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James Smallwood

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BLACK EDUCATION IN RECONSTRUCTION TEXAS: THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE FREEDMEN'S BUREAU AND BENEVOLENT SOCIETIES

by James Smallwood

In recent years, some attention has been focused on the education of blacks during Reconstruction. Broad surveys such as Henry Allen Bullock's *A History of Negro Education in the South*, have been written.¹ Such broad surveys, wide in scope, have not adequately analyzed or detailed the contributions of the Freedmen's Bureau to black education. However, if the Bureau's work in education in one state, Texas, for example, is isolated and examined, it is possible to gauge the significance of that work. The Bureau only existed from 1865 to 1870, but many of its hard won successes established permanent trends.

Because a majority of the white population, and, more importantly, a majority of slaveholders, did not approve of black education, the great mass of Negroes in antebellum Texas remained illiterate. When Union forces occupied the state in June, 1865, approximately 95 percent of its black population could neither read nor write. Of the remaining 5 percent, most could be classified as untutored, having received only rudimentary instruction in reading and writing but no formally structured schooling.²

The widespread illiteracy caused by slavery convinced northern reformers that only a concentrated national effort could advance Negro education in the South. Black self-help programs were extremely important, but self-help alone could not bring about satisfactory progress.³ Congress recognized this and in 1865 it created the Freedmen's Bureau and assigned to it the task of organizing schools for the ex-slaves. In a most significant action, Congress extended federal protection to black schools, began the institutionalizing of Negro education, and committed itself to support the undertaking. Between 1866 and 1870, Congress spent more than five million dollars on the project. Because Congress believed that other areas needed more help, Texas did not share equally in the distribution of the funds, receiving no more than \$20,000 in any one year. In the first six months of 1867, for example, the District of Columbia received almost \$45,000 while Texas received only \$9,789.57. Even limited appropriations, however, helped reduce the expenses of blacks and of benevolent agencies in the state.⁴

In September of 1865, under the direction of Texas Superintendent of Education E. M. Wheelock, the Freedmen's Bureau founded its first

black school in Texas at Galveston, which reported an initial enrollment of eighty pupils. With no allocated funds and only limited income from tuition charges of \$1.50 per month from each student, Wheelock reached few blacks in 1865. Many freedmen could not afford the high tuition fee. Nevertheless, by October the Bureau had established five schools in the state—all in the Galveston area—which counted four teachers and an enrollment of 264. By Christmas the number of schools had expanded to twelve, with nine teachers and 615 students, and by early January the Bureau had opened four more schools and increased its total school enrollment to 1,200.⁵ The Bureau founded schools in the larger towns before giving attention to the countryside. In this early work, E. M. Gregory, the Assistant Commissioner for Texas, aided Wheelock. Gregory, called the "father" of black education in Texas by some contemporary observers, urged missionaries to come into the state and, whenever possible, extended military protection to the new schools.⁶

The early progress in black education surprised moderates among the white population. Even the conservative white press occasionally, complimented blacks on their desire to learn. In late 1865, the moderate Republican newspaperman Ferdinand Flake made extensive visits to Bureau schools in Galveston. Although a drop in enrollment in November which Flake attributed to "discouragement" disturbed him, the order and decorum of the schools and the regular attendance pleased him. Further, he praised the instructors who taught in the schools for their diligence.⁷

Wheelock tried to establish his schools on a New England pattern. Schools commenced at 9:00 in the morning with a hymn or a prayer. Teachers allowed students thirty minutes for lunch and dismissed classes at 2:30 in the afternoon. The superintendent forbade severe punishment. The holiday calendar followed that of white schools. Daily exercises, prescribed by Wheelock, were required. Bureau schools did not, as many black schools would do in the future, stress industrial education. Instead, the superintendent established an academic curriculum which gave Negroes the same kind of education that whites received. Further, the curriculum catered to the needs of individual blacks by taking into consideration any previously acquired education.

Most children began school with basic instruction in the alphabet, soon graduating into "spell and read easy" classes. After mastering the rudiments of reading and writing, children began work with advanced readers, the McGuffey series being the most widely used. Teachers introduced pupils to geography and arithmetic. Ultimately, after mastering elementary courses, some students graduated into the "higher

branches" and received more advanced instruction. Of course, when Bureau schools first began to function, most instruction centered on elementary courses. The great majority of children first needed to master reading and writing, but as time passed, teachers pointed with pride to the number of children who studied on advanced levels.

Most teachers for the Bureau also maintained night and Sunday schools. Night schools, established for adults and older children who worked during the day, met the same standards as day schools. Teachers conducted weeknight classes from 7:00 to 9:30. Sabbath classes for both adults and children emphasized Biblical instruction and "moral" lessons. Yet, many blacks not enrolled in regular classes attended Sunday schools, and many teachers regarded their Sabbath classes as extensions of regular school where freedmen who needed help could be taught the rudiments of reading and writing. Importantly, the structure of all Bureau schools remained flexible; individuals could advance as rapidly as their competence warranted.⁹

In 1866 Bureau schools experienced phenomenal growth. By February the number of schools—day, night, and Sabbath—had increased to twenty-six, the number of teachers to fourteen, and students to 1,691. By May these figures increased approximately threefold, to ninety-nine schools, fifty-three teachers, and 4,796 students. Such statistics, however, overemphasized Bureau success because Sunday school enumerations inflated the figures. Moreover, many students attended both a regular school and Sabbath classes and were counted twice in the totals. In July of 1866, Wheelock reported the following figures to J. W. Alvord, the general superintendent of all Bureau schools: seventy-two schools, forty-three teachers, and 4,365 students. At the same time, excluding Sunday school statistics, in his report to the new Assistant Commissioner of Texas, J. B. Kiddoo, the superintendent divulged these totals: twenty-five schools, twenty-five teachers, and 1,013 students. Nevertheless, the Texas enumerations compared favorably with those of most other southern states. Bureau schools in Georgia, for example, had a higher enrollment than those in Texas, but schools in Florida, Arkansas, and Alabama had fewer students.¹⁰

