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ORGANIZING THE FREEDMEN'S BUREAU IN MISSISSIPPI

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When General Ulysses S. Grant marched into Mississippi in the fall of 1862, he encountered an unusual army, an "Army of Contrabands." It was friendly, yet dangerous; docile, but impeding.¹ Grant's victory at Corinth had driven most of the plantation owners out of the vicinity, which left a multitude of slaves to seek refuge with the Union army. The Negroes came in droves; as Chaplain John Eaton, an eyewitness, said, "an army in themselves." They were clothed in rags and in silks; some were shod and some were not; many were ravaged by disease and debility. Without plan or direction, they irresistibly and instinctively made their way to those whom they supposed would grant them the necessities of life and the freedom for which they longed.²

Previously Grant had met small contingents of this "Black Army" and, with the aid of northern benevolent societies, had employed them on fortifications under the supervision of his division officers.³ But never had he met an "oncoming of cities," as Eaton expressed it. Now in the real black belt he was faced for the first time with the problem of what to do with Negroes whose freedom was only promised.⁴ To facilitate their care, Grant named Chaplain Eaton to take charge of the contrabands who came into camp, and to organize them into companies while they worked in the cotton fields which the owners so quickly had deserted.⁵ This was the beginning of almost three years of inefficient, bickering supervision of the Negroes by military commanders, treasury officials, and benevolent associations.⁶

During the same period Congress labored to establish an organization to supervise efforts in behalf of the freedmen. In December, 1864, a bill was introduced to establish a bureau in the War Department to handle freedmen's affairs. From the beginning, this proposal met decided opposition, public and private, in the House and in the Senate. Supporters of the bill carried the day, however, and March 3, 1865, the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands was established.⁷

The purpose of the "Freedmen's Bureau," as it frequently was called, was to control "all subjects relating to refugees and freedmen from the 'rebel states,' or from other districts embraced in the operation of the army." Under this charge came the responsibility of supervising and assigning abandoned lands, protecting recipients for three years, and issuing fuel and clothing to the destitute.⁸ General Oliver Otis Howard was named commissioner of the Bureau. Establishing his headquarters at Washington, he divided the South into 10 districts, each of which was under the jurisdiction of an assistant commissioner who had seen military service and had become familiar with the social and economic conditions of the South. They were generally men of ability and good repute, having had some experience in the affairs of freedmen.⁹

¹ The greatest danger came from the variety of freedmen's diseases. John Eaton, *Grant, Lincoln and the Freedmen, Reminiscences of the Civil War with Special Reference to the Work for the Contrabands and Freedmen of the Mississippi Valley* (New York, 1907), 13.

² *Ibid.*, 2; James W. Garner, *Reconstruction in Mississippi* (New York, 1901), 249.

³ Paul Skeels Peirce, *The Freedmen's Bureau, A Chapter in the History of Reconstruction* (Iowa City, 1904), 9.

⁴ The Emancipation Proclamation of September 22, 1862, was not to become effective until January 1, 1863.

⁵ Eaton, *Grant, Lincoln, and the Freedmen*, 5; Garner, *Reconstruction in Mississippi*, 249 *Personal Memoirs of U. S. Grant*, 2 vols. (New York, 1885).

⁶ Eaton, *Grant, Lincoln, and the Freedmen*, 171-72.

⁷ Peirce, *Freedmen's Bureau*, 40-41; *Statutes at Large*, Vol. XIII, Chap. 90, 38 Cong., 2 Sess., 507-509.

⁸ Peirce, *Freedmen's Bureau*, 44.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 48-49.

General Howard named Colonel Samuel Thomas, a former assistant to Colonel Eaton in the Freedmen's Department in Mississippi, assistant commissioner of Mississippi. Thomas had become familiar with the social, economic, and political problems of both the black and white peoples. He was an educated man with administrative ability and a good reputation, and had served successfully as a colonel of the United States Colored Infantry.¹⁰

Economic, social, and political disorder presented a discouraging picture of Mississippi's 400,000 freedmen. This study concerns the organization of the Bureau, the methods Thomas used to insure its proper functioning, and the problems he faced during his administration.

