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THE FREEDMEN'S BUREAU IN TENNESSEE

By WEYMOUTH T. JORDAN

During the Civil War the condition of the Negroes in Tennessee, as well as in all parts of the Confederacy, presented new and acute problems. As slaves they had been a constant worry to owners and statesmen. During and after the war, especially after emancipation, they became a still greater source of trouble. It gradually dawned on them that they were free, and they seemed to believe that their former owners' land had been turned over to them. This idea was fostered by Union soldiers and agents, who told them to continue living at their plantation homes, but not to work. Some followed this advice, but other thousands left to follow Union columns and to roam. Many of the more industrious found jobs, but the majority became discontented, hungry, and unhappy. Those who were either too lazy to work or could not find jobs poured into the Federal lines. They went out of curiosity, for protection, and to fill their stomachs, most of them "as helpless as a dog without his master."¹

The plight of the Negro became so deplorable and pressing that a number of generals, of both the Federal and Confederate armies, set up concentration camps to help alleviate his condition. This palliative was begun even before emancipation. General Grant was particularly active in this respect in Tennessee. In November, 1862, he appointed Chaplain John Eaton, Jr., as superintendent of Negro affairs in the Tennessee department of the United States army. Eaton was instrumental in establishing several camps for his charges in the state. Quarters were erected for them at Clarksville, where two large buildings were put up, affording room for from one hundred to two hundred weekly. Barracks were also constructed especially for Negroes at Camp Shiloh, near Memphis, and at Nashville. Any Negro who wished could come to these camps and live at the expense of the Federal government until employment was found.² Later, in August, 1863, this program was extended when Grant ordered all military posts within his department, which included Tennessee, to establish camps for unemployed Negroes. In a further effort to provide for the Negro, and, possibly of more importance, to fill the depleted ranks of the Federal armies, the United States war department sent an agent into Tennessee in Septem-

¹Lyman Abbott, *Reminiscences* (New York, 1915), 234.

²*Ibid.*, 247; *Personal Memoirs of U. S. Grant* (New York, 1909), I, 352-355; Walter Lynwood Fleming, *Documents Relating to Reconstruction* (Morgantown, West Virginia, 1904), No. 6, p. 3; *Freedman's Saving and Trust Company* (Chapel Hill, 1927), 6-7; *The American Annual Cyclopaedia and Register of Important Events* (New York, 1861-1901), 1863, pp. 428-429. The last source is cited hereafter as *Annual Cyclopaedia*.

ber, 1863, to recruit Negro troops in the state. The result of this work was the recruitment of six regular and two each of garrison and hospital regiments.³ Few Negroes went into the Confederate armies in Tennessee, although as early as 1861 Governor Isham G. Harris was given authority by the state General Assembly to receive "free persons of color" into the service to act as flunkies. Those few who were accepted were paid eight dollars a month.⁴

Other groups than the military leaders also took an active interest in the destitute Negroes during the war. Among these were Northern benevolent societies, of which the most enterprising in Tennessee were the Christian Commission and the Sanitary Commission. Relief was also rendered to the Negroes by various Northern churches, most of which established freedmen's departments. In this effort the Protestant churches were most active.⁵ Moreover, the Federal department of the treasury, which controlled confiscated property in the South during the war and before the Radical Republicans placed such lands under the direction of the department of war, turned over much land to army leaders who in turn erected Negro camps on it.⁶

Despite the many activities of the various agencies interested in ameliorating the conditions of the Negroes in Tennessee, these conditions got into a lamentable plight during the war. In June, 1864, the United States Senate appointed a special commission of two members to investigate and report on Negro affairs in the state. On completing its inquiry, the commission reported that Tennessee, and especially the Negro camp at Nashville, had become "wholly destitute of anything tending to the reasonable comfort of its most unfortunate inmates."⁷ No immediate action was taken on this report, however, and on May 18, 1865, the Christian Commission called a convention at Chattanooga to decide on methods of administering relief to Tennessee Negroes. The important accomplishment of the convention was the appointment of a committee of eight members to study conditions and to recommend legislative steps to be taken by the General Assembly in behalf of the Negro.⁸ But, before this committee could act, the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen and Abandoned Lands, commonly known as the Freedmen's

³*The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (Washington, 1880-1901), Series 3, III, 816; IV, 762.

⁴G. W. Williams, *A History of the Negro Troops in the War of Rebellion* (New York, 1888), 81-83.

⁵*Autobiography of Oliver Otis Howard* (New York, 1908), II, 196. Howard was chief commissioner of the Freedmen's Bureau.

⁶Fleming, *Documents Relating to Reconstruction*, No. 6, p. 3.

⁷*Senate Executive Documents*, 38 Cong., 2 Sess. (1864-1865), No. 28, p. 2.

⁸*Nashville Daily Press and Times*, May 26, 1865.

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Bureau, was introduced into the state.⁹ For this reason the contemplated work of the committee sponsored by the Christian Commission was dropped.

