able to return to work with his new artificial leg. Another way that the Village helped to ensure the health of the residents was by providing them with access to medical care. There was a doctor on staff who made regular rounds to check on the residents. In addition, the Village had a hospital designated for more serious cases. The hospital intensive care had six rooms with two beds in each room. There were also three wards with four beds in each ward. The Village also had a Dispensary where patients could receive medicine.

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<sup>306</sup> Ibid, 183.

<sup>307</sup> Ibid, 185. It was reported that Smith was bitten by the insect while in Haiti. It is unknown how and why Smith was visiting the country of Haiti and he was not a soldier. After Smith was bitten by the insect, it was reported that he suffered from gangrene which resulted with Dr. Scammon amputating his left leg. Dr. Scammon performed the surgery at Abbott Hospital, where Dr. Wheeler was currently employed as the surgeon in charge. Dr. Wheeler was the surgeon in charge of procuring the artificial leg for Smith. See Registers and Letters Received by the Commissioner, Letters Received, Unregistered Letters, (1865–1871, Part 3), p 185.

There were many cases involving residents of the Village who had received major surgeries which included amputations and other medical procedures that included attaching an artificial leg. After providing Smith with an artificial leg, Dr. Wheeler requested approval to procure another artificial leg for another Freedmen named Elias Smith. Elias was not in the military, and it is unknown if he was related to James Smith. Elias was an eighty-year-old man and like James Smith he was single. Dr. Lee and Dr. Warrenton successfully amputated Elias's leg. Nearly twenty years earlier, Elias injured his leg while working on or near a wheat machine in February of 1847.<sup>308</sup>

Another freedman named Jerry Savage needed an artificial leg as a result of losing his right leg to frostbite in 1867. Savage's leg was amputated in Frederick, Maryland and Dr. Baer performed the surgical procedure. Dr. Wheeler was designated to superintend the purchase of the leg and attach it to Savage. The money towards the purchase of the leg would be deducted from the Freedmen's fund.<sup>309</sup>

The Freedmen's headquarters sent a letter to Dr. Wheeler on March 2, 1867, regarding his duties at the Freedmen's Village. Previously, the House for Dependents at Freedmen's Village asserted that they did not receive personal, hands-on administration from the surgeon. Dr. Wheeler was thus directed to give his full attention to the details of management and maintain continuous oversight of the hospitals under his charge. Dr. Wheeler was charged to ensure that the wants of the Freedmen were satisfied as promptly as practicable. It was noted that Dr. Wheeler's authority did not supersede the Matron, Mrs. Stull, in her duties, rather he was supposed to render her all the assistance and cooperation possible.<sup>310</sup> The Matron was

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<sup>308</sup> Ibid, 193.

<sup>309</sup> Ibid, 193.

<sup>310</sup> Ibid, 199.

responsible for the domestic arrangements and cleanliness of the facility. It was her duty to see that the Freedmen were properly clothed and fed and that their beds were kept in order. The Matron was also responsible for the moral conduct of the Freedmen. The Freedmen who were unruly or disobedient were to be reported to Dr. Wheeler, who would then decide if they needed to be removed from the premises.

As Matron Mrs. Stull had numerous administrative duties, the Freedmen's Village had a shoemaker whose duties included keeping the residents of the Village furnished with suitable shoes. Mrs. Stull requested and received an order from Lt. Bergervin that authorized her to select all the tools required to complete a set of shoemaker tools. Once Mrs. Stull received her tools, she had to send a memorandum that included an itemized list of the tools that she obtained. Mrs. Stull complained to General O. O. Howard that the bed sheets were in short supply at the Village. The General launched an investigation into the claim to determine if the shortage occurred in the gross amount that was sent to the Village or in the number of yards that was marked on each piece of sheeting. This quick response showed the high level of monitoring and continuous supervision that was always afforded to the Village.<sup>311</sup> There were several reasons for this, with one being to ensure fair treatment of the Freedmen and the other to ensure cost-effective operations.

On September 21, 1867, General O. O. Howard sent a letter to Lieutenant Colonel Reybrun inquiring about the medical treatment provided to the Freedmen of the Village and those in the surrounding area. The Medical Officer of the Freedmen's Village had been providing medical care to all the freed people who resided in the Village and the surrounding area. The

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<sup>311</sup> Ibid, 203.

general asked if this practice would continue, and if so in what manner was he to procure medical supplies for such expenditures.<sup>312</sup> During this time, there were around three hundred renters in the Village, and there were at least two hundred Freedmen who lived nearby only yards outside of the Village. The medical care that was being provided to the Freedmen was essential and greatly appreciated by them.

On June 26, 1868, the Assistant Commissioner inquired and tried to reduce the operations of the Medical Department of the Bureau. The Freedmen's Village was directed to plan for closing every hospital in the Village, except one. The one hospital that would remain open would be dedicated to housing the permanently sick and dependent Freedmen that were under the care of the Bureau. The hospital would still be responsible for the needs that might have existed among the large population of dependent Freedmen who lived in the Village and its vicinity. The Village and other communities suffered from several illnesses and diseases. At the direction of the Assistant Commissioner, the Village had to turn over a portion of their hospital furniture and medicines to the Bureau to aid them in caring for the sick and destitute Freedmen living outside of the Village.<sup>313</sup>

The Assistant Commissioner required the Village to provide an inventory of the property which was expected to be furnished to the authorities at the time of the transfer. Additionally, the Bureau requested a list of the patients, which would include their age, sex, place of birth, length of time in the state, length of time in the hospital, and disease or disability for which they were admitted. The Village was required to immediately close most of its dispensaries. The Assistant Commissioner noted that the period had arrived when the communities within the Freedmen's

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<sup>312</sup> District of Columbia Field Offices, Freedmen's Village, Letters Received, (Dec. 26, 1864–Dec. 9, 1868, Part 2), 71.

<sup>313</sup> *Ibid*, 174.

Village must depend upon their own exertions for the care and maintenance of their own sick. He further stated that if a dispensary was required in any portion of the Village, they were instructed to make a report on the subject, providing the fullest and strongest reasons for such a claim.<sup>314</sup>

Throughout 1868 the government worked toward closing the Village, initially concentrating on the largest expense, medical care. In July 1868, it was reported that there were 553 adult dependent Freedmen and 196 children who were entitled to rations. The Board stated that many residents in the Village were classified as dependents. The Board further noted that many Freedmen who were classified as dependents were able to provide their own support. The Board recommended that the Freedmen's Village be discontinued as rapidly as practicable. To carry out their recommendation, the Board further suggested the way the Village should be closed. The first step was that the hospital should be closed immediately. The sick were removed from the hospital at the Village and transported to Freedmen's Hospital, Washington D.C. Secondly, the tenements that adjoined to the Freedmen's Hospital were to be vacated and as well as the patients of the "Home" at Freedmen's Village. Those permanently disabled by age or disease were also removed and sent to Freedmen's Hospital, Washington D.C. Finally, the employees of the Village were to be discharged as soon as practicable and the property turned over to the proper accounting officer.<sup>315</sup>

There were many instances in the Village when the Freedmen did not receive adequate medical care from the hospital in the Village due to poor staffing of physicians. On September 25, 1868, Mr. Hall reported to General O. O. Howard that the Freedmen were in desperate need of a physician. At least seven Freedmen were gravely ill and needed a physician and had not

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<sup>314</sup> Ibid, 175.

<sup>315</sup> Ibid, 244.



received medical treatment. He noted that those patients had been sick for a prolonged period.<sup>316</sup> The hospital at the Village was overcrowded with patients and was not able to provide adequate medical care to all. The number of patients at the hospital had risen to such an extent that some of the patients were being treated in tents that had been pitched on the hospital grounds and some were transferred to the Freedmen's Hospital in Washington D.C.

On September 25, 1868, under Chief Surgeon Reyburn's authority, Dr. Howard was appointed as the outdoor physician for the portion of Washington that was located east of the Capitol building. Dr. Howard was tasked with rendering medical attention and prescribing medicine "to all colored people who are in need of or apply for it."<sup>317</sup>

On July 10, 1868, Chief Medical Officer Edwards responded to Dr. Howard's correspondence regarding the Assistant Commissioner's Office proposal for abolishing dispensaries and closing the hospitals of the Bureau in the Freedmen's Village. Chief Medical Officer Edwards stated that if the patients who were being cared for by the Bureau were to be left to their own devices, or to the care of mere bystanders, there would be great suffering among them. A grievous wrong would also be committed. But if orders were given for no further admissions into the hospitals of the Bureau, and prompt efforts were made to require the civil authorities to take responsibility for the helpless and permanently disabled patients housed at the Village hospital, and the Bureau rendered proper assistance, he would support such a measure. He further stated that accommodations should be made to transfer some of the patients to various county or city almshouses within the state.<sup>318</sup>

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<sup>316</sup> Ibid, 258.

<sup>317</sup> Ibid, 260.

<sup>318</sup> Registers and Letters Received by the Commissioner, Letters Received, Unregistered Letters, (1865–1871, Part 3), 6.

Chief Medical Officer Edwards further explained that similar accommodations were successfully implemented and were operational within several of the districts, and it was proposed to extend the application to Freedmen's Village. Final termination of the Village's existence and its legal limit was required to be carried out before July 16, 1869. It was therefore important that the various closure operations of the Bureau were put into practice before that date. The Assistant Commissioner believed the current time was a favorable one to initiate the closing of the dispensaries and hospitals in the Village. It was not so much to cut down on costs as it was to transfer the care of some of the county's sick and disabled citizens to other authorities. The Bureau had stated that the patients should be given temporary provisions, and it was inevitable that they would be transferred to other authorities at some point. It is important to note that the Bureau made a start in addressing the various issues that affected the county's civil society. One of the most important steps that the government took was providing financial aid to the local hospitals. It was proposed that the government give the hospitals a certain amount of property, and then provide a portion of the required rations for a certain period. It was expected that at least three or six months of government support would be sufficient.<sup>319</sup>

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<sup>319</sup> Registers and Letters Received by the Commissioner, Letters Received, Unregistered Letters, (1865–1871, Part 3), 9.

## Request for admittance into the Village

The Washington D.C. Local Superintendent Spurgin requested the admittance of an elderly couple known as John, age 76, and Kitty, age 74. The couple was approved for admittance and were placed in the home for the elderly in room number 193.<sup>320</sup> On August 28, 1866, Philip Taylor and his wife were identified as destitute Freedmen and were admitted into the Village upon the request and recommendation of Spurgin.<sup>321</sup> The poor, destitute, and elderly were not the only people with special accommodations who were admitted into the Village. The Village admitted Lewis Campbell's wife and daughter so that they could live with him in the Village. Lewis had been previously admitted into the Village and advocated for the admittance of his wife and daughter. Special accommodations were made for his wife and daughter because they were both diagnosed as being 'deaf and dumb.'<sup>322</sup>

"I have the honor to request admittance to the 'Old Folks Home' at Arlington for these two-colored people. Paul and Tabitha, they are not related, nor do I know their surnames."<sup>323</sup> Spurgin often admitted elderly people and it is important to note this because the elderly would incur an absolute financial liability for the Village. They had no means to provide for themselves and in many cases, relied wholly upon the aid of the Village. Able-bodied Freedmen were allowed to rent upon demonstrating that they could work their land advantageously and had a particularly good character. Qualifying Freedmen were granted the authority to rent five-to-fifteen-acre tracts of land.<sup>324</sup> Lt. Bergevin did not support the Bureau's practice of renting land to

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<sup>320</sup> District of Columbia Field Offices, Freedmen's Village, Letters Received, (Dec. 26, 1864–Dec. 9, 1868, Part 1), 74. Spurgin worked out of the Bureau Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, Office Local Superintendent, District of Columbia, which was located on the corner Seventh and O Street Washington, D.C. This location was roughly, in modern times, less than a thirty-minute drive from the Freedmen's Village.

<sup>321</sup> *Ibid*, 84.

<sup>322</sup> *Ibid*, 86.

<sup>323</sup> *Ibid*, 75.

<sup>324</sup> *Ibid*, 80.

the Freedmen for minimal sums. He believed that renting land should require the Freedmen to fully pay the Bureau for the use of the land for another season. His position was that if the proper management of the land were carried out, a considerable number of dependent Freedmen could be employed instead of being left idle.

There were many cases when the Freedmen's Village Administration was tasked with reuniting the Freedmen families, who were separated during the Civil War or slavery. This act and situation highlight two remarkable feats at once. First, the fact that we have documented records that supports the idea that the newly freed people had a deep sense of family shows their prioritized domestic relationships. This is important to note because many people who opposed the integration of the freed people into American society argued that the Freedmen were an uncivilized group that lacked emotional rationale. The feeling that was promoted regarding the Freedmen was that they were more akin to livestock or farm animals than their white counterparts. The second remarkable highlight is that it reveals that the Bureau agents and staff members had humility in their hearts toward the Freedmen. Assigning the duties of reuniting Freedmen families to a Bureau agent would force the agent to learn more about the Freedmen and their families' members than they would have during their regular day-to-day operations within the Village. The Freedmen's Village served as a reunion spot for many families who were torn apart by slavery. It was a place where they could finally be together and celebrate their newfound freedom. Despite the harsh conditions, the Village provided a sense of community and shared purpose that was missing from their lives before. They welcomed each other with open arms, sharing what little they had to make life a little bit easier. In the face of adversity, they found strength in one another and vowed to never give up.

On December 11, 1866, two Freedwomen, reported having one son each at the Freedmen's Village in Arlington. Their sons' names were Louis Primms, age fourteen, and Aaron Lawney, age sixteen. The women asked that the Bureau send their sons to Taylorsville on R. F and P. R Road where the women could receive their children. Upon receipt of this request, Captain Lawrence stated that the young boys would be transported to be reunited with their mothers once the boys were located at the Village.<sup>325</sup> The Bureau took it a step further and recruited the assistance of a gentleman by the name of Fra Ayers who contacted the Freedmen's Village and supported the reunification of the two families. On December 8, 1866, Ayers wrote a letter to Captain Bates and stated that the two liberated women, who were currently residing at Mr. Edmund Windston's house, each had sons at the Freedmen's Village. Ayers listed the names and ages of the boys and stated that they were separated from their mothers during the war. Ayers mentioned that both mothers were anxious to have their family lives restored. Ayers ended his letter by respectfully requesting that the boys be sent to Taylorsville where their mothers would gleefully receive and provide for them.<sup>326</sup>

The letter from Ayers to Captain Bates provides valuable insight into the effects of the Civil War on families. It is heart-wrenching to read about the women who were separated from their sons during the war and were desperate to be reunited with them. The boys themselves must also have been traumatized, having been taken away from their mothers and living in a strange place. It is commendable that Captain Bates diligently acted to help the mothers regain custody of their sons. Ayers' letter and the actions of the Freedmen's Bureau depict not only the

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<sup>325</sup> Bid, 115.

<sup>326</sup> Bid, 117.

importance of family within the Village but also the lengths to which the government was willing to go to maintain peace and order.

The Freedmen's Bureau published a circular on December 11, 1866, regarding the transportation of Freedmen. The circular addressed all applications sent to Headquarters related to the transportation of freed persons from Washington, Freedmen who were being transported were those who were dependent on the Government for support and were liable to remain in that condition for an extended period. As to those who depended on the government to gain employment and for sustenance, the Bureau was in large part relieved of these liabilities once they transported the dependent Freedmen to other parts of the country.<sup>327</sup>

One key takeaway from the circular was that the Freedmen's Bureau made it clear that the duties of transporting Freedmen should be limited to transporting those who were dependent upon the government to other areas of the country where the Freedmen might find other financial opportunities or support from family members, and this would relieve the financial burdens that had been placed upon the government. Unfortunately, many of the Freedmen fell within this category. It was apparent that the circular was written in a fashion which would limit the transportation of Freedmen, crafted to expedite the removal of and transportation of dependent Freedmen to other parts of the country.

The Freedmen's Bureau established a guideline for the transportation of Freedmen under the age of twelve years old. If the person requesting transportation was twelve years old or older, they would be regarded as an adult. Everyone between the ages of eleven years old and four years old was to be transported as children, at half cost to the Bureau. No charge was made by

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<sup>327</sup> Bid, 119.

the transporting contractors for children under four years of age. The guideline further established the fact that children who were under the age of four should not be mentioned in the request for transportation.<sup>328</sup> The reason was that it was assumed that small children would be with their parents or guardians.

Many of the residents of the Freedmen's Village had served the nation or had family members who served the nation in the United States Colored Troops. This also presented a need for reunification for many families that lived within the Village. Many of the soldiers went to various parts of the nation with their regiments. To reach their husbands in Kentucky, Bureau Agent Mr. Johnson requested that Mary Chick and Jennie Mickens be transported from Washington to Louisville. He stated that he did not know how many more people would want to travel to reach their loved ones. Captain Lawrence was put in charge to investigate the substantial number of cases such as these and if there was sufficient evidence, transportation would be provided. Captain Lawrence stated that if the women's husbands would be willing to meet them at Louisville or if they found employment there, then transportation would be provided.<sup>329</sup>

On December 20, 1866, Mr. Johnson informed General O. O. Howard that some members of the 107th United States Colored Troops had returned to several locations throughout the country and requested their children and wives. The veteran Freedmen sent money directly to the Village to cover the cost of the transportation of their families. Johnson mentioned that he did not know how many Freedwomen still wished to receive free transportation. He further stated that Mrs. Jennie Mickens and Mary Chick were successfully transported to Louisville and were

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<sup>328</sup> *Ibid*, 127.

<sup>329</sup> *Ibid*, 139.

reunited with their husbands. The financial burden the Freedmen's Village was under was lifted and taken on by the women and their husbands after being transported away from the Village to places where the heads of household found employment.<sup>330</sup>

Visiting agents at the Freedmen's Village recommended transporting another elderly man who was incapable of sustaining himself. Nelson Boliver was sixty-five years old and had no family or home. Before Boliver was transported to the Village, he was first taken to Roseburg Alley to receive medical attention.<sup>331</sup> The Freedmen's Village worked with many of the organizations and agencies that fell under the umbrella of the Freedmen's Bureau. The Freedmen's Hospital served as a fitting example of this.

On February 25, 1867, Lt Rogers requested approval for the transportation of Anna Johnson and her twelve-year-old son to Caroline County Virginia. Lt. Rogers stated that Mrs. Johnson's husband was in that county, he rented a home there and was waiting to receive his family. They had been dependent upon the government for support for a long time. Mrs. Johnson received a letter from her husband, imploring her and his children to come live with him in a house he rented for them, and there was no doubt that they would be abundantly able to provide for themselves. Mrs. Johnson and her son were both able to work and seek employment to supplement her husband's income.<sup>332</sup> There were other cases where family members were requesting to be reunited with their loved ones who were living in various parts of the country. In some instances, the Freedmen's Bureau was able to provide free transportation for these individuals.

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<sup>330</sup> Ibid, 140.

<sup>331</sup> Ibid, 155.

<sup>332</sup> Ibid, 195.



