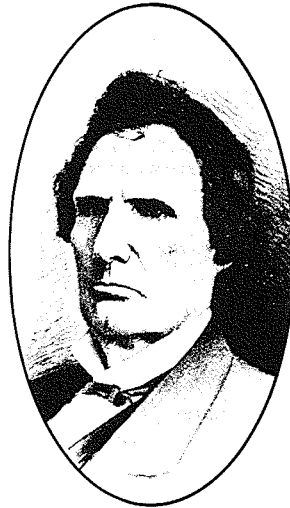




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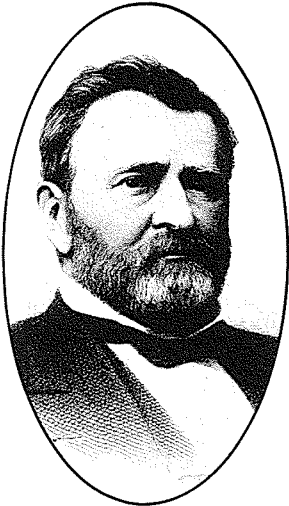
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The principal actors in the drama of Reconstruction were President Abraham Lincoln, Radical Republicans Sen. Charles Sumner of Massachusetts and Rep. Thaddeus Stevens of Pennsylvania, President Andrew Johnson, and President Rutherford B. Hayes, elected in 1876.



Reconstruction

1865–1877

The Reconstruction era after the Civil War has been called “the bloody battleground of American historians”—so fierce have been the scholarly arguments over the missed opportunities following black emancipation, the readmission of Southern states to the Union, and other critical developments of the 1865–1877 period. The successes and failures of Reconstruction retain a special relevance to the civil rights issues of the present day. Here, three noted historians offer their interpretations: Armstead L. Robinson reviews the politics of Reconstruction; James L. Roark analyzes the postwar Southern plantation economy; and James M. McPherson compares the first and second Reconstructions.



THE POLITICS OF RECONSTRUCTION

by Armstead L. Robinson

The first Reconstruction was one of the most critical and turbulent episodes in the American experience. Few periods in the nation’s history have produced greater controversy or left a greater legacy of unresolved social issues to afflict future generations.

The postwar period—from General Robert E. Lee’s surrender at Appomattox in April 1865 through President Rutherford B. Hayes’s inauguration in March 1877—was marked by bitter partisan politics. In essence, the recurring question was how the

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Northern states would follow up their hardwon victory in the Civil War. The downfall of the Confederacy not only assured the permanence of the federal union but also confirmed the destruction of the "peculiar institution" of slavery.

How to readmit 11 former Confederate states and how to guarantee the rights of 3.5 million former slaves became the central issues of Reconstruction. To the extent that our society, a century later, continues to experience racial crises, and that our national politics must reckon with the remnants of a self-consciously "Solid South," it is clear that the first Reconstruction failed to resolve these central issues completely. Thus, the ambiguous heritage of this failure remains relevant to contemporary America.

The partisan battles in Washington during Reconstruction raised very basic questions, questions then focused around Southern readmission and emancipation. The struggle between Congress and the President for control over the process of readmission foreshadowed the subsequent political crises generated by conflicts between an expansive modern Presidency and the statutory powers of the legislative branch.

Reconstruction also produced America's first truly national political scandals, especially the *Crédit Mobilier* and the Whiskey Ring episodes. These scandals forced the country to wrestle with the conflict arising when certain practices condoned in the world of business were transferred to the arena of public trust. And, lastly, Reconstruction raised the question of how far the government would go in the resolution of racial inequality in America.

Confusion and conflict marred the nation's post-Civil War years. What renders Reconstruction such an enigma is the pervasive sense that somehow American society bungled the process of national reconciliation. So complete was the Northern military victory in 1865 that the way seemed clear to make good on Abraham Lincoln's promise, in his second inaugural, of reunification "with malice toward none and charity toward all." Yet malice proved to be the stock in trade of many Reconstruction politicians, and charity is difficult to discern amid the fury

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of Ku Klux Klan violence. Far from generating a national political consensus, Reconstruction was marked by confusing discontinuities as first Lincoln, then Andrew Johnson, then the Radical Republicans, and then Ulysses S. Grant and Rutherford B. Hayes took turns directing and misdirecting Washington's efforts to cope with the ebb and flow of the intertwined national and local struggles over readmission and emancipation.