The Bureau was given plenary powers over all abandoned Confederate lands, and the money received from rentals was to be used in administering to the needs of freedmen, as well as white refugees of the South. It was destined to be considered one of the most unscrupulous and powerful political machines ever developed in the United States. At the same time, however, many of its activities were beyond reproach. If its agents happened to be discreet and self-respecting their influence was wholesome; if, on the other hand, as was so often the case, in Tennessee as well as in other Southern states, they were rascally and unprincipled, their control over the Negro turned out to be a curse both to ex-Confederates and the ex-slaves. The Bureau's success depended almost entirely upon the scruples and personalities of its agents, who had actual contacts with its charges. In this respect, Tennessee was more fortunate than most of the South in the choice of the men placed in charge of the Bureau, at least during the greater part of the period when the agency was active in the state.¹⁰ The first assistant-commissioner of the Bureau in Tennessee was Brigadier-General Clinton B. Fisk, of New York and Michigan. He was a native of New York and had grown up in Michigan, although at the outbreak of the Civil War he had been living near St. Louis, Missouri. He had recruited a regiment of Missouri volunteers, and after six months of service had advanced to the rank of brigadier-general. He was an ardent Methodist, and has been described as being free from the "bigotry and self-righteousness which characterized the vast majority of the northern missionaries who came into the South" during Reconstruction.¹¹ He had educated himself, was considered as a man of good reputation, and was later characterized as the "American Havelock . . . who could fight rebels, hang traitors, and hold prayer-meetings on the same day."¹²

⁹The Bureau was established by an act of Congress of March 3, 1865. *Congressional Globe*, 38 Cong., 2 Sess. (1864-1865), 1402.

¹⁰For purposes of administration and otherwise, the conquered South was divided into ten districts. At the head of each district was appointed not only a military general, but also an assistant-commissioner of the Bureau, who, in most cases, had served in the Federal army during the war. According to the original act establishing the Bureau, it was to cease operations one year after the close of the war. See P. S. Peirce, "The Freedmen's Bureau, A Chapter in the History of Reconstruction," (*Bulletin of the State University of Iowa*, New Series, No. 74, 1904), *passim*, for a general discussion of the activities of the Bureau.

¹¹James Welch Patton, *Unionism and Reconstruction in Tennessee* (Chapel Hill, 1934), 150. This interpretation is perhaps open to question.

¹²*New York Christian Advocate*, March 28, 1867. See also Alphonso Alva Hopkins, *Life of General Clinton B. Fisk* (New York, 1907). Fisk also was placed in charge of Bureau affairs in Kentucky.

Shortly after his arrival, on July 1, 1865,¹³ at his headquarters in Nashville, Fisk divided Tennessee into three districts for carrying on the work of his organization. Sub-assistant-commissioners were stationed in Nashville, in Memphis, and in Chattanooga.¹⁴ These sub-districts were then further divided by counties.¹⁵ Concerning his duties Fisk outlined them as follows:

... the promotion of productive industry, the settlement of those so lately slaves in homes of their own, with the guarantee of their absolute freedom and their right to justice before the law as set forth in the proclamations of the President and the laws of Congress, the dissemination of various intelligence, and to aid in permanently establishing peace and secure prosperity.¹⁶

He advised that local agents be chosen in all cases from citizens living in the county in which they were to work, and cautioned his subordinates not to exert too much supervision. He demanded also that the Negroes not be allowed to come short of their work. While he was in charge of the Bureau, Fisk usually dismissed those of his agents who mismanaged affairs, or failed to carry out his orders. At the same time, however, he made it a practice to appoint persons of Union sentiments as his assistants.¹⁷

Because of his zeal in carrying what he considered his duty, Fisk soon got himself into embarrassing situations in his new work. His first dispute was with the state legislature over the question of Negro testimony in the courts. As provided by federal law, the Bureau had been given authority over all litigations in which freedmen were not allowed civil equality with whites. On his arrival in Nashville, Fisk immediately began to set up courts under the direction of his Bureau. At this early date in Reconstruction, before the Radicals took over complete control, such an act naturally enraged both the ex-Confederates and the members of the state legislature. Accordingly, the Senate of the General Assembly, on October 19, 1865, passed a bill allowing Negro testimony in the state courts, thus hoping to remove the reason for the establishment of the Bureau courts.¹⁸ The bill, however, was held up by the lower house of the legislature until January, 1866, when it was finally passed.¹⁹ During the interval, in November, 1865, a case concerning a disputed contract of a Negro laborer was brought before the

¹³Nashville *Daily Press and Times*, October 18, 1865.

¹⁴In 1867 the sub-districts of Pulaski and Knoxville were added. *Report of the Secretary of War*, 1868, p. 1057.

¹⁵*Senate Executive Documents*, 39 Cong., 2 Sess. (1866-1867), No. 6, p. 127.

¹⁶Nashville *Daily Union*, July 29, 1865.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, September 8, 1865; Nashville *Daily Press and Times*, September 18, December 11, 1865; Nashville *Daily Union and American*, February 4, 15, July 14, 1866.