On April 17, 1867, in a report to General O. O. Howard, Captain Gates recommended that six Freedmen who used to be part of the Arlington Estate, when enslaved be permitted to live on the estate. The Freedmen were deemed unable to provide for themselves because of their old age. He asserted that they were living in a comfortable house, and he thought it was important that they remain where they were, as opposed to being moved to the Home. He also recommended that they continued receiving their daily rations. The Home was a communal building designated for those who were elderly or disabled.<sup>333</sup>

According to reports received by the Chief Quartermaster's Office on March 27, 1867, the Freedmen's Bureau has been asked to provide rations for seven freed individuals on R. E. Lee's estate in Arlington, Virginia. Those Freedmen were indigent and destitute. General O. O. Howard granted approval for the Freedmen to receive rations and recommended that they be considered for admittance into the Home. Furthermore, he recommended that the Freedmen be examined at the Abbott Hospital by a physician.<sup>334</sup>

On June 26th, 1868, Acting Assistant Commissioner Stuart Eldridge disapproved General C. H. Howard's request to transport Eliza Bailey, eleven women, and twenty-one children to Cambridgeport, Massachusetts from the Freedmen's Village. The freed women and children were destitute, and homes were provided for them in Cambridgeport. Eldridge respectfully disapproved the request until evidence was forwarded to him that the group of freedwomen and children could not be received at the Howard Industrial School. Eldridge also noted that in such request the ages of the children should also be given.<sup>335</sup> Below is a depiction of children of the

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<sup>333</sup> Ibid, 256. Three of the Freedmen he discussed names were Louisa Bingham, age 67, Sallie Norris, age 70, and Chas Syphax, age 73.

<sup>334</sup> Ibid, 259.

<sup>335</sup> District of Columbia Field Offices, Freedmen's Village, Letters Received, (Dec. 26, 1864–Dec. 9, 1868, Part 2), 7.

Freedmen's Village learning to make and repair shoes at the Howard Industrial School in 1898.<sup>336</sup> This request exemplified the bureaucratic nature of a military procedure wherein General C. H. Howard could not act independently but rather had to secure consent from the War Department Commissioner or Assistant Commissioner.



Industrial School, Courtesy of The New York Public Library Digital Collections.

On June 15, 1868, General C. H. Howard recommended to Major Eldridge that designated Freedmen be transported from the Freedmen's Village to the places where work had been secured for them. These Freedmen were unable to find employment in the vicinity of the Village and could not by proper industry and exertion avoid destitution, suffering, or dependence. The list contained the names of the Freedmen, their destination, and the addresses of their employer: Eliza Bailey, age 36, and two children to Cambridgeport Massachusetts, Rosa Bird, age 24, and two children to Cambridgeport Massachusetts, Louisa Burley, age 27 and one child Cambridgeport Massachusetts, Celia Boyd, age 25 and one child to Cambridgeport

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<sup>336</sup> Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Photographs and Prints Division, The New York Public Library. "Learning how to make and repair shoes; Howard Orphanage and Industrial School." New York Public Library Digital Collections. Accessed July 15, 2022. <https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47df-fd15-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99>

Massachusetts, Hester Downs, age 25 and two children to Cambridgeport Massachusetts, Ellen Green, age 35 and three children Cambridgeport Massachusetts, Julia Hill, age 34 and two children Cambridgeport Massachusetts, Rachel Lewis, age 38 and three children to Cambridgeport Massachusetts, Mary Lewis, age 25 and child to Cambridgeport Massachusetts, Mary Fletcher, age 30 and two children to Cambridgeport, Massachusetts, Mary Mitchel, age 30 and one child Cambridgeport, Massachusetts, and Louisa Jackson, age 35 and one child Cambridgeport Massachusetts. Each of the freed people was trained at Howard Industrial school and was educated at the Village.<sup>337</sup>

On June 30, 1867, Amelia Steward identified herself as the wife of a man who was suffering from a disability. She appealed to General C. H. Howard for aid. Amelia noted that she had been working extremely hard since she was set free from slavery. She managed to purchase a house for herself and her husband to reside. She and her husband needed clothes and her wages were not enough to cover their essential needs. Amelia asked if the Bureau was willing to help her. She added that the Bureau could send an agent to confirm her story so that they can see that her claims were truthful. Her husband, Larry Steward, was living on the Fairfax Farm. General C. H. Howard instructed the Freedmen's Village to provide the couple with rations and ordered that they be admitted into the Home for the Aged and Infirm at Freedmen's Village.<sup>338</sup>

On July 20, 1867, General C. H. Howard inquired if under any circumstances could the Freedmen's Village admit Freedmen as dependents without an order from the Assistant Commissioner's office. The general was informed that in all cases applications for admission should be made to the Assistant Commissioner's office in the District of Columbia.<sup>339</sup> General C.

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<sup>337</sup> District of Columbia Field Offices, Freedmen's Village, Letters Received, (Dec. 26, 1864–Dec. 9, 1868, Part 2), 9.

<sup>338</sup> *Ibid*, 15.

<sup>339</sup> *Ibid*, 26

H. Howard made this inquiry because he understood that there have been many instances when Freedmen had been admitted into the Village as dependents by the Superintendent. On August 31, 1867, General C. H. Howard wrote a letter to the Commissioner of the Bureau given the considerable number of Freedmen that were slated to be sent to the "Home" at Freedmen's Village from Washington County and Georgetown, but only a limited number, approximately twelve Freedmen were admitted into the Village.<sup>340</sup>

On September 11, 1867, Lt. Rogers noted that Sarah Owens, a Freedwoman, needed assistance and should be admitted to the Home for the Infirm and the Elderly. Mary Chase, who was sick and found outside the Village, was admitted.<sup>341</sup> On October 7, 1867, upon the request of Lt. Rogers, Assistant Superintendent Lieutenant Bergevin granted the temporary admission of a Freedwoman identified as Lavinia Jenkins, 50 years of age, and her three children, aged 2, 5, and 7 years. The family was most destitute. Dr. Howard, the Superintendent of the Village, agreed to provide Jenkins and her children with temporary shelter until the Village was able to locate her a home and possible employment in the North.<sup>342</sup> In cases such as this, the Village, as well as the Bureau, were motivated to assist with relocation so that the family would not cause a prolonged financial burden.

Many factors were often considered when receiving Freedmen into the Village due to concerns about overcrowding. On April 8, 1868, Pastor H. W. Reed petitioned the Assistant Commissioner detailing the dire conditions of a destitute freedwoman named Melvina Lucket. Pastor Reed stated that several Freedmen families that were residing in the Village of Falls Church, in Fairfax County, Virginia, needed immediate relief. One of the women, Melvina

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<sup>340</sup> Ibid, 55.

<sup>341</sup> Ibid, 59.

<sup>342</sup> Ibid, 80.

Lucket, was an industrious Christian woman and had been struggling to make ends meet for many months, but Lucket had four children and two of them were sickly and too young to earn a living. Her husband suffered from frostbite while serving in the United States Colored Troops. His feet were frozen and were unable to go to work during the winter. Her children, who were barefoot and in rags, also need clothing, and Mrs. Lucket needed provisions. The pastor mentioned that several days had passed and the family had no food to eat. Families such as this one exited the South in substantial numbers post-emancipation and their famished conditions made them more likely to commit theft of food.<sup>343</sup>

Paster Reed advocated for another freedwoman, Harriet Gaddis. Gaddis was a widow and had six children. Four of them were small, two were twins, and one of the twins was sick with scrofula. Gaddis did not eat well on some days and needed food and clothing. Gaddis was described as an exceptionally reliable and industrious Christian woman, who was “altogether reliable and trustworthy.”<sup>344</sup> Paster Read highlighted the fact his statements were made based on his own knowledge and offered the additional reference of Rev. D.W. Anderson as a method of validating the claims.<sup>345</sup>

On December 3, 1867, a young thirteen-year-old freedman was found wandering the streets of Washington alone. The child was taken to the Colored Orphan’s Home by Ms. Bigelow. The boy was not of a sound mind, and he was transported from Washington to the Village, where he was later admitted.<sup>346</sup> The transportation of Freedmen and their families, who were reliant on the government for support, to places of work beyond Washington was

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<sup>343</sup> Ibid, 80.

<sup>344</sup> District of Columbia Field Offices, Freedmen’s Village, Letters Received, (Dec. 26, 1864–Dec. 9, 1868, Part 1), 143.

<sup>345</sup> Ibid, 143.

<sup>346</sup> Ibid, 224.

significantly limited. The transportation of freed orphan children, as well as women with young children in their families, was restricted to locations where homes had been provided pursuant to regulation. Strict compliance with such curtailing regulations reduced the total number transported by recommendation of the officials. After the new policy was established, only 362 Freedmen were provided with government-aided transportation as opposed to the 5,212 Freedmen who were transported in previous years. Transportation was permitted only when necessary to ensure children were not left destitute or with inadequate care in case of the death of a parent.<sup>347</sup>

The transportation of all other able-bodied Freedmen was generally unrestricted, with the understanding that if they failed to support themselves, they would have to accept such aid as the government could provide. To make it easier for Freedmen to find employment and become self-sufficient, the Bureau helped them to relocate to areas where there were job opportunities. The Bureau also worked with local employers to help them find workers. In some cases, the Bureau provided Freedmen with tools and other supplies that they needed to do their jobs.

The Freedmen's Bureau moved 10,000 Freedmen from Washington on government transportation between February 1866 and October 1868, along with many more who had been helped to locate homes in Maryland, Virginia, and elsewhere, where transportation was not required. As a result of the labor market in Washington being overburdened, with a large influx of Freedmen, it was essential for those who were able to work to relocate. In efforts to relieve the indigent, employment offices became a primary method of securing employment. The Bureau noted that through employment offices in Washington 1,977 Freedmen were provided with jobs during the period July 1, 1867, through August 31, 1868. The number of able-bodied men, who

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<sup>347</sup> Ibid, 224.

were seeking employment in Washington, D.C., was more than the local demand for labor. The limited amount of work available within the immediate vicinity was not sufficient for all who needed it. To help with this issue, the Freedmen's Bureau assisted in the relocation of Freedmen to other areas where there were job opportunities.<sup>348</sup>

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<sup>348</sup> Ibid, 224.

## **Trouble at the Village**

All the happenings within the Freedmen's Village were not without fault. Mr. J. H. Reynolds petitioned General C. H. Howard to investigate an assault that occurred at the long bridge. Four black men armed with muskets came to his house near Fort Jackson and made threats against his life. He stated that he did not provoke the men and that he believed that the men were residents of the Village. Mr. Reynolds sought an investigation into this matter and reported it to the authorities of the Village. He also indicated that he would like to take the necessary steps to prevent similar incidents in the future.<sup>349</sup> Mr. Reynolds fell short of articulating what lead him to believe that the four men lived in the Village. Shortly afterward, a swift investigation ensued. Lieutenant Bergevin was able to apprehend three parties who were suspected of committing the outrage against Mr. Reynolds. The men were subsequently placed in Fort Jackson. The names of the individuals were as followed: Samuel Chessin, Dick Robinson, and George Stout. All three men were from the Village. Mr. Reynolds was also informed that Thomas Stout, who used to be a resident of Freedmen Village, and apparently one of the perpetrators was currently in jail in Alexandria, Va.<sup>350</sup>

It is important to note that the Village was not without its share of crime. But it appears as though the Bureau actively working to investigate and prevent such incidents. The Freedmen's Village was a self-contained community that provided housing, schools, and medical care for African Americans in Arlington County, Virginia. The Village became home to thousands of freed slaves and other free African Americans who came seeking a better life. While the Village offered many opportunities for its residents, life there was not without its challenges. Crime was

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<sup>349</sup> District of Columbia Field Offices, Freedmen's Village, Letters Received, (Dec. 26, 1864–Dec. 9, 1868, Part 1), 47.

<sup>350</sup> *Ibid*, 47.



a problem in the Village, as evidenced by the case of the assault on Mr. J. H. Reynolds.

Additionally, the Village was often overcrowded, and conditions were sometimes unsanitary.

On June 26, 1866, Lieutenant Bergevin asked General O. O. Howard to grant the Village more guards. Previously, the General granted the Village more guards to assist with deterring the destruction of the fence that surrounded the community. The guard at the facility was inadequate to protect the Freedmen's crops, and twenty-five privates and two corporals were brought in to help. Those individuals were tasked with securing the crops in response to complaints about the theft of vegetables. General O. O. Howard denied the subsequent request for additional security. It was suggested that certain measures be taken to identify and punish those who commit trespassing. These could include the use of keen monitoring and the imposition of severe penalties for those found guilty.<sup>351</sup> The lack of security was a major concern for residents of the village, and it appears as though their concerns were justified.

Despite receiving a denial for his original request, Lt. Bergevin made a second appeal on June 22, 1866, to General O. O. Howard for assistance regarding the crop theft problem at the Village. Lt. Bergevin asserted that to secure the crops grown at Arlington Farm, he has requested the addition of twenty-five more privates and one sergeant to the already present number of enlisted men. These men would be responsible for ensuring that the farm's Freedmen were not disturbed. There had been numerous complaints made to him about the activities of unknown individuals who were stealing vegetables and other agricultural products from the gardens of the Freedmen. The number of enlisted men at the facility at the time was as followed: two sergeants, four corporals, twenty-nine privates, and one sergeant. The enlisted men were detailed to the

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<sup>351</sup> Ibid, 60.

Village from different companies within the 107<sup>th</sup> regiments of the United States Colored Troops. He found it difficult to stop the activities due to the number of complaints they received.<sup>352</sup>

Although the troops were used to bring order and keep the peace, on occasion they brought their own unique set of problems to the Village. On April 2, 1864, there was an arrest of an illegal recruiter at the Freedmen's Village. The offender was accused of unlawfully recruiting and coercing Freedmen to enlist in the United States Colored Troops. The various units regularly sent black troops into the camp at Freedmen's Village to enlist. The black soldiers were offered a bounty for each recruit the soldiers were able to enlist. They went at will about the country to pick up some men. Some were engaged in the Engineers Department, some from the Army of the Potomac infantry, while others were servants of officers or employed the government farms.<sup>353</sup>

To prevent abuse from black recruiters who sought to enlist black troops were barred from entering the Freedmen's Village, Camp Todd, and other camps but they continued to do so. The occupants were ready to retaliate and beat soldiers, as they were filled with fear resulting from the virtually forced imprisonment recruiting tactics of the black troops. It was alleged that a black troop took 5 or 6 men by force. The black troops threatened that if the Freedmen went with them quietly and enlisted into the USCT they would receive a dollar bounty, but if they refused, they would still be drafted but receive no compensation. Some of the Freedmen opposing such recruitment were threatened with assault and battery. Many of the black troops were in general of greater physical strength. Black soldiers were in the habit of coming to the camp ostensibly to

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<sup>352</sup> Ibid, 61.

<sup>353</sup> Freedman's Village and Reconstruction Collections Records, 1857-1996, RG 103 Box 1, Folder (1) "Freedman's Village: Arlington, Virginia, 1863-1900, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 1992."

attend church services but were coming without the sanction of the proper authorities to enlist. Col Green encouraged recruitment but insisted that recruiters receive his permission. That way he could be sure enlisters would receive the bounties owed to them and arrange to have a portion directed to support their family.<sup>354</sup>

It is interesting to note that there was a level of communication and respect between the African American residents of the village and the Bureau staff. The fact that Lt. Bergevin made two appeals on their behalf speaks to the fact that he believed their concerns were legitimate. It is also clear that the residents of the Freedmen's Village were taking measures to protect their crops and property. Despite the lack of security in the Village, it appears as though the residents were doing what they could to ensure their safety.

Unfortunately, Lt. Bergevin advocacy for the Freedmen went unheard concerning the theft of their crops. Seven days after Lt. Bergevin submitted his second request for assistance, special order number forty-seven was published on June 29, 1866. By the power of General O. O. Howard, the order relieved Lt. Bergevin of his duties at the Freedmen's Village and appointed Captain Lawrence in his place.<sup>355</sup> In response to the complaints, General O. O. Howard had ordered the appointment of Captain Lawrence as the Superintendent of the Freedmen's Village. Both Lt. Bergevin and Captain Lawrence were made responsible for ensuring that the farm's Freedmen were not disturbed. Under this order, Lieutenant Bergevin was ordered to give Captain Lawrence all the public property in the Freedmen's Village, including the papers and records related to the operations of the Village. Lt. Bergevin continued to perform only duties related to

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<sup>354</sup> Ibid.

<sup>355</sup> District of Columbia Field Offices, Freedmen's Village, Letters Received, (Dec. 26, 1864–Dec. 9, 1868, Part 1), 63.

renting of lands and tenements, and other specific duties as directed by the Superintendent of the Freedmen's Village.<sup>356</sup>

The fact that Lt. Bergevin was removed from his position at the Freedmen's Village suggests that the concerns of the African American residents were not taken seriously. The removal of Lt. Bergevin was in response to the complaints about the lack of security at the village. However, it is unclear why General O. O. Howard decided to appoint Captain Lawrence as the Superintendent of the Freedmen's Village. It is possible that General O. O. Howard felt that Captain Lawrence would be more effective in addressing the concerns of the African American residents. Although Lt. Bergevin was no longer the Superintendent of the Freedmen's Village, he continued to be involved in the operations of the Village. Lt. Bergevin was still dedicated to ensuring that the African American residents of the Village were taken care of.

Shortly after the installment of the new superintendent, a Board of Survey was appointed to investigate the cause of a deficiency in corn at the Freedmen's Village. This was the responsibility of Lieutenant Bergevin before being relieved of his duties.<sup>357</sup> It appeared that Lt. Bergervin attempted to resolve the situation but was largely unsuccessful because he did not receive the support that he requested. It was apparent that the Bureau was concerned that there had been an ongoing theft of crops from the Freedmen's Village, but it did not appear that demoting Lt. Bergervin was the best course of action. The Board of Survey, composed of Major J. Hoff, Captain Lawrence, and Newton Whitton, met at Freedmen's Village on Monday,

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<sup>356</sup> *Ibid*, 64.

<sup>357</sup> *Ibid*, 65.

October 16, at 10:00 A.M. to investigate the cause of the shortage of corn. It was also expected that they would identify the source of the deficiency and recommend a solution.<sup>358</sup>

On July 17, 1866, Assistant Superintendent of the Freedmen's Village, Lieutenant Whitten Newton requested aid on the behalf of a freedwoman who resided near the Village. It is noteworthy to highlight the fact that the lieutenant was making an honest attempt to aid Margaret Lee, being that her situation did not necessarily fall within the scope of his duties, as she was not a resident of the Village. This showed the humanity of the lieutenant and as we have come to learn, the Village was well endowed with its own set of problems. Lieutenant Newton stated that Lee needed aid and was in a destitute state because her husband was in jail. Lee needed rations since her husband had been placed in jail. Margaret Lee, the wife of Spencer Lee, was imprisoned at the time in Alexandria on a charge of conspiracy to assault Mrs. Murtaugh. Margaret Lee was extremely poor and needed assistance. Lieutenant Newton referred Lee to Captain Lawrence since he knew that she lived near the Village, but he hoped that the Village could provide her with assistance.<sup>359</sup>

One of the most important aspects of the staff's duties was to make sure that the residents had enough to eat. This was a constant challenge because the food supplies were often limited. There were times when the staff had to ration the food so that everyone would have enough to eat. The staff also had to deal with the issue of theft. There was an ongoing problem with crops being stolen from the Freedmen's Village. This was a major concern because it limited the amount of food that was readily available for the residents.

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<sup>358</sup> Ibid, 67.

<sup>359</sup> Ibid, 68.

On August 17, 1866, Lt. Bergevin, despite his demotion, addressed a concern that was brought up by a freedman known as Blackwell and a man named Henry D. Peyton. In response to the accusations of theft levied against Henry D. Peyton, Lt. Bergevin noted that the Freedmen's Village was instructed to punish those who steal.<sup>360</sup> The man who was accused of stealing was able to prove that he had been getting corn from his own garden. To safeguard against thefts, agents who worked at the Village wanted the Bureau to assign enough guards to secure the numerous fields and gardens in the Village that produced copious quantities of crops. With regards to the charge and allegations of theft, those who were found to be guilty were deported to areas where they could gain employment, after being jailed for a period. Some Freedmen who lived within the Village who were not able to gain employment within the general vicinity refused to leave the Village to gain employment elsewhere when the opportunity was offered. As a result, they were arrested and jailed until they could be transferred to other work locations.