Colonel Thomas assumed his duties June 20, 1865. He divided the State and the Louisiana parishes along the Mississippi River from the Red River to the Arkansas line, which were also under his command, into three districts. These districts, designed to coincide with the military organization, were placed in charge of acting assistant commissioners.¹¹ Realizing that efficiency and experience with Negroes would be invaluable, Thomas chose officers of colored regiments for these positions.¹² The Northern District, the largest of the three, composed of the northern and eastern two-thirds of Mississippi with an estimated 225,000 freedmen, was placed under the charge of Lieutenant Colonel R. S. Donaldson of the 64th United States Colored Infantry. The Western District, the smaller of the three with 45,500 freedmen, was assigned to Captain J. H. Weber, also of the 64th United States Colored Infantry. The Southern District, with 76,100 freedmen, was under Major G. D. Reynolds of the 6th United States Colored Artillery.¹³

The districts then were divided along county lines into subdistricts to conform to the military subdivision of Mississippi.¹⁴ General Howard issued instructions to the assistant commissioners July 12, 1865, establishing offices in the subdistricts with at least one agent in each subdistrict.¹⁵ In this year as provost marshal general of freedmen of Mississippi, Thomas developed men who were qualified to become subcommissioners of the Bureau.¹⁶ With the aid of his acting assistant commissioners, Thomas set to work to detail officers to every county in the state. Although Howard had indicated that citizens of the community might serve as Bureau officers, Thomas declined to appoint them. He felt there was danger that they would wish to stand well with their neighbors, and that they would be unable or unwilling to do justice to the Negroes. As a consequence, Thomas felt, Negroes would have little or no confidence in the Bureau officers, and its purpose would be thwarted.¹⁷

Great care had to be taken in the selection of Bureau officers. The sudden about-face in the system of labor, and the new relationship of black and white, demanded prudence and caution from these officers. Nevertheless, Thomas found

¹⁰ Eaton, *Grant, Lincoln, and the Freedmen*, 237; Peirce, *Freedmen's Bureau*, 48; Samuel Thomas to Oliver Otis Howard, June 22, 1865, RG 105, XIV, 1-2. The material taken from the official records of the Bureau deposited in the National Archives is indicated by RG 105.

¹¹ Thomas J. Wood to Howard, July 13, 1866, *ibid.*, XVII.

¹² Thomas to Captain J. W. Miller, June 28, 1865, *ibid.*, 48.

¹³ General Orders No. 4, Thomas, July 24, 1865, *ibid.*, XXXI, 6. In August, 1865 there were Bureau officers in only Warren and Yazoo Counties and Madison Parish, Louisiana, in the Western District. Sixteen counties had officers in the Northern District and eight counties in the Southern District. The latter also included Concordia and Tensas Parishes of Louisiana. Thomas to Howard, August 15, 1865, *ibid.*, XIV, 238-50.

¹⁴ Thomas to Howard, October 12, 1865, *ibid.*, 400.

¹⁵ O. O. Howard, "Instructions to Assistant Commissioners," July 12, 1865; Walter L. Fleming (ed.) *Documentary History of Reconstruction*, 2 vols. (Cleveland, 1906), I, 230; Thomas to Howard, July 29, 1865, RG 105, XIV, 166-72.

¹⁶ Thomas to Howard, October 12, 1865, RG 105, *ibid.*, 400.

¹⁷ Colonel J. L. Haynes to Captain B. F. Morey, July 8, 1865, *ibid.*, Box 357; Thomas to J. H. Weber, June 26, 1865, *ibid.*, XIV, 35-38. Thomas forbade Weber to appoint any civilian as provost marshal, which the sub-district supervisor was called. On July 27, 1865, the designation was changed to subcommissioner. Special Orders No. 4, Office of Acting Assistant Commissioner, Southern District, Mississippi, July 27, 1865, Natchez, *ibid.*, CCCXVII, 3.

enough men who had served previously in the Department of Freedmen and the regular army to be able to report optimistically July 29, 1865, that almost every county was provided with an officer who had a complete set of orders, books, circulars, blanks, and registers and who was thoroughly familiar with his duties. Since many of the officers he had appointed already were operating under orders favorable to the freedmen, Thomas did little more than provide general principles. Later, when he more nearly had perfected his organization, he issued more detailed instructions.¹⁸

In addition to the officers in the field, Thomas appointed a staff to serve in his headquarters at Vicksburg. Here also he placed men who had served in the Freedmen's Department or in some relationship with the Negroes, generally with the colored infantry. To facilitate the operation of both his staff and his subcommissioners, Thomas permitted the hiring of clerks when necessary.¹⁹ In July, 1865 there were 160 civilian employees of the Bureau. Besides the clerks already mentioned, there were acting assistant surgeons, hospital stewards and attendants, printers, nurses, cooks, laborers, carpenters, teamsters, and porters. Although most of them were low salaried and their number varied from time to time, they were indispensable in the hospitals, asylums, and general work of the Bureau.²⁰