¹⁸Nashville *Daily Union*, September 7, 17, 1865; Nashville *Daily Press and Times*, October 20, 23, 1865.

¹⁹Nashville *Daily Union*, January 27, 1866.

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²³Nashville *Daily Union*, December 18, 1865.

²⁴*Senate Executive Documents*, 39 Cong., 2 Sess. (1866-1867), No. 6, p. 127.

²⁵New York *Chronicle*, December 18, 1865.

²⁶Nashville *Daily Union*, September 8, 1865.

²⁷*Ibid.*, September 11, 1865.

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Bureau court in Nashville. All the available witnesses were Negroes. In the case, the white man was admittedly in the right, but Fisk refused to allow the case to be adjudicated, advising the judge "to refer the white man to the legislature."²⁰ After this occurrence, Fisk lost caste with the Conservatives of the state, and even with some of those whites who were leaning toward radicalism. He added more embers to the fire by continuing the Bureau courts until May, 1866, even though Negroes had been granted admission to state courts in January of that year.²¹

Because of the incident over Negro testimony, Fisk attempted to resign from his post in November, 1865, but his request was refused by President Andrew Johnson. He became more and more dissatisfied with his work, but despite the unpleasantness of his situation and the open dislike of him displayed by the Conservatives, he remained in Nashville. On August 29, 1866, however, he received information that he would be mustered out of service on September 1.²² On the evening of the latter date he gave a farewell address to the citizens of Nashville at the state capitol building, and within a few days left for his home in St. Louis.²³

On Fisk's departure his duties were assumed temporarily by General J. R. Lewis, who had been serving as assistant-superintendent of the sub-district of Middle Tennessee. Lewis leaned definitely toward Radical principles, and he immediately began replacing some of Fisk's appointees in the Bureau with agents of more pronounced Union sentiments.²⁴ During his term as assistant-commissioner of Tennessee, however, comparatively little work had to be done by the Bureau. Crops had improved during 1866, and relations between Negro laborers and white farmers were excellent.²⁵ Also, in June, 1866, Kentucky had been detached from Fisk's district, and thus Lewis did not have to administer to that state. From the standpoint of Lewis, the establishment of Kentucky as a separate district was fortunate, for Fisk had been forced to spend much of his time in Kentucky in an attempt to quell outbreaks between Negroes and hot-tempered Kentuckians. Fisk had once described the Kentuckians as "the meanest, unsubjugated, and unreconstructed, rascally, rebellious revolutionists" that "curse the soil of the country."²⁶

²⁰Nashville *Daily Press and Times*, November 8, 1865.

²¹*Senate Executive Documents*, 39 Cong., 2 Sess. (1866-1867), No. 6, p. 665.

²²New York *Christian Advocate and Journal*, November 30, 1865; Nashville *Daily Union and American*, August 29, 1866; Nashville *Daily Press and Times*, November 23, December 18, 1865.

²³Nashville *Daily Union and American*, September 2, November 4, 1866.

²⁴*Ibid.*, September 6, 1866; Nashville *Daily Press and Times*, September 19, 27, 1866.

²⁵Nashville *Dispatch*, August 18, 1866; Nashville *Daily Union and American*, June 30, 1866; Nashville *Daily Press and Times*, October 27, 1866.

²⁶*Report of the Secretary of War*, 1867, p. 687; *Senate Executive Documents*, 39 Cong., 1 Sess. (1865-1866), No. 27, p. 3.

General Lewis remained in charge of the Bureau in Tennessee for only three months, and on January 1, 1867, was succeeded by Major General W. P. Carlin, of the 34th United States Cavalry. General Carlin had spent most of the Civil War period in the South, and knew conditions as they actually existed.²⁷ In his selection, Tennessee was again fortunate, for of all the men connected with the Bureau throughout the South he was probably one of the most humane and conscientious of the group, Radical though he did become. One of his first acts was to abolish the corrupt fee system by which Bureau agents had been paid in the state until he was placed in charge. Agents were now placed on regular salaries.²⁸ Another of his acts was to discharge numerous inefficient agents who had been appointed while General Lewis was in control of the Bureau.²⁹ By the time Carlin came to office, most of the philanthropic activities of the Bureau in the state were confined to Negro education. But, shortly after he came to Tennessee as assistant-commissioner, the state took over control of a majority of the Negro schools. Carlin necessarily began to curtail still further the activities of his organization.³⁰ There was so little for the Bureau to do during the fall of 1867 that General Grant, in December, 1867, advised that it be discontinued in Tennessee, and orders to that effect were received by Carlin in February, 1868.³¹ No further orders were received immediately, however, and actually the Bureau was not entirely abandoned in the state until May 1, 1869. Even after that date, Brevet-Major L. N. Clark remained for a short time in charge of the few Bureau schools which were left.³²

With this sketch of the organization and various persons in charge of the Bureau in Tennessee, it is now possible to turn to a discussion of the more specific activities of the organization in the state. Those activities were: relief to Negroes and whites; advancement of Negro education; and interference in state politics.