Furthermore, Lt. Bergevin noted that many of the Freedmen who stole did so because they were unemployed and when challenged about the theft some of them made up excuses to justify their actions.<sup>361</sup> Many of them would steal from nearby farms where they were formerly held in captivity. These were the lands and crops that they were previously forced to cultivate and as a result, they held the view that they were entitled to the fruits of their labor. Acts of theft such as these were not viewed as theft or morally wrong by many within the Freedmen's community. Nonetheless, when caught stealing, the Freedmen would be jailed, fined, and leased out as involuntary laborers to individuals and corporations.

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<sup>360</sup> Ibid, 80.

<sup>361</sup> Ibid, 80.

In response to the allegations of theft or refusal to work made against Freedmen's Village residents, the residents of the Village respectfully asked the Bureau to take the time to address their concerns and provide them with the necessary information. An unidentified group of Freedmen authored a letter and addressed it to General C. H. Howard and Lt. Bergevin. The Freedmen collectively voiced the following concerns. In the first place, they asked if they could have the facility, they presently occupied for one more year. This would allow them to make the necessary preparations for the coming season. The Freedmen who requested one more year at the Village, likely made that request because they were asked to leave. Bureau agents often asked Freedmen to leave or evicted Freedmen from the Village for reasons such as making room for new arrivals, failure of tenants to make rent payments, or when other employment opportunities were presented in other parts of the county.

The Freedmen asked the Bureau heads if there was a better and more effective way to prevent people from stealing. This concern was raised because theft was a prevalent and ongoing issue that often occurred. According to the regulations of the time, the owner of the stolen property was required to provide evidence against the thief even if the owner did not witness the act. As a result, most cases of theft were not reported to the police. Not having protection against theft such as guards or systems to safeguard against theft left the Freedmen's property vulnerable.

A group of Freedmen also requested that ways be put in place to help them find honest and steady employment. They asked that the pay for their current jobs be increased. The residents were likely not being paid a livable wage and as a result, they had to take on multiple jobs to make ends meet. The Freedmen asked that more food be sent to the Village because the quality and quantity of the food that was sent were not enough to sustain them. Lastly, they

requested that an agent be placed at the Village as a liaison who could provide them with information and help with their various concerns.<sup>362</sup>

The Freedmen asked the Bureau to address their concerns and provide them with the necessary information. Captain Lawrence, the Superintendent of Freedmen's Village, authorized the re-renting of up to 15 acres of land to various parties. Captain Lawrence believed that the Freedmen had done their best to maintain and work their land.<sup>363</sup> The Freedmen were undoubtedly invested in their success, agency, and mobility. They did not sit idly by and beg for alms from the Bureau. Instead, they took the initiative to improve their own lives and petitioned for better working and living conditions. The fact that they had to rent their land back from the government after being promised it as part of their emancipation is a testament to the ongoing struggles that African Americans faced even after the Civil War.

On March 14, 1866, a Freedmen who once resided at the Freedmen's Village became subject to an investigation regarding a farm known as Frog Nest. A white planter, J. S. Budd from Charles County, Maryland had his legal counsel contact the Freedmen's Bureau regarding a dispute over ownership of the farm. Budd's counsel claimed that his farm was now in possession of a freedman named Judson. The counsel stated that the case was investigated about a year prior by an agent of the Bureau. The claim did not state how the land came into the possession of Judson nor did the claim provide any proof that Budd was the rightful owner of the land.<sup>364</sup> It was likely that the only reason Judson was not arrested and charged with some form of a crime was the fact that he had ties to the Freedmen's Village and he the fact that he was likely the rightful owner of the land. His connection to the Village was enough to keep him from being

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<sup>362</sup> Ibid, 82.

<sup>363</sup> Ibid, 82.

<sup>364</sup> Ibid, 226.



arrested, jailed, fined, physically abused, or mortally wounded, because the latter would be the fate of the Freedmen who did not live under the protection of a Village that was owned and operated by the government. Otherwise, Judson would have been in grave danger or placed in jail because of the property title dispute with Budd.

On April 6, 1867, Lt. Rogers launched an inquiry into allegations made by Dr. Armstrong regarding his cows. Doctor Armstrong went to the Bureau headquarters and made the following statements in person. He noted that some of his cows had been stolen or killed. The doctor was not able to provide any further information or evidence regarding his claims, although he did state that he believed the person or persons responsible for committing the crimes were Freedmen who reside at the Freedmen Village. During the time, thefts of any sort were widely associated with the Freedmen and in some cases, this suspicion was warranted, but this view of the Freedmen also held a racial undertone that was not always appropriate. In this instance, it is possible that one of the Freedmen stole the doctor's cows, but it is also possible that they were stolen by other people who simply used the Freedmen as a scapegoat. This was a common occurrence during this time. The Freedmen were often blamed for crimes that they did not commit. This was done to justify their mistreatment of them. It is also possible that the doctor's cows were stolen by white supremacists who did not want the Freedmen to succeed. The overarching default presumption was that the Freedmen were inherently criminal and often committed theft and grand larceny on innate impulse. The Assistant Commissioner directed Lt. Rogers to conduct a thorough investigation into the allegations set forth by Dr. Armstrong. The

Assistant Commissioner also directed Lt. Rogers to ascertain whether any of the Freedmen who resided at the Village had been concerned in this transaction.<sup>365</sup>

Dr. Armstrong provided a supplemental statement that he had reason to believe that parties from the Freedmen's Village visited his premises and stole two cows. Dr. Armstrong described one cow as a good-sized dark red cow, horned, the switch part of the tail was lacking which gave the tail a short appearance. He described the other cow as a small brindle, also horned, the ears of both were split. He further stated that a set of worn buggy harnesses were taken. The name 'Wiltsie' was stamped on the loop where the trace passes in after being buckled to the collar. Dr. Armstrong stated that the stolen collar was dropped by the thief between the Freedmen's Village and his house. A "Dutch" or breast collar was also taken, along with two turkeys and several fowls. General C. H. Howard kindly ordered a letter to be written to the Freedmen's Bureau relative to the losses that he suffered. Dr. Armstrong enclosed his detailed letter with the following call to action: "Be kind enough to have all necessary inquiries made if any cattle answering the foregoing description have been seen alive or butchered in or about the Village, as also any turkey or fowl feathers in fact any steps that may lead to the discovery of the guilty party or parties."<sup>366</sup>

John Kimball supported Dr. Armstrong's claims and petitioned the Freedmen's Village and the Freedmen's Bureau field office in Washington to conduct a thorough investigation into the matter. Dr. Armstrong was an old friend of Kimball. They only lived about one mile apart from one another. Kimball said that this incident was a damaging theft. He exclaimed that any man who would steal from Dr. Armstrong must be bold and care little for his own life. He stated

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<sup>365</sup> Ibid, 246.

<sup>366</sup> Ibid, 251.

that the doctor was a well-known retired army officer and would not spare a shot. Kimball stated that Dr. Armstrong had two “colored” men from the Village working for him. He believed this fact suggests that a Freedmen from the Village stole the property and had taken it to the Village. Kimball implored, “I hope you will do all you can to help him.”<sup>367</sup> Lt. Rogers conducted his investigation and found that there was no evidence to support the allegations made by Doctor Armstrong. There were no eyewitnesses or any other type of evidence to suggest Freedmen who resided in the Village had been involved in the theft of the doctor’s cows.

Regarding theft of items, crops, cattle, and all other property at the Freedmen’s Village, General O. O. Howard felt that the complainants of such crimes and the guards at the Village should bear some responsibility for not appropriately securing and protecting property. Captain E. B. Gates was the President of the Board of Survey and Brigadier General Henry Whittelsey was the Chief Quartermaster. According to General O. O. Howard, the property described in the proceedings of the Board of Survey was stolen or lost between July 1, 1866, and January 31, 1867. An explanation as to the time when the loss was discovered should have been provided to determine the responsibility for the said property. The Board of Survey was responsible for determining the liability of the respondents for the stolen property.<sup>368</sup> General O. O. Howard stated that it was important to learn whether the property was either unserviceable or serviceable when it was lost. He noted that this information was not mentioned in the alleged report regarding theft. This fact should have been disclosed to determine the kind of care that was taken to maintain the property. The kind of security and care that was required to maintain the property would be considered insufficient in the case of the lost property. He added that if the proper

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<sup>367</sup> Ibid, 251.

<sup>368</sup> Ibid, 251.

number of guards were employed to secure the property that was reported stolen, the theft probably would not have occurred.<sup>369</sup>

The general further noted that it was not clear why the property was not protected from unauthorized entry for six months. This lack of protection was not only evident by the fact that the property was not maintained properly, but additionally by the fact that it was not guarded properly. It was not clear if the officer took adequate measures to secure the property, from unauthorized entry. The subordinate was only aware of the situation when he was informed by his superior officer. Other measures could have been taken to prevent the loss.<sup>370</sup>

Moreover, it was not clear if the facts presented in the proceedings of the Board of Survey were sufficiently developed. This issue should be brought to the attention of the Board of Survey to determine if a full report of its proceedings has not been made. It was also suggested that the officer should not be absolved from his responsibilities for the loss of the property until he demonstrated that he took the necessary steps to protect it. He should have shown that he did so in a prudent manner. Besides the type of care and diligence that he exhibited; he failed to note the value of the property at the time it was lost.<sup>371</sup>

Efforts were also implemented to control theft at the Home and hospitals in the Village. Under the authority of General O. O. Howard, a memorandum containing the description of each piece of goods that was delivered to the Matron would be provided to her upon request.<sup>372</sup> The Freedmen's Bureau provided the Matron with a copy of the report made by Lt. Rogers of his

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<sup>369</sup> Ibid, 277.

<sup>370</sup> Ibid, 277.

<sup>371</sup> Ibid, 277.

<sup>372</sup> District of Columbia Field Offices, Freedmen's Village, Letters Received, (Dec. 26, 1864–Dec. 9, 1868, Part 2), 1.

investigation into the conditions at the Freedmen's Village so that she would be aware of the conditions at the Village and take steps to improve them.<sup>373</sup>

On August 14, 1867, General C. H. Howard wrote a letter to the Assistant Commissioner's office and asked for instructions as to the discharging of dependents, the removal of quarrelsome renters, whether he may punish them, and if so, in what manner. He asked for instructions on how to deal with dependents who were insubordinate, assaultive, indecent, or used abusive language. He stated that some Freedmen should be discharged from the Village and some renters were frequent violators of good order. He also mentioned that there were dependents who had to be watched to prevent them from committing violence against people in authority.<sup>374</sup>

The Assistant Commissioner's office responded to General C. H. Howard's inquiry and forwarded him the necessary instructions to discharge Freedmen from the Village. The Superintendent of the Village was sustained in all reasonable measures of discipline necessary for maintaining good order in any emergency. The below excerpt is from the letter General C. H. Howard sent to the Assistant Commissioner's office:

“On the 20th of July I forwarded to your office a code of rules and regulations, for the administration of affairs in this Village; for your examination, in compliance with Special Orders from your Headquarters, I have not felt myself justified in introducing rules of discipline until I should first have your approval of my own rules, or laws established by you, and as there has been heretofore no order & letter Book Report to which I could refer, I would now respectfully ask, instructions, as to the discharge of dependants from the Village the disposal of quarrelsome and turbulent renters, and whether I may punish, and in what manner, dependants, for insubordination, assault, or indecent or abusive language, and conduct, towards civilian employees here. There are persons here on the role of dependants, who should be in my opinion, not only, discharged as dependants, but discharged from the Village. There are renters who are frequent violators of good order, and troublesome inhabitants, and there are dependants who have to be constantly watched to prevent them from using violence to persons in authority under me, and who have already committed assaults in several instances. All these are grievous sources

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<sup>373</sup> Ibid, 38.

<sup>374</sup> Ibid, 38.

of trouble to the Superintendent of Disorder in the community and of disrepute to the operations of the Bureau of this Village. I only desire authority to be able to remove them all.”<sup>375</sup>

General C. H. Howard was seeking guidance so that he could take swift actions to address the ongoing issues that he has made the Assistant Commissioner’s office aware of regarding the behavior of some of the Freedmen at the Village. The general’s plan of action may seem harsh, but when the greater good of the Village was called to attention, his concerns and plans to remedy them were suitable.

The behavior of the Freedmen in the Village was at times commendable and at other times deplorable. One example of the down times can be found in the investigation that was initiated by General C. H. Howard in response to the behavior of a freedman named Glasgow. On October 30, 1867, there were strong allegations against Glasgow regarding his daily behavior. Mr. Mitten stated that Glasgow spent most of his days drunk at the Freedmen’s Village. The investigation revealed that David Glasgow was a very self-indulgent man.<sup>376</sup> It was discovered that Glasgow was not a productive member of the Village, and his actions were disreputable. The Freedmen were encouraged to live moral and upright lives and many of them did. The case of Glasgow was not an isolated issue, as incidents such as this occurred regularly, but the infractions were committed by a small number of the Freedmen. The Freedmen’s Village was a place that was meant to help Freedmen get back on their feet after the Civil War. The village provided housing, food, clothing, and access to education and medical care. The majority of the residents were able to take advantage of the resources and opportunities that were available to them. However, there were a small number of residents who caused problems with their disruptive and self-indulgent behavior.

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<sup>375</sup> Ibid, 40.

<sup>376</sup> Ibid, 110.

On November 1, 1868, a freedman named Lewis Gaskins complained about not being treated as well as other Freedmen who resided within the Village. His allegations were forwarded to the Bureau's headquarters in Washington for an investigation.<sup>377</sup> The management of the Freedmen's Village could be very harsh and oppressive. The Superintendent and his assistants were constantly threatening to expel the Freedmen from the Village if they did not comply with their rules and regulations. Freedmen like Gaskins often complained that the food provided by the Village was inadequate and poor in quality. He also alleged that the Village officials were unjust in their treatment of the Freedmen.

On December 24, 1867, the Village experienced a wood shortage. Regarding the reported wood shortage, the Assistant Commissioner's Office directed Dr. Howard to examine the provisions for the keeping of fuel, wood, and coal, supplies for the use of the Village. He also instructed Dr. Howard to hire a new watchman or guard if needed to help secure the wood from possible theft. Dr. Howard was informed that the reported deficiency of such a large amount of wood in an abbreviated period of time was irregular.<sup>378</sup>

The Assistant Commissioner's office noted that an excessive amount of wood was being consumed within Freedmen's Village. The Assistant Commissioner was concerned with the fact that there were no stores of wood for future use, especially with winter approaching. After investigating the matter, Dr. Howard discovered that the Superintendent had failed to make any contracts for a regular supply of wood during the summer and fall. There were allegations made about Freedmen cutting down trees and using them for fuel without permission. Additionally, it was suspected that some of the villagers were stealing wood from other properties to supplement their own needs. To remedy the situation, Dr. Howard planned with a local supplier to provide

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<sup>377</sup> *Ibid*, 180.

<sup>378</sup> *Ibid*, 220.

the Village with a steady supply of wood. He also requested guards around the perimeter of the Village to deter any further theft. In addition, he issued a warning to the residents that anyone caught stealing wood would be subject to punishment.

Rev. Danforth Nichols, a Methodist missionary, and American Missionary Association agent, worked the Village. Mr. Nichols and other abolitionists had a harder time dealing with the actuality of slavery than they did calling for its abolishment. Freedmen were considerably different from the abolitionists' well-to-do, acculturated free black supporters in terms of their education and integration into society. Alarmed that Freedmen were violating constantly the laws of chastity and honesty often led Nichols and his colleagues resorted to heavy-handed efforts at control. They frequently referred to Freedmen as “poor things” and condescension came easy to them.<sup>379</sup>

On January 14, 1864, Luisa Jane Barker (wife of Rev Stephen Barker, Chaplain of 1st Mass. Heavy Artillery) testified to the Bureau that she was living in the house of Lt. Shepard when he brought Lucy Ellen Johnson to her room in a state of great agitation. Barker stated that Johnson was weeping violently and rubbing her hands and arms which she said were in great pain. Her thumbs were scarred across with welts showing the marks of cords by which she had been tied. Her wrists bore similar marks and one of her sleeves was torn in two. Johnson's bonnet was torn. Barker asked Johnson what happened she replied that the guards of the Freedmen's Village had released her. She stated that the guards had tied her up to a tree and subjected her to gross abuse. Barker transcribed the statements of Johnson. Barker mentioned that it took nearly two hours to soothe and claim Johnson down. Johnson was crying unconsolably and was outraged.

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<sup>379</sup> Rick Beard, “Fifty houses of freedom: though the Freedman's 'Village at Arlington was founded in good faith, it remained a troubled enterprise.” *Civil War Times*, April 2016, (Vol. 55, Issue 2), 49.



Johnson's husband asked Mr. Nichols to place her under his protection at the Village while he went away to work. Johnson was to earn her food and clothing like the other Freedmen; it was on this understanding that Johnson entered the Village. She was not able to work because she was sick when she arrived. In the first week, she applied to receive free rations, a bed mattress, a blanket, a pair of shoes, and a dress. Mr. Nichols had been sick for the last two months and had not laid eyes on Johnson prior to her request. He asked Johnson if she was employed, and she told him she had been too sick to begin work but hoped to do so the following week. Mr. Nicholas asked Johnson how much money her husband earned. Johnson stated her husband earned \$25 per month. He asked her why she needed any free rations or items from him. Johnson informed Mr. Nichols that he should have explained this to her husband before he decided to bring her to the Village. Mr. Nichols became angry and ordered Johnson to come closer to him, but she was afraid of him and hesitated. He seized her by the shoulder and forced her down into a chair. In her attempts of defending herself, Johnson rose from the chair and Mr. Nichols forced her down a second time. Once more, Johnson defiantly got up from the chair, to which he forced her down a third time and ordered her to sit there.<sup>380</sup>

This time she remained in the chair until a guard entered the room, seized her by the shoulder, and shoved her. The guard threatened to imprison Johnson in the guard house. At the door, they were joined by a corporal, a sergeant, and some soldiers who took Johnson to the guard tent. While being escorted to the guard tent some of the soldiers pushed and kicked Johnson. At one point she was seized by her throat until she was nearly strangled. A guard fastened a rope around both of Johnson's thumbs and passed the rope over the limb of a tree and

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<sup>380</sup> Freedman's Village and Reconstruction Collections Records, 1857-1996, RG 103 Box 2, Folder (18) "Copies and Transcripts from the Freedom and Southern Society Project, 1864."

raised her from the ground. Johnson was suspended in the air by her thumbs, which supported her body weight. Johnson stated that a lieutenant came to their location and the guards removed the rope from her thumbs and tied it around her wrist. Johnson was once again hoisted into the air with her arms outstretched, powerless, and defenseless. While she was suspended from the tree, one of the guards kicked her, another choked her, and a third guard stuffed dirty wool in her mouth to mute her piercing screams of pain and despair. This beating continued for half an hour. The lieutenant ordered the guards to bring Johnson down from the tree in which she was suspended and advised her to leave the Village. Johnson told the lieutenant that she did not have any other place to go. He then advised her to keep out of Mr. Nichols's sight.<sup>381</sup>

Johnson's father, Fielding Lewis, also witnessed his daughter's abuse and provided his corroborative testimony to the Bureau. He said that his daughter was treated very barbarously indeed. Lewis witnessed the guards dragging Johnson to the tree and he begged them to stop. Lewis said Johnson was trying to resist the guards while they were trying to suspend her from the tree. One of the soldiers put his sword on the end of his gun and threatened to run it into her if she kept trying to defend herself. Lewis testified that the guards bound Johnson's wrists and thumbs with a rope and threw the rope over a tree branch. The guards pulled the rope over the branch and suspended his daughter in the air. Johnson's feet along with her entire body swayed each time the guards struck her. Lewis said that the guards whipped and beat Johnson severely. Lewis cried as he looked on at his daughter's brutal beating. One of the guards kicked Johnson right under her clothes with his foot. Johnson begged the men to stop at this, they stuffed rags into her mouth so that she could not speak. Lewis stated that Johnson's beating was prolonged and added that he could have walked an entire mile for the length of time that passed during the

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<sup>381</sup> Ibid.

attack. The testimony of Luisa Jane Barker regarding the case of Johnson was filed with the Bureau and her account was supported by nineteen other witnesses. Additionally, the testimony regarding Johnson was in turn filed with testimony by more than thirty other people, regarding the comparable treatment of Freedmen at Camp Barker and Freedmen's Village.<sup>382</sup>

The testimony of a freedman shoemaker named Henry Cook was provided to the Quartermaster Department in January 1864. Cook said Mr. Simpson, a white Village administrator, came after his son, Charles Cook, who had been sick. Cook said that his son was sick and unable to work, but Simpson said Cook's son must go out to work. Simpson became angry and pushed and shoved Cook's son about. Cook and his wife pleaded with Simpson asking him to stop the assault. Simpson eventually relented but threatened to have Cook's son arrested and placed in the guard house. Cook turned away from Simpson, sat down inside his tent, and picked up a peg cutter that lay on the ground beside him. Cook turned around and observed Simpson with a big stick in his hand. Simpson used profanity-laced language as he shouted profanities at Cook. Simpson taunted Cook by asking him what he was going to do with the peg cutter. To which Cook replied, nothing, and hastily asked Simpson what was he planning to do with the large stick he had.<sup>383</sup>

In response, Mr. Simpson called Cook a "damn nigger" and told him to come out of the tent. Simpson threatened to kill him with this stick. Simpson struck Cook in the back of his head. Once he came out of the tent, Simpson struck him another awful blow with the stick just above his forehead. Cook nearly fell to the ground. Simpson threw the stick at Cook and a tussle between the two ensued which resulted in Simpson being thrown down to the ground. Simpson simultaneously cried out for help and within an instant, Mr. Fowler, another white Village

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<sup>382</sup> Ibid.

