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BLACK LIVES, RED TAPE:  
THE ALABAMA FREEDMEN'S BUREAU

by

Kenneth B. White

In March 1865, when the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen and Abandoned Lands was established in Washington D. C. supporters of racial justice were extremely hopeful. Not only was the Civil War winding down to a successful conclusion, but the Thirteenth Amendment abolishing slavery was on its way to ratification, and the federal government had seemingly committed itself to the struggle for racial adjustment in the Southern States.

The Freedmen's Bureau, as it was more familiarly known, was to be organized in the War Department with a national Commissioner and state organizations under Assistant Commissioners. It was to have complete authority in freedmen's affairs. Bureau personnel were authorized to handle justice, labor, relief, law, health, and could also set aside land for sale to freedmen and loyal refugees within the Southern States. These broad powers promising major results were seemingly only restricted by a lack of initial financial support. The latter deficiency was remedied in mid-1866 when Congress reorganized and expanded Bureau authority and appropriated \$6,926,450 for its activities.<sup>1</sup>

Yet within a few short years these initial actions and the high hopes they engendered for racial advancement had been dashed. The Freedmen's Bureau had disappeared and with it congressional support for land distribution, education, relief, labor, and equal justice for southern blacks. Why did the promising program, so dramatic in its inception, disappear so quickly and fail so utterly? Numerous explanations and critiques have been offered over the years. For some scholars Andrew Johnson has loomed large as the villain. Other historians have seen weaknesses in the local and national leadership of the Bureau. The failure of a true national commitment

<sup>1</sup>*U. S. Statutes-at-Large*, XIII, 507-09; XIV, 91-2, 176-77.

to racial reform, some have argued, meant ultimate failure. All these explanations have validity. Yet, in all the assessments of the Bureau from the early writings of Paul Peirce and W. E. Burghardt DuBois through the more contemporary views of George Bentley, John and LaWanda Cox, and William S. McFeely one major limitation has been consistently overlooked, one problem which above all others precluded the likelihood of success: bureaucratic mismanagement. The most debilitating aspect of Bureau operations was the incredible bureaucracy and red tape which strangled the efficiency of the organization.<sup>2</sup>

In Alabama the situation was strikingly clear. From the earliest days until it ceased operations in July 1870, the Alabama Bureau was stymied by delays, indecision, administrative shuffling, manpower problems, and strangling paperwork. The appointment of Wager Swayne, the enduring Assistant Commissioner who served from July 1865 to January 1868, exemplified some of these problems. Major General Swayne was appointed head of the Alabama agency in June 1865, after the initial designee was unable to fill the position. Because of various delays Swayne did not arrive in Montgomery until late July. Upon arrival the General found the Bureau in limbo. Administration of the State had been divided between the Assistant Commissioners of Louisiana and Tennessee. While Tennessee's General Clinton Fisk had been moderately active

<sup>2</sup>Hans L. Trefousse, *Impeachment of a President: Andrew Johnson, the Blacks, and Reconstruction* (Knoxville, 1975), 12-14, 29, 115-20; J. Thomas May, "The Freedmen's Bureau at the Local Level: A Study of a Louisiana Agent," *Louisiana History*, IX (1968), 5-19; William S. McFeely, *Yankee Stepfather: General O. O. Howard and the Freedmen* (New Haven, 1968), 304-28; Martin Abbott, *The Freedmen's Bureau in South Carolina, 1865-1872* (Chapel Hill, 1967), vii-viii; Kenneth B. White, "Relief, Labor and Education: Some Aspects of the Alabama Freedmen's Bureau, 1865-1870," (unpublished M. A. Thesis, Florida State University, 1969), 124; Kenneth M. Stampp, *The Era of Reconstruction, 1865-1877* (New York, 1965), 131-35; Paul S. Peirce, *The Freedmen's Bureau; A Chapter in the History of Reconstruction* (Iowa City, 1904), 150-60; George R. Bentley, *A History of the Freedmen's Bureau* (Philadelphia, 1955), 72-3, 136-39, 214; W. E. Burghardt DuBois, "The Freedmen's Bureau," *Atlantic Monthly*, LXXXVII (March, 1901), 354-65; John and LaWanda Cox, "General O. O. Howard and the 'Misrepresenter Bureau,'" *The Journal of Southern History*, XIX (November, 1953), 427-56; LaWanda Cox, "The Promise of Land for the Freedmen," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, XLV (1958), 413-40. The only published study of the Alabama Bureau is Elizabeth Bethel, "The Freedmen's Bureau in Alabama," *The Journal of Southern History*, XIV (February, 1948), 49-92.

in Northern Alabama, Thomas Conway, the Louisiana Assistant Commissioner, had largely ignored his section of the state. Conway informed Swayne that he had not wanted to build another man's foundation. Disjointed and reluctant administration only made Swayne's job more difficult as time was essential to success.<sup>3</sup>