We normally think of Reconstruction as beginning with the end of the Civil War. However, the political struggles of the postwar period make no sense whatsoever unless viewed as part of a sustained debate whose roots lay in the war itself. Both emancipation and readmission influenced the conduct of the Civil War. Indeed, much of the postwar bickering between the President and Congress must be understood as an attempt to resolve questions raised during the war but left unresolved at its conclusion.

The Spoils of War

The struggle between Lincoln and some of the Republicans in Congress for control over the readmission process opened almost as soon as the war began. In July 1861, a sharp debate arose over a proposal by Illinois Republican Senator Lyman Trumbull that would have given Congress the right to control military governments established in areas recaptured from the Confederacy. The battle over emancipation followed a similar course. The prominent New York abolitionist Lewis Tappan, for example, published a pamphlet on May 14, 1861 that insisted, "Slavery is the cause of the present war . . . What then is the remedy? . . . Immediate Universal Emancipation."

Thus, pressure from antislavery radicals to transform Lincoln's struggle to save the Union into a war against slavery went hand in hand with congressional insistence that the legislature ought to control readmission of the rebel states. Paralleling the military struggle to win the Civil War were a series of disputes about how best to conduct it and how to get the most from the hoped-for victory.

The wartime argument within the ruling Republican Party over the readmission question turned upon the theoretical issue of how to describe the process of secession. Radicals such as Senator Charles Sumner of Massachusetts and Representative Thaddeus Stevens of Pennsylvania argued that secession ought to be viewed as "state suicide," while Lincoln insisted that secession was the result of treasonous political leadership. Beneath these semantic differences lay the substance of their dis-

pute. For if the state suicide theory prevailed, then Articles I and IV* of the Constitution gave Congress the obligation to establish the terms upon which these former states could be re-created. But if the treasonous leadership concept was accepted, then all a president had to do was use his power as commander in chief to punish the traitors and restore civil order. Having done so, he could then empower loyal Union men to revive the state and restore it to its former status.

By recognizing a phantom government headed by Francis H. Pierpont at Wheeling as the legitimate government of Virginia, Lincoln actually began presidential Reconstruction in June 1861. This regime had no power. However, Lincoln hoped that the Northern army would install Pierpont as Virginia's governor as soon as Richmond fell. But the Confederacy blocked this plan by clinging stubbornly to its national capital. In the end, Lincoln found himself compelled in late 1862 to accept the creation by Congress of a new state, West Virginia, which was carved out of Virginia's territory. Pierpont was replaced. The new state clearly owed its legitimacy to congressional action and not to presidential dispensation.

Lincoln's inability to coerce Congress on the readmission question dogged his wartime Reconstruction efforts. He could and did appoint military governors to manage civil affairs in states conquered by the Union army. However, he could not compel Congress to accept representatives elected by these governments. And as long as Congress refused to accept these representatives, the states would continue to be excluded from the federal government.

The Price of Readmission

The process of wartime presidential Reconstruction went furthest in Louisiana because the Union army managed to capture the state's capital at Baton Rouge as well as its major commercial center, New Orleans. In Louisiana, representatives elected in 1863 were actually seated by Congress.

Heartened by apparent congressional acquiescence, Lincoln proceeded in December 1863 to promulgate his famous 10 percent amnesty plan, a plan that offered readmission whenever a number of voters equal to 10 percent of the state's vote in the

* Article I, Section 5—"Each House shall be the judge of the elections, returns and qualifications of its own members. . . ." Article IV, Section 3—"New States may be admitted by the Congress into this Union; but no new State shall be formed or erected within the jurisdiction of any other State; nor any State be formed by the junction of two or more States, or parts of States, without the consent of the Legislatures of the States concerned as well as of the Congress."

1860 presidential election took the oath of allegiance. Congress responded early in 1864, first by refusing to continue accepting Louisiana's delegation, and second by enacting its own plan for Reconstruction, a version embodied in the Wade-Davis bill. Because Lincoln's renomination was by no means a certainty in the critical summer of 1864, the President chose to sidestep the issue. He blocked the Wade-Davis bill by pocket veto on July 7 and then issued a proclamation on July 8, 1865 that offered the seceded states the option of seeking readmission under his 10 percent plan or under the more stringent requirements of Wade-Davis.*

Emancipation also followed a zigzag course. But while he acted boldly on the readmission question from the outset, on the emancipation issue Lincoln evinced a marked inclination to wait and see.† Kenneth Stampp offers the most cogent summary of the new perspective on the evolution of Lincoln's emancipation policy: "If it was Lincoln's destiny to go down in history as the great Emancipator, rarely has a man embraced his destiny with greater reluctance than he."¹

