As soon as the war ended — even before, in areas controlled by Union troops — former slaves took advantage of their freedom. Helped by the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands — known as the Freedmen’s Bureau — they searched for lost family members, made their marriages legal, learned to read and write, and organized to fight for their civil rights. In this chapter we’ll explore the expectations that African Americans had for freedom and their priorities once they had it.

Section Contents

- What Justice Entitles Us To [2]
- History of a Scout [3]
- School for Freed People [4]
- “The school houses are crowded, and the people are clamorous for more”[5]
- The Freedmen’s Bureau [6]
- The Raleigh Freedmen’s Convention [7]
- Reuniting Families [8]
- Making Marriages Legal [9]
- Charges of Abuse [10]

User Tags:
African Americans [11]
Chapter Cover [12]
Civil War [13]
Freedmen’s Bureau [14]
history [15]
North Carolina [16]
North Carolina History [17]
Students [18]
Teachers [19]
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[8] https://www.ncpedia.org/anchor/history/reuniting-families
[10] https://www.ncpedia.org/anchor/history/charges-abuse
[12] https://www.ncpedia.org/category/user-tags/chapter-cover