

History 225

Re: Notes/ Outline Chpt. 7

I. Composition of Congressional(Radical)Governments

[Note: Test Foner against the Tragic Legend view of these Racial governments]

A. New black leaders:

Begin w/ suffrage was not something thrust upon an indifferent mass of freedmen. They were avid for the vote; they were not "voting cattle" as the TL view would have it.

Some of the black political activists were not from the South. Many were preachers, teachers, lawyers, from the North or Canada. There were native blacks who assumed leadership rolls--former blacksmiths, carpenters, clerks, waiters, and former house servants of the old planter class.

Blacks were all aligned with the Republican party, of course, because there was no real choice between a party that gave them civil and political rights and a party whose stock-in-trade was racist demagoguery.

The organization through which black activists worked in the Reconstructed states were the Loyal Leagues. These were political clubs under the control of agents of the Republican party. The Loyal Leagues were only one of the means by which blacks were politicized.

Black churches. They gave the freedman their first chance to handle their own affairs in their own institution. Black men and women, for the first time in their lives, became decision-makers: learning how to cope with finances, cooperation, and management. Ultimately, the church would help shelter the black community against white hostility when Reconstruction came to an end.

Service in the Union. Former black soldiers had been politicized during the war when they had to deal with all forms of white discrimination in the Union Army--unequal pay issues, exclusion from officer status, and myriad forms of racism they confronted from the whites in Blue and Gray.

B. Republican Coalition

In addition to solid black support for the Republican party the newly

Perhaps the most important generalization to be made about the role of African Americans in reconstruction are (1) that while they had influence in all southern radical govts they did not control any of them.

According to Foner, Northern whites (carpetbaggers) controlled most of the key committees and drafted most of the important provisions of the new constitutions.

Native southern whites (scalawags) made up the largest group of the delegates in these state constitutional conventions.

Few A/A were elected to high office. During the course of reconstruction in the South some did serve as lieutenant governors, secretaries of state, treasurers, speakers of the house, superintendent of education, etc. In all two blacks were elected to the U.S. Senate from Mississippi-- (Hiram Revels and Blanche Bruce and 14 served in the House of Representatives.

The real story of black political activism was at the local level. Local blacks leaders had to steer a course of moderation with one eye on Northern support for Reconstruction and another on the growing incidents of white terror while keeping black rank-and-file constituents tied to their leadership.

Black leaders were generally moderate on all issues except civil and political rights.

Not-so-
Black
republic
had
back

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Source: Foner, Reconstruction

Re: Addendum Notes on Composition of Congressional Reconstrion Govts.

Black Leaders: The chief instrument for politicaally mobilizing the black community were the Union Leagues. beginning as middle-class patriotic clubs in the North during the Civil War, the League emerged as the political voice of impoverished black freedmen.

Blacks were already politically active before the new Congressional Reconstruction Acts (we discussed the mobilization of the black community). Now with the new Reconstruction govts. blacks were registered to vote and poured into the League. By the end of 1867 it seemd that virtually blacxk voter in the South was enrolled in the Union League.

Need to refer to Foner addendum on who the emergent black was. A profile is needed. See addendum for Black Political Profile:

See the migration of blacks (free blacks from Northern urban centyers into the South). Reconstruction was one of the few times in American history that the South offered black men of talent and ambition opportunities to not only serve their race but greater possibilities for personal advancement than existed in the North.

The main work of the League was in the area of politics and political education. Education. For poorer and newly freed blacks the land question was a major concern. It was regarded as a way out from under the contract labor system that was replacing slavery.

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Carpetbaggers: Make the point that while most Southern blacks were found in the Republican ranks there was no way that a viable Republican party could sustain itself with only black votes. A party based mostly on the freedman's vote would never have grown old. Only in three states--Mississippi, So. Carolina, and Louisiana did blacks make up a majority of the population. In all the other former Confederate states they were a minority.

The TL view of the carpetbagger: a member of the lower class of Northern population who came South with all his belongings in his carpetbag to fatten on the South's misfortunes and in the process poisoning the alleged harmonious existing race relations.

In fact, most of the carpetbaggers were well educated and middle class in origin. Not a few had been lawyers, business men, and other pillars of Northern society. The majority were men who served in Congress during Reconstruction, were veterans of the Union Army, or teachers who served as FB agents, and men who had invested thousands of dollars in vacant cotton plantations. Most had come to the South before the 1867 Reconstruction Acts.

Most carpetbaggers did not initially come South to get involved in politics. They came because they saw economic opportunities in the South. Some came because as Union soldiers they like the region. They also shared a bond with the blacks in that they wanted to take part in reforming the South. They generally became committed to far-reaching changes in the region supporting measures aimed at democratizing and modernizing the South--civil rights legislation, aid for economic development, the establishment of public education systems.