Despite early delays, the Assistant Commissioner quickly took hold and sought to complete his organizational structure and institute policies in the many areas of freedmen's affairs. Unfortunately, this was more difficult than expected. A limited number of officers were available to fill key positions both in the Montgomery headquarters and in the local agencies throughout the State. Several months elapsed before the staff was stabilized under Swayne. Even the selection of a Superintendent of Education was delayed because Swayne was unaware of any provision for such a position. When he finally realized that the post was available, having read of it in a speech given by Commissioner Oliver Otis Howard, Swayne wrote to request a Superintendent for Alabama. At the end of the year the position was still unfilled as the General was awaiting an answer from his first choice.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup>United States House. *Executive Document No. 11*, "Message From the President of the United States Transmitting Report of the Commissioner of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen and Abandoned Lands," 39th Cong., 1st Sess., 27; Thomas McAdroy Owen, *History of Alabama and Dictionary of Alabama Biography* (Chicago, 1921), IV, 1639; *Dictionary of American Biography* (New York, 1936), XVIII, 240-41; Wager Swayne Military Records, Records of the Adjutant General's Office, 1780's-1917, Record Group 94, National Archives, Washington, D. C.; General Wager Swayne to Major General O. O. Howard, July 24, 31, 1865, Letters Sent by the Assistant Commissioner, hereinafter cited as Letters Sent. Records of the Alabama Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen and Abandoned Lands, Record Group 105, National Archives, hereinafter cited as BRFAL, Ala.; B. Gen. Clinton B. Fisk to Brig. Gen. Swayne, October 7, 10, 1865, Letters Received by the Assistant Commissioner, hereinafter cited as Letters Received, BRFAL, Ala. Fisk administered Alabama above the 34th parallel until ordered to relinquish control on October 10, 1865. Eric L. McKittrick, *Andrew Johnson and Reconstruction* (Chicago, 1960), 28-41; William S. McFeely, "Unfinished Business: The Freedmen's Bureau and Federal Action in Race Relations," in Nathan I. Huggins, Martin Kilson, and Daniel M. Fox, *Key Issues in the Afro-American Experience*, vol. II (New York, 1971), 22. McKittrick and McFeely recognized that the period immediately following victory until approximately December 1865, held the greatest promise for a successful peace built on racial adjustment in the South. As time passed, those chances diminished proportionately.

<sup>4</sup>Brig. Gen. Wager Swayne to Maj. Gen. O. O. Howard, September 11, August 28, 1865, January 31, 1866, Letters Sent, BRFAL, Ala.

At the local level the Bureau advanced at an equally dilatory pace. With no appropriation, Swayne was forced to rely on military personnel or civil magistrates as agents under specific Bureau mandate. In the fall of 1865 the General urged the deployment of additional military personnel in Alabama to allow for the extension of Bureau agencies. Failing in this, Swayne began to pursue the utilization of citizen agents at Commissioner Howard's suggestion. By the end of the year sub-districts had been established in Demopolis, Greenville, Huntsville, Mobile, Montgomery, Selma, and Tuskegee. However, at the time of Swayne's annual report in October 1866, the Tuskegee station had been abandoned and new facilities created at Tuscaloosa and Talladega. From that point until the general removal of services at the end of 1868, stations or sub-districts were sporadically created and abandoned. For example, a sub-district was established in Claiborne for two months in 1868, in Elyton for three months in the same year, and in Eufaula for one and one-half years from June 1867, to January 1869. Opelika had an agency for twenty months ending in December 1868, while Newton had one for two months in 1868. Agencies were also temporarily established in Girard, Eutaw, and Greensboro.<sup>5</sup>

The lack of continuity in Bureau stations created serious problems in dealing with the local population. The appearance and sometimes sudden disappearance of Bureau operations was a constant source of concern particularly to the black population which the agency was to service and protect.

As if the shuffling of offices were not enough, constant shifting of personnel profoundly compounded the problem. In Opelika, for example, the headquarters there operated under four separate Sub-Assistant Commissioners during its twenty month existence. Two of these officers served a total of four months. The final officer moved from clerk to Sub-Assistant Commissioner for the remaining two and one-half months of Bureau operations in 1868. In Mobile, the Bureau

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<sup>5</sup>Brig. Gen. Wager Swayne to Maj. Gen. O. O. Howard, September 11, 18, 1865, Letters Sent; See also Reports of Operations From the Sub-Districts, hereinafter cited as Sub-District Reports, BRFAL, Ala.; Report of the Assistant Commissioner For Alabama, 1867, Lewis E. Parsons Papers, Alabama State Department of Archives and History, Montgomery, Alabama.

operated under no fewer than eight different officers for an average of five months per administration. Demopolis and Talladega each had seven Sub-Assistant Commissioners, while Huntsville and Greenville each had six shifts in leadership. Montgomery and Selma had five and four commanders respectively.<sup>6</sup>

At Montgomery, the State headquarters was equally chaotic. The four separate Assistant Commissioners used seven Assistant Adjutant Generals, and five Superintendents of Education. During 1868, the last year of full Bureau activity, the Assistant Commissioners and School Superintendency changed hands four times. In personnel Lieutenant James Fell McGogy was a dramatic example of the bureaucratic wizardry of the agency. After serving initially as the Acting Assistant Quartermaster in Montgomery, the Indiana native moved on to Greenville as Assistant Superintendent. Within less than a year he was ordered to Talladega to assume command there. From there he eventually became Sub-Assistant Commissioner in Newton, a position which lasted only two months. McGogy finished his tenure with the Bureau with a five month reprise as head of the Greenville headquarters.<sup>7</sup>

In assessing Bureau effectiveness it is hard to minimize the impact of constant changes. If the agency was to be successful in assisting freedmen in their quest for a fair share in Alabama society, officials would have to establish themselves in local areas. Once they made their presence known they would have to effect a policy that could be enforced throughout their district. With policy established and enforcement procedures in place, their policies would need time to allow for acceptance and compliance: continuity in leadership and policy was essential. If all this could be accomplished the ultimate result would be confidence. The Bureau had to convince freedmen, undoubtedly skeptical of all whites, that its agents had their interests at heart and that ultimately those interests could be secured and protected. Without a clear policy and the power to enforce it, and, most important, the continuity that comes with consistent, effective, and enduring leadership,

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<sup>6</sup>Rosters of Bureau Personnel, BRFal, Ala.

<sup>7</sup>Rosters of Bureau Personnel, BRFal, Ala.

blacks would never develop confidence in the Freedmen's Bureau.