When the Bureau opened its first office in Tennessee it found over 300,000 Negroes for whom it had to provide.³³ The number of destitutes, white and black, in the state was enormous. Filth and offal filled the streets of Nashville, and the whole city needed renovating.³⁴ General Fisk's first act was to attend a convention of about four thousand

²⁷Nashville *Daily Press and Times*, January 24, 1867.

²⁸Report of the Secretary of War, 1867, pp. 687-688.

²⁹Nashville *Daily Press and Times*, January 21, February 7, March 12, September 18, 1867.

³⁰Ibid., October 2, 1867; Patton, *op. cit.*, 161.

³¹Nashville *Daily Press and Times*, January 31, February 15, 1868.

³²Ibid., April 27, 1869.

³³Ibid., May 29, 1865. *Harper's Monthly Magazine*, February, 1867, p. 399, also states that there were over 300,000 Negroes in the state.

³⁴Nashville *Daily Union*, July 12, August 5, 1865.

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Negroes in Nashville and to promise them aid in every way possible.³⁵ Shortly afterwards he had a census taken of Nashville, and found that in that city alone he had 10,744 Negroes to look after.³⁶ He also had about twenty-five thousand persons in Tennessee and Kentucky drawing rations through his office. Of this number, seventeen thousand were whites and eight thousand were Negroes. He immediately began an arbitrary curtailment of the number of rations issued. In Middle Tennessee, from July 21 to July 31, 1865, he reduced the number of rations by two thousand three hundred. Despite having promised to provide food for Negroes, he cut them off from rations entirely by September, 1865. This was done in order to force the Negroes to sign contracts with white farmers for the winter. Only three thousand one hundred whites were allowed to remain on the register, and after September even this number was decreased daily.³⁷

During the fall and winter of 1865-1866, improved economic conditions in Tennessee allowed Fisk to continue his program of curtailing the distribution of rations, and in December, 1865, rations valued at only \$620.23 were issued.³⁸ During the first half of the year 1866, economic conditions continued to improve, and on June 30, Fisk ordered that all rations be stopped except in cases of absolute necessity. Only orphans and aged Negroes were to be supported by the Bureau in the future.³⁹ In September, 1866, rations were being issued to only fourteen whites and one hundred and thirty-nine Negroes in the entire state.⁴⁰ Early in 1867, after General Carlin assumed charge of the Bureau in Tennessee, rations were restricted to those physically unable to work, and after August, 1867, few were issued except to orphan asylums and hospitals.⁴¹

One of the important phases of the philanthropic work of the Bureau in Tennessee was the maintenance of hospitals and orphan asylums. In January, 1866, Fisk was operating four asylums and one hospital for Negroes in the state; and from October 1, 1865, to August 31, 1866, the Bureau hospitals in Tennessee and Kentucky treated 13,667 freedmen, 497 of whom died.⁴² When General Carlin succeeded Fisk in January, 1867, he found that Tennessee still had only one Bureau hospital, located at Memphis, and he made plans for an additional unit in Nash-

³⁵*Ibid.*, July 13, 1865.

³⁶*Nashville Daily Press and Times*, August 12, 1865.

³⁷*Ibid.*, September 22, 1865; *Nashville Daily Union*, September 27, 1865.

³⁸*Senate Executive Documents*, 39 Cong., 1 Sess. (1865-1866), No. 27, p. 13.

³⁹*Nashville Daily Press and Times*, August 16, 1865.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, June 26, 1866.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, July 22, 1867.

⁴²*Report of the Secretary of War*, 1866, p. 725.

ville. In March, an emergency hospital was opened there, and the Bureau continued to operate both hospitals until December, 1868.⁴³

Another function of the Freedmen's Bureau was the disposition of "abandoned" Confederate lands. According to a statement of General Fisk, 355,751 acres of land had been abandoned in Tennessee before he arrived in Nashville.⁴⁴ Part of his relief program was to place freedmen on this land. When the Bureau began its work, it found Negroes concentrated in the following camps in Tennessee and Kentucky: Nashville, Memphis, President's Island, Clarksville, Louisville, Paducah, Columbus, Gallatin, Hendersonville, Tunnel Hill, Pulaski, and Chattanooga.⁴⁵ Fisk immediately hired out these Negroes, usually under contract for one year, and many were placed on the abandoned land. In most cases when a Negro signed a contract, he received from \$150 to \$180 for the year, in addition to clothing and housing. Some rented land by the acre; others worked on shares. All contracts of course had to be approved by Bureau officials.⁴⁶ No general regulations were laid down for the enforcement of the contracts, however, but provost courts, military commissions, and local courts were opened to the Bureau to force white farmers to give the Negroes what the Bureau considered a fair deal. Any disputed contract could be adjudicated favorably to the Negro during most of the period.⁴⁷ Even so, Fisk's procedure in the settlement of contracts was usually amicable, and many of the planters in the state accepted the new situation and cooperated with him. In partial return for this cooperation, Fisk restored about \$20,000,000 worth of property to its original owners by January 21, 1866.⁴⁸