<sup>383</sup> Ibid.

administrator, and a guard joined in the fray. Fowler and the guard held Cook down so that Simpson could assault him without privation. Simpson now full of bravado placed his knees on Cook's chest and penned him securely to the ground. Simpson told Cook he will kill him. Simpson began forcefully pounding Cook in his head and face with his fist. Then he took his two thumbs and gouged them into Cook's eyes. Simpson attempted to gouge Cook's eye out, but Mr. Fowler intervened. After the beating Simpson got on his horse and told Cook to come to work. Cook informed Simpson that he will no longer work for him. Cook was severely injured and confined to his bed for about two weeks following the beating. Cook's wife reported the beating to Captain Perry, who in turn instructed her to be quiet and not to make any trouble.<sup>384</sup>

About three weeks later, Nichols, a white Village administrator, informed Cook that he had orders to discharge him from the Village because he refused to work for the government. Cook lived in the Village with his family for a long time. Cook did not have any money or a means of securing a place to go once he and his family were evicted from the Village. Other testimony indicated that Thomas Simpson was a farm overseer and Phillip Fowler an assistant to the Director of the Government Farms, Edward A. Holman. Simpson was a slave driver in Maryland before the war, who used to hire out slaves for his own benefit as well. Fowler also supervised slaves on plantations in Maryland before the war. Nichols was also known to be of bad character in his treatment of the Freedmen. Mr. Nicholas was also a pastor.<sup>385</sup> Lt. Greene had enough of Nichols' conduct and moved him to a camp on nearby Mason's Island (now Roosevelt Island).

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<sup>384</sup> Ibid.

<sup>385</sup> Ibid.

## Government Eviction at the Village

Lieut. Chas. H. Shepard was the Provost Marshal of the 1st Massachusetts Heavy Artillery, stationed next to Freedmen's Village. In January 1864, Lieut. Shepard reported the removal and destruction of the tenements at the Village located in front of the Arlington House. Lieut. Col Lathrop complained that the Freedmen should be removed because they injured the look of the Estate. As result, the Freedmen were relocated away from the immediate view of the Arlington House and were granted permission to build there. Approximately, fifteen or twenty houses were erected. According to Lieut. Shepard, those homes housed upwards of 100 people.<sup>386</sup>

After they had been established some time, a Union military official complained that the Freedmen were stealing and that he did not want the Freedmen so close to his fort. The Freedmen were once again removed to another location within the Village. Lieut. Shepard appealed to other Union military leadership to allow the Freedmen to stay at their secondary location, to no avail. In either instance, if the Freedmen refused to remove their property, they would be arrested and put into the contraband Camp. Although the Village was founded as a contraband camp, it had transitioned into a complete community. One clear difference between the Village and contraband camps was that the Village functioned more like a thriving community, whereas the Freedmen at the contraband camps were held in a degraded condition comparable to imprisonment.

Lieut. Shepard gave an account of a white woman, Miss Donnalsen, who was a supporter of the Freedmen. Donnalsen sharply criticized and opposed the relocation of the villagers to

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<sup>386</sup> Freedman's Village and Reconstruction Collections Records, 1857-1996, RG 103 Box 1, Folder (1) "Freedman's Village: Arlington, Virginia, 1863-1900, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 1992."

another area within the Village. Donnalson was subsequently arrested as a woman of bad character and was taken to jail in Washington, D.C. Lieut. Shepard stated that Donnalson was a very respectable woman, and the wrongful detention provoked the involved Freedmen to march over to Washington on the day of her arrest in protest. The Freedmen were obliged to stay out in the cold. Lieut. Shepard reported that a freedman died due to being in severe weather. Lieut. Shepard stated that the Freedmen refused to leave, and they were surrounded by a guard.<sup>387</sup>

On June 30<sup>th</sup>, 1865, Captain Carse received a total of three hundred and forty-four dollars for house rent at the Freedmen's Village.<sup>388</sup> Each resident within the Freedmen's Village was responsible for paying monthly rent for their tenements. A substantial number of Freedmen who could afford to pay the fee did so, but there were a considerable number of those who simply could not afford the rent. Within the number of Freedmen who failed to pay their rent fee were the unemployed, disabled, and elderly. Despite the financial difficulties that arose from a lack of payment, the Freedmen's Bureau continued to provide food and supplies for those living within Freedmen's Village, using eviction only as a last resort.<sup>389</sup>

On September 28, 1865, in a letter addressed to President Andrew Johnson, a freedman named Langerfield Bevely expressed his concerns and asked for more relief. Langerfield exclaimed that he was a poor and lame person who has been reliant upon the government for four years. He asserted, if anyone doubts his statements, then they shall believe the good lord, he knew those things to be a fact. Langerfield stated that he and his wife and children who were sick were threatened with eviction from the Freedmen Village and that their belongings would be

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<sup>387</sup> Ibid.

<sup>388</sup> District of Columbia Field Offices, Freedmen's Village, Letters Received, (Dec. 26, 1864–Dec. 9, 1868, Part 1), 18.

<sup>389</sup> Ibid, 18.

thrown in the streets.<sup>390</sup> Langerfield's letter not only reflects the difficult living conditions that many Freedmen faced but also highlights the lack of resources available to them. African Americans in Arlington County were forced to confront many obstacles after emancipation. While some white residents were supportive of black self-sufficiency, others actively worked to undermine it. Consequently, the community development of African Americans in Arlington was a slow and arduous process.

Langerfield attempted to contact Gen. Howard's office twice but was told he had not been removed from the Village therefore he had no recourse to an appeal. He further asserted that he and his family were thrown out without anything to eat. Langerfield stated that he was informed that all the belongings within his home would be burnt up that day if he did not pay one month's rent. He stated that he had been in his house for a total of eighteen months and always paid his rent on the first day of the month.

As a result, Langerfield filed a petition with the Freedmen's Bureau, requesting that the Bureau assist him in relocating to his home region of King George's County in Virginia.<sup>391</sup> It is also important to note that Langerfield authored his own letter. The Civil War concluded on May 9, 1865, and Langerfield authored his letter only five months later. Because of this short span of time, one would suppose that he might have learned to read and write before the end of the war. Another point that stands out, is the fact that Langerfield asked to leave the Village as opposed to remaining. This shows his sense of agency and desire to return to his home county, where many familiar faces reside. Captain Carse was assigned this case and swore to investigate the claims made by Langerfield and see that justice was done.<sup>392</sup> While a final response from Captain Carse

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<sup>390</sup> Ibid, 21.

<sup>391</sup> Ibid, 21.

<sup>392</sup> Ibid, 23.

was not located, it was widespread practice to aid Freedmen in their transportation from the Village in effort to make room for the new residents, who arrived daily. The story of Langerfield Bevely provides a glimpse into the lives of Freedmen immediately following emancipation as well as the difficulties they faced in trying to build new lives for themselves.

In a letter addressed to Lieutenant Bergevin, Lt. Col Rogers made the case for a Freedmen named Cornelius West to retain his home at the Freedmen's Village and not be thrown out. According to West, he would be going to work on Monday of the following week, and he would be able to pay his rent on that day. He further stated that he could provide the Village with only a portion of his rent. Lt. Col Rogers determined that West would be able to pay his rent in the future and advocated for him to keep his place.<sup>393</sup> The advocacy on the part of Lt. Col Rogers was extraordinary and it reflected the interpersonal relationships that must have developed between Bureau agents and the residents of the Village. It also reflected that certain positive interracial relationships existed amongst the Village and Bureau staff who were largely white and the residents who were African American.

To support the efforts of cutting costs, at times families were compelled to leave the Freedmen's Village. This was done for several reasons: failure to make rent payments for lands being occupied, and to make room for newly arriving destitute Freedmen. Some families were compelled to leave the Village shortly after the head office for the Bureau issued a letter prompting these actions, with Ester Johnson and Washington being allowed to remain at the Village for one additional month. Additional families were compelled to leave the Village in November 1866, are as followed: Daniel Hoggins, wife, with three male children and three

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<sup>393</sup> Ibid, 57.



female children, Benjamin Green, and his wife and three children, Randal Bates, and his wife and three children and Robert Hawkins and several hundred other families.<sup>394</sup>

These individuals were forced to find other places to stay, whether that be with family or friends, as the Freedmen's Village was no longer an option. In this case, Freedmen would seek out dwellings to shelter in the nearby vicinity. Many of the Freedmen made formal grievances in response to the Bureau's decision to evict them from their homes. The first grievance type was that the government did not provide them with any type of alternative housing or resources for relocation. The second grievance type was that the government did not consult with the Freedmen community before deciding to evict them from their homes. The third grievance type was that the government did not provide any justification for why they were being evicted from their homes. The fourth grievance type was that the government did not give them adequate notice before evicting them from their homes. The fifth and final grievance type was that the government did not provide any compensation for the belongings that they were forced to leave behind when they were evicted from their homes.

The Freedmen's Village made housing and clothing provisions for some of the families. Captain Lawrence inquired if Humphrey and Thomas Owens could be allowed to stay in the Village. Captain Lawrence noted that they would be working in the cemetery, and Owen's wife would work as a cook for the mess hall. Clothing was supposed to be given to the women and children before they were sent away from the Village. The staff of the Freedmen's Village was more than just employees who worked with the Freedmen, rather they were lifelong advocates

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<sup>394</sup> Ibid, 104.

for them. Those who were actively employed in the Village or near it may be allowed to stay in their tenements. Those who were going away had clothing issued as needed.<sup>395</sup>

The reaction of the Freedmen who were compelled to leave the Village was varied. Some Freedmen wanted to leave the Village to seek better employment and return to areas where they had family members living. Some Freedmen did not wish to leave the Village and even requested to be allowed to remain. The case of Hannah Tremmer aptly describes the latter. Tremmer inquired why was not she allowed to continue living in the Village and her concerns were forwarded to General O. O. Howard. The General responded that her request would not be granted and that she must vacate the premises. The decision to evict the Freedmen from the Village was met with mixed reactions from both the white and black communities. Some whites saw it as a positive step, as it would relieve the government of the burden of caring for the Freedmen. Some Freedmen saw it as a positive step, as it would allow them to seek better employment and living conditions outside of the Village. However, many of them saw it as a negative, as they were being forced out of their homes without any compensation or alternative housing options.

On November 15, 1866, Tremmer authored a letter that detailed the following concerns about her pending eviction. Tremmer was a sixty-four-year-old Freedwoman who had lived in the Village, and she regularly paid her rent-on time. She demanded to know the reason she could not stay in the Village. Tremmer was asked to leave the Village even after paying her rent. She came to the Village in 1864 after she was brought into the country from the West Indies. Four months later, her grandson located her in the Village and took care of her financially until he

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<sup>395</sup> Bid, 106.

went away in May. Once her grandson left, Tremmer found a way to pay her rent and succeeded at doing so monthly. She stated that was getting old and could not work like she used to.<sup>396</sup>

Tremmer noted that her grandson paid the rent at the Village from June 1, 1865, through December 1866, in the amount of four dollars per month.<sup>397</sup> It was likely that the Village was seeking to have Tremmer reunited with her grandson or other relatives who might take care of her in her old age. The government's decision to evict the Freedmen from the Village was a major setback for the African American community in Arlington, Virginia, significantly contributing to homelessness, unemployment, and poverty.<sup>398</sup>

Lt. Rogers addressed several issues to the Freedmen's Bureau that the Village and the residents had been experiencing, chiefly residents being compelled to leave the Village. He worked with Captain Lawrence to ensure that the appropriate measures were taken to address the concerns of the Freedmen. After investigating the claims, he concluded that the relocation of the residents of the Freedmen Village was not carried out properly. Lt. Rogers believed that the relocation requirements of the residents were not explained properly. He additionally stated that Bureau management did not exert enough pressure on the individuals to accept the situations that they were offered. In many cases, some Freedmen were offered employment and housing opportunities in other parts of the country, but despite this, some Freedmen still were not compelled to leave the Village. Some of the Freedmen who were asked to leave the Village claimed that they were at work at the time evictions were carried out or when eviction notices were posted. However, several families that lived on the Arlington farm outside the Village had their houses forcefully demolished. If the Freedmen were not willing to tear their homes down,

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<sup>396</sup> Ibid, 109.

<sup>397</sup> Ibid, 111.

<sup>398</sup> Ibid, 111.

then they were asked to move their homes. As a result, they incurred damages and loss, as well as having to pay excessive land rents. Some Freedmen simply did not want to leave the Village because this community was the only comfortable environment, they knew post-emancipation. They also had a well-established social and cultural network of family, friends, and church parishioners. Therefore, it was quite hard for many of the Freedmen to just pick up their life and leave all that they have come to know at such short notice. To add insult to injury, some of the Freedmen were threatened if they did not leave the Village upon request.

As a result of the Freedmen being forced to leave, there was an influx of people in Washington D.C., and proximities in northern Virginia. Many of these people were destitute and had no place to go. The churches and relief associations were burdened with having to care for this influx. In an attempt to reduce the number of destitute individuals in Washington, the government provided free transportation to any place where the heads of household found employment. The plan was that once the head of the household was employed, they could then send for their families.

The plan to provide free transportation was met with much criticism. Some individuals believed that this would just be another way for the government to get rid of the Freedmen. Others saw this as an opportunity for the Freedmen to start anew for social and economic advancement. The main concern with this plan was that it would separate families. Many of the heads of household were not willing to leave their families behind with the promise of being able to bring them at a later date. In the end, few Freedmen left the Village, and most remained with their families onsite.<sup>399</sup> Freedmen residents of the Village were not ready or willing to leave their

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<sup>399</sup> Ibid, 111.

homes. They had already faced so much hardship and they did not want to experience it anymore. The Freedmen had only recently gained their freedom and they were still trying to adjust to this new way of life. They were finally settled in the Freedmen Village, which was a place where they felt comfortable and safe. They had established a community and a support system for themselves. It would have been extremely hard for them to just pick up and leave everything that they have come to know.

William Conway, one of the individuals who raised the issue of being compelled to leave the Village, claimed that Lieutenant Bergevin called his mother-in-law “a damn fool,” after she asked where they should go if they decided to pull down their house. Lt. Rogers maintained that he did not have an opportunity to speak with Lt. Bergevin regarding the claim since the allegation was made. In another instance, a “colored” woman was evicted from her house and was forced to stay outside until morning. Lt. Rogers reaffirmed that he does not believe that the order was carried out properly and stated that he believed that unnecessary and severe suffering was caused by poor execution of it. The complaints that have been raised were more likely the result of the difficulties that the residents had been experiencing due to the implementation of the order.<sup>400</sup> The order to remove the Freedmen from the Village was eventually rescinded. The reasons for this were twofold: First, it was decided that the Village should remain standing since it was seen as a model community for the Freedmen; Second, the Union Army realized that they needed the labor of the Freedmen to support the war effort. The Freedmen were able to farm and sell their produce.

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<sup>400</sup> Ibid, 146.

Lt. Rogers recommended that Captain Lawrence investigate the cases of the Freedmen who had been forced to leave the Village. He stated the Freedmen who can earn an allowance and hold a good livelihood for themselves be allowed to return to the village. He stated that the residents should be allowed to occupy their houses, but no further modifications to the order were deemed advisable. He noted that Captain Lawrence was instructed to make the heating apparatuses within the homes of the residents more effective and comfortable and to hire a good carpenter to make the necessary repairs and alterations to the buildings. The Matrons should also be given the necessary measures to improve their performance. The residents of the Village were expected to have a better experience with these institutions.<sup>401</sup> In his report, Lt. Rogers brought to light the many problems that the Freedmen residents were facing. He discussed the poor living conditions, lack of food, and inadequate medical care. He also noted the negative effects that the eviction order had on the residents of the Village. It was clear from his report that administrative enhancements were needed to improve the lives of the Freedmen in the Village.

On January 8, 1867, Captain Lawrence received correspondence from the Freedmen's Bureau headquarters located in Washington, which outlined the procedures for removing unemployed Freedmen from the Village. The Assistant Commissioner had ordered the removal of the unemployed individuals from the Village. He ordered that the staff who was assigned to the Village adhere to the rules and policy during the process. The Freedmen who had jobs in the City of Georgetown or the immediate vicinity may request to acquire tenements from the Bureau in the respective city.<sup>402</sup>

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<sup>401</sup> Ibid, 148.

<sup>402</sup> Ibid, 150.

The individuals who were not employed were to be removed from the Freedmen's Village. The first step in the process was for Captain Lawrence to provide a report that listed the names of those who desired tenements in the cities or vicinity where they were employed. The Assistant Commissioner noted that the objective was not to force any individual to leave the Freedmen's Village if they insisted on remaining. The second step of the process was for Captain Lawrence and his staff to explain the order and procedures to the residents of the Village to enhance compliance. They were to inform the residents that they could either find employment or be removed from the Village. Those who chose to find employment were given two weeks to do so. If they failed to find employment, they could be removed from the Village. The Assistant Commissioner noted that Captain Lawrence should use his sound discretion when carrying out the order. If any of the Freedmen were sick to be unable to find work, they should be allowed to remain in the Village. The Assistant Commissioner stated that the overriding objective was not to force any individual to leave the Freedmen's Village if they did not want to, but rather to provide them with an opportunity to find employment.<sup>403</sup>

The captain was instructed to forward a list of names of the Freedmen who were employed in Virginia and Maryland who could not comfortably live in a tenement located in Washington, but desired to live at the Freedmen's Village, Headquarters would investigate and determine if they would be admitted into the Village. Finally, Captain Lawrence was instructed to distinctly inform the Freedmen who were not employed that the agency planned to send them to better situations where they would be able to gain employment and homes in the North.<sup>404</sup>

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<sup>403</sup> Ibid, 150.

