

# 1. Excerpts from a Report from Major Charles Soule to General Oliver Otis Howard, Commissioner of the Freedmen's Bureau

Orangeburg, S.C.,  
June 12, 1865

General:

To avert disorder and starvation, officers...were sent into the country to explain to white and black alike their condition under the new state of affairs, and to induce the laborers, if possible to resume work upon the crops, which are now in the most critical stage....We have almost invariably met with courteous and hospitable treatment at the hands of the planters, most of whom seem desirous to comply in good faith with the wishes and orders of the Government, and to make the best of a system of labor in which, notwithstanding, they thoroughly disbelieve.

It is found very difficult to disabuse the negroes of the false and exaggerated ideas of freedom they have received, in great measure from our own colored troops. They have been led to expect that all the property of their former masters was to be divided out to them; and the most reasonable fancy which prevails, is that besides receiving their food, clothes, the free rent of houses and gardens, and the privilege of keeping their hogs and poultry, they are to take for themselves all day Saturday and Sunday, and to receive half the crops. Their long experience of slavery has made them so distrustful of all whites, that on many plantations they persist still in giving credit only to the rumors set afloat by people of their own color, and believe that the officers who have addressed them are rebels in disguise. There are many whom the absence of the usual restraint and fear of punishment renders idle, insolent, vagrant and thievish....

Little danger to the welfare of society, or of the country, need be apprehended from the former slaveowners, who appear generally desirous to become good citizens. It is the ignorance, the prejudice, the brutality, and the educated idleness, if so it can be termed, of the freedmen, all attributable, not so much to their race, as to the system of slavery under which they have lived, that are mainly to be watched and placed under restraint. To supply the place of the rigid plantation discipline now suddenly done away with, some well digested code of laws and punishments, adapted to the peculiar position of affairs, should be applied throughout the entire South. The interests of the capitalists and landowners of the South will lead them to make the best possible use of freed labor: but it will be more difficult to convince the freedmen themselves of their true position and prospects. Only actual suffering, starvation, and punishment will drive many of them to work. It is a general complaint on the part of the planters that although the laborers have had fair offers made to them of compensation, including a share of the crops, they nearly all have shortened their day's work several hours, and persist in taking to themselves every Saturday.

In districts remote from our posts of occupation the plantation discipline still prevails, and cases of flogging and shooting are continually brought to the notice of the Commission. Nor are the planters always to be blamed for such measures of self-defense. There must be some restraint in every community, and where there are but two classes, the one educated and intelligent, the other ignorant and degraded, it is preferable, if one class must govern, that it be the former....

A form for making contracts, adapted after consultation with a number of planters, is enclosed herewith. It was found, at the outset, that half the crop was too much to give, if the laborers were also to be fed and clothed until the end of the year. At the wish of General Hartwell, therefore, the planters have been left to make their own proposals, the Commission reserving the right to disapprove such contracts as seemed unjust to the workmen. It has been found, however, that in almost every instance, the offers have been very liberal. [The share of the crop varies...] according to circumstances from one-tenth to one-half (the latter in very rare instances)....The Commission are of opinion that these contracts are very favorable to the workmen. It would appear that so low, uneducated and inefficient a class of laborers as these now suddenly freed, should not receive more pay than Northern farm laborers, allowance being made for difference of circumstances....Were the freedmen to receive more, the relation between capital and labor would be disturbed, and an undue value placed upon the latter, to the prejudice and disadvantage, in the end, of the laborers themselves.