Wheelock was so pleased with the progress that he persuaded his superiors to forego custom and maintain schools throughout the summer.¹¹ But a cholera epidemic and the need for more black labor caused enrollment to decline and forced many schools to close. In September Wheelock reported that he maintained only thirty-eight schools, with twenty-three teachers and an enrollment of 1,679. Yet by October schools began to revive, and the superintendent informed Alvord that totals had increased to forty-five schools, thirty-four teachers, and 2,462 students.¹²

To encourage more rapid expansion, in January of 1867, General Kiddoo experimented with a free school system. The \$1.50 monthly tuition fee that the Bureau previously had charged inhibited enrollment because most black laborers earned only \$10 or \$12 per month. Like Gregory, Kiddoo regarded the advancement of black education as a prime responsibility and allowed teachers in Houston and Galveston to drop tuition. Funds from the sale of confiscated property and gifts from "local sources" allowed the assistant commissioner to replace his teachers' lost income by paying them salaries of from \$10 to \$40 per month. For the expected expansion, Kiddoo convinced Reverend J. R. Shipherd, Secretary of the American Missionary Association, to furnish more teachers and to pay \$15 per month to supplement their Bureau wages. Further, Kiddoo ordered sub-assistant commissioners across the state to charge fees for examining labor contracts to increase the Bureau's education fund: \$1 for each employer and \$.25 for each freedman. The experiment succeeded. Enrollment in Galveston and Houston increased. Complications arose, however, when freedmen in other areas, hoping that the Bureau would establish free schools for them, stopped paying tuition.¹¹

In late January General Charles Griffin replaced Kiddoo. Finding Bureau funds insufficient to maintain, much less to expand, the free school plan, Griffin reestablished the tuition system but reduced the charge. He required families with one child in school to pay \$.50 per month, those with two, \$.75, and those with more than two, \$1.00 maximum. He waived fees for children of widows and for orphans. To ease the financial worries of teachers, the general allowed them to keep the tuition payments, while he continued to pay salaries of up to \$40 per month, less any monies contributed by benevolent societies.¹²

Although Griffin's tuition system did not become as popular as Kiddoo's, expansion continued. Two travelling agents, D. T. Allen, assistant superintendent of Bureau schools, and G. T. Ruby, a Galveston sub-assistant commissioner, traversed the interior to organize new schools. Griffin facilitated expansion by appointing more sub-assistant commissioners for isolated, interior towns. He also allocated more troops to the interior, thus offering protection to missionary teachers who opened new schools. By June enrollment in day and night schools reached a peak that would not be surpassed. Fifty-three teachers maintained fifty-five schools in forty-two locations and instructed 5,157 pupils.¹³

In July disaster struck the system. During the summer and early fall, enrollment once again declined, and schools closed as demands increased for black labor in the fields. A partial crop failure that limited the earnings of Negroes compounded the problem. Although most

teachers allowed blacks to continue in school even if they could not pay fees, many parents, too proud to accept charity, withdrew their children. An outbreak of yellow fever that spread inland to every town within 150 miles of the coast also retarded enrollment and disabled the teacher corps. Finally, the surplus funds controlled by the assistant commissioner evaporated. Finding the Bureau short of money when he assumed command in September of 1867, General J. J. Reynolds discontinued payment of teachers' salaries. Denied a livable income, many teachers closed their schools; those from the North frequently returned home and increased the teacher shortage.¹⁵ Because of these problems, only four schools functioned by September. Total attendance dropped to 268 pupils. Sabbath instruction also declined, with only 160 blacks attending Sunday schools.¹⁶

In the 1867-1868 term the education program slowly recovered as ceaseless efforts by Bureau personnel resulted in the reopening of many schools. Moreover, reports filed from 1868 to 1870 demonstrated that a degree of stability finally had been reached. In July of 1868, Wheelock informed Alvord that 1,558 students attended the thirty-three day and three night schools then functioning. Sunday schools numbered twenty-seven with an enrollment of 2,148. By January of 1869, the totals increased to fifty-four teachers, fifty-seven day and night schools, and 1,871 enrolled. Further, approximately 1,000 freedmen attended the twenty-four schools that submitted no regular reports to Bureau officials. Ten months later, ninety teachers conducted ninety-five day and night schools with 4,188 students attending.¹⁷

As a result of congressional action, the Bureau withdrew from Texas in July of 1870. That month, Alvord delivered his final report to Congress. Statistics divulged the usual summer drop in enrollment, but attendance remained higher than that of the previous summer. Sixty-three teachers, who conducted fifty-three day and thirteen night schools for 3,248 students, reported regularly. The proportion of pupils who had advanced beyond the rudimentary level demonstrated the effectiveness of the schools. Only 553 had to begin the term studying the alphabet whereas 1,266 mastered "spell and read easy" lessons and 1,429 studied in advanced readers. Separate listings for other areas of study included: geography, 1,019; arithmetic, 1,355; writing, 1,710; and "higher branches," 307. An estimated 1,500 additional students attended the twenty-two day and night schools that did not report to the Bureau.¹⁸

Although the Bureau helped foster Negro education in Texas, progress developed more slowly than supporters of blacks desired. The reports of local agents demonstrated that Bureau officials never fully met the needs of freedmen. In 1867 the agent at Tyler recommended

the establishment of twenty-one schools in his sub-district, an area that included five East Texas counties. Only one school regularly functioned there, and it was disbanded in 1868. Moreover, the census of 1870 enumerated a black school age population of 88,638 in the state, but of that group—aged five to eighteen—only 4,189 or 4.7 percent attended school. Comparatively, one study estimates that the Alabama Freedmen's Bureau reached more than 11 percent of that state's school aged children. In Texas, out of 196,103 white children, 61,010 or 31 percent attended school, while more than 150,000 blacks ten or older still could not read or write.¹⁹