Lincoln moved toward emancipation when it became clear that freeing the Confederacy's slaves—and thus depriving the South of its black labor force—was the only means available to turn the balance of the Civil War decisively in the North's favor. Lincoln's Secretary of the Navy, Gideon Welles, recorded the first public utterance of the President's change of mind on July 13, 1862. While riding in a funeral procession, Welles recalled, Lincoln mused about emancipation: "He had given it much thought and had about come to the conclusion that it was a military necessity absolutely essential for the salvation of the Union, that we must free the slaves or be ourselves subdued. . . ."²

The President's reservations about his power to free the slaves show clearly in his Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation of September 22, 1862. Emancipation, as Lincoln proclaimed it, did not affect slaves in states that had not seceded, such as Delaware, Maryland, Kentucky, and Missouri, nor did it

* The Wade-Davis bill provided that each Confederate state was to be ruled temporarily by a military governor who was to supervise the enrollment of white male citizens. A majority of the enrolled electorate, rather than merely 10 percent, was required to take an "ironclad" oath of allegiance before a legal state government could be reconstituted.

† In the course of his debates with Stephen Douglas in 1858, Lincoln asserted, "I am not, nor have ever been, in favor of bringing about in any way the social and political equality of the white and black races." The President applied these beliefs during the Civil War when he urged a group of black leaders meeting at the White House in August 1862 to leave the United States if they wanted to achieve equality. "Go where you are treated the best," Lincoln advised.

apply to slaves in areas conquered by the Northern army prior to September 1862, such as Tennessee and southern Louisiana. (Freedom for these slaves had to await either state action or ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment in December 1865.)

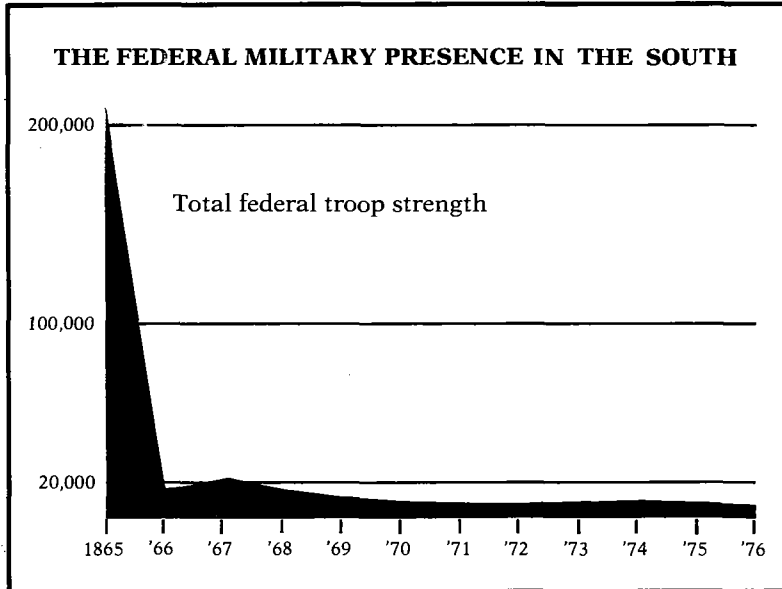
What Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation actually offered was a powerful inducement for slaves to run away from their masters. As we shall see, the threat of a slave exodus proved critically important for the course of Reconstruction. But the tentative nature of Lincoln's strategy toward emancipation reflected his sense that the prospect of freeing the slaves raised fundamental political questions in the North.

Speaking in Washington in February 1862, Senator Trumbull expressed the perspective that most Northerners took on the question of wartime emancipation. Trumbull demanded to know what plans were being made to cope with the newly freed blacks if emancipation ever came about: "We do not want them set free to come among us; we know it is wrong that the rebels should have the benefit of their services to fight us; but what do you propose to do with them?"³

Popular resistance to resettlement of the freed blacks outside the South found expression in a series of wartime race riots, most prominently the 1863 Copperhead draft riots in New York, Detroit, and Chicago, sparked largely by the reluctance of new Irish and German immigrants to be conscripted for a war of emancipation. What these riots told Northern politicians was very clear: Readmission was a national political question but the social consequences of emancipation would ultimately have to be resolved within the former slave states.