The Freedmen's Bureau maintained a close relationship with the army of occupation. Not only were they both under the same authority, the War Department, but most of the Bureau officers came from the regular army. The military was commanded to uphold Bureau authority in the performance of its official duty. Major General Henry W. Slocum, commander of the Department of Mississippi, issued an order August 3, 1865, calling the attention of his officers to the Bureau Bill of March 3, 1865, and to subsequent orders and circulars that defined the Bureau's work and its relationship to the army. Officers who possessed abandoned property, money collected as taxes or rentals, and records of freedmen affairs were ordered to turn them over to Bureau officials and to send Colonel Thomas a complete list of property held and quarters occupied by the army. The army also detailed such officers and soldiers as needed by the Bureau and stood ready to render "any aid that may be required by them in the performance of their official duties."²¹ Although the close relationship and interdependence of the army and the Bureau promised friction and jurisdictional jealousy, Howard and Thomas attempted to keep such discord at a minimum by clearly defining the relationship and responsibility of each. Evidently they were successful.²²

The chief policy maker of the Bureau was Commissioner Howard. Aided by his general staff, he handed down--through letters, general and special orders, and circulars--the principles by which the Bureau operated. Howard did not intend to give minute instructions to his assistant commissioners. Realizing that their situations and problems would vary with the locality, he first issued only general principles and relied upon the integrity and intelligence of his subordinates for their application. In turn, Assistant Commissioner Thomas, by the same devices, and often with the same vagueness, sent these principles on to his staff.²³

Although white refugees received some aid, Negroes were the Bureau's major responsibility. In defining the Bureau's authority over the freedmen, Assistant Adjutant General Stuart Eldridge said, "You have the right to prevent any injustice being done the freedman by anyone, even himself. Therefore, if you see

¹⁸ Thomas to Howard, July 29, 1865, *ibid.*, XIV, 166-72. There was an attempt to locate the officers with respect to population as well as to geographical location. G. D. Reynolds to Stuart Eldridge, October 5, 1865, *ibid.*, Box 358.

¹⁹ General Orders No. 6, Thomas RG 105, I, 8-9; Thomas to Howard, October 12, 1865, *ibid.*, XIV, 400-423.

²⁰ Monthly Report of Citizen Employees, Mississippi, September, 1865, *ibid.*, Box 368.

²¹ General Orders, No. 10, General Henry W. Slocum, Headquarters Department of Mississippi, Vicksburg, August 3, 1865; *Natchez Courier*, August 8, 1865.

²² Thomas to Howard, January 1, 1866, RG 105, XVI.

²³ Circular No. 1, Thomas, July 3, 1865, *ibid.*, XXXI, 25-51; Thomas to Weber, June 26, 1865, *ibid.*, XIV, 35-38.

him throwing away opportunity to help himself, you should use measures to force him to the road to improvement."²⁴

Besides feeding and clothing the refugees, the Bureau attempted to find homes for the freedmen in colonies or with employers, in orphanages, or as apprentices. It transported them when necessary, and regulated their contractual association with the employers. It sought justice for the freedmen by mediating in minor cases, but in serious offenses the Bureau turned to a military commission or to the civil courts. Freedmen were encouraged to better themselves by education, another field of endeavor in which the Bureau gave much aid. It sought to raise the level of morality and integrity among the freedmen and to enforce all laws and presidential proclamations. Generally speaking, the Bureau was a "wetnurse" organized to take in hand temporarily the new-born "freedmen" and nurture and develop them until they could stand on their own feet.²⁵

Thomas sent out his Bureau officers armed with current orders and circulars, some designed for the Bureau officer only and others prepared for circulation among both blacks and whites. These printed circulars--disseminating Bureau policy--were scattered widely over the districts. Often they were printed in the newspapers. In one instance, where printing was not available, written copies were distributed in a community.²⁶ Thomas suggested that meetings of freedmen be held where the circulars could be read and explained, and that copies be given to preachers, teachers, and other friends of the Negro.²⁷