Myriad factors explained the Bureau's problems. Superintendent Wheelock and his successors found a constant shortage of instructors and supplies a limiting factor. For a totally effective system, schools had to reach the 95 percent of the black population that remained illiterate at the end of the Civil War, but this proved impossible. In a partially successful effort to recruit teachers, Wheelock went to New Orleans in late 1865 for a lengthy stay. Returning to Texas, he announced that Louisiana had a supply of unemployed teachers. Demand for their services, however, quickly absorbed the surplus. In the Bureau's earliest educational efforts in the Galveston-Houston area, observers pointed out that a teacher shortage remained chronic. From 1865 to 1870, parties interested in black education petitioned Bureau officials to furnish more instructors, but even when other factors encouraged the establishment of schools, often no teachers could be recruited. In 1867 when the Bureau agent at Wharton asked headquarters to send him an instructor, he was told that "the demand for teachers from all parts of the state greatly exceeds the supply and none can be furnished from Galveston."²⁰ Other agents received similar replies.²¹

In 1869 the blacks of Sabine Pass secured the use of a "good" house for classes and convinced a local Bureau agent of their desire for education, but he could find them no teacher.²² When parties from Quitman, Coffeetown, Tyler, and Sherman wrote James McCleery, superintendent of education for northwestern Louisiana and northeastern Texas, he offered to supplement the salaries of instructors if they could be found but added that his office could not meet 10 percent of the demands for teachers. Out of exasperation, local agents usually took the initiative, making their own independent search. From Tyler, an agent corresponded with sources in New Orleans, but like most others, he could not lure teachers to his sub-district.²³

When the Bureau managed to find teachers, it could not provide them with supplies. In September of 1865, a Galveston teacher lamented that he had 250 students and the largest Sabbath school in town, but

no books, particularly elementary primers and advanced readers.²⁴ Such complaints remained constant during the five years of Bureau activity in the state. Teachers requested but usually did without books, newspapers, Bibles, and other supplies.²⁵

The Bureau had no funds for construction of school buildings. It could rent schoolrooms, however, and state officials usually approved rent vouchers of \$7 to \$15 a month, depending on the quality of the facility.²⁶ In addition, following a policy allowed by General O. O. Howard, national head of the Bureau, and extended to Texas by General Griffin, after March 1867 the superintendent of education could allocate money for the "repair" of existing schools. Agents instructed freedmen to secure title to some land and to erect a structure "however crude" and deed it to a board of black trustees. Then the Bureau would extend money for improvements if the number of Negroes in a given area warranted it. From 1867 to 1870, officials apparently allocated all money possible to sub-agents for construction, but the average grant, which amounted to approximately \$200, never met the needs of the freedmen.²⁷

Many Bureau schools remained hopelessly inadequate because of insufficient construction funds. Agents constantly complained that schools needed repairs. Conducting classes in structures which could only be described as "sheds," many teachers maintained that their instruction would be more effective and that attendance would be higher in better facilities. Although Marshall reportedly had the best school facilities in North Texas during the 1868-1869 term, the local agent asserted that the school building was "calculated to keep children away," with the effects of its "miserable condition" felt most keenly in the winter because it afforded "insufficient" shelter. Some teachers lacked facilities altogether. A Harrisburg instructor held classes in his own home; in Wallisville, Chambers County, another teacher conducted a school out of doors, in a grove of trees.²⁸

The Bureau received some aid from benevolent societies. Although invited into the state, many societies—such as the New York National Freedmen's Relief Association, the Freedmen's and Union Association, and the Maryland Union Commission—wanted to work in areas closer to their headquarters and chose not to enter Texas. The Peabody Foundation remained notably absent, despite the hopes of Bureau officials. Between 1868 and 1872, this agency spent approximately \$445,400 to further black education in the South, but because of unsettled conditions in Texas, its only grant to the state came in 1870 when it awarded San Antonio \$1,000 for the establishment of a free school for blacks and underprivileged whites.²⁹

Other societies such as the American Bible Society, the African Methodist Church, the Freedman's Aid Society of the Northern Methodist Episcopal Church, and the American Missionary Association contributed more significantly to black education in Texas. As one of their earliest functions, these societies sent Bibles and hymn books to freedmen in care of Bureau agents, hoping ultimately to place them in the hands of all Negroes who wanted them. Benevolent groups also furnished textbooks to schools whenever possible, but the associations could not meet all demands. Teachers such as Sarah Barnes of Galveston constantly requested more materials only to be turned down. Serious problems in instruction resulted, with both preachers and teachers being handicapped by shortages. Sometimes freedmen petitioned Bureau agents for a Bible or hymn book—one not just for a family but for an entire school or congregation.³⁰

In addition to their attempts to furnish books to Bureau schools, benevolent agencies also helped alleviate the teachers shortage. Working closely with state Bureau officials, the aid societies furnished the majority of white teachers for black schools. In September of 1865, for example, teachers recruited by the African Methodists opened Houston's first Negro school, an achievement marred only by the complaints of native whites who said that the teachers taught young blacks to love northern soldiers. The ever-present American Missionary Association proved the most successful recruiting agency. The association sought teachers from throughout the United States, offering to pay their transportation expenses and to supply them with all available materials if they would move to Texas. Further, in 1866 as part of its agreement with Kiddoo, the association began paying up to \$15 per month as a supplement to the salary of its teachers. Recruiting drives apparently proved most successful in the Old Northwest, the home of a majority of teachers who came into the state. Although they entered the state later than the association, the Freedmen's Aid Society and the Methodist Episcopal Missionary Society also became prominent suppliers of teachers and helped establish schools.³¹

Native Anglos criticized their motives and their character, but most missionary teachers were devoted Christians dedicated to helping blacks overcome the limitations of slavery and reach their full potential as free men. Unlike most native whites, missionaries, not influenced by southern customs and traditions, had a more positive—if in some cases paternalistic—attitude toward Negroes. They believed in the educability of their charges. With their reports usually stressing the progress that their students made, missionaries attacked their jobs with zeal and willingly complied with schedules that demanded day, evening, and Sabbath instruction. Some Bureau agents believed that the drive of northern

teachers—supported, of course, by freedmen who wanted an education—provided the most important single explanation for what success Bureau schools enjoyed. The industriousness of the teachers even impressed some native whites, who asked missionaries to organize schools for Anglos.²²