As slaves became aware of the promise of freedom contained in Lincoln's emancipation policy, they ran away from their plantations whenever Northern troops drew near. Because much of the Union army tended to move by water—as in the Sea Island, South Carolina, Fort Henry, and Vicksburg campaigns—its advances brought it into close proximity with the largest plantation regions in the South. Slaveholders in such areas had little choice if they expected to retain their human property; either they had to move or watch most of their slaves flee. Plantation abandonment made short-term sense. But by leaving vacant much of the richest land in the South, such as the 20-mile swath along the Mississippi River from Memphis to New Orleans, the exodus of planters and slaves created an opportunity for significant land redistribution in the postwar period.

Such redistribution became the heart of the earliest Radical Republican plan for coping with emancipation. Senator Sumner wrote in March 1865, "We must see that the freedmen are estab-



Source: James E. Sefton, *The United States Army and Reconstruction, 1865-1877* (La. State Univ., 1967).

To uphold Reconstruction laws, federal troops remained in the South for a decade: 20,117 of them in 1867, but only 6,011 in 1876.

lished on the soil and that they may become proprietors. From the beginning I have regarded confiscation only as ancillary to emancipation."⁴ By giving the freed people small plots of land upon which they could support themselves, Radicals felt they would remove any inducement to a massive migration of land-hungry blacks out of the South. These plans were embodied in the Freedmen's Bureau bill passed by Congress and signed into law by Lincoln on March 3, 1865, a month before Appomattox. Although the agency created by this law came to be known as the Freedmen's Bureau, its actual title was the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen and Abandoned Lands.

The bureau was designed as a general welfare agency whose basic purpose was to assist in the reconstruction of the South. It was empowered to take control of property abandoned during the war and to distribute it in 40-acre parcels to poor whites and poor blacks. The inclusion of "refugees," that is, poor whites, stemmed from the Northern Democrats' refusal to allow the bill to pass until it did as much for whites as it promised to do for blacks; it seemed unfair to give land only to blacks when many

whites were both impoverished and landless. And indeed, in many states, the Freedmen's Bureau actually fed more poor whites than former slaves during the lean summer of 1865.

Neither poor whites nor poor blacks were ever likely to benefit permanently from the bill because Lincoln insisted as early as 1861 that no federal confiscation act could remove the actual title to the land from the heirs of the former owners. Thus, the bill provided for the lease of abandoned land to blacks and whites for only four years, after which time the government would sell the lessees "whatever title it can convey."

Political Plotting

Later, the Radicals renewed the legislative battle for permanent land confiscation and distribution. They failed in their efforts to make this part of the First Reconstruction Act passed on March 2, 1867. By the time the Second Reconstruction Act was enacted on March 23, 1867, land distribution was a dead issue. It was a keen disappointment to Senator Sumner who, during the debates on the Reconstruction bills, insisted that Reconstruction "would be incomplete unless in some way we secured to the freedmen a piece of land."⁵

All in all, a tangled situation greeted Andrew Johnson as he embarked upon his Presidency. In the aftermath of Lincoln's assassination on April 14, 1865, the Republican Party found itself in the anomalous position of having a former Southern Democrat as its titular head. Johnson had been a senator from Tennessee and had served during the war as the state's military governor. Lincoln selected Johnson as his running mate in 1864 to broaden the base of support for his *ad hoc* National Union Party. After the assassination, Johnson recognized that he had no real future in the Republican Party; he used his powers during the earliest stages of presidential Reconstruction trying to build a national conservative coalition that he could lead.

But Johnson faced politicians who had postwar goals of their own. Northern Democrats, led by Representative Samuel Cox of Ohio, looked with horror upon Republican success at exploiting the wartime crisis to push through most of its prewar high-tariff, pro-industry economic program as embodied in the Morrill Tariffs, the Homestead Acts and railroad land grants.*

*The Morrill Tariff, enacted March 2, 1861, ended a period of low duties by imposing an import tax of 10 percent on specific items. There was a gradual rise in duties to an average of 47 percent by 1870. The Homestead Act of May 20, 1862 granted a 160-acre parcel of public land to any settler who would reside on it for five years and pay a small fee. The railroad land grants gave generous portions of public land to railroads as inducements to extend the rail system.

Democratic hopes for the future lay in speedily reviving their Southern wing so as to forestall further Republican political gains.