## 2. Excerpts from a Letter from South Carolina Planter Joseph Daniel Pope to the Union military commander of South Carolina

Charleston, So Car  
29 June 1865

Sir:

In visiting the plantations on the Islands of Hilton Head, St. Helena and Port Royal, neglect and decay, overgrown roads and badly cultivated fields were visible everywhere....These observations lead to an inquiry into the causes; and this opens the grave question of free negro labor. Can the freed negroes be made a useful and efficient peasantry? I propose to give you my views with great frankness and candor for in the present agony of the country this is not time for flattery, self delusion or varnished statements. In the middle and upper parts of the State which I had but recently left there was a universal complaint that the negro labor upon the plantations could not be controled. While the planters appeared to be willing to make contracts with their own slaves and others and to engage in the present crop with zeal they assured me that the "freedmen" would not stand to any engagement whatever and the planters had no means of compelling a performance on their part. This is a grave difficulty; important to the whole country North and South....I visited several plantations [where] white contractors [were] trying to cultivate their crops with hired negro labor. The crops were miserable beyond description....I invariably asked "Why is this?" and the invariable answer was "the negroes will not work regularly or systematically". Much was due of course to ignorance of the cultivation of the crops, ignorance of the climate and of the soil, but doubtless the greater part of the default was due to the irregularity and uncertainty of the system of labor.....The negroes employed work when they please and do just as much as they please, they visit the neighboring cities or plantations as they please, do not work on Saturdays at all, get paid for just what they do and rely largely upon hunting and fishing to make up for what they lose in the field; and in this way a crop that is planted for thirty hands is attended by the aggregate labor of ten or twelve hands and the result is certain failure—ruin to the master of the plantation and to the prospects of the country. Labor must be commanded completely or the production of the cotton crop must be abandoned....

Can nothing be done to regulate and control this system of free negro labor so as to make it as useful for the future as slave labor has been profitable in the past?...Careful and judicious legislation from time to time will be necessary....For the present I would make a few practical suggestions:

1. Let the whole white population of the South be at once let in to the cultivation of their lands and the quiet enjoyment of their homes. Those who understand the cultivation of the...the Sea Island cotton crop...must be restored to its cultivation or we shall witness nothing but failure. These valuable cotton and provision lands are now entirely occupied by freed negroes and are groaning under mismanagement and an idle superfluous colored population. The abolition of slavery has worked the most gigantic practical confiscation of property that has ever been enforced in the history of the world....If we are to expect any kind of prosperity the lands at least must be restored.

2. The immediate establishment of some system of "permits" or passports by which the freed negro will be prevented from running all over the country vagabondizing as is now the case. This will tend in a great degree to hold him to his engagements to labor, prevent vagrancy and remove many of the evils now experienced....

3. The quartering of negro soldiers in a community of negro laborers must always be attended with evil consequences. The negro Soldiers are not uncivil to the white citizens but the influence is bad upon the colored population because the negro soldier sets the example (upon a peace establishment) of idleness that is injurious. He encourages habits of immorality and dissipation which must destroy the usefulness of the laborer....

With a liberal spirit and good faith let the North and the South wake up to a Sense of mutual obligation, to the instincts of justice and mercy, and to the fearful crisis that lies before both. If free black labor can not be made industrious, tractable and profitable, let us know the fact at once in order that it may be made to yield its position to free white labor....

### 3. Excerpts from a Speech by Freedmen's Bureau Agent Major Martin Delany

Beaufort, S. C.  
July 24, 1865

If I had been a slave, I would have been most troublesome and not to be conquered by any threat or punishment. I would not have worked, and no one would have dared to come near me. I would have struggled for life or death, and would have thrown fire and sword between them. I know you have been good, only too good. I was told by a friend of mine that when owned by a man and put to work on the field, he laid quietly down and just looked out for the overseer to come along, when he pretended to work very hard. But he confessed to me, that he has never done a fair day's work for his master. And so he was right, so I would have done the same, and all of you ought to have done the same.

People say that you are too lazy to work, that you have not the intelligence to get on for yourselves without being guided and driven to the work by overseers. I say it is a lie, and a blasphemous lie, and I will prove it to be so.