During General Lewis' administration of Bureau affairs, Negro labor conditions became unsettled because of his undiplomatic handling of the entire situation. He was wholly in favor of supporting the cause of the Negro in every respect. At this time the Negroes received the impression that they were to receive property from the federal government, and the "Forty Acres and a Mule" idea was fostered and magnified by certain Bureau agents and by agents of various political organizations and clubs which were becoming quite active in Tennessee. Those Bureau agents located in Middle Tennessee were especially outspoken in making promises of land to Negroes. The immediate result was the re-

⁴³Nashville *Daily Press and Times*, March 16, 1867; *ibid.*, February 18, September 16, October 1, 1868.

⁴⁴Nashville *Dispatch*, September 2, 1866; Nashville *Daily Union and American*, September 2, 1866.

⁴⁵Nashville *Daily Press and Times*, August 29, October 14, 1865.

⁴⁶Nashville *Daily Union*, January 11, 1866; *House Executive Documents*, 39 Cong., 1 Sess. (1865-1866), No. 11, pp. 44-46.

⁴⁷*Annual Cyclopaedia*, 1865, p. 375.

⁴⁸Nashville *Daily Union*, January 21, 1866.

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⁴⁹Nashville *Daily Union*

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fusal of many freemen to sign contracts during the fall of 1866.⁴⁹ This condition continued until August, 1867, when another seasonal demand for labor brought the matter to a crisis. By that time General Carlin had become assistant-commissioner, and he issued orders that those Negroes who had been offered work and refused it should receive no further aid from the Bureau.⁵⁰ The result this time was that the Negroes went back to work. Their holiday under Lewis was over. In an effort to placate the whites, Carlin, by November 1, 1867, returned all abandoned land to its owners, except 27,986 acres.⁵¹

In the winter of 1867-1868, the so-called southern outrages reached their height in Tennessee. It was only natural for the freedmen to bear the brunt of the attack of the pent-up rage of ex-Confederates, who were giving vent to their feelings through their newly organized Ku Klux Klan. Labor conditions grew worse as the year 1868 advanced, and, according to reports of Federal army officers stationed in the state, Tennessee planters were determined to turn off all Negro help as soon as the year's crops were gathered.⁵² The Bureau again stepped in to aid the Negro, and during the fall of 1868, affairs became somewhat settled. By January, 1869, the majority of the freedmen were settled for the year, with wages averaging between \$120 and \$150 for good hands. At that time, as stated by a Nashville newspaper, those Negroes who "have nothing but health and hands find ready contracts every where."⁵³

Although the Bureau in Tennessee administered much relief and attempted to maintain stable working conditions in the interest of Negroes, probably the most active division of the organization was its educational department. This department of the Bureau's work was the first to be organized by Fisk after he opened his office in Nashville. He had school buildings erected on abandoned lands in all sections of the state, and in August, one month after his arrival, Memphis alone had ten Negro schools being attended by 1,948 pupils. By September, 1865, so many Negroes of all ages had flocked to the Bureau schools that space and teachers were not available for them. To handle this situation, more buildings were constructed, and Fisk set up a school in Nashville for the training of Negro teachers.⁵⁴ Within five months he had seventy-five Negro schools under his direction in Tennessee and Kentucky, and 264 teachers had been employed by the Bureau to teach 14,786 pupils.⁵⁵

⁴³Nashville *Daily Union and American*, November 6, 1866.

⁴⁴Nashville *Daily Press and Times*, August 9, 1867.

⁴⁵*Report of the Secretary of War*, 1867, p. 622.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, 1868, p. 170-175.

⁴⁷Nashville *Daily Press and Times*, January 7, 1869.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, August 16, September 19, 1865.

⁴⁹*House Executive Documents*, 39 Cong., 1 Sess. (1865-1866), No. 11, p. 31.

The year 1866 began auspiciously for Negro education in Tennessee, for on January 9 of that year Fisk University was formally opened. The necessary funds for operation were provided by the American Missionary Association of New York City and the Western Freedmen's Aid Commission of Cincinnati. Presumably the university was started for the purpose of training all classes of Negroes, but, carrying out General Fisk's desire to prepare Negro teachers, the school from the beginning specialized in teacher training. It grew in size rapidly, and before the end of its first year had an enrollment of 850 students.⁵⁶

