

## Freedmen and the Freedman's Bureau: Needs and Actions

Lesson plans for primary sources at the Tennessee State Library & Archives

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**Grade Level:** 5th and 8th Grade

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Visit <https://sos.tn.gov/tsla/education> for additional lesson plans.



**Introduction:** This lesson plan is a limited one-day use of primary sources to assess the goals, actions, and effects of the Freedmen's Bureau in the context of Reconstruction. It is targeted mainly at 5th and 8th graders.

### Guiding Question(s):

- What challenges did newly-freed slaves face after the Civil War ended?
- How did the Freedman's Bureau help the newly-freed slaves?

**Learning Objectives:** In the course of the lesson, students will

- Understand the impact of the Freedmen's Bureau
- Explore challenges faced by the newly-freed slaves

### Curriculum Standards:

**\*All standards in this lesson correspond with the passing of the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments**

**5.44** Explain the development and efforts of the Freedmen's Bureau in helping former slaves begin a new life, including Fisk University. (C, H, P, T,)

**8.70** Identify the significance of the Tennessee Constitution of 1870, including the right of all men to vote and the establishment of a poll tax. (H, P, T, TCA)

**8.72** Explain the restrictions placed on the rights and opportunities of freedmen, including: racial segregation, black codes, and the efforts of the Freedmen's Bureau to address the problems confronting newly freed slaves. (C, H, P, T)

## Background Notes:

**Note 1:** Not all sources are directly connected to the Freedmen's Bureau. Some sources are contemporary connections to the goals and efforts of the Bureau, such as Governor Brownlow's letter regarding the franchise. I have included these sources to show needs of freed men and women and to give a broader picture of Tennessee during Reconstruction. I will mark these less connected sources with an asterisk in the list of sources.

**Note 2:** The lesson depends on student's ability to access the "Object Description" information that accompanies each source as it appears on the TSLA web site. Provided are the links to those descriptions.

## Materials Needed:

1. [\\*Correspondence from William G. Brownlow regarding endorsement of the franchise](#)
2. [Freedman Employment Office form](#)
3. [Ordinance Ratifying Marriages of Ex-slaves and Freedmen](#)
4. [\\*Unpleasant conditions in Nashville for Northern men and freedmen](#)
5. [The Freedmen's Bureau](#)
6. [Teaching The Freedmen](#)
7. [Individual transportation order #67101 for Angeline Taylor](#)
8. [Individual transportation order #67122 for Antony DeGraft](#)
9. [Individual transportation order #67108 for Mary Phinny and Child](#)
10. [Memphis Colored Orphan Asylum](#)
11. [\\*The first vote](#)
12. [Fisk University](#)
13. [\\*Questions to agents of benevolent societies](#)
14. [Freedmen's Bureau Project/Short FBureau introduction](#)
15. [National Archives Freedmen's Bureau brochure](#)

**Lesson Activities: Introductory Activity**—This lesson specifically covers the Freedmen’s Bureau and its attempts to fulfill the needs of the newly freed. Students will need to have a general knowledge of Reconstruction, the end of the Civil War, and rights protected by the 13<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup>, and 15<sup>th</sup> amendments.

### **Lesson Activities Continued: Activity 1**

1. Have students watch the Freedmen's Bureau short film at <http://www.discoverfreedmen.org/> . As they watch, have students answer the following questions:

- What challenges were faced by the newly freed? (food and shelter, fear, employment by former masters, chaos)
- What services did the Freedmen’s Bureau provide to help people face those challenges? (work, schools, basic needs,
- What important information did the Freedmen’s Bureau record? (background, family, history)
- How can that information be important to people today? (know where you’re from, genealogy searches)

### **Lesson Activities Continued: Activity 2**

Provide the students with either a link to (<https://www.archives.gov/research/african-americans/freedmens-bureau>) or a copy of (you can download a pdf at the above address) of the National Archives’s “Freedmen’s Bureau Field Office Records” brochure. Have students read the first section “The Freedmen’s Bureau” and **LIST ways the Freedmen’s Bureau helped former slaves.**

Have students look over the rest of the brochure. For each source on the brochure (listed below) explain HOW that service filled a need of freed African Americans.