A few native whites, apparently guided by humanitarian motives, helped the missionaries advance black education. Some Germans established small classes or instructed freedmen individually. Resisting pressure from the white community to ostracize Bureau personnel, other German Unionists offered to board teachers and to help supply them. Still others with Unionist sentiments helped establish schools. Wanting to organize a free school for orphans and indigents, one group in Austin subscribed a sum that supported a teacher and one assistant for six months during 1867. In mid-1866 George Honey, assistant superintendent of education in Texas, began a drive to establish plantation schools and thus reach rural blacks who lived too far from towns to attend classes regularly. He found some planters willing to help. In Brazoria County whites pledged more than enough land and money to begin a school, leaving a surplus fund with which to build a black church. Sometimes, northern teachers helped convince planters to cooperate with the Bureau. Before leaving Brazoria County, Honey persuaded a planter at Sandy Point to allow a school on his place. But under no circumstances, the planter swore, would he board a "Yankee" teacher because he was sure she would be an old maid who would mind "everybody's business but her own." Honey then took a handsome young woman of the "Wesleyan persuasion" to meet the planter who immediately took the girl into his family, gave her transportation anywhere, any time, and had a school built for her in seven days. Later, planters at Savoy Point and Chances' Prairie in Brazoria also helped Honey establish schools.²³

In other areas, Anglos, acting individually or through a local church, also assisted the Bureau. In 1869 some whites in Harrison County helped establish a black school on the Shreveport-Marshall railroad at Wascum Station, a settlement of black workers and their families which included 300 to 400 children. One Anglo deeded land to the American Missionary Association, which in turn promised to furnish a teacher and books for the school. Other planters attempted to conduct classes for their workers, but often blacks withdrew from such classes because "scolding" painfully reminded them of the old master-slave relationship.²⁴ Some white churches extended limited aid to blacks by allowing free or rented use of church space for schools. Further, in areas of concentrated Mexican-American population, the Catholic Church adopted a benevolent attitude toward Negroes. In

Victoria the Catholic Church even allowed black girls to enter the convent and to attend its school—in segregated classes. A white Baptist church school in the same town also allowed freedmen to attend.³³ But aid extended to Negro education by white Texans proved the exception rather than the rule.

Most whites remained hostile or indifferent to black schools. Even societies or groups of people who, on cursory glance, appeared favorable to black progress, showed little interest in Negro education. The native white churches generally did little to help black schools. In their early conventions, leaders of various sects piously acknowledged that Christians had a duty to uplift the ex-slaves, but such pronouncements proved more illusionary than real.³⁴ Sometimes local churches led the opposition to black education. In Austin former slave members of the First Methodist Church organized a school which met in the basement of the church building without the permission of the white trustees. After reviewing the situation, the trustees gave notice that the school could not be resumed after the Christmas holidays. The freedmen, supported by Bureau agent George Honey, lodged a claim against the trustees for \$600, the estimated value of black time and money spent in the construction of the church. Whites refused to pay, and during protracted negotiations that followed Negroes continued to use the basement.

The black school flourished, with the freedmen ultimately securing the services of Fannie Campbell, a teacher recruited by the American Missionary Association. By November of 1866, Campbell reported that she had eighty-seven day students, forty night students, and 200 attending Sabbath classes. The more successful the school became the more whites complained. Not only did the school become too independent but Campbell conducted her Sunday classes while Anglos conducted theirs. To force their trustees to do something about this new "problem," white church members took their children out of the Sunday school. Trustees then ordered Campbell to hold her classes in the afternoon. She complied, and her Sabbath class suffered a drop in enrollment. Still whites complained, fearing that afternoon classes would interfere with Anglo meetings. The Bureau agent in Austin tried unsuccessfully to soothe white feelings by assuring church leaders that Campbell would enforce strict discipline. Ultimately, Anglos solved their problems by making a compromise payment of \$200 to secure removal of the Negro school.

Like church leaders, native teachers in white schools did little to advance black education but did much to retard it. The 1866 state convention of teachers suggested that white Southerners aid Negro education but only as a means of controlling the black system. At subsequent conventions committee reports on education helped further

white opposition by emphatically stressing the limited "mental and moral capacity" of Negroes. Moreover, individuals instructing Anglos sometimes greatly undermined black progress with their assumptions of racial superiority and with their hostility toward freedmen. In July, 1867, the Bureau agent for Freestone, Limestone, and Navarro counties charged that teachers in white schools compounded Bureau problems by foisting upon students extreme anti-black sentiments and by belittling Negro attempts to gain an education throughout his district."

Still committed to the doctrine of white supremacy, most Anglo Texans agreed with the sentiments of church leaders and teachers. If blacks received an education, they would become too independent, too politically and socially aware, whites maintained. They then might upset the "Southern way of life." Worse, Anglos asserted that Negro education would lead to mixed schools and then to complete integration and social equality. Planters and other employers who had a direct economic interest in black labor added that "moral and intellectual darkness" represented the "natural" state of freedmen and also represented a necessary condition if blacks were to be controlled as laborers and as voters."

When whites realized that the Freedmen's Bureau, supported by federal troops, intended to create a school system for Negroes, they tended to focus on the question, "who will educate the blacks?" Because Negro education carried important social, economic, and political ramifications, the Anglo majority strongly objected to northern influences in the Bureau system. As early as September of 1865, whites in Galveston bemoaned the fact that missionaries taught freedmen to love the Union and Yankee soldiers. Later, Galveston newspaperman Ferdinand Flake expressed this same complaint, arguing that northern teachers gave blacks "foolish notions" and did not teach blacks proper southern customs. Some people believed that the missionary teachers' habit of teaching Negroes that they deserved the same rights as Anglos encouraged racial hostility. The editor of the *Harrison Flag* likewise disapproved of Yankee control but acknowledged that blacks needed an education in order to become good citizens. Many whites, however, could not agree with even the conservative editor of the *Flag*. They enjoyed their social and economic status on a level above freedmen, and they perceived that their status would be undermined if blacks received an education. Moreover, on observing the relationship that developed between white missionary teachers and Negroes—a relationship that necessitated frequent contact, including not only parental visits to the schools but also teachers' visits to black homes—whites saw their worst fears confirmed: black education stimulated social mixing."