<sup>404</sup> Ibid, 150.

Captain Lawrence submitted a list that included the names of three Freedmen who lived at the Village but worked a considerable distance away from it: Cane Duncan, who worked in Piedmont Virginia, John Church, who worked in Maryland, and Daniel Hogans, who worked in Maryland. The first two Freeman lived in tenements on the grounds of the Freedmen's Village. The problem was that Daniel Hogans owned his own log house. Therefore, when he was asked or forced to leave the Village this was a great setback for him, and his family as opposed to a benefit. According to Captain Lawrence, all the men had been instructed to leave the Village and take their families along with them as soon as possible. There was not a policy in place to make special consideration for Freedmen who had shared experiences such as Hogans.<sup>405</sup>

Despite the Bureau's strong push to open space at the Freedmen's Village, by removing the unemployed Freedmen, they still admitted those who could not work into the Village. On January 8, 1867, an old Freedmen name Cornelius Carney who was not able to support himself petitioned the Village for admittance. Carney lived in various places wherever he could find shelter in Washington, prior to relocating to the Village. Carney did not have any family or friends to aid him. Additionally, he was feeble and incapable of sustaining himself. Lt. Rogers was the official that facilitated Carney's transition into the Village. Lt. Rogers noted that Carney was living on Fredrickburgh Island D.C.<sup>406</sup> Carney was not the only Freedmen that the Bureau took in, despite their efforts to send unemployed Freedmen away from the Village. The Bureau's efforts to send unemployed Freedmen away from the Village and make room for those who could not work were two separate issues. The Bureau did not want the Village to be a burden on the government, so they made every effort to make it self-sufficient. That is why they sent the

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<sup>405</sup> Ibid, 155.

<sup>406</sup> Ibid, 152.



unemployed Freedmen away from the Village in hopes that they would find employment and become self-sufficient as well. On the other hand, they also wanted to help those who could not work and needed assistance.

Although the Freedmen's Bureau had multiple field offices throughout the country, including Virginia, General O. O. Howard mandated the Freedmen's Village to report to the Assistant Commissioner's Office of the Freedmen's Bureau, in the District of Columbia, as opposed to a local Virginia field office. This was largely done because the daily functions of the Village were being tightly administered and monitored by the government.<sup>407</sup>

There were many residents of the Village that provided essential functions for the entire community. One example can be found in the life and experiences of a preacher Freedmen named Reverend R. S. Laws. On March 20, 1867, Reverend R. S. Laws requested that General C. H. Howard make special accommodations by allowing him to live within his dwelling in the Village rent-free. He explained that he was a Minister of the Gospel and a student at the National Institute of Education. The Freedmen pastor noted that he did not earn any money for the services he provided to the residents of the Village. He stated that he did not have any money or the time to make money for himself. Reverend R. S. Laws pleaded that he needed help finding a way to pay his house rent. "If possible, please let me have my house rent free of charge."<sup>408</sup> This man dedicated his life and service to the residents of the Village and labored tirelessly as he preached the gospel. Pastors were of extreme importance during this time, as they often functioned to shepherd the overall culture of the community and often directly shaped the fabric of their society.

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<sup>407</sup> Ibid, 236.

<sup>408</sup> Ibid, 241.

Benjamin Wade and his wife were allowed to stay in their house at Freedmen's Village despite being defaulted on their monthly rent, with the support of General C. H. Howard. According to the arrangement made on April 3, 1867, Benjamin Wade and his wife were instructed to behave properly and perform the labor they could do in return for their rations and quarters. Furthermore, Wade was required to bring his account current once he received his monthly pension. Although the arrangement did not specify Wade's former employment, it was thought that he was a retired member of the United States Colored Troops.<sup>409</sup> Not all of the residents at Freedmen's Village were able to find regular and steady employment. Many of the residents had to take odd jobs when they could get them to make ends meet. Despite the challenges that the residents of Freedmen's Village faced, they still managed to find ways to improve their quality of life. One way that they did this was by forming civic organizations for themselves.

Wade set the arrangement in motion when he wrote a letter to General C. H. Howard and requested his help. In his letter, Wade wrote in part, that it was his honor to inform the general about a crippled soldier and his condition who was residing within the Freedmen's Village. Wade noted that it was true that he was drawing a pension but added that he has not received his payment for the month. He stated that he was sorry to inform the general that he could only perform light work, and that no one would hire him because of the limitations placed upon him as a result of his disability. Wade asked General C. H. Howard to consider that he has tried to get work and has walked day after day in the city looking for work. Wade noted that he could not find any work despite his constant attempts. Wade lamented that he could not even find work as simple as driving a wagon. He exclaimed that he was actively seeking employment where he

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<sup>409</sup> Ibid, 242.

could make a positive contribution to the Freedmen's Village. But he had unfortunately been unsuccessful to that end. He mentioned that he had been tending to the elderly in the old home. Wade stated that he wanted to stay at the Village until he could draw his next pension. Although he asserted that he would leave the Village upon request, he ended his letter with the following appeal, "please seek some place for me to live Benjamin Wade I am downstairs would like to have a conversation with you."<sup>410</sup>

Wade's letter highlights the challenges that many of the residents of Freedmen's Village faced. He was a disabled veteran who could not find regular employment because of his physical limitations. Despite his challenges, Wade still found ways to contribute to the village. He did this by helping to care for other villagers who were in need. This type of community support was essential for the survival of the village. But with the recent cold snap, the number of people that required his assistance had increased. He stated that he did not have any money or the time to make money for himself.

On July 25, 1867, Charles B Purvis wrote a letter to the Chief Medical Officer, Lt. Col. Reyburn, requesting the removal of the daughter of Elizabeth Brown to the Village. The unnamed daughter of Brown resided in Proctors Ally between 12 and 13 L M Streets, Washington. Purvis exclaimed that Brown's daughter was an "idiot" and she was not capable of supporting her.<sup>411</sup> There were times when some of the families who resided within the Freedmen Village fell behind on their monthly rent. Some Freedmen had long-standing rent obligations that went back to 1866. On March 31, 1868, Assistant Commissioner Stuart Eldridge ordered that the Freedmen who rented tenements in the Village should pay their rent as quickly as possible, and

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<sup>410</sup> Ibid, 245.

<sup>411</sup> District of Columbia Field Offices, Freedmen's Village, Letters Received, (Dec. 26, 1864–Dec. 9, 1868, Part 2), 29.

all past due rent prior to January 1, 1868, should be remitted. Those who were not able to pay their rent by the due date were discharged from the Village on 30 days' notice.<sup>412</sup> In response to the Assistant Commissioner's order, General C. H. Howard requested that all delinquent rent due prior to January 1, 1868, be canceled. He further stated that with a proper effort he could collect all rent as it came due.<sup>413</sup>

On June 27, 1868, Assistant Commissioner Eldridge informed General C. H. Howard of following the recommendation of the Board of Inspection. Eldridge was required to remove or evict the Freedmen who were described below. The Freedmen would either be offered work by the local Superintendent in Washington or by the Freedmen's Village and were required to accept the opportunity. Any Freedmen who refused work or accepted employment for any reason would be recommended for expulsion and were informed to leave the Village by July 10, 1868. Orphans and older children were placed in labor as soon as possible. It was believed that the older dependent children and adults could perform all labor, except for skilled labor such as carpentry and mechanics. He noted that older dependent children and adults were given the opportunity to work at other locations within the North. If they were not willing to work elsewhere, they were to be removed from the Village by August 1, 1868.<sup>414</sup>

On July 20, 1868, the Freedmen's Village Administration petitioned the Assistant Commissioner's Office for the suspension of the sale of some buildings. The buildings that were proposed to be sold were occupied by the Freedmen. The petition was for the suspension of the sale of the buildings until the next session of Congress so that the Freedmen might have time to plan for securing property for themselves and their children.<sup>415</sup> On July 22, 1868, in response to

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<sup>412</sup> Ibid, 138.

<sup>413</sup> Ibid, 139.

<sup>414</sup> Ibid, 178.

<sup>415</sup> Ibid, 235.

the Freedmen's Village petition, the Assistant Commissioner's Office stated that the sale of the buildings could not be suspended. There were still houses that would not be sold, and those homes were designated for the use of Freedmen who rented land. The homes were designed to allow two Freedmen families to live in them. This action did not prevent the Village residents from presenting a petition to the next Congress. The petition would request that the land at Arlington be sold or donated to the Freedmen who were currently occupying it. In addition, anyone who rented land should be allowed to bid on the houses that they currently occupied to purchase them. The Secretary of War had decided that the sales of the land would only be made for cash transactions. The Assistant Commissioner's Office stated that the Freedmen who sought to buy the houses would be given time to secure their funds. He also decided to recall his previous proposition where he gave three months' credit to the renters of the land. Instead of giving the renters three months of credit, he stated that the Freedmen should pay rent until October when a sale would be made for their accommodation. If the Freedmen were not renting land occupying a home, they would be given ten days to vacate the building or they would forfeit the possession contained therewithin. Additionally, the building would be removed, burned, or torn down.<sup>416</sup>

On July 19, 1868, the residents of the Freedmen's Village petitioned the United States Senate and the House of Representatives to pass a bill that would authorize the sale of one hundred acres of land located at Arlington and the houses that the government owned located at the Freedmen's Village for the total sum of \$10,000.00.<sup>417</sup> The Freedmen who were currently living in the Village and renting land from the government would be eligible to purchase their homes and associated parcels. Many Freedmen had already purchased their homes and land but

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<sup>416</sup> Ibid, 235.

<sup>417</sup> Ibid, 238.

there were a number of them who did not. The Freedmen were willing to pay a reasonable price for the land and the homes.

## Legal Maneuvering for Freedmen Justice

Until the abolishment of the asylum for the infirm in Arlington, Virginia, on August 31, 1868, there were various individuals working at the facility, including a superintendent, a contract surgeon, and a matron for the Old Women's Home. Due to the destitution experienced by the Freedmen in the area during the winter season, the superintendent's jurisdiction was extended to encompass the county by three miles. J. V.W. Vandenburg, who was a prominent United States Volunteer during the Civil War, was the Superintendent of Columbia's District until August 31, 1868. There were three barracks in this office, which were used for Freedmen. The barracks were fitted up as tenements for the Freedmen. One of the agents oversaw the receiving and issuing of clothes made from industrial schools or received from other sources. During the winter and spring, there were additional agents in the office to assist with investigating cases of applicants for relief.<sup>418</sup>

As a consequence of the numerous appeals that were made by the Freedmen to the Bureau for assistance, which could only be rendered effectively in the courts, or which involved the representations of friendly judges and others of a large number of injustices that often happened to the Freedmen as a result of their ignorance of the processes of law, or inability to secure suitable counsel, the Bureau appointed at least one lawyer, in Washington, as a special agent. The Bureau helped the Freedmen with most of their civil business. The Bureau helped the Freedmen with the examination of titles and conveyancing. They also helped the Freedmen by giving them legal information, providing legal counsel, and writing letters in cases, not before the courts. This sort of assistance that the Bureau provided was regarded as educational in large measure as they provided legal and business instruction for the Freedmen. A freedman lawyer,

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<sup>418</sup> Registers and Letters Received by the Commissioner, Letters Received, Unregistered Letters, (1865–1871, Part 3), 47.

George B. Vashon, was employed during most of the year as an assistant in Mr. Browne's office. Vashon assisted with well over thirty-eight cases related to the Freedmen in need of civil counsel outside of the District of Columbia alone. The criminal cases consisted mainly of the prosecution of persons for outrages that were frequently committed upon Freedmen. In many instances outrages committed against the Freedmen were not reported because they feared further victimization. Many of the cases were in the defense of Freedmen when they were indicted for alleged infractions of the laws, such as petty larceny, grand larceny, or vagrancy.<sup>419</sup>

The Bureau provided these services despite not having a legal provision in the district that required them to provide counsel in such cases. The Bureau operated in this fashion when petitioned to do so by the Freedmen or by the court. The Special Agent Counsel made a practice of visiting some of the Freedmen who were confined in jail and unable to employ defense counsel to defend themselves. Consequently, the Bureau found itself representing an exceptionally large number of Freedmen in Virginia and Washington. Their criminal court docket was large as a result. The Bureau had employed their earnest endeavors in several instances to procure pardons for many Freedmen who they had the strongest reasons to believe had been wrongfully convicted and imprisoned.

The report further noted that the Bureau assisted the Freedmen with a wide variety of things extending beyond legal assistance. The report noted that the average number of daily calls they received from the Freedmen or parties connected with them, for information, and counsel was estimated to be around twenty-five. In 1868 within Washington alone, the Bureau agents were tasked with participating in a massive amount of legal work. The report revealed that the Bureau agents represented approximately eight hundred and eighty-three cases. Despite this large

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<sup>419</sup> Ibid, 47.



effort, the Bureau agents expressed that it was their opinion that there was still a great indisposition, on the part of the former slave owner and of others who were in sympathy with them, to accept the new condition of affairs, and to recognize fully the immunities with which the civil rights bill clothe their aforesaid chattel, Freedmen. Many of the former slave owners felt that they had been deprived of their proprietary rights, “they still seemed to regard the Freedmen as their legitimate prey, and therefore they do not scruple to defraud them, as hirelings, of their contract wages, to render the butts of malice and persecution, and to baffle, as much as possible, every effort made for a redress of their grievances before courts.”<sup>420</sup>

The Freedmen who lived in Washington, in the states of Maryland and Virginia were faced with similar adversities, where “colored” men had but a slight chance of obtaining justice or none. But this was not the case for the Freedmen who lived at the Freedmen’s Village, Virginia. The report noted that the strength of “colored” witnesses was underprivileged, as it was unlawful for a person of color to testify in court against a white person. The Freedmen did not have the ability to employ suitable counsel and as a result, the courts of Maryland, Virginia, and Washington decisions were decided with their prejudice. Many Freedmen were robbed, murdered, and otherwise ill-treated. In many instances, the fate of the residents of the Freedmen’s Villages was the same as those who resided outside of it. It was increasingly apparent that something must be done to place the Freedmen on an equal plane with white citizens before the law.

A Bureau Special Agent visited Upper Marlboro, Prince George’s County, Maryland, and discovered that the jail there contained thirty persons and twenty-six of them were Freedmen who were awaiting trial at the next term of court. A practicing lawyer who worked in Upper

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<sup>420</sup> Ibid, 47.

Marlboro informed the agent that many of the Freedmen were arrested and jailed for small or frivolous offenses. The lawyer further pointed out that many of the jailed Freedmen were not guilty of committing a crime at all and they remained in jail because they were unable to pay bail and associated fines. Therefore, they had no other alternative way of liberating themselves except to be confined, “lose several months work at harvest time when their labor would have brought the highest price and be released late in the fall with no means of support for themselves or their families for the winter; that theft or beggary would be almost inevitable.”<sup>421</sup>

As a result of this, Special Agent, A.K. Browne, esq., was directed to appear in court to provide legal aid and represent the twenty-six Freedmen who were jailed. A. K. Browne was tasked to see that the Freedmen received fair treatment and legal representation. The fact that Browne was already tasked with resenting the Freedmen in Washington, it was not practical for the lawyer to attend all the courts in Maryland. The chances of the Freedmen who were jailed and were summoned before the courts would improve if they had the money needed to secure a lawyer. Despite having several black lawyers available, the Freedmen could not obtain justice until public sentiment improved toward their race as a collective whole. This also included allowing the testimony of “colored” persons in court and the same punishment to be applied to the Freedmen as to a white person when arrested and indicted on similar offenses.<sup>422</sup>

In the meantime, the only thing that can be done was to see that as many Freedmen as possible were provided with the means of securing a lawyer to represent them in court. The fact that the bureau has taken up their case helped with improving public sentiment and ensuring that they receive fair treatment before the law. It was also essential that the Freedmen be made aware of their rights and what they can do to protect themselves from unjustified arrest and

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<sup>421</sup> Ibid, 48.

<sup>422</sup> Ibid, 48.

imprisonment. Many Freedmen did not know that if they were arrested and jailed without just cause, they had the right to file a complaint with the bureau against the person or persons responsible for their wrongful imprisonment.

There had been many complaints about abuse and exploitation under the apprenticeship system in Maryland. In response to the complaints about the system, the Chief Justice of Maryland, Chase, issued a circular that voided all indentures that had already been made illegal under the Civil Rights Act. The decisions were then sent to the masters, who were told that they could avoid prosecution and costs by releasing their apprentices immediately. In most cases, this method worked and the Freedmen children who had been apprenticed were released and allowed to return to their families and rightful parents. However, in some cases, the masters refused to comply with the courts' orders. Although they were forced to release the children through a writ of habeas corpus, this process took a while.<sup>423</sup> Despite the Bureau's efforts, they continued receiving daily letters from Freedmen in Washington and surrounding areas regarding their children being held by other parties as apprentices.

Many times, white persons would unlawfully seize a Freedmen's child and bind the child to an apprentice contract without the consent of the child's parent. In cases like this, the parent would threaten with violence and abuse for refusing to allow their child to be taken as an apprentice. At times apprentice contracts lasted for a specified time but more general contracts last until the apprentice ages out of the contract. If the apprentice were a male child, he would be bound out until the age of eighteen and until the age of twenty-one for female children. Time could be added to the apprentice contracts just like it was for adult labor contracts if there was a violation of the agreement. In other cases, the apprentice would be returned to their previous

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<sup>423</sup> Ibid, 48.

owner if they ran away. In most cases, indentured servitude was used as a punishment for Freedmen who committed crimes. In these instances, the Freedmen would be arrested, jailed, and fined. They would eventually be sold at public auction to the highest bidder and then treated as the chattel property of that person until their sentence was completed.

## **Justice**

No adequate protection for the rights of the emancipated slaves existed at the time of the Bureau's foundation, it was not possible to secure justice. The statutes were harsh and unjustly applied. Even in places where legislators and judges were inclined to be equitable, prejudice among juries resulted in such a degree that a white man's conviction for any injustice against a black was extremely unlikely, while a black person's acquittal under any charge brought by a white man was practically certain.<sup>424</sup>

In the face of such conditions, it was exceedingly difficult for the Bureau to secure justice for the emancipated slaves. In some cases, they were able to secure convictions and punishments for those who committed crimes against Freedmen, but in many cases, they were not. The lack of adequate legal protection made it difficult to ensure that the Freedmen received the justice they deserved. One of the main goals of the Freedmen's Bureau was to ensure that freed slaves were treated fairly and given the same rights as other citizens. Unfortunately, due to the prejudice of many people in the South, this was not always possible. The Bureau did its best to secure justice for freed slaves, but in many cases, it was simply not possible.

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<sup>424</sup> American Freedman's Union Commission, and African American Pamphlet Collection. The results of emancipation in the United States of America. (New York City etc. American Freedman's Union Commission, 1867), 23.

The Commissioner established Bureau courts as one of the first measures. These were military courts that handled minor legal difficulties between the planters and Freedmen. They generally consisted of a single officer appointed by the Assistant Commissioner, who would sometimes solicit the aid of one or more citizens in resolving issues. Civil and criminal cases were equally addressed. The decisions of these courts were not always carried out, however. In some instances, the officers in charge of carrying out the punishments met with resistance from the local community. In other cases, they were simply unable to locate the offender. Despite these difficulties, the Bureau courts did succeed in bringing some justice to freed slaves.<sup>425</sup>

The only recourse for the freed people was to appeal to the Executive through the Assistant Commissioner and the Secretary of War. Wherever local tribunals were unjust to the freed people, these Bureau courts were maintained; but wherever civil courts admitted testimony from black witnesses and secured justice or a fair approximation thereof, Bureau courts were discontinued, and jurisdiction transferred to civil authorities. The former institution of military courts continued only in a few locations; and generally, in those where the people desire it. The operation of these courts had two purposes: not just to provide justice to the Freedmen for the time being, but also to create a long-term change in civil legal administration.<sup>426</sup>

People in the south, who had been living under inequitable systems, found that military tribunals were beginning to rule their lives. They also found that contracts between masters and servants were being more rigorously and justly enforced. And finally, they realized that they would not be able to access civil law unless they agreed to follow principles of equity and justice and employ methods that the Bureau courts had employed, to secure the restoration of their civil

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<sup>425</sup> *Ibid*, 23.