Moderate Republicans, like Senator John Sherman of Ohio, wanted to perpetuate their party's rule while using Reconstruction to guarantee the inviolability of the Union. Their plan was to create a Republican Party in the South at the local level to garner black votes and to ease the task of electing a Republican president. Radical Republicans shared Sherman's goals of political power and national unity and hoped to implement them by effecting the removal of those ante-bellum Southern leaders thought responsible for starting the war. Realizing the delicacy of their position, Southern Democrats, led by former Governor Herschel Johnson of Georgia, fought a masterful holding action, hoping that delays in Washington and in the South would prevent the imposition of truly radical changes on the structure of Southern society. Thus, the immediate postwar period produced conflicting visions about how the process of reunification ought to be accomplished. That the Radical Republicans triumphed for a time suggests how tangled and confused these politics actually became.

Presidential Power Plays

With Congress in adjournment from April through December 1865, President Andrew Johnson had an opportunity in the early months after Lincoln's death to exert great influence upon the outcome of these disputes. During that summer, Johnson used his presidential pardon and amnesty powers to relieve Southern landowners from the civil disabilities (*e.g.* loss of the right to vote and to hold public office) contemplated in the Freedmen's Bureau bill while simultaneously asserting the President's power to supervise the process of readmission. In his Amnesty and North Carolina proclamations, both issued on May 19, 1865, Johnson set out to complete Lincoln's program.

By pardoning thousands of former Confederates, Johnson not only gave them back their land—scotching any redistribution plans—but also allowed them to re-enter politics in their states during the crucial autumn and fall elections in 1865, elections that determined the entire slate of state officers and congressional representatives. Thus Johnson hoped to establish conservative (Democratic) governments headed by men who owed their positions to him. But Johnson could not control what the Southerners did with the power he gave them. In every former Confederate state except Tennessee and Texas, the pro-

visional governments held elections that put numerous former Confederate officials—men like the Confederacy's former Vice President, Alexander Stephens—in high state and national posts.

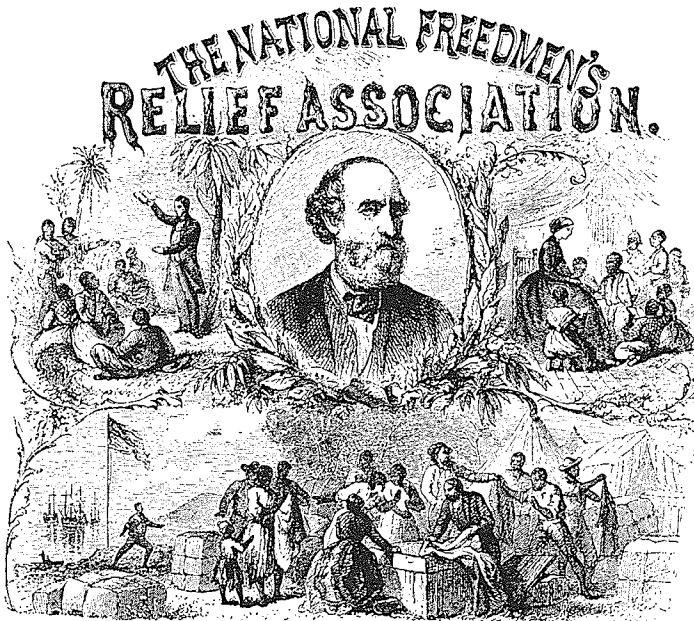
During this same critical period of 1865, the reconstituted Southern state legislatures took their turn at coping with emancipation. In South Carolina, the legislature declared as vagrants any blacks found without regular employment; it then decreed that blacks could not leave the premises without their "master's" permission; and finally, it barred blacks from any non-agricultural jobs or the skilled trades without special permission from a local judge. As a group, these laws, which came to be known as the "black codes," had the effect of denying the recently freed former slaves most of their basic citizenship rights. The blacks could neither vote nor serve on juries and they were subject to vagrancy laws designed to control the labor force by restricting blacks' movements.

Southern Self-Determination

By propelling so many former Confederates into high offices and by enacting what many Northerners considered to be oppressive black codes, Johnson's provisional governments provided ammunition for the President's Radical adversaries. Johnson temporized on the black codes, refusing to condemn them, perhaps because he felt that "white men should determine the way of life that was to be led in the Southern states." When the commissioner of the Freedmen's Bureau, General O. O. Howard, issued decrees in the fall of 1865 that invalidated the Mississippi and South Carolina black codes, Johnson responded to Southern protests by observing that, "none of the (codes) should be nullified except by courts of law."