Some Anglos feigned cooperation with the Bureau in order to limit

northern influences on the freedmen. After the Reconstruction Acts of 1867 convinced whites that Negroes would become a political as well as a social and economic "problem," some people, like Flake of Galveston, advised planters to found and maintain black schools and thereby control both students and teachers. The editor of the *Houston Tri-Weekly Telegraph* openly urged native white support for black education to prevent "scheming" radical Republicans from "manipulating" the black vote.¹¹ In April of 1867, the San Antonio Bureau agent reported that Anglos in his sub-district took such advice by establishing two schools for freedmen, not out of benevolence, he asserted, but to "draw them away from the influence of government teachers."¹² Other agents reported similar developments. In November of 1868, the sub-assistant commissioner in Austin said that planters in his district intended to hire Negro teachers and to open plantation schools. Blacks would then attend school during the summer and winter and would work in the spring and fall, with their teacher making an extra hand.¹³ Whites would thus secure greater control over black labor by making sure that school schedules did not interfere with planting and harvesting and would certainly secure a greater degree of political and ideological control by exercising a veto power over the teacher and over any potentially dangerous ideas.

Only a minority of southern whites tried to control freedmen's schools directly. Most simply opposed black education in any setting. This opposition sometimes took peaceful forms but also involved violence, including threats to students and instructors. Such acts created an atmosphere of fear and suppression that, more than any other factor, limited the expansion of Negro education. Because of this opposition, by early 1866 Wheelock adopted the policy of encouraging Bureau schools only in towns garrisoned by troops, in towns that could be reached easily by soldiers, or in towns that at least served as headquarters for a Bureau sub-agent who presumably could control the white community and offer some protection for the schools.¹⁴ Others agreed that this was the only possible course of action. Even from federal headquarters in Galveston, assistant superintendent of schools George Honey asserted that if Anglo teachers of Negroes lost their military protection "not one of them could remain here 24 hours."¹⁵ Without protection, instructors could not establish schools in the interior; in counties with large black populations, which in some cases formed majorities, white fears tended to run even stronger and opposition to black schools more severe. Near the end of the Bureau's activity in Texas, most schools existed along the Gulf Coast or in the South Central parts of the state. Only six Bureau schools functioned in northern and northeastern Texas. The Bureau finally recognized its failure to reach North Texas in 1869 when it allowed James McCleery, superintendent

of education in northwestern Louisiana, to take jurisdiction over the area north of the 32nd parallel.⁴⁴

From the beginning of Bureau activity in Texas, whites found non-violent ways to slow the development of black schools. Many refused to board or to associate with teachers. Most agents reported that only the "loyal Germans" would quarter missionaries in the towns where the Bureau established its schools. With the exception of some clergymen, most whites considered it a disgrace for members of their race to teach Negroes. Once missionaries committed this "sin," they "lost caste" and became "no better" than blacks.⁴⁵ Unable to tolerate the examples of social mixing that Bureau schools stimulated, Anglos completely ostracized the missionaries. "My daughters are not able to get schools among whites," complained a white citizen of Goliad in 1873, "because they have taught the colored."⁴⁶ From Galveston, in early 1866, George Honey reported that his teachers were "entirely cut loose from all society save that of blacks."⁴⁷

In Houston Bureau teachers staunchly supported their local churches, but not even their white ministers would visit them. Respected ladies of the churches avoided them as well. Further, merchants in many areas used economic pressure against black schools, refusing to supply either the teachers or the schools. White property owners extended this economic warfare by refusing to sell, or even to rent, space for Bureau schools. When Honey escorted two teachers into the "interior" to organize a school, he found no one willing to lodge them or to rent a building for a school. Bureau agents in Austin managed to purchase a lot for a school but only under false pretenses. In Halletteville the first Bureau teacher found that she had to stay at the "German" hotel because no one else would board her. She needed a soldier escort to and from school every day because she received daily insults and threats.⁴⁸

As the Bureau expanded into North and East Texas, agents reported that worse conditions existed there, away from concentrations of troops, than in Coastal and Central Texas. In 1867 the agent in charge of Jefferson, Rusk, Harrison, Marion, Panola, and Upshur counties asserted that combinations of men who "violently" opposed black education inhibited expansion of schools in his district. They pressured other Anglos, who were afraid not to join their "conspiracy." In this East Texas district a school functioned only in Marshall near a military garrison.⁴⁹ In 1869 McCleery toured North Texas and found it worse than any other area he had seen because the government stationed fewer troops there. Hoping to influence a change of white attitudes, he made special appeals to Anglo ministers, an important segment of southern society, but he could only report that while some

agreed to help him, most ignored him, and a few promised to tar and feather him. In disgust he concluded that "a good healthy earthquake would . . . be beneficial to many communities in this quarter."¹²

Believing that removal of teachers would lead to the collapse of Bureau schools, in many towns a minority of whites attacked the reputations of female missionaries. In letter-writing campaigns to various authorities, Anglos charged that teachers undermined community morality by behaving in the most shameful manner with men. Complaints reached such a voluminous level in 1867 that J. R. Shipherd, Secretary of the American Missionary Association, asked General Griffin to investigate.¹³ In all cases, charges against the teachers proved false, but even false accusations undermined their positions in the community. This sometimes led to the result desired by whites.