Black concern was often expressed through petitions to the Bureau. Swayne received two pleas for the retention of C. W. Pierce, the Sub-Assistant Commissioner in Demopolis, one from blacks and one from local whites, who claimed that Pierce's removal would be "injurious to all." General O. L. Shepherd, the third Assistant Commissioner of 1868, was confronted with a similar request when blacks in Bluffton feared the removal of W. H. Hunter, the local agent. Their worst fears were confirmed two months later when Hunter, who had only served in the Bluffton area for four months, was transferred across the State. Even General Howard received a plea, fruitless nonetheless, from Alabama blacks when they anticipated the effects of shifting personnel.<sup>8</sup>

Constant turnover caused incredible confusion and a lack of continuity. Lack of funds and mustering out of troops caused problems with shifting personnel during the first year. As the years passed, however, the problem continued unabated. In 1865 agents and Superintendents wrote headquarters asking for aid. O. S. Abbott, a new Assistant Superintendent in Gainesville, did not know what to do about contracts or contract violations. "What if someone breaks a contract?" In Talladega conditions were profoundly confused. General A. L. Chetlain, the commanding officer in Talladega informed Swayne in November 1865, that Chaplain D. P. Cilley, the Assistant Superintendent, had left and no one was available to assume his duties. Chaplain T. Humphrey was appointed to fill the void but by the end of the month Humphrey was bemoaning his ineffectiveness. On the job for two weeks, and yet to hear from Swayne, he was unable to obtain necessary supplies from the Quartermaster. Frustrated and unsure as to his authority, Humphrey told Swayne, "Indeed this Bureau in this place has been carried on in a manner which was abhorrent to humanity and a burning disgrace to the country." A week later the Chaplain was still writing unanswered letters about

<sup>8</sup>W. B. Lane, *et al.* to Brig. Genl. W. Swayne, April 13, 1866; Lafayette Bates and Wife, *et al.* to Major General W. Swayne, April 13, 1866; Lafayette Reese, Lumpkin Reese, *et al.* to General O. L. Shepherd, June 11, 1868; Henry Fane, *et al.* to Maj. Gen. O. O. Howard, January n.d., 1868, Letters Received, BRFAAL, Ala.

the deplorable state of affairs. By the end of the month Humphrey was gone.<sup>9</sup>

The early months of 1866 saw no decline in such incidents. Young Rabb, administrator for Conecuh County, wrote asking for guidance as to his duties. W. C. Webb complained from Stevenson of "red tape" and "pigeonholes" between his town and the District headquarters in Huntsville. The Wisconsin native also averred that, "Since I have been here (only a little more than *two months*) there have been three different sub-agents appointed at this place — and not *one of them* has any of the 'orders' issued by you nor any from the War Department, nor from the Head of the Freeman's Bureau at Washington." Education Superintendent Chaplain Charles W. Buckley reported pessimistically about efforts in Talladega, saying, "Capt. Taylor had been but recently assigned to that position [Assistant Superintendent]. The frequency changes in the office of Asst. Supt. had caused great confusion in the affairs of the office, which combined with the inexperience of the present occupant, and the inefficiency of the Surgeon, compelled me to think that little has been done, of late, either to better the condition of the Freedmen or relieve the appalling destitution of the poor white." As personnel adjustments occurred confusion and frustration grew and continuity was dissipated.<sup>10</sup>

In 1867 reports reaching Montgomery revealed the same problems. James McGogy, the ubiquitous Bureau official wrote disconsolately of freedmen's affairs in the Talladega area, calling attention to the fact that, ". . . no officer [was present] at this Sub-District when the employer and employee were contracting for the coming year . . . ." James Seales of Lebanon, reported somewhat incredulously that, "the agent for the Bureau in this county knows nothing about the laws or rules of the Bureau or Civil Rights Bill . . . ." <sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup>O. S. Abbott to Brig. Gen. Wager Swayne, September 14, 1865; Brt. Maj. Gen. A. L. Chetlain to Swayne, November 10, 1865; T. Humphrey to Brig. Gen. Wager Swayne, November 30, December 8, 1865, Letters Received, BRFAL, Ala.

<sup>10</sup>Young Rabb to Gen. Wager Swayne, January 10, 1866; W. C. Webb to Brevt. Maj. Genl. Wager Swayne, February 1, 1866, Letters Received; Chaplain C. W. Buckley to Brvt. Maj. Genl. Wager Swayne, January 16, 1866, Sub-District Reports, BRFAL, Ala.

<sup>11</sup>J. F. McGogy to Col. O. D. Kinsman, August 3, 1867, Sub-District Reports; Jas. A. Seales to Gen. Swayne, January 11, 1867, Letters Received, BRFAL, Ala.

Changes in administration, however, did not alone create the problems. Bureaucracy, the chain of command, and communications all played major roles. Constant requests poured into Montgomery for adjudication of cases, for orders, for guidance, often in areas that were unimportant or should have been dealt with at the local level. Bureau veterans such as John B. Callis, James McGogy, and Samuel Gardner, men who served in Alabama for years, were still writing for guidance in local problems by 1867.

In late 1867, Colonel Callis wrote Swayne regarding the abuse of freedmen's rights in crop distribution. Callis said, "May I *beg you* to give this matter your immediate attention?" Samuel Gardner, Greenville's Sub-Assistant Commissioner, was forced to expend valuable time writing headquarters requesting appropriations to purchase a carving knife and spring balance for cutting and weighing bacon for the destitute. Gardner also needed funds to purchase four coffins to bury deceased Bureau hospital patients. On another occasion the Greenville bureaucrat submitted a year-old bill, in triplicate, to pay for, among other things, a well bucket and some rope. James McGogy in Talladega was equally cautious, asking for permission to purchase \$33 worth of cooking utensils for the local Bureau hospital. Automomy and flexibility seemed non-existent as official after official went "upstairs" to obtain approval. Requests poured in for approval of expenditures for wood, forage, horse rentals, coffin lumber, or instructions regarding such important questions as labor regulations, ration distribution, adjudication of criminal or civil cases, and apprenticeship violations. In each instance the local agent either did not have or did not feel that he had sufficient authority to act on his own-initiative. At times the bureaucratic tangle seemed insurmountable. A local agent sadly wrote Swayne about his impotence. "[It] makes the position I hold a very unpleasant one not being able to do for the negroes what I promised when they contracted for the year."<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>Bt. Brig. Gen. Jno. B. Callis to Major General Wager Swayne, November 8, 1867; Sam. S. Gardner to O. D. Kinsman, September 7, 1867; Sam. S. Gardner to Lt. J. F. Conyngham, March 27, 1867; J. F. McGogy to Col. O. D. Kinsman, February 21, 1867, Letters Received; R. H. Brewer to Maj. Gen. W. Swayne, November 29, 1866, Sub-District Reports, BRFAL, Ala.