<sup>426</sup> *Ibid*, 23.

courts by consenting to administer justice in them. Two compelling examples of the Bureau courts' influence on civil jurisdiction in the South were presented. This study previously discussed how unjust laws were passed in South Carolina. The military commander of South Carolina advised the Governor that he should not allow the law limiting labor freedom to the Freedmen to be applied, and as a result, the legislation was repealed at the next session of the Legislature.<sup>427</sup> In Alabama, the Assistant Commissioner pushed for local authorities to take over jurisdiction if they would admit black testimony and treat them fairly; this proposal was accepted by virtually all of Alabama's courts, while testimony from the Freedmen was admitted and such an approximation to fairness ensured the transfer of power. After Alabama set the example, other states began to follow suit with regard to the admission of “colored” testimony. Now, due in large part to the influence of the Bureau, nearly every southern state has overcome any objection to this practice entirely or at least significantly reduced it.<sup>428</sup>

There were varying patterns of discrepancies between the communities that African Americans lived in and those who lived outside of them, such as white politicians and developers. The first community that they saw was the Freedmen's Village, but it would be repeated in different communities as the two communities battled for space in the Jim Crow society. A growing number of black residents who saw their community as thriving were pitted against white politicians, developers, and other outsiders who viewed the area as a shanty town. This pattern began with Freedmen's Village but would continue in subsequent communities across the nation, at a time when black and white citizens were struggling for power within society. The negative portrayal of villagers being squatters by the outside forces showed how

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<sup>427</sup> Ibid, 24.

<sup>428</sup> Ibid, 24.

racialized their resistance was toward the Villagers. These forces were allegedly taking lands for other reasons.<sup>429</sup>

The second wave of urbanization led to the displacement of black residents from their homes and businesses in Arlington. This process was driven by a combination of factors, including white flight, redlining, and urban renewal. White flight refers to the phenomenon of white residents moving out of cities and into suburbs to escape the perceived problems of inner-city life. Redlining is the practice of denying or limiting financial services to certain areas, typically those with a high concentration of minorities or low-income residents. Urban renewal is a government program that provides funding for the redevelopment of urban areas. It often results in the demolition of existing structures and the displacement of residents. All three of these factors contributed to the displacement of black residents from their homes and businesses in Arlington.

The concept of self-sufficiency and planning was a central theme of the Village, which was built by the residents themselves. The fact that the community was able to achieve so much despite the limited resources was a testament to the resilience and strength of the African American community in Arlington. Although the War Department's efforts in developing the Village's central planning contributed to its success, it was the residents who made it a thriving community. This does not mean that there were no problems or tensions within the Village. The success of the Village was a resounding example of how African American communities can be successfully developed and self-sufficient. It would serve as a model for other communities in Arlington.

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<sup>429</sup> Lindsey Bestebreurtje, "Beyond the Plantation." *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 126, no. 3 (2018), 347.

In the years following the Civil War, African Americans in Arlington faced many challenges as they transitioned from slavery to freedom. One of the biggest challenges was finding gainful employment. While some Freedmen were able to find work on plantations or farms, others had to move to urban areas in search of employment. This often meant leaving their families behind, which was a difficult decision to make. Another challenge that Freedmen faced was providing for their families. In many cases, women were forced to take on jobs traditionally done by men to support their families. This often meant working long hours for little pay. Additionally, African Americans had to contend with the Jim Crow laws that were enacted in the South after the Civil War. These laws limited their ability to vote, own property, and participate in the political process.

Despite the challenges they faced, many Freedmen were able to find work and provide for their families. This was due in part to the fact that African Americans had long been involved in agriculture and other manual labor jobs. Additionally, many Freedmen had acquired skills during their time as slaves that they were able to use in their new lives. For example, many of the Freedmen were skilled carpenters, blacksmiths, and masons. These skills allowed them to find employment in urban areas.

Many outsiders wanted to take the land that the Villagers had given them. This process was carried out in a drawn-out manner. In 1865, Congress discussed the future of the agency known as the Freedmen's Bureau. Although it was not closed, its powers were restricted to only educating African Americans. Other camps in the area were dismantled following the Civil War. These were the first to be affected by the growing number of contraband camps. In 1868, the government tried to close the Village, but this attempt failed. The Village's well-designed buildings and layout helped it continue to thrive. Compared to the other contraband camps, the



Village's residents were more likely to be impoverished and difficult to uproot. The War Department's idealized suburban and urban reform model also helped create a politically active and socially active community.

### **Bayley Wyat's plea**

In December 1866, a freedman by the name of Bayley Wyat, a black resident of rural Yorktown, Virginia, made a speech to a gathering of Freedmen, several Freedmen Aid societies, and Freedmen's Bureau officials held in a large schoolhouse. Wyat gave his speech at a meeting that was called regarding the closure of the contraband camps. Jacob H. Vining, Superintendent of Friends Freedmen's Schools transcribed Wyat's speech.

According to Wyat, the overwhelming majority of those in attendance at the previous meeting held by the Bureau supported the idea of the Freedmen being returned to the various parts of the country where they came from so that the camps, they were currently living at could be closed. But if they were to return to the counties or villages from which they came, in the current circumstances of the rebels and the confused condition of the United States, they would be forced to become hewers of wood and drawers of water.<sup>430</sup>

When they looked back on their previous state, before receiving an education; even though God made the Freedmen like other men, they were kept in bondage. They worked making bricks without straw under old Pharoah's rule. Wyat reminded his audience that his enslaved wife's house was eight or ten miles away from the main house where the plantation was located. When held in bondage, Wyatt would go to the wife's house Saturday night hoping to see

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<sup>430</sup> "A Freedman's Speech," [late Dec. 1866], enclosed in S. C. Armstrong to Bvt. Brig. Gen. O. Brown, 26 Jan. 1867, A-78 1867, Registered Letters Received, series 3798, VA Assistant Commissioner, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, & Abandoned Lands, Record Group 105, National Archives.

the wife. In other instances, like this, the male slave would discover that his wife or children had been sold down south, never to return. The little cabin where she was once held would be shut up and desolate. Wyatt noted that in cases like this, the enslaved would fold his arms and cry out "O Lord, how long!" That was all they could do or say in such a moment of despair.<sup>431</sup>

Wyat exclaimed that when held in the bondage of slavery, they were not able to even keep their own names, as men among other men. Because of this, they look at their present situation and believe that it was only by the overruling providence of God, and not of men, that they enjoy freedom - that they were placed in this most pleasant situation. Wyat thanked God for the great blessing they now had and his friends from the North for the tremendous sacrifices they had made on behalf of the Freedmen. and He exclaimed that he was incredibly grateful to have some friends who interceded for them and assisted them.

Wyat stated that the Quakers of the North were the greatest earthly friends of the Freedmen because of their great sacrifice and continuing contribution to them. The Freedmen appreciated them most sincerely for their sacrifices of money, lives, and blood that had been made for the benefit of the formerly enslaved. the Quakers of the North were regarded as their devoted friends, and Wyat thanked them wholeheartedly. The Freedmen now, as a people, desired to be elevated from their former condition and they eagerly wanted to be educated. The Freedmen depended upon their friends for aid. Thousands of the Freedmen who had been previously forced to return to their home counties after the war testified that they were now seen as traitors by their white neighbors. Those black folks had left the Confederates and supported

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<sup>431</sup> Ibid.

the Union side. Wyatt cautioned the audience, that the Confederate sympathizers and the people of the South could not forgive them for it.<sup>432</sup>

The thousands of Freedmen who were forced to live amongst the former Confederates felt unprotected. They were unprotected without any protection or intervention. Despite the rebels scoffing at them for calling the North their friends, they hoped they would never lose confidence in them. Wyatt appealed directly to those that considered themselves to be among the most upstanding citizens of the North to take the interest of the Freedmen into consideration. He noted that they often felt as if their very livelihoods depended upon them. Mr. Vining noted that he believed that Wyatt's speech was rooted in Truth and immediately the audience agreed to accept his call to action because they felt it would be beneficial to them and they had every reason to believe he was a friend of theirs. Vining vowed to tell all his friends and foes that the Freedmen had a legitimate claim to the land on which they reside. Wyatt stated that the Freedmen had a rightful claim to the land that they had settled upon with encampments. His argument highlighted the fact that their wives, children, and men had been sold many times to acquire the parcels of ground on which they were now settled; therefore, having a heavenly right to the soil. This train of thought and portion of his argument was beautifully stated.<sup>433</sup>

Wyatt stated that the Union told the Freedmen when they were still enslaved that if they left the Confederates and came to the aid of the Union, in turn, the Union would give the Freedmen land. The Union further stated to the formerly enslaved that they would continue to assist them after they settled upon the lands the Union provided for them. Wyatt noted that the Union promised the Freedmen that they would be aided in every step of the transition from

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<sup>432</sup> Ibid.

<sup>433</sup> Ibid.

slavery into freedom. The Union promised to protect them from the rebels if they escaped from slavery and became supporters of the Northern cause. The Freedmen left everything behind that they had worked for, hoping that the Union would keep their promise of freedom. Some of them had money saved up to buy our freedom. According to Wyatt, some even owned houses, and others even owned cattle, but it did not matter. The Freedmen were convinced by the Union's appeal and abandoned it all to have a chance at liberty.<sup>434</sup>

Freedmen felt disappointed that the Union had not kept its promise. Wyatt referred to the Union men, as educated men of great principle and honor, who were failing to live up to their ideals. He noted that the Freedmen did not know what to think of the Union men, for the great confidence they once had in them was shaken; after they received orders from the Superintendent of the Bureau to leave their encampments and lands.

The Freedmen were originally ordered to pay rent, and they paid the rent; now they had orders to leave or have their log cabins torn down around them. The Union said the land had been returned to their former masters, who were the old owners. According to Wyatt, the Union advised the Freedmen that the old owners must have the land and they must go. Additionally, some of the Freedmen had purchased tracts of land. Furthermore, The Secretary of War issued General Order No. 61. which states in part that the lands occupied by the Freedmen under General Sherman's Field Order will not be restored to the former masters until after the crops have been brought in, and fair compensation was paid to the Freedmen for improvements and betterments made.<sup>435</sup> Wyatt questioned, where shall the Freedmen go? Shall they go into the

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<sup>434</sup> Ibid.

<sup>435</sup> Freedman's Village and Reconstruction Collections Records, 1857-1996, RG 103 Box 1, Folder (1) "Freedman's Village: Arlington, Virginia, 1863-1900, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 1992."

streets, or into the woods, or down to the river? They had nowhere to go! And they wanted to know what they can do. Wyatt was not asking the government for help, nor had he ever asked his friends for assistance. He stated that he had been by being able to support himself and his family through honest work, and he even managed to save some money. Wyatt proudly exclaimed that he did not owe anything to anyone, but not everyone in his community was capable of this feat, Wyatt's case was an anomaly.<sup>436</sup>

African Americans had been bought and sold like horses; they had intentionally been kept in ignorance; they had been sold for resources, animals, transportation, and anything else their old masters desired. Wyatt requested that someone told him of one thing that his people have not had to be sold to purchase for others. He questioned the audience rhetorically, did not the Freedmen clear the land and grow crops of corn, cotton, tobacco, rice, sugar, and everything else? Did not those large cities in the North grow up on the cotton, sugar, and rice that the Freedmen involuntary labored from before day and nightfall, suffered beatings, and the brutalities of slavery to produce? Yes! Wyatt appealed to both the South and North and assured them that his account was been truthful.

The picture that Wyatt illustrated to his audience revealed that the rich had gotten richer, and his people were still poor. They lived in tiny huts made of logs, with dirt for floors, and many of them did not even have food. They were ragged and nearly naked. But God heard their groans. He saw their afflictions and came down to deliver them from slavery. Wyatt stated that another king had risen, Andrew Johnson! He refused to call Johnson king or President. Wyatt exclaimed that Johnson was not a friend of the Freedmen. Johnson had forgotten their suffering,

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<sup>436</sup> "A Freedman's Speech," [late Dec. 1866], enclosed in S. C. Armstrong to Bvt. Brig. Gen. O. Brown, 26 Jan. 1867, A-78 1867, Registered Letters Received, series 3798, VA Assistant Commissioner, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, & Abandoned Lands, Record Group 105, National Archives.

that is if he ever knew it, and they were asked to go back to being slaves under old masters. If they did not leave our cabins, they would be torn down over their heads, and they will be forced to move from place to place constantly. Wyatt stated that the Freedmen were being treated like animals that were being hunted. Wyatt asked rhetorically, and they must go; he asked again, where shall they go, and who shall they trust? He said the Freedmen could trust God. Wyatt declared that God would bring all the Freedmen out of the wilderness unharmed, somehow, sometime, somewhere. He did not state how or when God will do it but stated he was leaving it up to God as the Freedmen's best chance at hope, freedom, and liberty.<sup>437</sup>

In his speech, Wyatt appealed to his fellow citizens, saying they cannot rely on the warlike nations of the former Confederacy and the war ravished Union to help them; they had all misled them in the past and were conspiring against them now to stop their progress. He told the crowd that the Freedmen must be united, they must take care of themselves and protect themselves if they really wanted to achieve their goals. They created communities to help those who could not help themselves, and in doing so, they showed the nations that they can support and protect themselves with God's help. He has helped them in the past, and Wyatt trusted that God will help them again if they turn to Him. Wyatt said he knew times were tough and very dark for some of the Freedmen who were hungry and cold. Their souls had been dried up, and like all of Israel's children, they were ready to say, "Oh, that our graves were here!" For they believed that Moses had departed from them and their confidence in him had dissipated. But Wyatt stood before the audience and assured them that God had not forgotten them or shown Himself unrighteous. He went on and state that God was just and would aid the Freedmen at some point.

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<sup>437</sup> Ibid.

Wyat exclaimed that they had experienced challenging times, hunger, and cold because they were not all honest and did not always try their best. He added that they need to help themselves; otherwise, God would not help them either. Wyatt stated that Joshua's men were defeated and killed when fighting against God. Wyatt stated likewise that the Nation was filled with liars and thieves, and everyone was fully aware of it, and they were suffering as a nation because of their sins. God will bring trouble to them in some manner if they were bad; if they did not speak the truth; as long as they stole; as long they did not believe; God would not help them if they do not help themselves.<sup>438</sup>

The Village was one of many Freedmen's Bureau camps that were established in the years following the Civil War. These camps were designed to provide food, clothing, and medical attention to the Freedmen. The Village was unique in that it was created as a model community. The War Department hoped that the Village would be a model for other African American communities. The Village was successful in many ways. It had well-designed buildings and a layout that resembled a small town. The residents of the Village were also more likely to be employed than residents of other Freedmen's Bureau camps. Additionally, the War Department provided the Village with resources that other camps did not have access to. However, the Village was not without its challenges. Many of its residents were poor and illiterate. Additionally, the Village was in a remote area, and its residents were isolated from the rest of the county's general population.

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<sup>438</sup> Ibid.

## Closing the Village

On January 11, 1867, the *Staunton Vindicator* published an article that was critical of the Freedmen's Village. The newspaper described the Village residents as destitute and desperate with clothing that was falling apart. They were called poor benighted creatures that did not know any better and were scattered throughout darkness in the Village. The establishment of the Village was seen as a mistake because the residents appeared to be miserable and ignorant according to the article. The *Staunton Vindicator* insinuated that the government was wasting money by continuing to support the Village. It claimed that the Freedmen would never be able to take care of themselves and would always be a burden on society. Many whites within the area echoed the same sentiments and called for the Village to be disbanded and for the residents to be relocated to Africa.<sup>439</sup> Articles such as this and other publications alike caused an uproar among the abolitionists and other supporters of the Freedmen's Village. Newspaper articles such as this aimed to stir up trouble and cause harm to the Freedmen.

In February 1886, the *Alexandria Gazette* newspaper published an article that stoked public fear in Arlington regarding being overly taxed because of the Freedmen's Village being situated upon the Arlington estate. The article claimed that the citizens of Arlington paid more taxes than every county in the state of Virginia so that the government could support the residents of the Village. The article claimed that Village residents paid little taxes which caused the county to carry the burden of heavy taxation.<sup>440</sup> The article also claimed that the Freedmen's Village was a nuisance and that it should be relocated. Newspapers weaponized their platform by disseminating misinformation to cause public outcry which caused many people to call for the

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<sup>439</sup> *Staunton Vindicator*. [no volume] (Staunton, Va.), 11 Jan. 1867. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*.

<sup>440</sup> *Alexandria Gazette*. [no volume] (Alexandria, D.C.), 11 Feb. 1886. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress.



Freedmen's Village to be shut down. They claimed that it was a waste of resources and that the residents were not contributing to society. They also accused the Village of being a haven for criminals and undesirables. The Freedmen's Village was a source of contention for many people in Arlington. Some saw it as a necessary step in the reconstruction of the South after the Civil War. Others saw it as a waste of resources and a burden helping freed slaves transition to life in freedom. Others saw it as a burdensome expense that was not worth the resources it required. There was also a lot of resentment from people who saw the government helping freed slaves while they had to struggle after the war.

The *Sunday Herald and Weekly National Intelligencer* published an article in July 1891 that stated the following: many white citizens of Arlington felt that the government should not allow Freedmen's Village to remain open; they believed that it should be put to better use. The people said that if the government did not want the land, then it should sell the land to private persons who would improve it. One white resident noted that the land would bring in \$800 to \$1000 per acre in the open market.<sup>441</sup> They felt that the Freedmen had no intention of improving or developing the land and therefore it should be given to individuals who would make use of it. For years, residents of the Freedmen's Village had to fight for their right to remain in the community despite the negative publicity which sought to undermine their progress and efforts. They argued that the Freedmen should be relocated to some other location, preferably out of the state. The false claims that were aimed at deterring people from supporting or visiting Freedmen's Village were initially unsuccessful as Freedmen continued to grow their community

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<sup>441</sup> *The Sunday Herald and Weekly National Intelligencer*. [no volume] (Washington [D.C.]), 26 July 1891. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress.

and build a better life for themselves. But the unrelenting prejudice public outcries caused a great deal of negative publicity and tension between Freedmen supporters and their opponents.

Regarding the closing of the Village, James E. Clement, Commonwealth's Attorney for Alexandria County, VA, informed Hon. W. Endicott, Sec. of War, on January 21, 1889, that the County and State Courts had withdrawn all jurisdiction, civil and criminal because the United States have purchased the land. "The people on the Estate have had no form of government over them. There was concern that the estate would become a polluting spot filled with lawlessness and crime. Nine hundred acres comprises Freedmen's Village."<sup>442</sup>

Throughout its history, Villagers faced the challenges of the camp's permanent closure and purchased their homes from the government. After the initial scare, many of them started building their own homes. Most of the houses that the Villagers built were painted and had good-quality features. The surrounding farming community, which was known as Arlington Tract Farms, was also established. Hannah and Thomas Owens moved out of the central portion of the Village and into the farming community in 1868. John B. Syphax and his neighbors improved the lands by farming. Following the first attempt to close the facility in 1868, the agency that was responsible for lobbying for the Village was abolished in 1872. In the 1880s, the War Department asked Congress to close the facility. The military wanted to expand Fort Myer and build a parade ground. Due to rumors about other contraband camps, many of them were shut down immediately following the Civil War. Many of these camps were already phased out long before the war ended. Some of these, such as the one in North Carolina, closed before 1865.<sup>443</sup>

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<sup>442</sup> Freedman's Village and Reconstruction Collections Records, 1857-1996, RG 103 Box 1, Folder (1) "Freedman's Village: Arlington, Virginia, 1863-1900, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 1992."