Your masters who lived in opulence, kept you to hard work, by some most contemptible being—called overseer—who chastised and beat you whenever he pleased—while your master lived in some Northern town or in Europe to squander away the wealth only you acquired for him. He never earned a single Dollar in his life. You men and women, every one of you around me, made thousands and thousands of dollars. Only you were the means for your masters to lead the idle and inglorious life, and to give his children the education, which he denied to you, for fear you may awake to conscience. If I look around me, I tell you, all the houses on this Island and in Beaufort, they are all familiar to my eye, they are the same structures which I have met with in Africa. They have all been made by the Negroes....Now tell me from all you have heard from me, are you not worth anything?

Believe not in these School teachers, Emissaries, Ministers and agents, because they never tell you the truth....Believe none but those Agents who are sent out by the Government to enlighten and guide you.

Now I will come to the main purpose for which I have come to see you. As before the whole South depended upon you, now will the whole country will depend upon you. I give you an advice how to get along. Get up a community and get all the lands you can—if you cannot get any singly. Grow as much vegetables etc, as you want for your families; on the other part of land you cultivate Rice and Cotton. if you cannot get the land all yourself, the community can, and so you can divide the profit....

Have your fields in good order and well tilled and planted, and when I pass the fields and see a land well planted and well cared for, then I may be sure from the look of it that it belongs to a free negroe, and when I see a field thinly planted and little cared for, then I may think it belongs to some man who works it with slaves....

[Reporting the above speech by Major Delany to his superiors, Major Edward Stoeber commented: "Major Delany is a thorough hater of the White race....He tells the freedmen to remember that 'they would not have become free, had they not armed themselves and fought for their independence.' He openly acts and speaks contrary to the policy of this Government, advising them not to work for any man, but for themselves."]

#### **4. The Freedmen of Edisto Island Petition the Commissioner of the Freedmen's Bureau and the President for the Opportunity to Obtain Their Own Land**

Edisto Island, S.C.  
October 1865

General:

We want Homesteads; we were promised Homesteads by the government. If It does not carry out the promises Its agents made to us, If the government Having concluded to befriend Its late enemies and to neglect to observe the principles of common faith between Its self and us Its allies In the war you said was over, now takes away from them all right to the soil they stand upon save such as they can get by again working for your late and thier all time enemies. If the government does so we are left In a more unpleasant condition than our former. We are at the mercy of those who are combined to prevent us from getting land enough to lay our Fathers bones upon....

You ask us to forgive the land owners of our Island. You only lost your right arm In war and might forgive them. The man who tied me to a tree & gave me 39 lashes & who stripped and flogged my mother & sister & who will not let me stay in His empty Hut except I will do His planting & be Satisfied with His price & who combines with others to keep away land from me well knowing I would not Have any thing to do with Him If I Had land of my own—that man, I cannot well forgive. Does It look as if He Has forgiven me, seeing How He tries to keep me In a Condition of Helplessness.

General, we cannot remain Here in such condition and If the government permits them to come back we ask It to Help us to reach land where we shall not be slaves nor compelled to work for those who would treat us as such.

To the President of these United States:

....Here is where secession was born and Nurtured. Here is where we have toiled nearly all Our lives as slaves and were treated like dumb Driven cattle. This is our home, we have made These lands what they are. We are the only true and loyal people that were found in possession of these Lands. We have been always ready to strike for Liberty and humanity yea to fight if needs be To preserve this glorious union. Shall not we who Are freedman and have been always true to this Union have the same rights as are enjoyed by Others?....[A]re not our rights as A free people and good citizens of these United States To be considered before the rights of those who were Found in rebellion against this good and just Government (and now being conquered) come (as they Seem) with penitent hearts and beg forgiveness For past offenses and also ask if thier lands Cannot be restored to them. Are these rebellious Spirits to be reinstated in thier possessions And we who have been abused and oppressed For many long years not to be allowed the Privilege of purchasing land But be subject To the will of these large Land owners? God forbid....