- Hawkins Wilson letter
- Teachers’ monthly report
- Freedmen’s right to vote
- Marriage certificate
- Rations issued at Fort Smith
- Land order
- Labor contract

### Lesson Activities Continued: Activity 3

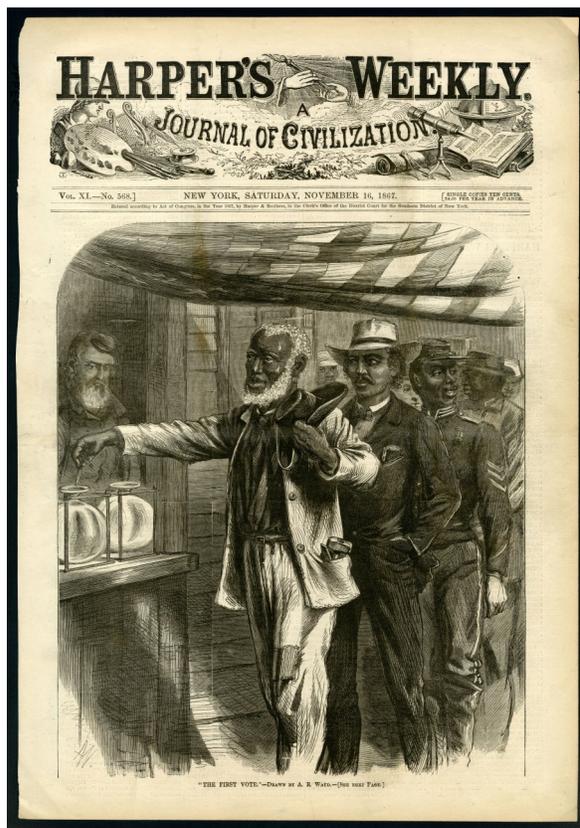
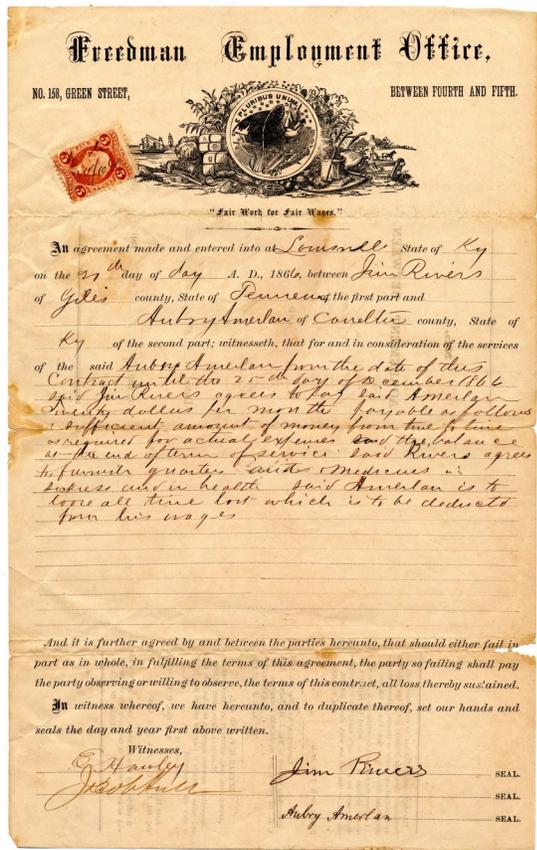
Students will review primary sources from the Tennessee State Library and Archives. See above under the “Materials Needed” list for URLs to link or print out sources 1-13. Provide all thirteen sources in whichever format you choose to student groups (group size, composition, and access to computers at teacher discretion). Each source should have the “Description” information attached if printed.

Have students fill out a graphic organizer (see below) that lists the sources, the need that source filled for freedmen and women, and an interesting or surprising detail from the source.

Debrief groups on the conclusions they reach based on sources. Review the list of ways the Freedmen’s Bureau attempted to assist people making the transition from slavery to freedom.

### Lesson Activities: Extending the Lesson:

As an exit ticket, classwork assignment, or test question, have students review challenges faced by freedmen and women and decide if they think the services provided by the Bureau were effective.



## Freedmen's Bureau Primary Source Analysis

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Source	What service did this source provide for freedmen and women?	What is something that <b>surprised</b> you about this source?