<sup>443</sup> Ibid.

The African American community continued to live in Arlington, but they were no longer concentrated in one area. Instead, they began to move into various parts of the county. This process of suburbanization was hastened by the construction of streetcar lines in the 1890s. The Washington and Old Dominion Railroad line ran through Arlington from east to west. The Washington and Old Dominion Railroad line provided transportation for people who wanted to commute to Washington, D.C. for work. It also allowed people to travel to the nearby towns of Alexandria and Falls Church. The railroad line had a profound impact on the African American community because it gave them greater mobility.

Compared to the other camps, the Freedmen in the Village had more options to resist the government's efforts to close them. Their various institutions and structures were strong enough to endure the pressures of the outside world for several years. When the government could no longer force them to maintain their operations, they started to spread across the county. The success of the Village and the various black communities it helped create offered a glimpse into what could have been achieved if the government had implemented similar policies throughout the country. The African American community in Arlington, Virginia, from the Civil War through the Civil Rights era was a product of the Freedmen community development processes of suburbanization and segregation.

Though residents benefited from the overall central planning of the Village's buildings, layout, and services undertaken by the War Department, African Americans were limited in their ability to participate in village governance and decision-making. In response, Freedmen created their own church congregations, social organizations, and political associations that met their needs and preferences within the context of white domination in a Jim Crow society. When the government closed the Freedmen's Village camp in 1900, members of the African American

community dispersed across Arlington County, creating new communities that continued to reflect their values and culture.

Those who came to Arlington embraced the project's goals of community formation. The Freedmen were enthusiastic about taking advantage of the government's assorted opportunities, including education, housing, and work. They also established social institutions and churches, and they were able to shape the environment that was created by the War Department. With the help of the War Department's base in Virginia, the villagers were able to create a robust community. During the 1880s, the Federal government's support for various programs, such as the Reconstruction program, and the establishment of African American rights projects decreased. As the white community in Arlington started to come to terms with the new realities of the South and America, the government decided to close the facility. Some of the individuals who pushed for the closure of the facility were land developers and those who wanted to limit the political power of African Americans. Those who attacked the legitimacy of the Village's black residents and the project's goals were those who wanted to own the land instead of the government. They saw the government's support for the project as an opportunity to seize it for themselves.<sup>444</sup>

By the 1880s, all support for the Freedmen had evaporated, and the officials who had once backed their legitimacy in the Village now urged them to leave. On December 7, 1887, eviction orders were issued. Despite being permitted to buy and rent their homes and properties since 1868, the Federal government required that they acquire no ownership of the land and depart when instructed. The War Department gave the Villagers ninety days to vacate their

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<sup>444</sup> Lindsey Bestebreurtje, "Beyond the Plantation." *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 126, no. 3 (2018), 355.

homes with no compensation, so the villagers organized and sent community leaders to plead their case. The people of the community organized themselves to fight the closure, utilizing the social and religious institutions that had been developed over a generation.

The representative for the village was John B. Syphax. He claimed that not just the rents paid, and houses built, but also the community formed by Villagers constituted a legitimate claim to their property in Arlington. Following Lee's successful land bid from the Supreme Court, Syphax proposed that if residents were not allowed to stay in the Village, they should be compensated for their homes and improvements. He called for each resident to receive \$350 for their homes, lands, and relocation costs. The memory of the scandal surrounding the mishandling of eviction notifications in 1868 inspired the War Department to survey and evaluate real estate in the winter of 1887-1888 to quell this protest. Most individuals were given at least some compensation for their land, although these amounts were far below market value.<sup>445</sup>

The Owens family received \$130 in compensation for their property and farm. However, this was not always the case; as some farmers, such as William Winston, were not compensated at all - their moderate homes and land improvements were deemed worthless by the government. Finally, each household was compensated an average of \$103 for its land and houses, which was less than half of Syphax's original request. In 1867, Congress passed legislation that stated the "contraband fund tax" paid by the Freedmen during the war in addition to regular taxes was unconstitutional retroactively. At the same time, valuations and taxes were reimbursed. These funds, when combined, allowed each household to acquire about \$576 for relocation, finding a new home, restarting their projects, and beginning life anew. By 1900, all of Freedmen's Village

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<sup>445</sup> Lindsey Bestebreurtje, "Built by the People Themselves: African American Community Development in Arlington, Virginia, from the Civil War through Civil Rights," 85.

residents had departed. Nearly forty years after Freedmen's Village was created, and thirteen years after the original eviction notice, the community ceased to exist.<sup>446</sup>

The African American community in Arlington, Virginia has a long and rich history dating back to the Civil War. Though Arlington was originally home to a small number of free African Americans prior to the war, most of the county's black population consisted of slaves who worked on plantations and farms owned by white Arlington residents. The Civil War brought about dramatic changes for the African American community in Arlington. In 1862, Union troops occupied the county and established Freedmen's Village, a settlement for newly freed slaves, on the grounds of what is now Arlington National Cemetery. Freedmen's Village was home to nearly 1,200 African Americans at its peak and served as an important center of African American life in Arlington for several decades.

Though residents benefited from the overall central planning of the Village's buildings, layout, and services undertaken by the War Department, they also faced challenges related to overcrowding, inadequate housing, and a lack of autonomy. Though African Americans continued to live and work in Arlington after the demise of Freedmen's Village, they faced significant obstacles in the form of segregation, discrimination, and limited economic opportunities. It was not until the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s that conditions began to improve for Arlington's African American community. Today, Arlington is home to a thriving and diverse African American community that plays a significant role in the county's social, cultural, and economic life.

Many people who lived in the area near the former Freedmen's Village left the area, but most stayed in the community. According to historian Kenneth Jackson, Americans during the

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<sup>446</sup> Ibid, 88.

1840s to 1890s started to idealize their suburban lifestyle through various narratives about domesticity, nature, and home. Andrew Wiese, another historian, has shown how African Americans were affected by these same ideological pulls. During the 1890s, African Americans in Arlington started to adopt a more suburban lifestyle. They started to build their homes and lives in areas that were more conducive to their lifestyle. This was a direct response to the increased suburbanization that was taking place in Arlington at the time. African Americans were able to find work and provide for themselves and their families. Additionally, they were able to build their own church congregations as well as social and political organizations.

The first generation of African Americans who were born after the Emancipation Movement embraced the suburban land reforms that occurred in the former Freedmen's Village. They also wanted to establish their own communities in areas like the Village. William A. Rowe and the Owens family moved to Green Valley, and other individuals started establishing new communities. The closing of the Village resulted in the spread of its resources and services across the county, which created more opportunities for African Americans. Several small black enclaves were also established in Arlington. Most of these new communities grew in eastern Arlington, which was close to the former borders of the Village. Although some of the communities that were established were like the former Village and grew up in similar ways, they each had their own unique path. Unlike the War Department, which provided all of the services and goods in the former Village, the residents of these new communities were required to provide for themselves.<sup>447</sup>

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<sup>447</sup> Ibid, 90.

This required them to be more entrepreneurial and self-sufficient. As a result, many African Americans in Arlington became business owners and professionals. These new communities also allowed African Americans to have more control over their own lives. They were no longer subject to the whims of their employers or the government. Instead, they were able to create their own rules and regulations. This newfound freedom allowed African Americans to live as equals to white citizens in Arlington. The Freedmen's Village was an important part of Arlington's history. It was one of the first places where African Americans were able to live as free citizens with equal rights.

At the end of the Civil War, African Americans began to arrive in Arlington County in the form of the Freedmen's Village. Although the houses and buildings were pre-built by the War Department, the residents were the ones who made the Village a community. There were also schools, churches, and social clubs that the residents created. The various institutions that the African Americans in Arlington County established revealed their desire for a community that was more like what they hoped for in freedom. During the 1880s to the early 1900s, Federal forces and white residents pressured the residents of the Village. The closing of the community marked the beginning of a white resistance movement against the formation of African American communities.

The Freedmen's Village was closed in 1889, the last families left in 1900, and the land was sold to developers. The African American community that had been established there was forced to move elsewhere. While the community was dispersed, the legacy of the Freedmen's Village lived on in the form of the African American churches and social organizations that were established during its time. These institutions served as a foundation for the African American community in Arlington and helped to shape its development over the next several decades.



Following the Village's closure, the residents and institutions of the community started to spread their ideas about the building and aesthetics of neighborhood communities. Before the closing of the Village, African American communities started to expand and form outside of the community. Residents of the Green Valley and Hall's Hill communities created more rural landscapes than the model that the residents of the Village adopted. The landscapes that were created during the war were like those that were seen in Arlington before the war. The large settlements and smaller plots that were established during this period were the results of the efforts of the Village's residents.

The Freedmen's Village community's diaspora also contributed to the emergence of various neighborhood types. During this time, working-class residents in Queen City and other areas were not able to purchase large lots, which was the type of farming practices that they used to supplement their incomes. Instead, they used their access to major roadways and trolley lines to support themselves. The small lots that were established in Queen City contributed to the development of a more densely populated community. The houses that were built in this area were in line with the county's suburban environment.<sup>448</sup>

The law has always been used as a tool to oppress African Americans, even after they were granted their freedom. Laws were enacted that limited where the Freedmen could live, work, and go to school. These laws were designed to keep them from fully participating in society and from achieving economic and social equality with whites. In Arlington, these segregation laws were enforced through Jim Crow ordinances. The Freedmen were required to live in separate communities, go to separate schools, and use separate public facilities. They were also subject to different legal standards than whites. This system of segregation lasted for

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<sup>448</sup> Ibid, 114.

many years until it was eventually challenged and overturned by the civil rights movement of the 1960s.

Though the Freedmen in Arlington faced many obstacles, they were still able to create lasting communities that met their own needs and reflected their own preferences when possible. They did this by establishing their own churches, social organizations, and political institutions. These institutions helped to meet the needs of their community and to provide a sense of identity and community for its members. This also served as a base from which the Freedmen could challenge the system of segregation that oppressed them. Through their efforts, they were eventually able to achieve desegregation and full equality under the law.

Following the Village's closure, various middle-class neighborhoods emerged in Arlington. The first generation of African Americans born in freedom was among the community leaders who led the development of the area's first middle-class neighborhoods. Similar to the working-class vision of community development, the middle-class ideas about what makes a place a good place to live were also reflected in the area's overall development. For instance, in Johnson's Hill, the Grays created a more urban brick row home while African American land developers Holmes and Butler created a streetcar suburb. This shows a difference in the aspirations of Arlington's black middle class, which was focused on mirroring the existing African American community but was more likely to align itself with white interests.

The choices African Americans made during the initial stages of Arlington's development revealed their aspirations for the future and the present. They also influenced the design of the houses that were built in the area. Residents' choices in terms of where they wanted to establish their neighborhoods and the size of their lots additionally had a lasting impact on the city's development. After the Civil War, white residents of Arlington regained their power. As a

result, they started to exert more control over the community's civic and social activities. They wanted to maintain their position as the area's white majority. During the Jim Crow era, the white leaders of the area started to envision an all-white, suburban setting.

They wanted to create an environment that was in line with their own interests and preferences. To do this, they started to push for the suburbanization of Arlington. This meant that they wanted the black residents of the area to move out of the central city and into the suburbs. They also wanted to create a more segregated society. African Americans resisted these efforts. They did not want to leave their homes and communities. They also wanted to maintain their social and political power. As a result, they started to establish their own suburbs. These were places they could live, work, and worship without being subject to hostility. The development of these Freedmen's communities was a way for African Americans to assert their power and agency. It was also a way for them to create lasting communities that met their own needs and reflected their preferences, when possible, within the context of white domination in a Jim Crow society. The contributions of Arlington's African American residents during this period reveal their agency and power in the face of adversity. They show that African Americans were not passive recipients of suburbanization or segregation but were instead active participants in shaping their own communities.

Without regard to the cultural and aesthetic differences between the African American communities in the area, the white leaders of Arlington started to develop comprehensive planning, zoning, and covenant legislation to push out the diverse communities that were established throughout the county. Like their planned actions and protest that brought about the closure of the Village, the white leaders also worked against the new African American communities that were created during the early 20th century. The resistance against African

Americans in Arlington was not restricted to one type of community. It was also apparent in the distinct communities that emerged during the area's development, such as Queen City and Butler-Holmes. This demonstrates how white policies related to planning and zoning were closely tied to the region's white majority. While the white leaders' desire to create an all-white suburban setting was based on the aesthetics of home design, the main factor that prevented them from achieving this was the absence of African Americans.<sup>449</sup>

The white leaders' efforts to create an all-white community did not stop the development of Arlington's African American neighborhoods. The building of new houses and churches continued throughout the county. These places were essential to the everyday lives of residents. They provided social, spiritual, and economic support for the community. Additionally, they served as a reminder of the presence of African Americans in Arlington. The development of African American neighborhoods during this time was a direct result of the white leaders' attempts to push them out. Despite the resistance from the white community, African Americans were able to create their own communities that met their needs and reflected their preferences. These places were a source of pride for residents and served as a reminder of their presence in Arlington.

Though Arlington's African American residents have faced challenges throughout history, the strength of the community that they built has helped them to overcome these obstacles and contribute to the vibrancy of the county today. Though their pleas were ignored, they were able to successfully stall their eviction for decades spanning from the first proposed eviction in 1868. In the end, the government never gave specific reasoning for the eviction despite the Freedmen's argument that revealed that they purchased their homes and lands and

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<sup>449</sup> Ibid, 117.

improved upon the entire community. In some cases, the Freedmen did not purchase the land outright but paid an annual ground rent. The Village of Arlington was home to a vibrant and close-knit community of African Americans, many of whom had been enslaved prior to the Civil War.

The evictions of the Arlington Village mark a significant moment in African American history, as it is representative of how the Freedmen were forced out of their homes and communities by a government that had once supported them. The Arlington eviction also highlights the strength and resilience of the African American community, as they fought for their right to stay in their homes. Though they were ultimately unsuccessful, their efforts offer a glimpse into the strength of character and community that would be necessary to survive in Jim Crow America. The African American community in Arlington, Virginia, was forcibly evicted from their homes in 1888 by the United States government. The villagers were given ninety days to vacate their homes with no compensation.

## **Conclusion**

The Freedmen's Village was an African American community developed by the formerly enslaved that celebrated self-determination, autonomy, and progress. Despite the challenges of government control, Freedmen were able to use the Freedmen's Village as a model for future African American communities. Today, it is still celebrated and studied as a result. The Freedmen often took independent action contrary to the Bureau's perspective that decisions should be made from the top down. Even though the central planning and infrastructure provided by Freedmen's Bureau aided them, it was really the Freedmen who were the driving force behind establishing a successful community. At the same time, they met resistance from a system unwilling to see their potential which was reflective of greater issues African Americans face in terms of civil liberties.

The Freedmen's Bureau was both a facilitator of African American objectives as well as an obstruction. The government facilitated the transition from slavery to citizenship through the "incubator" environment offered by their administration of the Freedmen's Village. However, this existence came with ingrained bureaucracy and objectives that were not always in accordance with what was best for the Freedmen. Even organizations with good intentions were often impacted by racism, which caused a lot of problems for Freedmen. On the other hand, Village residents were able to build a thriving community with schools, churches, and benevolent societies that gave them social and political outlets. These organizations allowed for a community to develop among the Freedmen. Although the Freedmen's Bureau and Freedmen's Village did not always succeed in helping the Freedmen, they did provide employment opportunities, housing, education, health care, and legal assistance. This allowed them to become self-sufficient, and they slowly gained more power and influence in their Village.

Established in 1863, the Freedmen's Village was situated on 1,100 acres of land in Arlington, Virginia, and it provided Freedmen with access to housing, education, and medical care. More than 3,000 Freedmen eventually called the Village home. Freedmen's Village at Arlington was located on what is now the Arlington National Cemetery. The Freedmen's Village was a success as it became the first black community in Arlington, Virginia and its closing helped established many prosperous black communities through dispersed former residents. Freedmen's Village was originally designed as an experimental community for the formerly enslaved, with many restrictions and rules that the residents had to adhere to. The Village ultimately served as a shining example of what the formerly enslaved could achieve if given the opportunity.

The Freedmen's Village was designed as a community for the formerly enslaved to aid them in their transition to freedom. However, residents arriving at the Village had many restrictions placed on them and their labor, comparable to the forced labor of slavery. The Freedmen's Bureau in charge of Freedmen's Village refused to allow able-bodied residents to live in idleness, thus demonstrating the importance of employment. Potential employers collaborated with both Freedmen's Village and the Freedmen's Bureau to offer job opportunities to the residents of the Village. Many of the formerly enslaved had skills in barbering, tailoring, shoemaking, blacksmithing, and construction work. Some of the children were apprenticed out to work and women found labor as seamstresses, servants, launderers, cooks, or housekeepers.

The Freedmen's Village was not perfect, and some people were skilled laborers who took advantage of the system. However, the benefits of the Village far outweighed the negative aspects. The Village allowed for the development of a strong African American community in

Arlington, Virginia that would lay the foundation for future generations. It also provided much-needed assistance to those who were struggling to make ends meet.

A part of Arlington estate which was confiscated from Confederate General Robert E. Lee was transformed by the United States government into a contraband camp. The Village included 50 houses, a school building, and a home for elderly Freedmen that face streets named after President Lincoln and other celebrated people. Many African Americans of the time revered President Lincoln. They viewed President Lincoln as an empathic man who was kind to everybody. "He was a poor man who learned to work hard as a boy. He knew all about life and the struggles of the unfortunate. That was why he sympathized with us colored folks, and we loved him."<sup>450</sup> The Freedmen's Village was one of the dozens of contraband camps created near the beginning of the war to house those escaping slavery. These camps were only meant to be temporary stopgaps, providing food and shelter while the Freedmen learned new trades before moving on to more stable jobs. However, the Freedmen had other plans beyond simply living in a camp designed as a waystation.<sup>451</sup>

They wanted to make the Freedmen's Village into a permanent community where they could settle and build their lives. The Freedmen's Village was a crucial step in the journey of African Americans toward equality. The village provided freed slaves with access to education and medical care, which was essential for their development and growth. Thanks to the efforts of religious organizations and philanthropic groups, the Village was able to thrive, and help emancipated slaves take their rightful place in American society.

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<sup>450</sup> Jonathan White, *A House Built by Slaves: African American Visitors to the Lincoln White House*. (Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2022), 171.

<sup>451</sup> Rick Beard, "Fifty houses of freedom: though the Freedman's Village at Arlington was founded in good faith, it remained a troubled enterprise." *Civil War Times*, April 2016, (Vol. 55, Issue 2), 48.



The clean country air of Arlington was seen to keep the Freedmen healthy and thought to stop the disease from spreading. At the Village, the Freedmen grew their food, as well as food for the army, and horse feed. This saved an immense amount of money for The Government. The Village used the money they received from a contraband tax to support the elderly and disabled Freedmen, as well as those who had not been able to find employment. The Freedmen who did have jobs paid the contraband tax, which in turn helped argued for a new camp that would provide permanent housing and social services for farm workers and others being relocated from other areas. The Freedmen's Village was an exemplary community that displayed qualities such as discipline, composure, and productivity. The people living there showed that they were able to support themselves and live free lives. The Village consisted of 50 wooden houses, each able to house four families. These structures shared a central chimney but had separate entry points. Additionally, the American Tract Society oversaw the Providence House for Aged and Infirm Freedmen. This was a two-story building that spanned 72 feet by 30 feet and accommodated them as well. Other buildings included a schoolhouse, tailor shop, carpenter's workshop, hospital, and orphanage.<sup>452</sup>

The self-sufficiency of the Village was also on display in their food production. They grew crops like wheat, oats, barley, rye, potatoes, and vegetables. The Freedmen also raised livestock such as cows, pigs, chickens, and turkeys. The success of the Freedmen's Village led to the creation of other villages like it across the country. These villages provided African Americans with the opportunity to build successful lives for themselves and their families. The Freedmen's Village was a major step in the journey of African Americans toward equality.

