

106TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

H. R. 5157

To amend title 44, United States Code, to ensure preservation of the records of the Freedmen's Bureau.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SEPTEMBER 12, 2000

Ms. MILLENDER-MCDONALD (for herself and Mr. WATTS of Oklahoma) introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on Government Reform

A BILL

To amend title 44, United States Code, to ensure preservation of the records of the Freedmen's Bureau.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the "Freedmen's Bureau
5 Records Preservation Act of 2000".

6 **SEC. 2. FINDINGS.**

7 The Congress finds the following:

8 (1) From 1619 to 1800 more than 660,000 Af-
9 rican men, women, and children were torn from

1 their homelands in west Africa and herded onto
2 ships for transport to North America as slaves.

3 (2) Between 10 and 15 percent of these Afri-
4 cans died during the journey across the Atlantic
5 Ocean.

6 (3) The institution of slavery robbed Africans of
7 their natural rights and divided this Nation over the
8 meaning of freedom, the principle upon which this
9 Nation was founded.

10 (4) Paraphrasing President Abraham Lincoln,
11 the Government could not endure permanently half
12 slave and half free.

13 (5) The United States waged the Civil War to
14 free the Nation's slaves, preserve the Nation, and
15 embrace all people as citizens regardless of race in
16 a system of inclusive freedom for all.

17 (6) On January 1, 1863, President Abraham
18 Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation,
19 which declared that individuals held as slaves within
20 the rebellious States “are, and henceforward shall be
21 free”.

22 (7) On April 9, 1865, General Robert E. Lee
23 surrendered the Confederate Army to General Ulys-
24 ses S. Grant, thereby ending the Civil War.

1 (8) In 1865, the Congress established in the
2 War Department the Bureau of Refugees, Freed-
3 men, and Abandoned Lands, commonly referred to
4 as the “Freedmen’s Bureau”, to supervise and man-
5 age all matters relating to refugees and freedmen,
6 and to supervise abandoned and confiscated prop-
7 erty.

8 (9) The records of the Freedmen’s Bureau are
9 a vital source of information for historians and gene-
10 alogists.

11 (10) These records contain a wide range of data
12 about the African-American experience during slav-
13 ery and freedom, including in marriage records,
14 labor contracts, Government rations and back pay
15 records, and indentured contracts for minors.

16 (11) These records are maintained in Alabama,
17 Arkansas, the District of Columbia, Florida, Geor-
18 gia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Delaware, Mis-
19 sissippi, Missouri, North Carolina, South Carolina,
20 Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia.

21 (12) All of these records are originals and, be-
22 cause they are deteriorating, require immediate at-
23 tention.

1 (13) These records are an important link for
 2 African-Americans to their slave and African ances-
 3 tors.

4 (14) Preserving the records of the Freedmen’s
 5 Bureau is a high priority for millions of Americans
 6 interested in Civil War and post-Civil War era his-
 7 tory.

8 **SEC. 3. PRESERVATION OF FREEDMEN’S BUREAU**
 9 **RECORDS.**

10 (a) IN GENERAL.—Chapter 29 of title 44, United
 11 States Code, is amended by adding at the end the fol-
 12 lowing:

13 **“§ 2910. Preservation of Freedmen’s Bureau Records**

14 “The Archivist shall preserve the records of the Bu-
 15 reau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, com-
 16 monly referred to as the ‘Freedmen’s Bureau’, by using—

17 “(1) available technology for restoration of the
 18 documents comprising these records so that they can
 19 be maintained for future generations; and

20 “(2) innovative imaging and indexing tech-
 21 nologies to make these records easily accessible to
 22 the public, including historians, genealogists, novice
 23 genealogy enthusiasts, and students.”.

24 (b) CLERICAL AMENDMENT.—The table of sections
 25 at the beginning of chapter 29 of title 44, United States

- 1 Code, is amended by adding at the end the following new
- 2 item:

“2910. Preservation of freedmen’s bureau records.”.