Even Ewayne occasionally became a prisoner of this process; on one occasion he wrote Howard seeking authority to sell surplus overcoats and use the funds to buy necessary clothing for women and children. Frequently the Assistant Commissioner had no other recourse than to seek aid from Washington officials. For example, in the early months of Bureau operations, Swayne repeatedly came into conflict with Treasury agents in the State. Jurisdiction was confused and authority insufficient to handle routine local problems. Swayne, in frustration, sought aid from above. "Major Noff, a Treasury agent at Selma is taking possession of lands and buildings owned by the late rebel government . . . . His claim is supported by superior authority, and I respectfully request that it be authoritatively set aside."<sup>13</sup>

One of the most debilitating displays of bureaucratic entanglement confronting Swayne was the struggle by the Alabama Bureau to obtain a suitable school site in Mobile. In 1865, a black school was instituted in the Mobile Medical College. It was a sizeable building that afforded excellent facilities for a graded school in one of the State's major cities. Despite Bureau control, the Trustees of the College were anxious to have the building returned. Swayne was equally anxious to maintain control. Early in 1866, Swayne was ordered by the Secretary of War to return the building to its owners and find another site for black education in Mobile. Reluctantly he moved to carry out this order until the inflammatory rhetoric of Dr. J. C. Nott, a conservative Mobilian and Bureau antagonist, and the burning of black churches in Mobile indicated to Swayne that black education was not safe outside the college building.<sup>14</sup>

At this point the General turned to the Marine hospital as the only viable alternative for black education in Mobile.

<sup>13</sup>Saml. S. Gardner to Chas. A. Miller, August 24, 1865; C. Cadle, Jr. to S. S. Gardner, September 15, 1865; S. S. Gardner to C. Cadle, Jr., October 2, 1865, Letters Received; Swayne to Howard, January 17, 1866, September 14, 1865, Telegrams Sent, BRFal, Ala.

<sup>14</sup>Bt. Maj. Genl. Wager Swayne to Colonel George D. Robinson, February 22, 1866; Bvt. Maj. Genl. Wager Swayne to Rt. Rev. Richard H. Wilmer, D. D., February 26, 1866; A. A. G. to Bt. Maj. Gen. W. Swayne, March 10, 1866, Letters Sent; J. C. Nott, M. D. to Gen. O. O. Howard, November 7, 1865, Letters Received, BRFal, Ala.

Between March and September 1866, Swayne underwent an incredible experience attempting to acquire the building. On going to the Treasury Department to obtain transfer to the Bureau, Swayne discovered the building was controlled by the War Department. Obtaining approval from the Secretary of War, Swayne moved to acquire the facility only to be confronted by Mobile Treasury officials who still mistakenly believed the Treasury Department controlled the hospital. To satisfy these bureaucrats, the Assistant Commissioner personally obtained transfer approval from the Secretary of the Treasury Hugh McCulloch. Even so, delays persisted. Fear of moving patients during small-pox and cholera season as well as the difficulty in obtaining a new facility slowed the process. Swayne, perhaps with tongue in cheek, suggested an exchange, transferring the patients to the Mobile Medical College and the students to the hospital. Swayne persisted, however, if only to thwart the Mobile incendiaries who seemed determined to burn any church used for educational purposes. He was determined to have a building "which they cannot set on fire."<sup>15</sup>

By the end of 1866 the Assistant Commissioner had decided to take occupancy March, 1867. Yet in March he finally had to admit defeat and abandon all hope of securing the building for black education. Recognizing defeat, he then moved to establish separate but permanent schools for Mobile blacks in other ways. Red tape, combined with Southern white hostility, had defeated an otherwise sound educational endeavor.<sup>16</sup>

In relief, the red tape seemed to inhibit an otherwise able effort. Colonel Callis, the Huntsville Sub-Assistant Commissioner, complained to the Assistant Commissioner that while there was neglect, waste, and squandering of rations, he was powerless to halt the process. Rations for distribution in North

<sup>15</sup>Bvt. Maj. General Wager Swayne to Major General O. O. Howard, April 27, 1866, Letters Sent, BRFAL, Ala.; J. Silsby to Rev. Strieby, May 22, 1866, American Missionary Association Archives, Fisk University, Nashville, Tennessee, hereinafter cited as AMAA; Major General Wager Swayne to Charles P. Gage, June 1, 1866; Major General Wager Swayne to Surg. Chas. Kipp, September 29, 1866; Maj. Gen. Wager Swayne to Bvt. Maj. Geo. H. Tracy, December 10, 1866; Maj. Gen. Wager Swayne to Maj. Genl. George H. Thomas, December 18, 1866, Letters Sent, BRFAL, Ala.

<sup>16</sup>Maj. Gen. Wager Swayne to Maj. E. M. K. Hudson, December 28, 1866; Maj. Genl. Wager Swayne to Rev. J. R. Shipherd, March 14, 1867, Letters Sent, BRFAL, Ala.