The Bureau officers were sent periodically on tours of the territory under their jurisdiction. In addition to seeking information, they made formal and informal talks, presenting the freedmen with the "truth of the matter." The meetings usually were well attended and always drew a number of white citizens.²⁸ Although frequent tours of inspection and reports by the subcommissioners enabled Thomas to gain a picture of the whole operation of the Bureau and its effects, he did not fully trust his subordinates, and he constantly checked on their work. Major Thomas S. Free, the assistant inspector general of the Bureau in Mississippi, was empowered to investigate and clarify misunderstandings. General Howard set the pace for this officer when he said that his inspector general and aides were "footloose, ready to go to any point within our official dominion at a moment's notice." Thomas himself occasionally took the field to inspect freedmen's affairs. One such trip, in January, 1866, included Jackson, Meridian, Lauderdale, Macon, Columbus, Aberdeen, Okalona, Corinth, Holly Springs, Grenada, and Canton, talking to mayors, magistrates, influential citizens, and the "better class" of freedmen.²⁹

Since the Bureau was in the War Department, all its officers and civilian employees were obligated to conduct their business and report their operations according to military regulations. Monthly reports were required of the subcommissioners and Thomas demanded that they be careful and accurate reports.³⁰ In addition to regular monthly reports, Thomas required ration and school reports, a monthly roster of officers, a list of civilian employees, and quarterly historical and statistical reports.³¹ Each officer on duty in the Bureau also

²⁴ Eldridge to Lieutenant C. W. Clarke, July 27, 1865, *ibid.*, XIV, 150-51.

²⁵ General Orders No. 5, Thomas, July 29, 1865, *ibid.*, XXXI, 6-8; Circular No. 7, Thomas, July 29, 1865, *ibid.*, 6-8; General Orders No. 6, Office Acting Assistant Commissioner, Freedmen's Bureau for Southern District of Mississippi, August 1, 1865, *ibid.*, Box 380; Circular No. 1, Thomas, July 3, 1865, *ibid.*, CCLXIV, 1-2; Donaldson to Lieutenant H. B. Quimby, February 14, 1866, *ibid.*, CLV.

²⁶ General Orders No. 5, Thomas, July 29, 1865, *ibid.*, XXI, 6-8; William R. Gallian to Reynolds, August 4, 1865, *ibid.*, CCCXXI, 201; Natchez Daily Courier, November 24, 1865; Eldridge to Donaldson, August 3, 1865, RG 105, XIV, 205-206.

²⁷ Circular No. 7, Thomas, July 29, 1865, RG 105, XXXI, 257-61.

²⁸ Jackson Daily Mississippian, November 12, 1865; Canton Semi-Weekly Citizen, November 16, 1865.

²⁹ *Autobiography of Oliver Otis Howard*, 2 vols. (New York, 1907), II, 216; Eldridge to Clarke, July 27, 1865, RG 105, XIV, 150.

³⁰ Circular No. 2, Thomas, July 4, 1865, RG 105, XXXI, 251-52.

³¹ Circular No. 1, Thomas, January 1, 1866, *ibid.*, 274-75; Eldridge to Reynolds, September 26, 1865, *ibid.*, XIV, 370.

was expected to keep a set of books for his office. One book was to contain copies of letters received, whether from official sources or citizens. Another was reserved for copies of written orders; a third for copies of letters, endorsements, and communications sent to other offices of the Bureau or to private citizens. A fourth book required by the Acting Assistant Commissioner of the Southern District of Mississippi, was a Memoranda Book, in which his men entered complaints, methods of handling them, and an itemized account of expenses.³² Colonel Thomas ordered July 29, 1865, that officers of the sub-districts would compile an enrollment of the freedmen under their charge, including names, ages, residences, and occupations. This record was to be revised from time to time as the freedmen came and went.³³ As may be expected, accuracy and completeness of records varied with the competence of the officers in charge.³⁴

Perhaps one of Thomas' most vexing problems was getting and keeping officers in the service of the Bureau. Regiments constantly were mustered out of service and valuable officers were lost to the Bureau, which prevented the extension of its activities as far into the interior as Thomas desired. Often, when officers were stationed in the interior, it was difficult for them to reach the freedmen. Impassable roads and occasional high water added to the problem. Major Reynolds and Colonel Thomas tried to reach Woodville February 22, 1866, but failed to do so. Reynolds reported: "Hannibal crossed the Alps; so did Napoleon; Julius Caesar crossed the Rubicon, but we did not cross the Coniochitta."³⁵

It was difficult to find men to serve the Bureau who were conscientious about meeting their responsibilities to the white and the black. On the whole, the rank and file apparently did a creditable job and some received praise from Mississippians. But, on the other hand, many of them took bribes, drank heavily, and extorted. Howard and Thomas issued orders, but often when these orders reached the people, if they reached them at all, they were so garbled they were of little value.³⁶ General Howard wrote a letter to Thomas February 23, 1866, in which he said, "Immoralities, corruption, neglect of duty, and incapacity are sometimes complained of against the officers and agents of the Bureau. If either of these charges be sustained on investigation, the guilty Agent will be at once removed, whether he can be replaced or not." It was more easily said than done.³⁷