We the freedmen of this Island and of the State of South Carolina—Do therefore petition to you as the President of these United States, that some provisions be made by which Every colored man can purchase land and Hold it as his own. We wish to have A home if It be but A few acres. Without some provision is Made our future is sad to look upon....We therefore look to you In this trying hour as A true friend of the poor and Neglected race, for protection and Equal Rights, with the privilege of purchasing A Homestead—A Homestead right here in the Heart of South Carolina.

[Both petitions signed by on behalf of the freedmen by a Committee consisting of Henry Bram, Ishmael Moultrie and yates Sampson]

## 5. Letter from a Freedman to His Former Master

Dayton, Ohio, August 7, 1865

To My Old Master, Colonel P. H. Anderson,  
Big Spring, Tennessee

Sir:

I got your letter and was glad to find you had not forgotten Jourdon, and that you wanted me to come back and live with you again, promising to do better for me than anybody else can. I have often felt uneasy about you. I thought the Yankees would have hung you long before this for harboring Rebs they found at your house. I suppose they never heard about your going to Col. Martin's to kill the Union soldier that was left by his company in their stable. Although you shot at me twice before I left you, I did not want to hear of your being hurt, and am glad you are still living. It would do me good to go back to the dear old home again and see Miss Mary and Miss Martha and Allen, Esther, Green, and Lee. Give my love to them all, and tell them I hope we will meet in the better world, if not in this. I would have gone back to see you all when I was working in the Nashville hospital, but one of the neighbors told me Henry intended to shoot me if he ever got a chance.

I want to know particularly what the good chance is you propose to give me. I am doing tolerably well here; I get \$25 a month, with victuals and clothing; have a comfortable home for Mandy (the folks here call her Mrs. Anderson), and the children, Milly, Jane and Grundy, go to school and are learning well; the teacher says Grundy has a head for a preacher. They go to Sunday School, and Mandy and me attend church regularly. We are kindly treated; sometimes we overhear others saying, "Them colored people were slaves" down in Tennessee. The children feel hurt when they hear such remarks, but I tell them it was no disgrace in Tennessee to belong to Col. Anderson. Many darkies would have been proud, as I used to was, to call you master. Now, if you will write and say what wages you will give me, I will be better able to decide whether it would be to my advantage to move back again.

As to my freedom, which you say I can have, there is nothing to be gained on that score, as I got my free papers in 1864 from the Provost Marshal General of the Department of Nashville. Mandy says she would be afraid to go back without some proof that you are sincerely disposed to treat us justly and kindly—and we have concluded to test your sincerity by asking you to send us our wages for the time we served you. This will make us forget and forgive old scores, and rely on your justice and friendship in the future. I served you faithfully for thirty-two years and Mandy twenty years. At \$25 a month for me, and \$2 a week for Mandy, our earnings would amount to \$11,680. Add to this the interest for the time our wages has been kept back and deduct what you paid for our clothing and three doctor's visits to me, and pulling a tooth for Mandy, and the balance will show what we are in justice entitled to. Please send the money by Adams Express, in care of V. Winters, esq, Dayton, Ohio. If you fail to pay us for faithful labors in the past we can have little faith in your promises in the future. We trust the good Maker has opened your eyes to the wrongs which you and your fathers have done to me and my fathers, in making us toil for you for generations without recompense. Here I draw my wages every Saturday night, but in Tennessee there was never any pay day for the negroes any more than for the horses and cows. Surely there will be a day of reckoning for those who defraud the laborer of his hire.

In answering this letter please state if there would be any safety for my Milly and Jane, who are now grown up and both good-looking girls. You know how it was with poor Matilda and Catherine. I would rather stay here and starve and die if it comes to that than have my girls brought to shame by the violence and wickedness of their young masters. You will please state if there has been any schools opened for the colored children in your neighborhood, the great desire of my life now is to give my children an education, and have them form virtuous habits.

P.S. Say howdy to George Carter, and thank him for taking the pistol from you when you were shooting at me.

From your old servant,  
Jourdon Anderson