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Ronald E. Butchart. *Schooling the Freed People: Teaching, Learning, and the Struggle for Black Freedom, 1861-1876.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010. xxii + 314 pp. $39.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8078-3420-6.

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Giving the New England Schoolmarm a Time-Out

Throughout the past century of Civil War and Reconstruction historiography, the portrayal of those who taught freed people in the South remained remarkably consistent: single, female, well-educated New England schoolmarms whose antebellum abolitionist credentials inspired their postwar educational work on behalf of freed slaves. W. E. B. DuBois set the parameters of this stereotype in *Souls of Black Folk* (1903), according to Ronald Butchart, to be enhanced by a broad spectrum of historians of the education of freedmen, including the scholars of the Dunning school, Henry Lee Swint, James McPherson, Jacqueline Jones, and Linda Perkins. The historians differed widely as to these teachers' benign or malevolent intentions, and the educators' positive or negative influence on their students, but the essential description of the teachers themselves varied little among the competing interpretations.

"The corps of teachers who actually taught in the freed people's schools bears little resemblance to the reigning image," states Butchart in *Schooling the Freed People* (p. xi). Going beyond the standard reliance on the records of the American Missionary Association archives, Butchart assembled a database of more than 11,600 teachers using missionary and freedmen's aid society records, state archives, Freedmen's Bureau and Freedmen's Bank records, Southern Claims Commission applications, military and pension records, college alumni catalogs, census returns, city directories, and biographical or narrative accounts of the teachers themselves or the schools in which they taught. The data collected as part of Butchart's Freedmen's Teacher Project yielded a vastly different picture of who taught freedmen and women during and after the Civil War.

Far from being comprised of primarily single, white, well-to-do, well-educated, abolitionist-leaning New England women, Butchart's research found that the teaching pool was considerably more interracial than previously suspected and displayed strikingly different gender balances among groups of teachers. He also discovered that New England actually contributed a relatively small percentage of teachers. Furthermore, few teachers identified themselves as abolitionists, and among those who did, this prior affiliation did not necessarily ensure a similar commitment to racial equality or advancement through educational means for the newly freed.

During and after the Civil War the freed people sought literacy wherever and from whomever they could find it, thereby creating an overwhelming need for teachers and educational infrastructure. Despite limited financial resources, the freed people often purchased or rented land on which to locate facilities, contributed the materials and sweat equity to build schoolhouses, and sacrificed so that their children might attend classes during the day, while the adults often made time after work to attend night school. Having previously been denied literacy, freed people understood that "formal learning had value" and "that the codes of power that lay in literacy were essential to a people who were to continue to live among whites" (p. 8). Literacy furthered the process of emancipation for freed people, Butchart concludes, by liberating them to read and interpret the Bible for themselves, "protect themselves against fraud," and prepare themselves for equal rights and citizenship (p. 11).

After establishing the desire for education on the part of freed people, Butchart describes the three distinct groups who served as teachers, as well as their motivations for doing so. African Americans were among the first to address the educational gap for freed people. Some teachers were former slaves who had secretly gained literacy before the war, others had learned to read and write while in military service during the war, and a few had attended institutions of higher education in the North. Whether they hailed from the North or South, however, most African American teachers pos-

sessed meager economic resources and saw teaching not only as an occupation but also as an opportunity to advance their race. Many, like Mary Best, spoke of teaching as a duty: "I felt it my duty to try to elevate the mindes [*sic*] of my color" (p. 43). Some teachers were only moderately more educated than their students but were willing to share whatever skills they had acquired. African American men outnumbered women as teachers, but only slightly, and the gender ratio was the most closely balanced for African American teachers among the three primary groups of educators.

Surprisingly, white southerners formed the largest group of teachers of freed people in the postwar South. Between 1861 and 1876 southern whites were the majority of teachers in black schools in the South, and Butchart estimates that nearly 6,000 southern whites were teaching by 1871. Practicality typically drove their decision to teach, rather than any commitment to the racial elevation of their students. Some southern whites went into teaching hoping to shape the contours of emancipation and forestall a change in southern race relations. Many more, however, were driven to teaching by economic necessity in a region impoverished by war. As a Freedmen's Bureau agent remarked of one white teacher, "Only hunger compels her to teach" (p. 68). Statistically, southern white men outnumbered women teaching in black schools, and the tenure of both genders tended to be brief: "more than half taught no more than one term" (p. 56). Butchart also speculates that teaching in black schools was "a task of convenience" for southern whites, who already lived in the area, often knew the students or their parents, and had few expectations about the importance of their work (p. 57).

Northern whites were the numerically smallest group to teach in southern black schools, with no more than 1,300 northern whites teaching in the South in any one year. In this group women outnumbered men by a ratio of two to one. But whether male or female, their opportunities and motives differed from those of the white southerners around them. Aside from the Union veterans who stayed in the South to teach after being discharged, and those teachers who considered education to be their vocation, northern white teachers overwhelmingly went south through the auspices of a northern aid or missionary society. Unlike African American teachers who felt a compelling duty to their fellow freed people, many northern white teachers sought to fulfill a personal duty of "doing good" and "being useful" in general, rather than any commitment to the racial advancement of their students (p. 105). Thus these teachers did not tend to stay long in education before moving to the next missionary cause that attracted their attention.

Butchart argues that recognizing the great variety of the teachers in black southern schools and their motivations for being there is important to understanding the lessons in emancipation they taught to freed people along with reading, writing, and arithmetic. Being taught by members of their own race mattered to freed people, according to Butchart, as did having teachers for whom teaching only represented a salary, or a means of social control, or their own salvation through good works. He also argues that regardless of the pedagogies of the individual teachers, "black students just out of slavery learned with astonishing speed," with literacy rates steadily increasing throughout the remainder of the nineteenth century (p. 131).

This story does not end on a happy note, however. Butchart's concluding chapter details the determination of many in the white South to crush any advancement by black southerners, including the attainment of education. Redeemer governments slashed education budgets, terror groups like the Ku Klux Klan employed violence to drive teachers and students from the black schools, the Freedmen's Bureau and aid societies withdrew support, and freed people lost much of their own financial and material investments in the schools. Although African Americans continued to struggle for their rights, Butchart laments that "education as the means to achieve that goal proved, in the final analysis, inadequate in the face of white oppression" (p. 178).

Unfortunately, the final two chapters in *Schooling the Freed People* tend to detract from the interpretive promise exhibited in the preceding chapters. Butchart argues that a teacher's background and motivations for teaching made a difference to the students and discusses the pedagogical options in circulation at the time, but he concludes that what was taught in black southern schools closely mirrored that of white northern schools, without elaborating on how the different groups of teachers in the South actually adapted these lessons to their own educational and political agendas in the classroom. The triumph of violent white supremacy also leaves the reader wondering how much the nuances of the black southern educational system Butchart so carefully details earlier in the book ultimately mattered–regardless of their race, gender, region of origin, or level of commitment to their students, a great many teachers of freed people were ultimately harassed into leaving the classroom. No doubt these nuances did matter to the students, but the argument would be better served with more direct testimony to that effect.

With *Schooling the Freed People* and his Freedmen's Teacher Project, Ronald Butchart has made a significant contribution to the historiography of black southern education. He has mined an impressive array of primary sources to demonstrate that teachers in black schools were a much more complex and varied group than the Yankee schoolmarm stereotype previously allowed.

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