After the opening of Fisk University, which cooperated closely with the Bureau, educational facilities for the Tennessee Negro continued to be augmented. According to a report, in July, 1866, of J. W. Alvord, general superintendent of the entire Freedmen's Bureau school system in the Southern states, Tennessee at that time had 42 Negro schools, 125 teachers, and 9,114 pupils.⁵⁷ Compared with the other Southern states, this was a large number. By the date of Alvord's report, however, Negro education in Tennessee was being attacked by ex-Confederates. In the famous Memphis race riots of the summer of 1866, school buildings valued at \$37,000 were destroyed. The riots were not confined to Memphis, however, and Negro schoolhouses were also destroyed at about the same time in Tullahoma, Decherd, Shelbyville, Brentwood, and Athens.⁵⁸ Bureau teachers and their pupils became the center of a verbal, and in numerous cases a violent, attack by an embittered white population. The most visible result of the attacks was the construction of new schools for Negroes at Nashville, Tullahoma, Springfield, Memphis, Chattanooga, Clarksville, Smyrna, Shelbyville, and other localities.⁵⁹ Reconstruction of destroyed buildings was carried on at such a pace that by September 1, 1866, when Fisk left Tennessee, there were in the state 41 schools for Negroes and 9,400 pupils being taught by 125 teachers.⁶⁰ This was practically the same number as reported by Alvord in July, before the riots occurred.

In February, 1867, the Tennessee legislature enacted a law providing for state maintenance of Negro schools,⁶¹ and as a result much of the Bureau's educational activities was taken over by the state. Rev. D. Burt, of Nashville, became state superintendent of Negro education, and among those pupils immediately placed under his direction were the following: 6,581 pupils from schools previously operated by benevo-

⁵⁶Nashville *Daily Union*, January 9, 1866; Nashville *Daily Press and Times*, January 10, December 19, 1866.

⁵⁷Nashville *Daily Union and American*, October 5, 1866.

⁵⁸Patton, *op. cit.*, 159.

⁵⁹Senate *Executive Documents*, 39 Cong., 2 Sess. (1866-1867), No. 6, pp. 131-132.

⁶⁰Nashville *Daily Union and American*, September 2, 1866.

⁶¹*Acts of Tennessee*, 1866-67, p. 39.

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⁶²Nashville *Daily War*, 1867, p. 653.

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⁶⁴*Ibid.*, May 14, 1

⁶⁵*Ibid.*, October 2

⁶⁶*Ibid.*, January 6

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lent societies; 938 from private schools; 5,105 from Sunday schools; 28 from schools operated by freedmen; and 39 from Bureau schools. For the time being the Bureau continued to operate its schools, and from January to June, 1867, spent \$13,208.21 in their upkeep.⁶²

The period from June, 1867, to May, 1868, was especially marked by another series of attacks by the Conservatives, the name now adopted by ex-Confederates, against Negro education. Teachers of Negro students were intimidated by the Ku Klux Klan. In one instance, at Carthage, a school building was burned, and the teachers were notified "in a bloody handwriting . . . that they should suffer death unless they went North where they belonged."⁶³ In the first week of May, 1868, Reverend Burt, unable to cope with the situation, resigned his position as state superintendent of Negro education. A week afterwards, his duties were taken over by an army officer, Major James Thompson, who was sent to Nashville by General O. O. Howard, chief commissioner of the Freedmen's Bureau, to restore order.⁶⁴ Under Thompson's control, with the aid of military force, Bureau schools were better protected, and again the number of Negro pupils in the state began to increase. In October Thompson gave out the report that 16 schools were being sustained and 11 partially sustained by freedmen, 19 were owned outright by them, and 43 were being furnished Negroes by the Bureau. There were 2,164 male and 2,493 female pupils being instructed under the auspices of the Bureau, and they were being taught by 54 white and 41 Negro teachers. During the previous month, September, Negroes had paid \$379 in tuition, the Bureau had spent \$2,959, and the total expense of Bureau schools for the month had amounted to \$5,809.⁶⁵

By the first of 1869 most of the Negro schools formerly operated by the Freedmen's Bureau had been taken over by the state, under the provisions of the Negro education act of February, 1867. By January, 1869, the free school system had been extended to 85 counties, and it was estimated at that time that more than 100,000 Negro pupils were attending state schools. In April, 338 Negro schools were being operated, and of these the Bureau helped support less than 25. The freedmen themselves were supporting 195 schools, while the remaining 143 were controlled either by the state or by benevolent societies, which were again becoming active in the state now that the Bureau's activities were being curtailed.⁶⁶ By the following month, May, supervision of Negro education had been turned over almost entirely to state authorities, and

⁵⁶Nashville *Daily Press and Times*, February 8, 1867; *Report of the Secretary of War*, 1867, p. 653.

⁵⁷Nashville *Daily Press and Times*, April 27, 1868.

⁵⁸*Ibid.*, May 14, 1868.

⁵⁹*Ibid.*, October 27, 1868.

⁶⁰*Ibid.*, January 6, 23, February 19, March 19, April 26, 27, 1869.

the few remaining schools under direction of the Bureau were gradually consolidated with those of the state. Thus, one of the most active divisions of the Bureau was brought to a close.

