

V.C.C.

# DOCUMENTARY HISTORY OF RECONSTRUCTION

Political, Military, Social,  
Religious, Educational & Industrial  
1865 to the Present Time

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dividual cases the agent should have in mind minimum rates for his own guidance. By careful inquiry as to the hire of an able-bodied man when the pay went to the master, he will have an approximate test of the value of labor. He must of course consider the entire change of circumstances, and be sure that the laborer has due protection against avarice and extortion. Wages had better be secured by a lien on the crops or land. Employers are desired to enter into written agreements with employes, setting forth stated wages, or securing an interest in the land or crop, or both. All such agreements will be approved by the nearest agent, and a duplicate filed in his office. . .

In order to enforce the fulfilment of contracts on both contracting parties, the Commissioner of the bureau lays down no general rule — the Assistant Commissioner must use the privileges and authority he already has. Provost courts, military commissions, local courts, where the freedmen and refugees have equal rights with other people, are open to his use. In the great majority of cases his own arbitrament, or that of his agent, or the settlement by referees, will be sufficient.

No Assistant Commissioner, or agent, is authorized to tolerate compulsory unpaid labor, except for the legal punishment of crime. Suffering may result to some extent, but suffering is preferred to slavery, and is to some degree the necessary consequence of events.

In all actions the officer should never forget that no substitute for slavery, like apprenticeship without proper consent, or peonage, (i. e., either holding the people by debt, or confining them, without consent, to the land by any system,) will be tolerated.

The Assistant Commissioner will designate one or more of his agents to act as the general superintendent of schools (one for each State) for refugees and freedmen. This officer will work as much as possible in conjunction with State officers who may have school matters in charge. If a general system can be adopted for a State, it is well; but if not, he will at least take cognizance of all that is being done to educate refugees and freedmen, secure proper protection to schools and teachers, promote method and efficiency, correspond with the benevolent

agencies which are supplying his field, and aid the Assistant Commissioner in making his required reports. . .

All public addresses of a character calculated to create discontent are reprehensible; but the Assistant Commissioner and his agents must explain, by constant recapitulation, the principles, laws, and regulations of this bureau to all parties concerned. It is recommended to the Assistant Commissioners to draw up in writing a careful summary to be publicly and privately read by agents throughout their respective districts.

### The Bureau and the Laws of the States

*House Ex. Doc. no. 70, 39 Cong., 1 Sess., p. 52.* Howard's circular letter to assistant commissioners. [October 4, 1865]

STATE laws with regard to apprenticeship will be recognized by this bureau, provided they make no distinction of color; or in case they do so, the said laws applying to white children will be extended to the colored.

Officers of this bureau are regarded as guardians of orphans and minors of freedmen within their respective districts.

The principle to be adhered to with regard to paupers is, that each county, parish, township, or City shall care for and provide for its own poor.

Vagrant laws made for free people and now in force on the statute-books of the States embraced in the operations of this bureau, will be recognized and extended to the freedmen.

### Regulation of Labor Contracts

*House Ex. Doc. no. 70, 39 Cong., 1 Sess., p. 30.* Issued by General A. Baird, New Orleans, Louisiana. [December 4, 1865]

I. . . ALL contracts for labor should be made in triplicate, and should be approved by the agent of this bureau for the parish in which the parties reside; one copy to be retained by the employer, and the other two copies sent to this office — one to be forwarded to Washington.

Contracts made otherwise than as thus prescribed will not be regarded as binding by the Bureau, nor as meriting its inter-

ference to enforce them, unless for the protection of the laborer.

II. As far as practicable, all members of the same family should contract conjointly for their labor, so that the number of useful hands and the number of the infirm who have to be supported may be regarded in fixing the rate of pay. The labor of minor children to be contracted for by their parents or guardian, and, in the absence of either, by the agent of this bureau. . .

IV. Twenty-six days of ten hours each in summer, and nine hours in winter, between the hours of daylight and dark, shall be considered a month.

V. Any work in excess of this will be considered as extra labor, and six hours will be considered as an equivalent for a day's work, and fractional parts of the six hours will be paid for at the same rate.

VI. Laborers working extra time will be allowed a half ration extra for each and every six hour's labor performed.

VII. In addition to the monthly wages paid to laborers, good and wholesome rations, comfortable clothing and quarters, medical attendance and just treatment, and the opportunity for instruction of children will be furnished free of charge; but the rations, clothing and quarters, fuel, and all other privileges granted by the employer, are part of the consideration which he pays for the services of the laborer, and are as really and fully wages as the money contracted to be paid, and are always taken into account in fixing the amount of money wages to be paid.

VIII. The Sabbath day being set apart for the worship of God, no laborer will be required to perform any work on that day, except works of necessity or mercy.

IX. The ration furnished to laborers shall be as follows: One peck of corn meal and five pounds of pork or bacon per week, and the money value of this ration will be taken into the account in fixing the rate of wages to be paid.

X. The allowance of clothing will be two summer and one winter suit for each laborer or member of the family, or clothing may be commuted at the rate of three dollars per month