Johnson's complicity in the attempt to deny civil rights to former slaves allowed congressional Radicals to brand him a Southern sympathizer. In addition, Johnson played into the Radicals' hands by making ill-tempered personal attacks on their leaders. During a celebration of Washington's Birthday on February 22, 1866, the President delivered an off-the-cuff speech attacking his congressional opponents. When challenged to give the names of the men he said were as guilty of treason as the Confederacy's leaders, Johnson replied, "A gentleman calls for their names. Well, I suppose I should give them . . . I say Thaddeus Stevens of Pennsylvania—I say Charles Sumner of Massachusetts—I say Wendell Phillips of Massachusetts."⁶

Having decided to fight the Radicals rather than com-



Reprinted by permission of Princeton University Press from The Struggle for Equality by James M. McPherson, 1964.

The National Freedmen's Relief Association, privately organized in 1862 to help freed slaves, was the precursor of the Freedmen's Bureau.

promise with them, Johnson achieved some initial successes with his vetoes of a bill to strengthen and extend the life of the Freedmen's Bureau in February 1866 and of a civil rights bill in March 1866. But the tide turned quickly. The hasty actions of the governments Johnson created in the South—such as passage of the black codes—and Johnson's own misreading of the national political temper combined to force moderate Republicans, like Senator John Sherman of Ohio, into the Radical camp; it soon became clear that there was no alternative between support for Johnson's apparently pro-Confederate policies and support for the Radicals, who at least remained loyal to the Union.

Johnson looked to the November 1866 congressional elections for popular vindication. Unfortunately for him, during the spring and summer of 1866, race riots erupted in Memphis and New Orleans, riots initiated by Southern whites enraged at what they considered disrespectful conduct by former slaves. The riots added to the North's growing conviction that former

Confederates would not accept the war's results. Although Johnson embarked upon an energetic "swing around the circle" through New England and the Midwest trying to stem the tide, Republicans swept all before them in the fall elections, winning two-thirds majorities in both houses of Congress.

Taking this victory as a mandate for radical action, Congress passed four Reconstruction acts between March 1867 and July 1868. These laws embodied the state suicide theory against which Lincoln had struggled for so long. Former states were to be treated as territories, complete with military governors under the control of Congress. The former states had to adopt new constitutions in order to qualify for readmission at Congress's discretion. These constitutions had to allow all adult males to vote, blacks as well as whites; prominent former Confederates were barred from the conventions in which the new constitutions were drafted and the states had to ratify the Fourteenth Amendment as a condition for readmission.

The Futility of Impeachment

Passage of the Reconstruction acts marked the height of the Radical Republicans' power but they, in turn, soon squandered this influence in a futile effort to remove Andrew Johnson from the Presidency. Many congressional Radicals viewed Johnson's conduct of his office as verging on treason. For example, during an unsuccessful effort in 1867 to have the House of Representatives impeach Johnson, the House Judiciary Committee accused the President of trying to reconstruct the "Rebel states in accordance with his own will, in the interests of the great criminals who carried them into rebellion." This effort failed, in large measure because the Judiciary Committee could find no impeachable offense.

The Radicals tried again and in February 1868 they succeeded in getting the House to vote for Johnson's impeachment. During the Senate trial, Sumner and Stevens exerted tremendous personal, political, and moral pressure to achieve Johnson's conviction and removal and they came within a razor's edge of achieving their goal. The Senate's vote on each of the 11 articles of impeachment was 35 for to 19 against, just one vote short of the required two-thirds majority.

This episode was a turning point of the whole Reconstruction story: the failure to oust Johnson served to shatter the Radicals' political power. Neither Stevens nor Sumner ever recovered his former influence. Grant's nomination and election as President in the 1868 campaign signalled the end of effective

BLACK SOLDIERS AND RECONSTRUCTION

Nearly 180,000 black soldiers (including 100 commissioned officers) fought for the Union during the Civil War. Several thousand of these veterans were stationed in the South as part of the occupation forces during the first year of Reconstruction. Some Southern historians—among them, E. Merton Coulter in *The South During Reconstruction, 1865-1877* (1947)—have maintained that black occupation soldiers “ravished white women” and exerted a “vicious influence.” Such assertions reflect the bias of the Southern interpretation; the black soldiers, more than three-quarters of them former slaves, were generally better disciplined than white soldiers.

To placate Southern whites during the pre-radical phase of Reconstruction (1865-66), the army quietly withdrew its black troops from the South in 1866. By this time nearly all of the black (and white) soldiers in the great Civil War volunteer army had been demobilized. Most black veterans returned to their Southern homes. There, some of them joined the state militia regiments—some black and some racially mixed—formed by Republican governors, notably in South Carolina, Louisiana and Mississippi, to protect freedmen and Republicans against Ku Klux Klan violence. In most of the armed clashes between the militia and white paramilitary groups, the whites were victorious.