In 1868 Julia and Mary O'Connor opened a freedmen's school in Georgetown. They found quarters at the local boarding house, but soon other residents began moving out. This economic pressure forced the owner to expel the two women. Opposed by a hostile white community, the O'Connors had no choice but to take room and board with a black family. Henceforth, insults and threats increased in frequency, forcing the teachers to ask for Bureau protection. The deputy sheriff of Williamson County, J. Harry Johnson, finally precipitated a crisis. Reportedly, he was "sweet" on Julia, but she rejected his advances. One night, the heartbroken Johnson got drunk and awoke the town with his ravings as he went to Julia's house. There he threatened all inside with bodily harm and implied that the girl had certain deficiencies of character. Later at his trial, a sober deputy alternately cried and apologized for his behavior, but the damage was done. After Johnson's outbursts, a drunken reprobate spread the rumor that the O'Connor sisters engaged in sexual relations with almost anyone, anywhere, any time and that they particularly fancied local Negroes and Yankee soldiers, whites and blacks alike. Although the charges held no truth, the mental anguish the teachers suffered and continuing white hostility accomplished what many Anglos wanted—by December the school closed.¹⁴ Whites doubtless failed to see the irony of the incident. They, like Anglos throughout the state, first denied housing to the women and ostracized them, thus forcing them to associate only with black people. This example of "social mixing" further enraged the whites, causing them to increase their opposition to Bureau schools.

Usually the presence of troops retarded violent acts, but not always. The army assigned infantry to the interior, but they proved too immobile to patrol large sub-districts that sometimes included four or five counties. Galveston, the headquarters for Bureau and army operations in Texas, also suffered early disturbances. In May of 1866, Michael Cahill

and three other Anglos threatened to "clean out the Negro school" in their section of town, but a schoolmaster and his black helper, Madison Symington, stopped them. Offended that a black man had the audacity to oppose him, Cahill later caught Symington and assaulted him. The Bureau court tried Cahill—who pled guilty—fined him \$50, and sentenced him to thirty days in jail. But such action only encouraged more white resistance.⁵³ In 1867 Anglos burned black schoolhouses in Cotton Gin, Waco, and Brenham, all towns with army garrison. Respectable white citizens often led the assaults. The Bureau agent at Cotton Gin alleged that a white justice of the peace organized the party that burned the school there and then tried to blame a freedman for the fire.⁵⁴ When Anglos closed a black school in Corsicana by driving the black teacher out of the county, the local Bureau agent could do nothing because his infantry could only protect the headquarters and its immediate environs. In Boston, Bowie County, two whites armed with shotguns confronted a Bureau agent, threatening to "shoot his head off" because he had organized a Sabbath school for Negroes and was then helping them construct a school building.⁵⁵

In 1868 the attacks continued. Events in Tyler demonstrated the necessity of maintaining troops in the interior and the impossibility of controlling the Anglo populace when troops were absent. As a result of Bureau expansion under General Griffin in 1867, Tyler became the headquarters of a sub-district which included Smith, Henderson, Wood, Van Zandt, and Cherokee counties. With four companies of soldiers comprising 179 men stationed there, relatively little trouble between the races occurred in Tyler. The first Bureau agent organized a school. At various times, either he or freedmen maintained two or three others in the "country," depending on the season and the finances of the black community. As crisis resulted when the army withdrew the troops in early 1868, however, leaving the new agent, Gregory Barrett, Jr., and the freedmen to the mercy of the white community then led by former mayor F. D. Crow.

Given to frequent anti-black tirades, Crow focused on the freedmen's schools in which blacks ostensibly encountered inflammatory ideas about equality. If Tyler's whites needed proof that black education would "upset the southern way of life," they received it in June. Children on the way to teacher Mary Stripling's class refused to give way to whites whom they met on a town sidewalk because they would dirty their clothes if they walked in the dusty road. Anglos refused to understand the children's motives and saw only "uppity niggers" who, after being indoctrinated by a northern teacher, tried to rise above "caste." For two consecutive days, infuriated whites attacked pupils on the way to school, beating them with clubs and stoning them. Afraid that whites

would kill the children, Stripling temporarily suspended the Bureau school.

Encouraged by this success, the Anglos went completely out of control. White harangues convinced the teacher that they intended to burn her school. Crow threatened both Stripling and Barrett, claiming that he would personally tear down the "damned Nigger school." When Barrett threatened to arrest Crow and others of his ilk, Crow defied him to do so. After freedmen told the agent that strong action on his part would heighten the race war—whites being determined to kill all Yankees and blacks if necessary—Barrett decided to do nothing until the arrival of twenty of the one hundred troops he had requested from Marshall. Afterwards, Barrett remained so afraid of local civil war that he made no arrests. The new garrison of soldiers proved large enough to protect the agent and the teacher, who reopened her school. But twenty men could protect only Tyler. The countryside and other towns in the district remained rebellious, and the agent found it difficult to maintain any other schools. In late 1868, when Washington began to "phase out" the Bureau and dissolved the sub-district, the Tyler school collapsed."

Similar events occurred in the neighboring sub-district, which included Harrison, Marion, Panola, Rusk, Jefferson, and Upshur counties but contained only one company of soldiers, stationed in Marshall. Earlier, in 1867 the agent reported on the white hostility to black education. Even protected by troops, only a German would board white teachers. Despite opposition, however, the Bureau slowly expanded its educational facilities, assuming supervision of two schools in the Jefferson area and supporting a freedman who opened a school outside Marshall. But in July of 1868, violence occurred. Absence of troops allowed whites in Jefferson to break up the schools there and to send Bureau teachers "fleeing for their lives." Anglos also attacked the "country" school outside Marshall and forced the black teacher to seek military protection. At the end of July, a new agent disgustedly reported that the only school left in the entire district was the one receiving military support. Later reports indicated that while bowing to direct military pressure, Marshallites continued to seethe about the black school that still functioned in their town."

From other areas of the state reports on the disruption of school flooded the assistant commissioner's office. In June whites in Anderson County turned against a one-armed ex-Confederate soldier because he started a freedman's school. In July the burning of yet another freedman's school prompted General Reynolds to offer a reward of up to \$500 for information leading to the conviction of such arsonists. In Richmond, Anglos "solved" their "problem" by violently assaulting the

freedmen's white teacher in the yard of his own home. Warned that he had until the end of the term to resign, the instructor dutifully obeyed."