Alabama were sent to Callis but from there they went to the distributing agents in the counties who “. . . regard themselves as responsible to [the State Commissioner for Destitution] Mr. Cruikshanks [sic] only. I, therefore can do nothing . . . . Without definite orders from you, I don't see how I can be instrumental in causing said stores promptly and thoroughly to fulfill the mission contemplated by the appropriation for their purchase.” Even if this problem could be eliminated there was still the requirement that the rations be disposed of on time. Under War Department regulations a county agent, late in picking up his county's quota, could be denied access to the supplies under restrictions prohibiting collection of back rations. Yet the limitations of time and distance could easily preclude collection within the prescribed period.<sup>17</sup>

Travel, of course, was always a problem, but especially for the freedpeople. Handled properly the locale of Bureau agents would have had an ameliorating effect on racial affairs. Instead, geographic decisions proved to be a chaotic bungle. Not only did the locale change indiscriminately, but agents were not always within convenient traveling distance. Freedmen often were forced to travel from 10 to 40 miles to seek aid. Many freedmen simply could not make such trips. Coercion, economic inability, and other factors easily precluded such journeys. Even if such a trip was undertaken and aid requested, there was no guarantee that a remedy would be provided. In many instances a report, inquiry, or request for approval from headquarters would cause serious delays. The trip would then have to be repeated at loss of time, perhaps wages and possible personal danger. How many trips a freedman would make under such circumstances was questionable. Already conditioned to doubt a white man's good faith or honest concern, dubious blacks were additionally disillusioned by delays, multiple trips and likely Bureau impotence. “Our hopes have been awakened and almost insured by the passage of a law & then the sending of men clothed with the proper authority to execute the law to our good & to the good of the entire people,” several Mobile blacks reflected, “but as yet we

<sup>17</sup>M. H. Cruikshank to the Senate and House of Representatives of the State of Alabama, November n. d., 1866, Miscellaneous Reports from Staff and Bureau Officers; Bvt. Col. Jno. B. Callis to General Wager Swayne, January 15, 1867, Letters Received, BRFal, Ala.

have realized nothing but delays, annoyance & disappointment." Another beleaguered black wrote puzzlingly, "I have spoken to Major Tracy here who, told me so many tales that, I cannot but remember the final decision made by him . . . ." <sup>18</sup>

In the Selma Sub-district Samuel Gardner became concerned and inquired of headquarters for relief. He had discovered that blacks in Lowndes and Autauga Counties were coming to his office rather than seeking aid at their district headquarters in Montgomery. For these people it was up to three times farther to Montgomery than to Gardner's office in Selma. His concern was unheeded and his request for flexibility was rebuffed. Gardner was told that blacks must continue to travel the extra distance regardless of the difficulty. The problem also compounded the difficulty of ration acquisition. Often the truly needy were incapable of traveling 20 or 30 miles to draw much needed supplies. As one American Missionary Association correspondent testified, "Poor widows and orphans cannot walk 20 or 30 miles to Huntsville to Decatur to draw their rations . . . ." <sup>19</sup>

State borders occasionally compounded the already difficult situation. In East Alabama, residents of Russell County bordering on Georgia turned to the Columbus, Georgia headquarters for assistance as their closest source of aid. Charles Buckley, on a tour of East Alabama in early 1866, expressed concern over obvious Bureau ineffectiveness. While visiting Columbus officials, he witnessed two black Alabama women, together with their children, enter the local office to seek assistance. They had all been hit by shotgun fire from Alabama militiamen, and no redress had been available in their area. Buckley's investigation into affairs in Russell County showed the need for Bureau presence there. Indeed, conditions were so bad that even Howard's office was concerned about it. Swayne was questioned about, "what steps have been taken to right the freedmen in this dark corner of Alabama. From the within report [Buckley's] it would appear as though the

<sup>18</sup>Allen Alexander, *et al.* to Major Genl. Wager Swayne, June 25, 1867; G. Benedict to Maj. Gen. Pope, August 31, 1867, Letters Received, BRFAL, Ala.

<sup>19</sup>S. S. Gardner to C. Cadle, September 11, 1865; C. Cadle Jr. to S. S. Gardner, September 15, 1865, Letters Received, BRFAL, Ala.; Mrs. M. C. Milligan to Rev. S. Hunt, July 31, 1866, AMAA.

rebellion was still in full force and the Proclamation of Emancipation a 'dead letter'."<sup>20</sup>

In still other circumstances the Bureau barely penetrated many areas. Tuscaloosa Sub-Assistant Commissioner William Peck expressed concern that his agency's effectiveness did not extend beyond a 20 mile radius. An early black petition informed Swayne that in Tuscumbia, "The BeauRoue [sic] an't [sic] no more then [sic] a cat here." Reports emanating from Union Springs, Selma, Tuskegee and the Demopolis district echoed these concerns. In fact, one recent study of the Freedmen's Bureau in Alabama suggests that in the first two years of operation the agency reached less than one quarter of the State's black population.<sup>21</sup>

In homesteading the problems were similar. Travel and location were as burdensome here as in other areas. Where the Bureau did afford the opportunity to register for land in absentia, freedmen still had to submit a statement of financial inability to appear in person. Additionally, in early 1867, despite the right to enter land, the land office was not open for Southern and Western Alabama.<sup>22</sup>

If all this were not enough, local and State Bureau officials were inundated with reports and forms to be filled out and filed. Quartermaster blanks, pay vouchers, reports to the War Department regarding locale of assignment, Bureau reports of a similar character, referral of bounty requests, educational reports, referral of correspondence, endorsement of correspondence emanating from local sources, and tri-monthly ration re-

<sup>20</sup>Capt. P. Slaughter to Brig. Gen. D. Tillson, October 16, 1865, Letters Received; C. W. Buckley to Brvt. Col. C. Cadle Jr., January 27, 1866, endorsed by Max Woodhull, Washington, D. C., Sub-District Reports, BRFAL, Ala. Swayne also received word of a similar situation along the Mississippi-Alabama border. Wm. R. Gallian to Gen. Woods, August 19, 1865, Letters Received, BRFAL, Ala.