Although Southern historians have often blamed the black militia for provoking racial bitterness and violence, the truth was more nearly the reverse. As in the case of the black Union soldiers, it was not the militia's behavior but its very existence that inflamed white hatred. Armed black men in uniform were the most frightening symbol to whites of the racial revolution of the late 1860s and therefore attracted the most concentrated counter-revolutionary violence.

—James M. McPherson

Radical control in Congress as a group of moderate conservative Republicans led by John Sherman seized the reins of power. Ironically, the Radicals lost national power just at the point when their Reconstruction program was being put into effect in the former Confederate states. They were forced to watch from the sidelines as the more conservative Grant administration temporized and delayed implementing a Radical program with which it disagreed.

This Radical plan for Reconstruction looked toward creating new political alignments in the South. Only in South Caro-

lina and Louisiana were black voters likely to be able to sustain a majority position. Thus, in the rest of the former Confederacy, Radicals sought to fashion a biracial coalition of poor whites and poor blacks, with some assistance from wealthy former Whigs such as Mississippi's James Alcorn. As improbable as it may sound, these alliances worked for a time during 1867–68, especially in Mississippi. The constitutional conventions mandated by the Reconstruction acts proceeded to modernize archaic Southern state constitutions. They updated the criminal codes, chiefly by effecting a sharp reduction in the number of capital crimes. The conventions also established a whole range of social services unknown in pre-Civil War times, such as state-supported public schools and institutions for the care of the retarded. Indeed, the brief Reconstruction-era alliances of poor whites and poor blacks brought about major changes in the laws of every former Confederate state before the white counter-revolution began.

The wealthy slaveholding group which led the South into the war did not need to be told that this newly forged Republican coalition had the potential to remain in power simply because it represented a majority of the voters. Predictably, these ante-bellum leaders reacted bitterly to every Radical move. For example, during the summer of 1866, the *Memphis Avalanche*, a conservative newspaper, protested sharply when it discovered that the Freedmen's Bureau intended to continue the policy of maintaining schools for former slaves. By the fall of 1865, these Bureau schools were offering blacks in Memphis formal instruction in basic literacy; hundreds of freed people, from children to the very elderly, seized this new opportunity. The *Avalanche* disapproved of federal interference in what it considered local social matters, and was especially indignant about schools that taught "Ethiopian wretches to play the piano."

Ending Republican Rule

Similarly, the Republican plan for biracial coalitions among the poor found itself a target for conservative criticism. In August 1868, the Raleigh, North Carolina *Daily Sentinel* quoted the former chief justice of the state's supreme court as saying he had joined the Republican party in order to put "an end to that alliance between the negro and the lower class white which is the other side of the Republican coin." In short, Radical Reconstruction confronted the South's white political leadership with a serious threat to its survival. Responding to the threat, this leadership used whatever means seemed necessary

to terminate Republican rule.

These means varied greatly from state to state. In Virginia, conservatives led by Alexander H. H. Stuart were able peacefully to delay action on the 1868 constitution until they could dominate the election that ensued in 1870. As a result, although Gilbert Walker, the first governor selected under the new constitution, was a Republican, he owed his position to conservative influence; Walker pursued a course so mild that Virginia is generally regarded as having escaped congressional Reconstruction. In Mississippi, on the other hand, conservative whites endured Republican control from 1867 through 1875. In 1876, these conservatives employed racial demagoguery, terrorism, fraud, bribery, and corruption to remove the Republican government. Conservatives threatened to kill any white man caught engaging in Republican political activity, and they warned that blacks who voted Republican would never find employment. Where threats failed, violence was used; indeed, the Democratic slogan in 1875 was, "Carry the election peaceably if we can, forcibly if we must." Yet, in South Carolina, Democrats were unable to oust the Republicans until the 1876 presidential campaign. By removing federal troops in 1877, President Hayes permitted local conservatives to complete the destruction of South Carolina's Republican Party.

The Redeemers

Among the most persistent of Reconstruction myths are those which seek to justify the tactics employed by the self-styled "Redeemers" as they struggled to "rescue" the South from Republican control. By depicting the Republican state governments as being wastefully corrupt regimes dominated by ignorant former slaves acting as dupes for vicious scalawags and greedy carpetbaggers, the Redeemers, who were mostly wealthy former slaveowners, tried to justify their use of extralegal means. Myths die hard, particularly when they appeal to regional or racial pride.

