

Abraham Lincoln papers

From Ulysses S. Grant to Abraham Lincoln [With Endorsement by Lincoln], June 11, 1863

Near Vicksburg Miss.

June 11th 1863.

Sir:

Enclosed herewith I send report of Chaplain J. Eaton,¹ Gen. Supt. of Contrabans for this Department, embracing a very complete history of what has been done for, and with, this class of people within my command to the present time.²

¹ ID: John Eaton, Jr., an Ohio minister and educator, was appointed chaplain of the 27th Ohio in 1861. In November 1862, General Grant appointed Eaton the general superintendent for freedmen in his department. As the superintendent, Eaton was responsible for aiding and organizing the former slaves who came within the lines of Grant's army. In 1863, Eaton began to recruit freedmen into military units and was commissioned colonel of the 63rd U. S. Colored Infantry. When the Freedmen's Bureau was formed in 1865, Eaton accepted a position as an assistant commissioner and served in this capacity for nearly a year.

² For an abstract of Eaton's report, see Robert Dale Owen to Lincoln, August 5, 1863.

Finding that negroes were coming into our lines in great numbers, and receiving kind or abusive treatment according to the peculiar views of the troops they first come in contact with, and not being able to give that personal attention to their care and use the matter demanded I determined to appoint a General Superintendent over the whole subject and give him such Assistants as the duties assigned him might require. Mr. Eaton was selected for this position. I have given him such Aid as was in my power by the publication from time to time of such orders as seemed to be required, and generally at the suggestion of the Supt.

Mr. Eatons labors in his undertaking have been unremitting and skillful and I fear in many instances very trying. That he has been of very great service to the blacks in having them provided for when otherwise they would have been neglected, and to the Government in finding employment for the negro whereby he might earn what he was receiving, the accompanying report will show, and many hundreds of visiters and officers and soldiers near the different Camps can bear witness to.

I commend the report to your favorable notice and especially that portion of it which would suggest orders regulating the subject of providing for the government of the contraband subject which a Department Commander is not competent to issue.

I have the honor to be

Very respectfully

your obt. svt.

U. S. Grant

Maj. Gen. Vols.

[Endorsed on Envelope by Lincoln:]

Gen. Grant.