<sup>21</sup>Capt. Wm. H. H. Peck to Major O. D. Kinsman, June 20, 1866; Petter Mesenger, *et al.* to n. n., November 29, 1865; A. C. Tyree to Maj. Gen. W. Swain [sic], March 4, 1867; Capt. E. M. Clark to Brevet Col. C. Cadle, January 4, 1866; S. S. Gardner to C. Cadle, September 16, 1865; Lt. Colonel Andrew Geddis to Colonel C. Cadle Jr., December 18, 1865, Letters Received, BRFAL, Ala.; Horace McLean Holderfield, "The Freedmen's Bureau in Alabama in 1865 and 1866," (unpublished M. A. Thesis, Auburn University, 1970), 72.

<sup>22</sup>O. D. Kinsman to Y. M. Rabb, January 11, 1867, Letters Sent, BRFAL, Ala.

ports all plagued local personnel. This was exemplified by General Order No. 8, which Swayne issued in 1865. It stipulated that,

Assistant Superintendents will send to this office on the first, tenth, and twentieth days of each month a report of rations issued.

The report will show the number of detached soldiers, citizens, employees, persons in colony, and those relieved outside, to whom rations have been issued during the previous ten days, distinguishing between white and colored, adults and children.<sup>23</sup>

All these reports required significant amounts of time. Clerks might help but they were limited in ability, zeal, or availability. Even at that level bureaucracy could intervene. A series of letters between Greenville and Montgomery in 1867 exemplified the problems. Sub-Assistant Commissioner Gardner received word in May 1867, that he was about to be sent a clerk. His surprised reply that he already had employed a clerk was met by Acting Assistant Adjutant General Lieutenant J. F. Conyngham's statement that Gardner had no authority to employ a clerk. One would be sent to immediately take over that position. After a series of communiques, Gardner prevailed, maintained his original clerk, and sent back the Montgomery replacement, who turned out to be an inebriate. The status quo was eventually maintained but at the cost of considerable time, energy, and paperwork — all devoted to an embarrassing bureaucratic tangle.<sup>24</sup>

Such machinations and negotiations all transpired through the mails. Yet in numerous instances the mails themselves failed the Bureau, thus severely limiting effectiveness and continuity. Transportation, particularly in a State dislocated by

<sup>23</sup>Maj. Genl. Wager Swayne to Bvt. Maj. S. C. Greene, January 7, 1867; O. D. Kinsman to Supts., BRFAL, February 1, 1867, Letters Sent, BRFAL, Ala.; United States House. *Executive Document No. 70*, "Letter from the Secretary of War . . . .," 39th Cong., 1st Sess., 41. For innumerable examples of this paperwork see Letters Received, BRFAL, Ala.

<sup>24</sup>Saml. S. Gardner to Lieut. J. F. Conyngham, May 6, 1867; Saml. S. Gardner to Col. Kinsman, May 19, 1867, Letters Received, BRFAL, Ala.

war and economic stagnation was certainly less than reliable. Mail service especially suffered from irregular post-war conditions. George O'Reilly, a Bureau inspector, found such a situation in Clarke County, Alabama, late in 1866.

On making enquiries about the Post Office I was informed that the institution was unknown in the County.

Letters directed to any person residing in Clarke Co. have to be entrusted to the clerk of some river boat, if the boat stops at this landing (Gainestown), which it rarely does on the way down the river, the letters are perhaps sent on shore, they are then kept at a Storehouse on the bank, until the advent of the first stray traveller from the interior, when they are placed at his disposal to be by him delivered, opened or lost, according as his honesty, inquisitiveness or carelessness may predominate. I was informed not one third of the letters sent have ever reached their proper destination.<sup>25</sup>

While Clarke County was an extreme example, it was symptomatic of an additional Bureau problem. Compounding all other conditions which deterred effectiveness was the inconsistency, if not outright failure, of communication and transportation.

Finally, one of the most debilitating aspects of the Bureau was its inability to use military force to impose its decisions. Early on, Swayne and others recognized that force would be necessary to implement the Bureau program. Throughout the fall and winter of 1865-66, Swayne urged Howard to provide necessary military aid. The Mobile, Selma, and East Alabama Sub-Districts were in need of military support in 1865, both for agents and enforcement. Atrocities, labor violations and other problems required the ameliorating impact of "bayonets." In an attempt to obtain more support, Montgomery catalogued crimes for which troops were unavailable for redress. Even in the employment of military commissions

<sup>25</sup>George O'Reilly to O. D. Kinsman, October 17, 1866, Sub-District Reports, BRFAI, Ala.

for trials, General Charles R. Wood pled insufficiency of troops or officers to establish such boards.<sup>26</sup>

Colonel Callis emphasized the problem when he complained, "I am utterly powerless. If I am expected to guard the interests of the negro, secure him in the exercise of his rights and privileges, restore property stolen or appropriated, mete out justice to thieves, robbers and murderers and [countless] other things, I must have, and demand the military power to do it. As I am now situated, I have not a single bayonet with which to enforce any measures I may think it necessary and expedient to adopt . . . ."<sup>27</sup>

Callis's sentiments were echoed by many other Bureau officials across the State, as well as by the freedmen themselves. William V. Turner, a black teacher and future politician, implored the Bureau to protect Wetumpka blacks from the abuses of local white officials. From Dadeville, Thomas Young appealed to General Shepherd for protection. Young had been assaulted by a white and could find no assistance or protection as the town had no sheriff. Even his letter seeking aid had to be sent from another town because his assailant was an official in the local Post Office.<sup>28</sup>

Unfortunately, in some instances, even when the military was present, it did not produce positive results. In December 1865, Swayne's headquarters received several complaints of military intransigence. In each instance the local military commander refused to accede to the wishes of a Bureau ad-

<sup>26</sup>Brig. Gen. Wager Swayne to Maj. Gen. O. O. Howard, September 11, 1865, January 31, 1866; Lewis E. Parsons to President Andrew Johnson, August 29, 1865, Letters Sent; Bvt. Col. C. Cadle Jr. to Maj. Gen. C. R. Woods, March 27, 1866, Letters Received, BRFAL, Ala.