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<sup>452</sup> Ibid, 50.

Thanks to the efforts of religious organizations and philanthropic groups, the village was able to thrive, and help emancipated slaves take their rightful place in American society.

But the Village was far from ideal. Their homes were jumbled together along unimproved streets which made it difficult to navigate. In addition, there was an inexcusable absence of gardens, and tree stumps made many of the streets impassible. The Village was constructed in a semicircular fashion, and it housed roughly 1800 Freedmen. The Village's rules stated that the smartest young adults needed to be educated as carpenters, blacksmiths, wheelwrights, harness makers, mechanics, or seamstresses. People suitable for manual labor were sent to work on Government farms while the children went to school. Physically able men worked 10 hours every day on the nine farms near Freedmen's Village or in the workshops; they earned \$10 per month. The government also employed a matron, teachers, and a doctor to care for the residents of Freedmen's Village.<sup>453</sup>

Village officials kept track of each resident's credits, the days they worked, as well as their debts, rations, clothing, fuel, and the \$1 monthly rent for their quarters. Women who worked in the fields or held other jobs earned \$6 a month while children aged 12 to 14 only earned half that amount. Outside workers who lived in the Village could only sign contracts for a year or more. If they accepted these positions, it would end their relationship with the Village, and they would not be allowed to return unless they could show that they had been victims of unjust or cruel treatment. The Village was always looking to reduce costs, so hired out Freedmen with families was one way to do this because it relieved them from having to support all family members financially.<sup>454</sup>

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<sup>453</sup> Ibid, 51.

<sup>454</sup> Ibid, 53.

The conditions in the Village were often squalid and cramped. There were reports of lice and bedbugs infesting the residents' clothing and bedding. The only source of heat was from fires in stoves that were in the communal areas of the buildings. These stoves were often broken and emitted soot that coated the walls and ceilings. In addition, there was no running water or flush toilets, so people had to use chamber pots and buckets. Bathrooms were in outhouses that were shared by several families. The Freedmen's Village was far from the ideal community that it was originally envisioned to be. But despite all its flaws, it was still a major step forward for African Americans. It provided them with a place to call home and the opportunity to build a better future for themselves and their families.

Conflicts arose between the Village's soldiers and administrators who were focused on preserving peace and minimizing costs and the residents, whose lives were restricted by rules that limited their freedoms as new citizens. People could not leave without a permit, and officials exploited their power over needs to motivate people to work regularly and diligently. Those who did not work often went without food, clothing, or a place to stay, while those employed had to pay rent along with other taxes. The often-irregular payment schedules for military contractors and the Army made meeting basic financial obligations a difficult challenge that slowly wore down morale. Although official policy forbids physical punishment and instead called for withholding passes or the sugar ration, reports of beatings and other abuse were frequent enough to warrant recurring investigations on occasion. There were many instances of unfair physical abuse meted out without warning.<sup>455</sup>

Some of the Freedmen felt they were better off before coming to the Village. They frequently spoke badly about their living conditions and how harshly they were treated, for

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<sup>455</sup> Ibid, 52.

which they were expelled from the Village. Although not everyone had it bad in the community. Many of them had comfortable houses, enough clothing, and food to get by, and were healthy. The Village school was satisfactory, and the students learned to read and write. The elderly and infirmed residents were cared for. Most of the Village's expenses were covered by the contraband fund, which included rations for over 2,160 residents and employees; salaries; and clothing. However, the surrounding farms where the Freedmen were hired out to work created a constant stream of wealth for the Government. At the close of the Civil War in 1865, Freedmen's Village became controlled by the Freedmen's Bureau. Most residents were unwilling to leave because they feared not having control over their labor and being abused outside of the Village.<sup>456</sup>

At the conclusion of the Civil War, an unprecedented revolution was witnessed in the Southern States and throughout the nation. The formally enslaved were free! They had to transition from chattel slavery to full citizenship. Whites were called upon to adjust themselves to the recognition of the freedom of the formerly enslaved. They were also called upon to accept the Freedmen as fellow citizens who enjoyed equal civil and political rights. Many old prejudices made the acceptance and recognition of the Freedmen as equal citizens hard. This revolution was attended by less demoralization of society in Virginia than in most of the other Southern States, but despite this fact, the transition from the old way of life to the new was painful and confusing.<sup>457</sup>

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<sup>456</sup> Ibid, 52.

<sup>457</sup> John Preston McConnell, *Negroes and their treatment in Virginia from to 1867*. (Pulaski, Va., Printed by B. D. Smith & brothers, 1910), I.

The Freedmen's Bureau was created in March of 1865, and it was responsible for providing food, clothing, housing, and medical attention to the Freedmen. The Bureau also helped Freedmen find employment and assisted them in obtaining land. White Southerners often resented the Bureau's presence. The Bureau was forced to scale back its operations due to a lack of funding. Despite the Bureau's challenges, it helped countless Freedmen in the years following the Civil War. It provided them with much-needed assistance and helped them to rebuild their lives. The Bureau also helped to establish African American churches and schools. These institutions served as the foundation for African American communities in the years to come.

In 1867, Congress passed the first Reconstruction Act. This act placed the South under military control and divided it into five military districts. Each state was required to ratify the Fourteenth Amendment, which granted citizenship to all persons born or naturalized in the United States. Additionally, states were required to grant African American men the right to vote. If a state failed to ratify the amendment or grant voting rights, it would be excluded from rejoining the Union. Reconstruction was a difficult and chaotic time. White Southerners resented the changes that were taking place, and violence was common. Ku Klux Klan groups terrorized African Americans and those who supported them. In 1871, Congress passed the Ku Klux Klan Act, which made it a federal crime to deprive citizens of their civil rights. Despite these challenges, Reconstruction did result in some positive changes. African American men were granted the right to vote, and African American women gained more social and economic rights. Additionally, African American communities flourished during this time. Churches and schools were established, and African American businesses thrived.

Education underlined every hope of success for the Freedmen. The education provided at the Freedmen's Village extended to the practical arts rather than to theoretical knowledge.

Everything depended on the youth and the children being thoroughly instructed in every industrial pursuit. Through education and embracing moral and religious training, the Freedmen were able to progressively transition from slavery to freedom. They were able to demand and receive both privileges and rights that had been difficult to obtain.<sup>458</sup> Through long years of unrequited and involuntary toil, suffering all the horrors of servitude, the Freedmen added by their forced yet productive labor to the material wealth of the United States, and thereby identified themselves with the advancement of her material prosperity. Furthermore, in the struggle with slavery, their blood was freely shed.

The Freedmen stood before the nation with the chains of slavery broken. Upon being emancipated, the Freedmen throughout the country represented the poorest and most lowly class of people in the nation. They demand as a right, in the name of justice and humanity, that the local, state, and federal government act to destroy the lasting effects of their long and bitter years of oppression and bondage fastened upon them by unholy legislation. The Freedmen were educated in efforts of preparing them to take the advanced step toward freedom and to exercise the privileges of such. The nation had to recognize his right to manhood and citizenship.<sup>459</sup>

With the succeeding years of emancipation, the Freedmen were able to support their own poor without government aid. Many Freedmen were able to establish their own schools, churches, social organizations, and political institutions. There were few abled bodied Freedmen who refused to work when presented with even poor employment opportunities.<sup>460</sup> If society or government withheld fair wages for labor from the Freedmen, denied them the right to a fair

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<sup>458</sup> American Freedmen's Aid Commission & African American Pamphlet Collection. (1865) The American Freedmen's Aid Commission, 6.

<sup>459</sup> American Freedmen's Aid Commission & African American Pamphlet Collection. (1865) The American Freedmen's Aid Commission, 7.

<sup>460</sup> National Freedmen's Aid Union. *The Industry of the Freedmen of America*, 1867, 4.

hearing in court, discouraged their efforts to own property and acquiring land, then they would drive away from their locality or state its wealth. The Freedmen learned that their newfound freedom brought about new challenges and new duties, such as the need for gaining employment within the free labor market, becoming literate, and a long plight for enfranchisement and full citizenship.<sup>461</sup> The Freedmen had to get adjusted to living as families absent the threat of being torn apart as on a slave plantation, and embraced legally recognized marriages.

After the emancipation of slaves, opportunities arose for them to learn to read and write and gain new skills. They became elected civic leaders. This allowed the Freedmen community to transform from a transitional contraband camp into a thriving community. The Freedmen's Village was a laboratory for new policies governing the formerly enslaved and their future. The nation had to decide what to do with African Americans now that slavery ended, and their solution was land redistribution and agrarianism. Most of this work fell under the War Department's jurisdiction, which was later transferred to the Freedmen's Bureau. The federal government undertook many reforms during the war and Reconstruction, but one of the most common was tying African Americans to land through agrarian work and land distribution schemes. Arlington provides a key example: on land that once belonged to Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee, Freedmen's Village contraband camp used ideas from urban and suburban reform to create a centralized Village for Freedmen.

The transition to freedom was very harsh for the Freedmen throughout the nation. Many of them died from starvation and exposure to the brutality of extreme weather conditions. The

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<sup>461</sup> United States. Bureau of Refuges, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands. *Freedmen's Bureau. Letter from the Secretary of war, transmitting a report by the Commissioner of the Freedmen's Bureau, of all orders issued by him or any assistant commissioner*, 1886, 2.

Freedmen resulted to begging from door-to-door and camp-to-camp for food. The Freedmen were not acquainted with the free labor market or with the concept of freedom. When enslaved their enslavers provided their bare necessities such as food and shelter. This old system was abolished with the institution of slavery. The Freedmen had to learn to support themselves and earn money in exchange for labor. One of the primary functions of the Freedmen's Bureau was to provide for the immediate needs of these destitute Freedmen. The Freedmen's Bureau established colonies for the Freedmen on abandoned farms and they built camps to house the Freedmen until they could secure permanent homes. The Freedmen's Bureau provided families with parcels of land to farm.

In 1866, residents of the Village began to resist new policies that were being put in place by the Freedmen's Bureau. They were required to pay rent before they received their monthly paycheck, and if anyone were unemployed or could not pay rent, they had to leave. When the administration started evicting people as winter set in, the residents fought back with a list of grievances which included not receiving enough food (rations), lack of heating in their homes, and how severe the eviction process was. The investigation, which concluded at the end of December 1866, noted that more care should have been taken when executing the eviction order. Although rejecting the argument from several residents who claimed the \$5 monthly contraband tax, they paid allowed them to live in Freedmen's Village without rent, The Bureau did re-evaluate multiple evictions. They recommended purchasing new stoves for heating in Freedmen and after three months, resumed evictions.<sup>462</sup>

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<sup>462</sup> Rick Beard, "Fifty houses of freedom: though the Freedman's 'Village at Arlington was founded in good faith, it remained a troubled enterprise." *Civil War Times*, April 2016, (Vol. 55, Issue 2), 53.



In 1868, the Bureau took initial steps to break up Freedmen's Village, but residents were given a two-year grace period and allowed to buy their homes and lease 10-acre plots of land nearby for \$1-\$2 per acre. The Bureau also relocated approximately 150 elderly or disabled residents who cost the most money in Village funds to Freedmen's Hospital near Howard University. Over time, the Freedmen established a community in which they were economically independent. Many of them raised vegetables for themselves and sold what they did not need in Washington for profit. Some held highly desirable government positions while others nearby worked in brickyards, and laundromats, or did sewing work. In 1882, the Supreme Court issued a ruling in support of George Washington Custis Lee's right to be compensated for his family property at Arlington. In response, the federal government renewed its efforts to clear out Freedom Village. The War Department assumed responsibility for the Village and ordered residents to leave in 1886.<sup>463</sup>

Desperate to turn the land into a public park, build a memorial bridge, and add an extension to the main road that went through the property, local leaders agreed with the government's desire to close the Village. This was also supported by state and county officials who tried unsuccessfully to remove Village residents' voting rights. They accused these people of overloading relief resources, committing crimes against other county residents, and cutting down trees on cemetery grounds without permission. By the late 1880s, residents knew that they would soon be evicted from Freedmen's Village. One resident spoke up and unsuccessfully requested \$350 as compensation for each person who would have to leave.<sup>464</sup>

After years of economic recession and whites seeking to limit black political power, pushed for the dismantling of Freedmen's Village. The legitimacy of the Village was questioned

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<sup>463</sup> Ibid, 53.

<sup>464</sup> Ibid, 53.

by those who wanted to obtain the land for themselves. The residents protested the closing of the Village.<sup>465</sup> The Village thrived for nearly forty years until it was ultimately closed in 1900.

In 1900, the government officially closed the Village and demolished all the houses and buildings. Freedmen's Village progressed from being a temporary relief effort and training ground for newly freed slaves to becoming a secure community amid social upheaval. After residents were forced to leave, most chose to permanently settle nearby. Today, many families in northern Virginia can date their ancestry back to Freedmen's Village. Those who came before them may have lost their homes, but they celebrated a small victory when Congress refunded \$75,000 of the contraband tax in 1900. Sadly, this was only a fraction of what the Freedmen had lost.<sup>466</sup>

The Village's closing prompted many of its institutions, such as Odd Fellows and similar organizations, churches such as Mt. Olive and Mt. Zion Baptist, and schools to relocate throughout Arlington. As a result of the Village's closing, many black enclaves and settlements were established or expanded such as Green Valley, Hall's Hill, and Johnson's Hill. This established an extension of the Village's culture and influence throughout Arlington. The course of these communities distinctively depended upon their respective residents, though they were all linked by the cross-community institutions that were established in Freedmen's Village. At the end of the nineteenth century, a small but cohesive black Arlington emerged which utilized its ties and organizations to maintain a presence in increasingly suburban Arlington. The Village has

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<sup>465</sup> *Alexandria Gazette*. [no volume] (Alexandria, D.C.), 08 Dec. 1887. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress.

<sup>466</sup> Rick Beard, "Fifty houses of freedom: though the Freedman's 'Village at Arlington was founded in good faith, it remained a troubled enterprise." *Civil War Times*, April 2016, (Vol. 55, Issue 2), 53.

left a legacy in Arlington. Members of the Syphax family, for example, are still prominent Arlington residents who can trace their roots back to the Village.<sup>467</sup>

Freedmen's Village was Arlington's biggest African American community post-war. However, there were only two other black communities in Arlington at the time, Green Valley (founded in 1844) and Hall's Hill (1865). They could not expand or create nearly as many institutions as Freedmen's Village because they did not have the same level of support from federal building programs. After the Civil War ended, many African Americans looking for a better life came to Arlington because of its job availability, cheap land, and the existing black community in Freedmen's Village. Even though African Americans were never the majority in Arlington County, the Village still increased the county's small black population significantly.<sup>468</sup>

The argument for African American agency before, during, and after the Civil War is based on the idea that black men and women sought independence as economic and political actors.<sup>469</sup> After emancipation, African Americans struggled to maintain their freedom in a conflict of epic proportions. Even though they were granted emancipation, there was little meaningful hope for them to make a success of their circumstances. Apart from the systems in place specifically designed to relegate them to an inferior class. There were no programs in place to help with the readjustment and little in the way of economic opportunity. Even with all these

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<sup>467</sup> Sarah Richardson, "The other heirs of Arlington House." *Civil War Times*, April 2016, (Vol. 55, Issue 2), 23.

<sup>468</sup> Lindsey Bestebreurtje, "Beyond the Plantation." *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 126, no. 3 (2018), 345.

<sup>469</sup> Erik Mathisen, "The Second Slavery, Capitalism, and Emancipation in Civil War America." *The Journal of the Civil War Era* 8, no. 4 (12, 2018), 699.

challenges, African Americans were able to create viable and long-lasting communities, such as the Freedmen's Village.<sup>470</sup>

The Freedmen's Village was a success, despite its closure. Other camps in the area were disbanded during or immediately following the Civil War in 1865 and 1866 when complaints first began against contraband camps. Many contraband camps elsewhere in the South were closed before the Civil War even ended. Half of North Carolina's camps had closed by 1865. Freedmen's Village did not merely provide the Freedmen with a place to live and work, they were allowed to thrive. With more tools at their disposal than in other camps, Freedmen created robust institutions which allowed them to resist pressures for nearly forty years. When traditional methods of resistance failed, the Village establishments did not fold, instead, they expanded throughout the county. The Freedmen's Village from 1863 to 1900 was a place of learning and community development that broke away from African Americans' preconceived notions of plantation life. The Village showed African Americans a new path forward. The communities the Village created and influenced proved that local, state, and federal policies focused on infrastructure, education, and agrarian labor rather than plantations could have been successful across the South. The Freedmen's Village is a key part of Arlington's history. The national significance of the Village has had profound effects on Arlington.<sup>471</sup>

Many of the former residents of the Freedmen's Village moved to other areas in northern Virginia, Maryland, and Washington, D.C., where they helped to establish the city's first African American neighborhood, known as Shaw. The Freedmen's Village is a key part of Arlington's

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<sup>470</sup> Ibid, 686.

<sup>471</sup> Lindsey Bestebreurtje, "Beyond the Plantation." *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 126, no. 3 (2018), 345.

history. The national significance of the Village has had profound effects on Arlington. The study provided a clear record of a thriving black community in Arlington during the antebellum and postbellum years that still has a lasting presence well over one hundred and fifty years later. Freedmen's Village went through many grim times and was investigated by multiple boards; however, it survived long after the Bureau had ended. The Village was a product of the War and everything that came with it. The Village is now known as Arlington National Cemetery, commemorating the site where so many African Americans found their final resting place. Arlington National Cemetery is a United States military cemetery in Arlington County, Virginia, across the Potomac River from Washington.<sup>472</sup>

The Village is remembered and respected today, and the descendants of the Freedmen still live in Arlington. An understanding of Freedmen's Village can help to create a better future for African Americans in Arlington County. It has been an integral part of our community since its founding and will continue to be so for years to come. The story of Freedmen's Village is an important one. It showed how African Americans could fight for their dreams and achieve success, even when faced with such tremendous obstacles. The Village provided a platform for African Americans to create sustainable communities in the aftermath of slavery. This legacy continues today and will continue long into the future as a reminder that people can accomplish remarkable things when they are allowed to exercise autonomy. The Freedmen's Village is a testament to the power of the African American community and their ability to rise from even the most difficult circumstances. It is a story of arduous work, resilience, and determination in the face of overwhelming odds. It serves as an important reminder that we must continue to fight

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<sup>472</sup> Robert Harrison, "Welfare and Employment Policies of the Freedmen's Bureau in the District of Columbia." *The Journal of Southern History* 72, no. 1 (02, 2006), 84.

for justice and equality for all. Freedmen's Village stands as a symbol of African American agency and autonomy during and after the Civil War. It proved that even when faced with some of the worst forms of oppression and deprivation, African Americans could still find ways to create resilient and vibrant communities. This legacy will continue to inspire people for generations to come. By remembering the history of Freedmen's Village, we can continue working towards a more equitable future. With knowledge, understanding, and respect, we can honor this important part of our past and create a better future. That is the true legacy of Freedmen's Village. It is our responsibility to honor and preserve Freedmen's Village as a symbol of African American resilience and perseverance.

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