The Bureau's difficulties were increased by the uncooperative attitude of many Mississippians. In January, 1866, Thomas toured the state and heard remarks like the following:

"That's a damned Yankee," "What does he want here?" and "He had better not stop long." Without military force it was almost impossible to command respect or courtesy.³⁸ Thomas believed it was impossible to please the whites while caring for the Negroes. Although an assistant commissioner might have the "abilities, virtues and powers of a Lincoln," he was doomed to disappointment, Thomas felt.³⁹

One reason for the strong feeling against the Bureau was the presence and behavior of the Negro troops. Angry passions were aroused by the appearance of a "noisy, boisterous squad of colored soldiers" on almost any public square,⁴⁰

³² Circular No. 3, Thomas, July 23, 1865, *ibid.*, 253; Circular No. 2, Office Acting Assistant Commissioner, Freedmen's Bureau, Southern District of Mississippi, Natchez, Mississippi, February 18, 1866, *ibid.*, Box 380.

³³ General Orders No. 5, Thomas, July 29, 1865, *ibid.*, XXXI, 6-8.

³⁴ Captain E. Buckwalter to Donaldson, July 31, 1865, *ibid.*, Box 396; Preston to Eldridge, April 12, 1866, *ibid.*, Box 360; Eldridge to Thomas, April 6, 1866, *ibid.*, Box 359.

³⁵ Reynolds to Eldridge, February 28, 1866, *ibid.*, Box 360.

³⁶ J. S. McNeily, "War and Reconstruction in Mississippi," *Publications of the Mississippi Historical Society*, Centenary Series, II (1918), 327-29, *Jackson Daily Clarion*, October 17, 1865; Eldridge to Thomas, April 6, 1866, RG 105, Box 359; Reynolds to Eldridge, August 7, 19, 1865, *ibid.*, Box 358.

³⁷ Howard to Thomas, February 23, 1866, RG 105, Box 360.

³⁸ Thomas to Wood, January 28, 1866, *ibid.*, XVI, 245-49.

³⁹ Thomas to Howard, November 2, 1865, *ibid.*, XIV, 487-92.

⁴⁰ Garner, *Reconstruction in Mississippi*, 104.

and there was frequent conflict between the races. In Corinth a young doctor was killed by Negro soldiers after he accidentally brushed against them while passing on the sidewalk.⁴¹ At Lauderdale a whole garrison of Negro troops, with the exception of one corporal, attacked a railroad car in which ladies were riding. Forcing the conductor to flee, they cursed the ladies in "most vulgar and disgraceful language," and threw stones and brickbats at the car.⁴² At Natchez a policeman was shot by Negro soldiers, after arresting one of their drunken crew, and a riot followed. Only the cool courage of the post adjutant prevented much bloodshed.⁴³

Negro troops also were having a bad effect upon the freedmen, leading them to believe that the troops were to "hold the white man in subjugation," and that the law would not necessarily be enforced against the Negro. The swaggering, cursing troops and the hordes that often gathered about their camps led to much ill-feeling.⁴⁴ The petitions and requests to the civil authorities ultimately led to the removal of the Negro troops from Mississippi by May 20, 1866. But the damage had been done and, as Thomas said, "the Freedmen's Bureau gets the credit of all such 'Spread Eagle' efforts."⁴⁵

In the fall of 1865 another problem threatened the successful operation of the Bureau in Mississippi. When the courts of the state again were made responsible for the administration of Justice to the freedmen, there was a reduction of their work. A large portion of the state was not occupied by Bureau officers.⁴⁶ The work of the Bureau had been reduced to a benevolent character while the civil authorities administered justice and assumed responsibility for the orphans, marriage records, and the destitute. Bureau officers could no longer make arrests, assess fines, collect taxes, or take part in court action, and almost all confiscated property had been returned. Bureau agents were merely sentinels to watch civil officials in their treatment of freedmen, to appear in court as their "next friends," and to look after their hospitals, asylums, and schools.⁴⁷ This resulted in a decrease in the number of officers and men on duty in the Bureau. In October 1865 Thomas ordered subcommissioners to discharge their clerks.⁴⁸ A month later Reynolds ordered his acting assistant quartermaster and the supervisor of the Home Colony at Washington, Mississippi, to discharge all paid employees. Teamsters or laborers were to be applied for from the troops.⁴⁹