A final phase of the activities of the Bureau in Tennessee had to do with the organization's interest in state politics. Although many derogatory statements, probably justifiable, have appeared in print in regard to the general efforts of Bureau agents to introduce and maintain Radicalism in certain Southern states, there is little available evidence which indicates that they showed equal vigor in this respect in the case of Tennessee. But the fact that they were not equally as vigorous by no means indicates that they were entirely apathetic. Since most of the functions of the Bureau were concerned with bettering the general condition of the Negro, it was only natural for its agents to work for Negro suffrage. Also, as was usually the case throughout the South, the Bureau in Tennessee helped persuade the Negro to vote the Republican ticket, after he was given the vote in February, 1867. In Tennessee this meant support of William G. ("Parson") Brownlow, and if the part played by the Bureau in gaining the vote for the Negro is to be understood, it is necessary also to know something of Brownlow's ideas on the subject before the Bureau began its operations in Tennessee. He was first elected governor on March 4, 1865,⁶⁷ and on the occasion of his first address to the legislature, one month later, he stated emphatically that it was his belief that the races in the state should be segregated.⁶⁸ Such a view was of course unacceptable to the rapidly growing Radical party in the North, and after Lincoln's death, members of that party began criticizing Brownlow for his views.⁶⁹ This criticism became so severe by July that Brownlow, who was now lining up with the Radicals, came out with a new program which he thought might appease his Northern allies. On July 3, the following proclamation was issued to the public:

The Negroes, like the Indian tribes will gradually become extinct—having no owners to care for them, and no one owning property in them, they will cease to increase in numbers—cease to be looked after and cultivated—while *educated labor* will take the place of *slave labor*. Idleness, starvation, and disease will remove the majority of the negroes in this generation. The better class of them will work and sustain themselves, and that class ought to be allowed to vote, on the ground that a *loyal negro* is more worthy than a *dis-loyal white man*!⁷⁰

⁶⁷This was the election by which civil government was reestablished in the state, replacing the military governorship of Andrew Johnson.

⁶⁸Tennessee *Senate Journal*, 1865, p. 22.

⁶⁹See *Harper's Weekly*, June 10, 1865, for an example of the opinion of a leading periodical of Brownlow. See also E. Merton Coulter, *William G. Brownlow, Fighting Parson of the Southern Highlands* (Chapel Hill, 1937), for a biographical account of Brownlow.

⁷⁰Nashville *Daily Press and Times*, July 3, 1865.

This proclamation arrived in Nashville. At least one objectionable to controlled legislation by disfranchisement. Again, it is possible that Brownlow's obvious political congressmen of August.⁷²

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⁷¹*Ibid.*, July 13, polls are printed in

⁷²*Ibid.*, August 4, tion that only 4,300 that only half of the

⁷³For detailed account August 8-11, 1865.

⁷⁴Nashville *Daily*

⁷⁵Tennessee *Senate*

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This proclamation was made public three days after General Fisk arrived in Nashville, and it is possible that it was issued partially on his advice. At least, latter events indicate that such a policy was not objectionable to Fisk. A week after the proclamation, the Brownlow controlled legislature went still further in advancing the Radical program by disfranchising the great majority of the ex-Confederates.⁷¹ Again, it is possible that this step was taken with Fisk's approval. Brownlow's obvious reason for this act was to insure the election of Radical congressmen at the election which was to be held in the first week of August.⁷²

Fisk took no part in the disputes which resulted from this election, and although he favored Negro suffrage, his references to the Negro during his first month in Tennessee were only as a worker. A week after the election, however, a Negro convention was held in Nashville for the purpose of agitating in favor of Negro suffrage.⁷³ On the second day of the convention, August 8, Fisk attended and promised the delegates that "the suffrage would come around all right." He pledged his support in securing this boon, stating: "I was one of the first to give the colored men the Bible—the first to give him the bayonet—and I shall not be behind in giving him the ballot. . . . I know what you want and what you desire, and I shall labor all I can to obtain it. You can depend on me."⁷⁴ Despite this open approval of Negro suffrage, there is no available evidence which indicates specifically that Fisk aided directly in the struggle going on in Tennessee for the next year and a half over the privilege. It is probable, however, that he did cooperate with Brownlow, but he ably covered his tracks from the historian. Brownlow continued his activities, caring nothing for the historian, and when the General Assembly met in October, 1865, he again stated it as his belief that "a loyal [Republican] negro is more eminently entitled to the suffrage than a disloyal white man."⁷⁵ By the first of the year 1866 he had definitely become a Radical. In March, there was no longer any doubt where he stood, for in a speech made in Knoxville in that month he remarked that "The name of Radical has no terrors for me. I have been known as a 'damned blue-light' and a 'damned lunatic,' and I think it cheap if they will now let me off by calling me a 'damned radical.'" ⁷⁶

⁷¹*Ibid.*, July 13, 1865. The test questions by which whites were excluded from the polls are printed in *ibid.*, June 29, 1865.

⁷²*Ibid.*, August 4, 1865; Nashville *Daily Union*, August 1, 1865, contain the information that only 4,300 voters in Nashville were allowed to register for the election and that only half of this number voted.

⁷³For detailed accounts of the convention, see Nashville *Daily Press and Times*, August 8-11, 1865, and Nashville *Daily Union*, August 8, 1865.