More importantly, they were not in the South in numbers that could provide a voting basis for Southern Republicanism for in no state did they constitute even 2% of the total population.

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Scalawags: Castigated even more by southern whites as "white negroes" who betrayed the region in their quest for office., etc.

Scalawags represented even a more diverse population than carpetbaggers. They included men of prominence, wartime Unionists, and former supporters of secession, entrepreneurs anxious to bring about modernization of southern economic life

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General James Longstreet
James L. Alcorn owner of the largest plantation in the Yazoo-Mississippi Delta. (An Old Whig).
Joseph Brown, the governor of Georgia during the 4 years of the Confederacy.

The Southern Republican ranks also attracted a number of urban and small town artisans who found opportunities that were denied them during the reign of the plantation economy.

The most extensive concentration of white Republicans came from the upcountry bastions of wartime Unionism. These were whites (non-slaver holders) from the hot beds of anti-planter and anti-secessionist sentiment from East Tennessee, Missouri, North Carolina, West Virginia, northern Alabama, and West Texas (many were German-Americans immigrants).

They had been an oppressed element in the Confederacy because of their opposition to secession and were now anxious for "pay back" against the old planter class. Reconstruction promised an end to state and local politics that were previously controlled by and for the interests of the planter class.

For the most part the alliance between scalawags and blacks was one based on convenience. They were not advocates of racial integration by any means. But this unique partnership carried with it a commitment unprecedented in southern life--to defend blacks' political and civil equality.

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Some observations:

It was remarkable on first sight that in a short matter of six months this coalition was able to establish a Republican party (shake and bake) in such a short time in a region where the party never existed before. There was a heady optimism about the future as these new Reconstruction govts. turned to the business of fulfilling the aspirations of their constituents for a new and more just South based on the principle of interracial democracy.

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constructed Republican party in the South was made up of Carpetbaggers and Scalawags.

Who ere the Carpetbaggers and Scalawags?

Carpetbaggers--crafty adventurers who invaded the South to pick it clean of economic and political plunder. The scalawags were poor native whites, betrayers of their race and section, who joined them in grasping for the spolis. Rights?

Most carpetbaggers came to the South for the same reasons that other Americans migrated to the Great West. To enter legitimate business, build factories, promote railroads, engage in trade. Few came southward for political reasons; at least initially. Many were Union veterans who returned to the South after the war because they enjoyed the climate and saw opportunities for a good life.

They became carpetbaggers when they entered Republican politics and began working for the party and/or organize blacks for political action.

Who were the scalawags? Some were poor whites from the upcountry who were Unionists during the war.

Some were former antebellum Southern Whigs who were never happy w/ planter/Democratic control of the South's economy.

Some were distinguished Southerners. Foir example, former Confederate Gneral James A. Longstreet supported the new Republican govts. Same with former Georgia Governor, Joseph E. Brown and James Orr, former Governor of South Carolina under the Johnson program.

II. Radical Rule in the South

A. Constitution-Making

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Despite all the investive levelled at the Radical govts. by the Tragic Legend school, there was nothing crazy or uniquely revolutionary about the work of these conventions in terms of the larger national picture. (For the South, yes, but not for the nation as a whole).

For the most part the radicals wrote orthodox state constitutions, borrowing heavily from the previous constitutions and from those of other northern states. They were neither original nor unique.

B. Provisions/ Accomplishments

1. Democractization of the political system in the South

The new constitutions provided for universal male suffrage. They eliminated property and literacy tests for enfranchisement. More state offices were elective rather than appointed. Juries were open to all males. In South Carolina, for example, it was constitutionally required that juries reflect the ratio of black to white voters in each county.

2. Social democraticization was initiated under these radical governments. For the first time in southern history the states were responsible for providing a free educational system, care for the aged, relief for the poor, and rehabilitation of institutions for mentally impaired and vast reforms in state prison systems.

Use South Carolina as an example. South Carolina because it was the only state where the constitutional convention had a majority of A/A delegates (76 A/A to 46 whites). Because of this racial imbalance the Palmetto State received more than its share of attention in the writings of the Tragic Legend school of Reconstruction. [Note: James Pike, The Prostrate State. Note Scenes from "Birth of a Nation"]

The fact was that this was the state's first really democratic constitution. The proof was that this state constitution was good enough to remain in force for nearly two decades after the state was redeemed--or returned back into the hands of the Southern Democrats.

None of these constitutional conventions voted in provisions for sweeping disenfranchisement of Confederate sympathizers. None of them went beyond the provisions for holding office provided in the 14th Amendment, and all made provisions for restoration of the franchise to those disqualified under the Amendment.