Sometimes, local Ku Klux Klan organizations perpetrated violence against black schools. Freedwoman Clarissa Scales reported that "after freedom," "old man Tilden" conducted classes for Negroes in an old log cabin on Williamson Creek, about five miles south of Austin. But "Kluxers" visited the school, scared the children, and told Tilden to get out and to stay away "from them niggers." In May of 1868, the Klan made its debut in Clarksville and celebrated by attacking a "school party." Continued harrassment ultimately forced the teacher to leave the area.⁴¹ Bureau officials held the Klan responsible for burning the black school at Kaufman in 1869 and for running all freedmen out of town. Most agents, however, blamed not only the Klan for such violent acts but also respectable white citizens who supported the organization. As Bureau work in Texas drew to a close, agents still reported widespread violence against freedmen's schools. In one of his last reports, Superintendent Welch dejectedly admitted that teachers still needed military protection. The latest outrage, Welch said, occurred in Gonzales where a teacher, on closing his night school, found himself attacked by five or six white men who beat him and threw him in the river. In another attack Anglos in Henderson County tarred and feathered a teacher and warned him to leave the county, which he did at once.⁴²

Continuing white violence or threats of violence always retarded progress in black education and affected withdrawal of Bureau support from some areas. In mid-1870 McCleery granted \$200 to the freedmen of Paris to build a school. After he allocated the money, the army removed the troops then in Paris. McCleery then cancelled the grant, holding that without military protection "the friends of our cause are powerless" and that "if we erect a house there it will certainly be burned."⁴³ Thus the Bureau encountered many obstacles in its path. Yet, during Reconstruction black education progressed to some extent. Through the Freedmen's Bureau, the federal government facilitated expansion of Negro schools, but evaluations of the Bureau's educational work in Texas have varied. In 1869 the National Republican asserted that the school program of the state was in a hopeless situation, but Joseph Welch, superintendent of the schools for Texas since 1868, vigorously defended his office, citing comparative enrollment statistics for 1867 and 1869 to demonstrate Bureau success. But after Barnas Sears, agent for the Peabody Foundation, toured the state in 1869, he disappointedly recommended to his superiors that the Peabody directors forestall any work in Texas until authorities brought lawlessness under

control." Calling Welch's domain "the darkest field educationally in the United States" in 1870, Commissioner O. O. Howard asserted that after five years of work far too many black Texans remained ignorant because of the undermanned and underfinanced nature of the Bureau's educational system.⁴⁵

Reviewing the accomplishments of the Bureau, historians have tended to be more sympathetic than Sears or Howard. One team of scholars who authored a standard textbook on Texas history remained generally critical of Bureau activities in the state but acknowledged the "salutary effect" of the schools in uplifting the freedmen.⁴⁶ Another historian, Claude Elliott, praised the Bureau's education program, certainly not as a widesweeping success but as a beginning. The Bureau, he pointed out, at least established "some schools" and sped white acceptance of black education.⁴⁷ Henry Allen Bullock stressed the Bureau's contributions. Its programs began the institutionalizing of the freedmen's education and represented an acculturation factor, exposing Negroes to white middle class values—religion, temperance, "conventional" behavior—on a mass basis.⁴⁸ Although the Bureau maintained more schools in states with larger black populations, it remained no small accomplishment that more than 4,000 attended freedmen's schools in the state in 1870. When the agency withdrew from Texas, it left behind 20,000 literate blacks.

White opposition remained a major limitation to black education throughout Reconstruction. Although some Anglos conceded that blacks needed an education to become "good" citizens, they objected to any type of education that would implant ideas of equality in the minds of Negroes. In some areas violence against schools abated only when whites either gained control over Negro institutions or when they became convinced that they had shown blacks "their place" and that there remained no danger that Negroes would, through education, become "uppity." Despite limitations, however, schools remained important to the black community as it struggled to overcome the legacies of slavery and Reconstruction. And the Freedmen's Bureau—along with benevolent societies—helped establish those early schools.

NOTES

¹Henry Allen Bullock, *A History of Negro Education in the South from 1619 to the Present* (Cambridge, 1967).

²E. M. Wheelock's report on education, October 30, 1866, U. S., Senate, *Senate Executive Documents*, 39th Cong., 2d Sess., 1867 (Serial, 1276), Document no. 6, 148-150; Frederick Eby, *The Development of Education in Texas* (New York, 1925), 263.

³For black self-help programs in Texas see James M. Smallwood, "Early Freedom Schools: Black Self-Help and Education in Reconstruction Texas," *Bulletin of Negro History* (March, 1978), 790-793.

⁴J. W. Alvord, *Sixth Semi-Annual Report of Schools for Freedmen* (Washington, D. C., 1868), 6-7; J. W. Alvord, *Seventh Semi-Annual Report of Schools for Freedmen* (Washington, D. C., 1869), 6-7; J. W. Alvord, *Tenth Semi-Annual Report of Schools for Freedmen* (Washington, D. C., 1870), 37-38; O. O. Howard's report, November 1, 1867, U. S. House of Representatives, *House Executive Documents*, 40th Cong., 2d Sess., 1868 (Serial 1324), Document no. 1, vol. III, pt. 1, p. 653; Bullock, *A History of Negro Education in the South*, 22-23, 27.

⁵Wheelock's report on education, October 30, 1866, U. S. Senate, *Senate Executive Documents*, 39th Cong., 2d Sess., 1867 (Serial 1276), Document no. 6, 148-150; *New York Times*, February 19, 1866; C. S. Tambling to George Whipple, December 1, 1865, J. R. S. Van Vleet to Samuel Hunt, January 29, 1866, Texas Correspondence, American Missionary Association Archives, Amistad Research Center, Dillard University, New Orleans, Louisiana, microfilm copies in the Texas Tech University Library, Lubbock, Texas, hereafter abbreviated AMA Archives.

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¹⁰Wheelock to Charles Griffin, May 1, 1866, Letters Received, Assistant Commissioner, Texas, BRFAL, RG 105, NA; Wheelock to Kiddoo, July 31, 1866, M803, 31

¹¹Wheelock to Alvord, October 31, 1866, M803, 31.

¹²Joseph Welch to Alvord, July 1, 1868, *ibid.*; Claude Elliott, "The Freedmen's Bureau in Texas," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, LVI (July, 1952), 13.

¹³Circular no. 2, February 7, 1867, Special and General Orders, 1865-1869, vol. 9, Assistant Commissioner, Texas, BRFAL, RG 105, NA.