Corruption certainly existed in Reconstruction state governments, as in the fraudulent misappropriation of Florida railroad bonds in the 1870s. But these governments also created public schools across the South, a region that possessed none before the Civil War. And the Redeemers, themselves, did not put an end to corruption (though they did cut back the public schools severely).

We ought not to allow ideology to confuse our perceptions of what actually occurred during Reconstruction. A large number

of poor men, black and white, found themselves in positions of real political power for the first time. Mistakes were made but there were solid achievements as well. Given the contemporary background of national political corruption, the Tweed Ring in New York City, and the *Crédit Mobilier* and Whiskey Ring scandals in Washington, D.C., the corruption of Reconstruction state governments was small potatoes indeed.

The End of Reconstruction

Reconstruction ended as it began, amid bitter partisan conflict and confusion. In the November 7, 1876 balloting for President, Samuel J. Tilden, the Democratic nominee, received 184 of the 185 electoral college votes needed to win. Rutherford B. Hayes, the Republican, received only 165. But there were 20 disputed electoral votes in four states that held the balance—South Carolina, Florida, Louisiana, and Oregon.

For Hayes to win, some method had to be found through which each of the 20 disputed votes could be awarded to him. A deal was struck between Southern Democrats willing to abandon their party's nominee and Hayes's representatives. As it happened, South Carolina, Florida, and Louisiana were the last states in which garrisons of federal troops were still nominally active in overseeing civil affairs. Southerners knew that Tilden intended to remove these troops. But they sided with Hayes in return for concessions and promises, including the U.S. Postmaster Generalship and federal assistance for Southern internal improvements—such as repairing Civil War damage to river levees and providing federal subsidies for the Southern Pacific Railroad.

No one would argue that Reconstruction offers noble examples of how democracy ought to operate. The corruption of the Grant era followed hard on the heels of Radical moral idealism, when this idealism spent its force during the futile effort to remove Andrew Johnson from the Presidency. The Grant era was marked by a Southern strategy that practiced benign neglect as far as enforcing Radical Reconstruction. Indeed, so alienated did the Radicals become that they supported Horace Greeley's liberal Republican revolt against Grant's conservatism; Greeley ran an unsuccessful campaign for the Presidency on a national fusion ticket with the Democrats. Grant defeated Greeley in 1872, running on a platform that restated his 1868 campaign slogan, "Let us have Peace." Thus, Grant's two victories reflected a national yearning for a period of normalcy after the tumult of Civil War and Radical Reconstruction.

Grant's status quo attitude on civil rights enforcement mirrored the country's reversion to a laissez faire ideology; one saw the reassertion of the ideal that each person ought to take care of himself, with the government assuming as small a role as possible in the resolution of social problems.

History seldom repeats itself and never in precisely the same context. But there are uncanny parallels between the Civil Rights Era out of which we are emerging and the Reconstruction period. In the cases of both Andrew Johnson and Richard Nixon, the President who followed an often unpopular wartime leader found himself beset by congressional furies intent upon reasserting the power of the legislative branch, even if this required removing him from office. In both instances, a period of explicit national commitment to the cause of civil rights was followed by a conscious drawing back as new administrations refused to push vigorously for the enforcement of laws with which they disagreed. And in both instances, these more conservative administrations generated major political scandals, scandals that touched the Presidency itself.

Historian C. Vann Woodward put it best when he argued that the first Reconstruction willed a legacy of ambiguity to our time. It is a legacy seen in the continuing struggle to integrate blacks fully into American society and to enable them to share fully in the fruits of that society; a struggle to give further substance to the American dream of equal opportunity.

1. Kenneth M. Stampp, *The Era of Reconstruction: 1865-1877*, New York: Knopf, 1965, p. 44.
2. *The Diary of Gideon Welles*, Cambridge: Houghton-Mifflin, 1911, Vol. 1, p. 71.
3. *Congressional Globe*, 37th Congress, 2nd Session, 1862, p. 2301.
4. James M. McPherson, *The Struggle for Equality: Abolitionists and the Negro in the Civil War and Reconstruction*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964, p. 408.
5. David Donald, *Charles Sumner and the Rights of Man*, New York: Knopf, 1970, p. 299.
6. Edward McPherson, *The Political History of the United States of America During the Period of Reconstruction*, New York: DaCapo, 1972, p. 61.