

From *The Mirror*

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May 23, 1866

**FREEDMEN’S BUREAU INVESTIGATION
REPORT OF GENS. STEEDMAN AND FULLERTON—THE REMOVAL OF THE BUREAU
RECOMMENDED**

Generals Steedman and Fullerton, the commissioners appointed by the President to investigate the operations of the Freedmen’s Bureau in the Southern States, have presented the following report for the State of Virginia:

Wilmington, N.C., May 8, 1866.

There are on duty in Virginia the following numbers of officers in the military service and of other persons employed by or attached to the Bureau. One colonel, two lieutenant colonels, three majors, one captain and commissary of subsistence, nineteen captains of the line, twenty-three first lieutenants, twenty second lieutenants, two hundred and thirty three civilian employees, classified and paid as follows:

58 clerks and superintendents of farms, paid average monthly wages.....	\$78.50
12 assistant superintendents, paid average monthly wages.....	\$ 7.00
168 laborers, paid average monthly wages.....	\$11.75

In addition to the foregoing, enlisted men in the military are employed as orderlies, guards, etc., but we were unable to produce the number of those so employed. Nine thousand freedmen received rations from the Bureau in the month of December last, 12,260 in the month of January, and 9,900 in February.

At the close of the war, in the chaotic condition in which society was left in the entire absence of all civil authority, the judicious and sensible officers of the Bureau, supported by the military, exercised a good influence and did much to preserve order and assist in the organization of free labor. The restoration of civil rights of the freemen, as evidenced by the changes made by the Legislature in the laws of Virginia—giving them the right to hold property, to sue and be sued, and to testify in the courts in all cases in which they may be interested, (a gratifying proof of the growing feeling of kindness toward them on the part of whites)—render the freemen, in our opinion, perfectly secure, if left to the care of the law and the protection of its troops.

There appears to be a contrariety of opinion as to whether the effect of the operations of the Bureau on the freemen has been to promote habits of industry, or idleness among them. In our judgment the effect produced has depended wholly on the character of the officers. Prudent and industrious freedmen rarely call upon the Bureau for advice or assistance. It is the idle and worthless who look to it for support. Among these, however, we do not deem to include the infirm and helpless. The mass of freedmen have an idea that the Bureau possesses some mysterious power to serve them, and that if they fail to secure such a livelihood as they desire, they can fall back upon it with a certainty of support. These ideas, it will be readily seen, lessen their efforts to procure employment and to support themselves and their families. They also regard the existence of the Bureau as evidence that the government looks upon the white people of the South as their enemies, which is calculated to excite suspicion and bad feeling on their part.

In the districts of Virginia where the affairs of the Bureau have been faithfully and impartially administered by men of sound judgment and discretion there has been no conflict between the agents of the Bureau and the

citizen. In all such districts the agents are acting in harmony with the civil offices of the State, and are assisted and supported in the performance of their duties by the citizens. But in many places where the agents are not men of capacity and integrity a very unsatisfactory condition of things exists. This originates in the arbitrary, unnecessary, and offensive interference of the agents of the Bureau with the relations between the planters and their hired freedmen, causing vexatious delays in the prosecution of labor, and imposing expense and cost to suits before themselves of trivial matters that could readily be adjusted by the friendly advice of a sensible man. The effect produced by the actions of this class of agents is bitterness and antagonism between the whites and freedmen, a growing prejudice against the Government among the planters and expectations on the part of the freedmen that can never be realized. Where there has been no such interference or has advice given to the freedmen by the agents of the Bureau, there is a growing feeling of kindness between the race, and good order and harmony prevail.

As an evidence of the manner in which this arbitrary power is exercised we would state that an agent of the Bureau, pleading in a freedmen's court in Accomac county decided questions of title to land as follows: A colored man, who was freed twenty years ago by his master, and who was permitted through the kindness of his master to make his home on the plantation wherever he chose, set up a claim to ten acres thereof around a cabin in which he had lived for ten years. The agent decided that the colored man had acquired title to the ten acres by adverse possession and forbade the owners of the plantation from bringing the question again before his court, or any other court, on pain of imprisonment.