

“A Bleak Future for Freedmen”

The Views of a Former Slave from Tennessee in 1865

Following Tennessee’s ratification of the 13th Amendment ending slavery, a former slave in Nashville wrote a letter to the editor of the *Weekly Anglo-African*. The opinions of Samuel Childress were published in the November 29, 1865 edition of the weekly newspaper.

Mr. Editor:

You desire to know our opinions respecting the policy of the President [Andrew Johnson] concerning the colored race. We are not acquainted with the whole of it.... To us the prospect seems gloomy. We have no permanent homes, and we see no prospect of getting any.

Most of us are accustomed to farm labor, and whatever skill we possess is chiefly in that direction. Land is dear, and few of us are able to buy it. We can hire out to our former masters, it may be said. It is true that we can do so to a considerate extent; but it is well known that the temper of our former masters had not greatly improved toward us.

Is it the intention of the Government to drive us to our worst enemies to ask for work...? Our race has tilled this land for ages; whatever wealth has been accumulated in the South has been acquired mainly by our labor. The profits of it have gone to increase the pride and wickedness of our old masters, while we have been left in ignorance and degradation.

It cannot be denied that the colored race earned nearly all this property. Justice required that it should be paid over to the colored race who had been robbed of it. But what did they do with it? It has gone back again to the very hands are dripping with the blood of murdered prisoners, and whose cruelties cry to heaven for vengeance.

It would seem that it was regarded as a greater crime to be black than to be a rebel. We think the Government ought in justice to the race to provide for their obtaining farms at such prices, and on such terms as would enable our people in a reasonable time to have a home of their own, on which they might hope to earn a living, and educate their children.

Samuel Childress, 1865

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Questions to consider while reading:

- Why did Samuel Childress think that the future for freedmen in the South was “gloomy?”
- What did Childress believe the United States government should do to help the freedmen?