<sup>27</sup>Bvt. Col. Jno. B. Callis to n. n., August 9, 1866, Letters Received, BRFAL, Ala.

<sup>28</sup>S. S. Gardner to C. Cadle Jr., September 16, November 1, 1865; Capt. F. Grabenhorst to Gen. Swayne, October 31, 1865; T. W. Goodfellow to Swayne, December 25, 1865; Capt. F. O. Steinberg to Colonel C. Cadle Jr., April 13, 1866; Capt. Wm. H. H. Peck to Major O. D. Kinsman, April 20, 1866; Benj. F. Porter to Major Genl. Wager Swayne, April 28, 1866; D. H. Bingham to Lieut. Genl. U. S. Grant, May 19, 1866; J. F. McGogy to Col. O. D. Kinsman, October 21, 1867; W. H. Hunter to Genl. n. n., August 16, 1868; R. A. Wilson to Bt. Lt. Col. Edwin Beecher, September 3, 1868; William V. Turner to Gen. Wager Swayne, November 17, 1865; Thos. Young to Gen. O. L. Shepherd, April 28, 1868, Letters Received, BRFAL, Ala.

ministrator. The Quartermaster in Selma refused to issue stores to the Assistant Superintendent without orders from Swayne through the Quartermaster in Montgomery. Colonel Gandolfo in Greenville even refused to recognize T. W. Mostyn as the head of the Bureau for that area. Two months later Mostyn was still complaining of military interference with no apparent help from Montgomery. Lacking the power and cooperation of the military, the Bureau was unable to protect freedmen's rights, allow for racial adjustment, or halt the coercion of freedpeople to keep them from even appealing to the Bureau for aid.<sup>29</sup>

While few will argue that the Alabama Bureau failed to provide a rational vehicle for Reconstruction, why it failed is still very much at issue. In Alabama the problem was institutional. Initially the identification of the military as the purveyor of social change was a crucial blunder. The rigid nature of the military, an organization so familiar with the concept of deference, chain of command, and the maintenance of the status quo certainly did not lend itself to the dynamics of race reform.

Further, from its entry into the State in 1865 until its demise five years later, the agency was plagued by instability and weakness. The continuous movement of Bureau agents and their headquarters led to a serious lack of continuity which in turn created confusion for the freedmen. Even when the former bondsmen were able to locate a Bureau agent, chances for successful resolution of their problems were seriously hampered by lack of local autonomy, chaotic communication systems, and the inability to use military force to implement decisions.

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<sup>29</sup>W. Irving Mieller to Col. C. Cadle, December 15, 1865; Lt. J. B. Morgan to Col. C. Cadle Jr., December 12, 19, 21, 1865; T. Mostyn to Col. C. Cadle Jr., December 14, 1865, February 18, 1866; Capt. Wm. H. H. Peck to Bvt. Maj. O. D. Kinsman, October 9, 1866, Letters Received; Capt. Wm. H. H. Peck to Bvt. Maj. O. D. Kinsman, October 10, 1866, Sub-District Reports; Over a year later reports of troublesome troops were still arriving from Greenville and Huntsville. Sam. S. Gardner to Lieut. J. F. Conyngham, February 17, 1867; Bvt. Col. John B. Callis to Maj. Genl. Wager Swayne, January 16, 1867, Letters Received, BRFAL, Ala. Inadequate troop strength is clearly delineated in James Sefton's *The United States Army and Reconstruction, 1865-1877* (Baton Rouge, 1967), 261-62. Troop strength in Alabama declined from a high of 35,100 in June 1865, to less than 1000 by late 1866.

As Martin Abbott asserted in his study of the South Carolina Freedmen's Bureau, ". . . the real test of the Bureau's worth is to be found not so much in the aims of Congress in creating it, or in the will of the national Commissioner in directing it, but, rather, in how well or how feebly it met at the local level the actual needs of those whom it was designed to serve. As a human institution, its ultimate success or failure depended mainly upon the kind of response its agents and officers in the field gave to the challenge before them . . . ."30

It is this test which the Alabama Bureau fails. The organizational pressures on the agency were such that it substantially collapsed in a tangle of bureaucracy. In the attempt to translate national policy to local needs the aspirations of the freedmen and the hopes for racial adjustment were virtually strangled by red tape.

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<sup>30</sup>Abbott, *Freedmen's Bureau*, vii-viii.

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# BUSINESS SUCCESS AND LEADERSHIP IN ALABAMA: A PRELIMINARY INQUIRY

by

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Warner O. Moore

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Assessing business "success" is fraught with the difficulty of determining what a society considers "success" to be. But if peer approval can be used as a guide, a significant effort has been made toward studying the history of business leadership of Alabama in the first twenty-six selections to the Alabama Business Hall of Fame.<sup>1</sup>

Created in 1973 by the Board of Visitors of the College of Commerce and Business Administration at The University of Alabama to "honor, preserve, and perpetuate the names and outstanding accomplishments of business personalities who have brought lasting fame to the state," the Hall of Fame is the first of its kind in the nation. Nominations are made by a thirty-six member committee, representative of the geographical areas and major categories of business in Alabama. All candidates must have been deceased or in retirement at least three years except those who are 55 years of age and older and still active in business. The first twenty-six honorees were inducted posthumously.

The nature of the selection process, of course, influences the composition of this sample. Longevity of business career

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<sup>1</sup>An earlier study is Justin Fuller, "Alabama Business Leaders: 1865-1900," *Alabama Review*, XVI (October 1963), 279-86, and XVII (January 1964), 63-65, which analyzes the careers of 186 Alabama business leaders in terms of their places of origin, family status, educational levels, military service, and political and religious activities. Fuller's analysis concentrates on characteristics of Alabama's late nineteenth-century business elite in a fashion similar to that of national studies. The most recent such study, which contains a thorough review of the literature on the subject is Jocelyn M. Ghent and Frederick C. Jaher, "The Chicago Business Elite: 1830-1930. A Collective Biography," *Business History Review*, L (August 1976), 288-328. Our study is oriented more toward individual personal characteristics.

and civic involvement increase the likelihood that a prospective inductee has been personally known to the members of the nominating body. Only seven of the twenty-six inductees, for example died before 1960. Nineteenth-century figures therefore have been lightly considered to date, and as a result, the state's coal, iron, steel, and railroad industries are underrepresented. This relative absence, however, is as much a statement about the nature of those industries in the twentieth century in Alabama as it is a comment on the selection process.