¹⁴D. T. Allen to James Kirkman, March 18, 1867, G. T. Ruby to Griffin, April 10, July 26, 1867, Letters Received, Assistant Commissioner, Texas, Wheelock to William Sinclair, May 8, 1869, Letters Sent, vol. 6, Superintendent of Education, Texas, BRFAL, RG 105, NA.

¹⁵Wheelock to Alvord, October 17, 1867, March 13, 1868, Welch to Alvord, July 1, 1868, M803, 31; Charles Garretson to C. S. Roberts, October 10, 1867, Garretson to W. H. Horton, October 10, 1867, Garretson to James Lowrie, October 10, 1867, W. T. Hartz to Disbursing Officer, November 11, 1867, Letters Sent, vol. 162, Assistant Commissioner, Texas, BRFAL, RG 105, NA.

¹⁶Wheelock to Alvord, September 30, 1867, Welch to Alvord, July 1, 1868, M803, 31; Barry A. Crouch, "The Freedman's Bureau of the 30th Sub-District in Texas: Smith County Environs During Reconstruction," *Chronicles of Smith County, Texas*, XI (Spring, 1972), 20.

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¹⁹U. S., Bureau of the Census, *A Compendium of the Ninth Census, 1870* (Washington, D. C., 1872), 452-453, 456-457; Crouch, "The Freedmen's Bureau of the 30th Sub-District in Texas," 18-19; and see Peter Kolchin's discussion in his *First Freedom: The Responses of Alabama's Blacks to Emancipation and Reconstruction* (Wesport, Connecticut, 1972), 79-99.

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²¹Charles Stiles to Superintendent of Schools, October 31, 1867, Letters Sent, vol. 53, Sub-Assistant Commissioner, Belton, Texas, BRFAL, RG 105, NA.

²²Tambling to Whipple, September 30, 1865, AMA Archives; Wheelock to Griffin, May 1, 1866, Letters Received, Assistant Commissioner, Texas, Louis Stevenson to Welch September 24, 1869, Letters Sent, vol. 118, Assistant Superintendent of Education, Texas, BRFAL, RG 105, NA; U. S. Senate, *Senate Executive Documents*, 39th Cong., 1st Sess., 1866 (Serial 1238), Document no. 27, 149.

²³James McCleery to Samuel Hundley, September 11, 1869, McCleery to H. R. Curtis, September 11, 1869, McCleery to H. A. Coleman, September 15, 1869, McCleery to () Brock, September 11, 1869, McCleery to Alvord, September 7, 1869, Letters Sent, vol. 440, Superintendent of Education, Shreveport, Louisiana, BRFAL, RG 105, NA; Crouch, "The Freedmen's Bureau of the 30th Sub-District in Texas," 18-19.

²⁴Tambling to Whipple, September 30, December 1, 1865, AMA Archives.

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²⁶Circular no. 3, February 12, 1867, Circular no. 4, March 29, 1867, Special and General Orders, 1865-1869, vol. 9, Assistant Commissioner, Texas, BRFAL, RG 105, NA.

²⁷J. Kirkman to A. M. Bryant, May 30, 1867, J. Kirkman to A. A. Metzner, June 29, 1867, Letters Sent, vol. 15, Superintendent of Education, Texas, McCleery to David Beath, September 2, 1869, McCleery to Thomas Younger, June 22, 1870, Letters Sent, vol. 440, Superintendent of Education, Shreveport, Louisiana, Circular no. 3, February 12, 1867, Circular no. 4, March 29, 1867, Special and General Orders, 1865-1869, vol. 9, Assistant Commissioner, Texas, BRFAL, RG 105, NA.

²⁸H. Sweeney to Roberts, Monthly Report, September 30, 1868, Letters Sent, vol. 134, Sub-Assistant Commissioner, Marshall, Texas, J. Kirkman to J. D. O'Connell, (), 1867, J. Kirkman to Henry Norton, (), 1867, Letters Sent, vol. 15, Superintendent of Education, Texas, Stevenson to Roberts, April 26, 1869, Letters Sent, vol. 118, Sub-Assistant Commissioner, Jefferson, Texas, BRFAL, RG 105, NA; Warren Norton to Whipple, November 19, 1871, AMA Archives.

²⁹David G. McComb, *Houston: The Bayou City* (Austin, 1969), 57; William F. Fleming, "San Antonio: The History of a Military City, 1865-1880" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1962), 407-408; J. L. M. Curry, *A Brief Sketch of George Peabody and A History of the Peabody Education Fund Through Thirty Years* (1898), reprint; New York, 1969), 147.

³⁰McCleery to Secretary, American Bible Society, December 16, 1869, McCleery to R. S. Ruse, December 20, 1869, McCleery to James B. Simmons, December 20, 1869, Letters Sent, vol. 440, Superintendent of Education, Shreveport, Louisiana, Wheelock to Griffin, May 1, 1866, Letters Received, Assistant Commissioner, Texas, BRFAL, RG 105, NA; Barnes to Secretary, American Bible Society, March 23, 1868, Barnes to Strieby, May 5, 1868, Elijah Gerrow to Smith, December 30, 1868, () Gonzales to Secretary of the American Missionary Association, February 4, 1870, AMA Archives.

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¹²Prentis W. Chunn, Jr., "Education and Politics, A Study of the Negro in Reconstruction Texas" (unpublished M. A. thesis, Southwest Texas State Teachers College, 1957), 77; Eby, *The Development of Education in Texas*, 265.

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⁶⁵Eby, *The Development of Education in Texas*, 157.

⁶⁶Rupert Richardson, Ernest Wallace, and Adrian Anderson, Texas: *The Lone Star State* (3d ed.; Englewood Cliffs, 1970), 210-217, 221-222.

⁶⁷Elliott, "The Freedmen's Bureau in Texas," 24.

⁶⁸Bullock, *A History of Negro Education in the South*, 28-30.

⁶⁹*New York Times*, November 17, 1874.

⁷⁰See, for example, Eby, *The Development of Education in Texas*, 167-168.