⁷⁴Nashville *Daily Press and Times*, August 9, 1865.

⁷⁵Tennessee *Senate Journal*, 1865-66, p. 11.

⁷⁶Nashville *Daily Union*, March 28, 1866.

For the rest of the year, he, the Radical press in the state,⁷⁷ and agents of the Union League club,⁷⁸ worked diligently and persistently for the enfranchisement of the Negro. Since Fisks' sentiments were in accord with his natural allies in this campaign, it may be assumed that he cooperated with them in it. And, after September 1, when General J. R. Lewis became assistant-commissioner of the Bureau, the agency became even more active.

With such pressure there is little wonder that the bill introduced in the General Assembly in January, 1867, designed to enfranchise the Negro, received the support of a majority of the members. On February 26, 1867, the bill was passed.⁷⁹ Immediately both the Conservatives and the followers of Brownlow began a concerted effort to entice the new voters into their respective ranks.⁸⁰ In this campaign, however, the Radicals had all the advantages because of numbers and the legality of their position. The Negro was not allowed to forget that it was Brownlow who had been mostly responsible for opening the polls to him. Also, at this time the Union League led the way in holding Negro conventions throughout the state, and at one of these conventions, in Chattanooga on April 3, Brownlow was endorsed for reelection in the gubernatorial election which was to take place in August, 1867.⁸¹ The Negro conventions continued throughout the spring, and because many of the Negroes were unable to pay their passage and expenses, they were allowed in some cases to ride the trains to the meeting places without paying fare and in other instances they were sent with funds furnished by Bureau agents.⁸² Among those Bureau agents who were particularly assiduous in campaigning for Brownlow was a Captain Walsh, of the Nashville sub-district.⁸³ Before the election, Bureau agents in many counties reported the Negro as being strongly in favor of Brownlow, and the Union League was able to announce that at least four fifths of the new voters had been taken into the Radical fold, bound by oath to vote the Republican ticket.⁸⁴

⁷⁷According to the editor of the *Nashville Daily Press and Times*, January 19, 1867, there were about 45,000 white Republican voters in Tennessee and about 50,000 Conservatives. The only way by which this Conservative majority could be overcome was by enfranchising the Negro. The editor estimated if the Negro could vote, the Radicals would then have a majority of at least 15,000.

⁷⁸The first Union League club had been established in Tennessee in the spring of 1863. *Nashville Union*, April 23, 1863.

⁷⁹*Tennessee Senate Journal*, 1867, p. 355.

⁸⁰*Nashville Daily Press and Times*, March 11, 1867.

⁸¹*Ibid.*, April 6, 1867.

⁸²*Ibid.*, April 17, 1867.

⁸³*Ibid.*, April 26, 1867.

⁸⁴*Ibid.*; I. P. Jones, "Reconstruction in Tennessee," in *Why the Solid South* (Baltimore, 1890), 191.

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The Conservatives, who were supporting Emerson Etheridge in opposition to Brownlow, determined that the only method by which they could defeat Brownlow was to keep the Negro from the polls. Accordingly, they began terrorizing the new voters. The results of their program of intimidation, which was carried on before and after the election, may be partially gathered from an official report made later by General Carlin. His report was that between June and September, 1867, there were 25 murders, 35 assaults with intent to kill, 83 cases of assault and battery, 4 of rape, and 4 of arson committed by Tennessee Conservatives against Negroes of the state.⁸⁵ Moreover, after Brownlow was reelected by a vote of 74,034 to 22,550 on August 1,⁸⁶ many Negroes under contract to Conservatives in Middle and West Tennessee were turned out of their jobs for having supported the Radical party. When this happened the Bureau immediately came to the Negroes' aid. In fact, it seems that assistant-commissioner Carlin expected such to occur, for the day after the election he had the following notice published in several Nashville newspapers: "Let every colored man who was discharged because he would not vote the Conservative ticket, report at once to General Carlin, and make affidavit to that effect. They will be provided for."⁸⁷

After the gubernatorial election of 1867, it was only natural for the Ku Klux Klan to center out the Bureau and the Union League for attack, with the hope that by destroying these two outside organizations the Negro could again be relegated to his old non-political position. In spite of its activities, however, the Negro continued to hold the balance of power in Tennessee politics until the state election of 1869. In the meantime, Brownlow resigned as governor in order to become United States senator, the Union League and Bureau gradually disbanded, and the Conservatives again gained a majority just prior to the election when they were reënf franchised by Governor DeWitt C. Senter. The Radical party was through in the state, and figuratively speaking, the state began a career of peace and prosperity. Even "Parson" Brownlow later in the year maintained that every citizen over twenty-one years of age should be restored to full rights of citizenship.⁸⁸

⁸⁵Howard, *op. cit.*, II, 344.

⁸⁶Charles A. Miller, *The Official and Political Manual of the State of Tennessee* (Nashville, 1890), 170.

⁸⁷Nashville *Daily Press and Times*, August 2, 1867.

⁸⁸Harper's *Weekly*, September 18, 1869.