Table 1 lists the twenty-six subjects of this study in chronological order and indicates their principal areas of business activity, places of birth, chief residences, and educational levels. To relate individual careers to broader business and economic patterns, the twenty-six leaders have been grouped roughly by decade of birth. Pratt, the only antebellum figure, occupies one group by himself. Miller and Comer, both born in the 1840's, represent the Civil War and Reconstruction generation. Henderson, Pizitz, McGowin, Shook, Johnson, Russell, Rush-ton, Moody, and Jemison — all born between 1860 and 1878 — represent the immediate post-Civil War generations. Martin, Bedsole, Bidgood, Ayers, Persons, McMillan, and May — all born between 1881 and 1889 — represent the generation that matured in the early twentieth century. Sterne, Spragins, Warner, Samford, Malone, and Roberts — all born between 1892 and 1898 — represent Alabama's business leadership in the post-World War I period. Smith, born in 1906, belongs wholly to the twentieth century.<sup>2</sup>

Our first group consists of Daniel Pratt, who is generally regarded as Alabama's first significant industrialist. A native of Temple, New Hampshire, he received rudimentary education, was apprenticed as a carpenter, and moved to Georgia in 1821 at the age of twenty-two. There he worked as a carpenter, builder, and architect before becoming associated with the making of cotton gins. In 1833 he ventured to fresher cotton lands in central Alabama to establish his own factory. After several years of renting mill sites, he purchased water

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<sup>2</sup>Brief biographical sketches of these twenty-six business leaders are available in the annual programs for 1974-78 of the induction ceremonies for the Alabama Business Hall of Fame in the files of the Executive Director maintained in the College of Commerce and Business Administration at The University of Alabama.

**TABLE I**  
**THE FIRST TWENTY-SIX INDUCTEES OF THE ALABAMA BUSINESS HALL OF FAME**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Dates</b>	<b>Area of Business</b>	<b>Place of Birth</b>	<b>Chief Residence(s)</b>	<b>Education</b>
Daniel Pratt	1799-1873	Durable Manufacturing (Iron Products)	Temple, New Hampshire	Prattville	Apprenticeship
Thomas R. Miller	1843-1914	Durable Manufacturing (Lumber)	Escambia County (then Conecuh, Alabama)	Brewton	None
Braxton Bragg Comer	1848-1927	Nondurable Manufacturing (Textiles)	Barbour County, Alabama	Eufaula, Anniston, Birmingham	College
Charles Henderson	1860-1937	Wholesale Trade (Groceries)	Pike County, Alabama	Troy	Some College
Louis Pizitz	1868-1959	Retail Trade (General Merchandise)	Brest-Litovsk, Poland	Birmingham	Rabbinate
James Greeley McGowin	1871-1934	Durable Manufacturing (Lumber)	Escambia County, Alabama	Chapman	Rural School
Paschal Green Shook	1872-1966	Wholesale Trade (Mining Equipment)	Tracy City, Tennessee	Birmingham	High School
Crawford Toy Johnson	1873-1942	Wholesale Trade	Danville, Virginia	Birmingham	College
Benjamin Russell	1876-1941	Nondurable Manufacturing (Textiles)	Tallapoosa County, Alabama	Alexander City	College
James Franklin Rushton	1876-1927	Wholesale Trade (Ice)	Columbus, Tennessee	Birmingham	High School

<b>Name</b>	<b>Dates</b>	<b>Area of Business</b>	<b>Place of Birth</b>	<b>Chief Residence(s)</b>	<b>Education</b>
Frank Maxwell Moody	1877-1941	Banking	Tuscaloosa, Alabama	Tuscaloosa	College
Robert Jemison, Jr.	1878-1974	Real Estate	Tuscaloosa, Alabama	Birmingham	College
Thomas Wesley Martin	1881-1964	Electrical Power	Scottsboro, Alabama	Birmingham	College
Joseph Linyer Bedsole	1881-1975	Wholesale trade (General Merchandise; Drugs)	Clarke County, Alabama	Thomasville, Mobile	Business School
Lee Bidgood	1884-1963	Business Education	Norfolk County, Virginia	Tuscaloosa	Ph.D.
Harry Mell Ayers	1885-1964	Newspaper Publishing	Anniston, Alabama	Anniston	College
John Cecil Persons	1888-1974	Banking	Atlanta, Georgia	Birmingham	College
Ed Leigh McMillan	1888-1977	Durable Manufacturing (Lumber)	Escambia County, Alabama	Brewton	College
Ben E. May	1889-1972	Durable Manufacturing (Lumber)	Atlanta, Georgia	Mobile	Some College
Mervyn Hayden Sterne	1892-1973	Investment Banking	Anniston, Alabama	Birmingham	High School
Marion Beirne Spragins	1892-1973	Banking	Huntsville, Alabama	Huntsville	College
Elizabeth Westervelt Warner	1893-1974	Nondurable Manufacturing (Paper)	Mechanicsville, New York	Tuscaloosa	Some College

Frank Park Samford	1893-1973	Life Insurance	Troy, Alabama	Birmingham	College
Wallace Davis Malone, Sr.	1896-1968	Banking	Dothan, Alabama	Dothan	College
Edward Aubert Roberts	1898-1964	Transportation	Mobile, Alabama	Mobile	Some College
James Craig Smith	1905-1977	Nondurable Manufacturing (Textiles)	Birmingham, Alabama	Birmingham	College