The limitation of authority discouraged some subcommissioners. One wrote from Winchester that he did not know the extent of his authority, and therefore he was doing very little. Another, asking to be relieved from duty, said, "Owing to the limited instructions under which I am acting, my position has been that of an idle 'spectator.' When aggravated cases of flogging have been reported, a few arrests have been made, and the parties turned over to the civil authorities; but out of more than fifty well-authenticated cases, but one has been acted upon."⁵⁰

⁴¹ Natchez Daily Courier, December 21, 1865.

⁴² Natchez Democrat, November 23, 1865.

⁴³ Natchez Daily Courier, March 14, 1866.

⁴⁴ Petition to Governor Humphreys from Macon, Mississippi, Citizens, October 31, 1865, Ser. E., Vol. LXXVII Governor's Records, Jackson; A. Gillespie to William L. Sharkey, July 29, 1865, Ser. E., Vol. LXX, *ibid.*

⁴⁵ Thomas to Marcus Bestow, December 8, 1865, RG 105, XVI, 92-93.

⁴⁶ Thomas to Howard, December 13, 1865, *ibid.*, XVI; Weber to Eldridge, December 31, 1865, *ibid.*, Box 358; Thomas to Wood, November 23, 1865, *ibid.*, XVI, 61-64.

⁴⁷ Thomas to Howard, November 13, 1865, *ibid.*, 20-22; Thomas to Howard, November 21, 1865, *ibid.*, Thomas to Wood, November 23, 1865, *ibid.*, XVI, 61-64.

⁴⁸ Clarke to Reynolds, October 6, 1865, *ibid.*, XV, 428.

⁴⁹ Reynolds to Lieutenant James W. Steele, November 7, 1865, *ibid.*, CCXI.

⁵⁰ H. H. Matthews to Reynolds, November 27, 1865, in *Report of the Joint Committee on Reconstruction at the First Session Thirty-Ninth Congress* (Washington, 1866), 184-85.

The withdrawal of troops seemed to be the signal for intimidation of Bureau officers and freedmen. From all over Mississippi subcommissioners reported that their position was untenable without armed guards. Some of the citizens threatened to "shoot the first damned Yankee" found unprotected on their premises. Officers were attacked and robbed, and in some cases were forced to leave their assignment. Negroes were whipped, turned off plantations, and generally abused.⁵¹

Economy became another obstacle for the Bureau. The lack of funds to hire clerks forced officers to perform clerical duties, although they were needed in the field.⁵² Inadequate office space and furniture was another result of economy. At Grenada the office was in a rough board shanty situated away from the business center.⁵³ At Brookhaven a subcommissioner inherited an office but no furniture from his predecessor; there never had been any. He borrowed a table and two chairs but they were subject to recall at any time.⁵⁴

Thomas faced numerous difficulties in the construction and operation of the Bureau in Mississippi. Throughout his administration he was plagued by the paucity of capable officers, hostility of Mississippians, limitation of authority, occasional conflicts with the military, and lack of sufficient funds to render the kind of service he wished to give the freedmen. Despite these and other hindrances, Thomas attempted to guide and protect the freedmen. Through letters, speeches, publications, and personal contact the Bureau instructed the freedmen and warned the planters to meet faithfully their new responsibilities. Although there was much justified criticism of the Bureau, it generally had a wholesome effect upon the Negroes in their transition from slavery to freedom, and the attitude of the Southerner gradually became less hostile to the Bureau later in Thomas' administration.⁵⁵

⁵¹ R. D. Mitchell to Reynolds, March 3, 1866, RG 105, Box 359; Gallian to Reynolds, November 10, 1865, *ibid.*, CCCXXI, 225-26; A. J. Yeater to Thomas, January 18, 1866, *ibid.*, Box 360; Reynolds to Weber, November 4, 1865, *ibid.*, Box 358.

⁵² J. J. Knox to E. Bamberger, February 10, 1866, *ibid.*, CXCVII, 10-12.

⁵³ Preston to Eldridge, April 12, 1866, *ibid.*, Box 360.

⁵⁴ Robert Gardner (addressee unknown), April 20, 1866, *ibid.*, XLVII.

⁵⁵ Thomas to Assistant Adjutant General's Office, Freedmen's Bureau, Washington, April 12, 1866, *ibid.*, General Records, CXXV, 148-53.