

William C. Harris, Presidential Reconstruction in Mississippi [1966]
Ph. D. diss. at Alabama University

Harris begins with the mounting antiwar sentiment building in the state even prior to Appomatox. Since 1863 when Grant's Western Army began pounding away at the river towns the smell of defeat was in the air. Former Whigs were grouping, requesting that the war be brought to an end. The dislocation of the state's economy was another factor. And the marauding deserter bands were so ~~band~~ in the northern part of the state that Confederate and Union ~~officers~~ thought of joint operations to wipe them out. They were taking a heavy toll on the state's farmers and virtually unprotected civilians.

Mississippi was ready for capitulation when news of Appomatox arrived. They were anxious to begin their own restoration. The point: that Mississippi politics thought that restoration would be carried out by themselves. They would not be forced from office.

7. Formulation of the Black Code

Harris suggests that the strict reservations and controls in the Code may have found precedents in both current northern laws--as against blacks testifying in courts for or against whites; vagrancy laws, etc. And also from some of the regulations of the Freedman's Bureau

He is perplexed at white the conservative white Mississippians sitting on the Committee on Freedmen would still legislate or propose such stringent measures in regard to the freedmen. (1) Section 1 denied blacks right to hold property. . . or discriminated against their rights to hold property. (2) blacks could not testify in courts against whites (3) apprenticeship provisions which allowed whites to take in black apprentices under 18 years of age if it was proved they were orphans or children of parents who were vagrants (4) the vagrancy provisions. . . after a certain date blacks had to provide documents or proof of employment, etc. . .

The interesting point is that the Code was really the work of the racial conservatives, or at least those who were more sensitive to the political world outside of Mississippi. They wanted to set out legislation that would not embarrass Johnson and derail their chances of being restored to the Union. The radicals, those who wanted to saddle the Negro with greater restrictions were generally voted down in the Committee and in the legislature.

Harris gives us the state picture and harsh conditions under which the moderates had to operate. He discusses the problems of getting the blacks to work. . . to contract out for a year, etc. Then there were the fearsome rumors of a black insurrection. From Oct 1865 to January 1866 blacks refused to sign contracts because of the "promises" of land and a mule by Christmas time. . . The story goes that blacks were convinced that forty acres would not be theirs if they were tied to a contract, etc with a planter. . . So all factors pressed in on the Mississippi architects of the Black Code. . .

James E. Sefton, The US Army and Reconstruction, 1865-1877[1967]

Sefton's work is a justification of the Military role in Reconstruction

His first two chapters deal with the difficulties the Army had in an uncertain situation. The military had no policy for the role it was forced to play. Nevertheless it carried out its difficult assignment in an overall constructive manner.

But the army was caught ~~in~~ the cross-fire between the politicians by 1866. Sefton also appears to be influenced by the old reconstruction mythology about the blackman. He is implicitly anti-Negro in this work . . .

He also seems to take the Army position that matters were moving along under Johnson and that the fall out with the radicals and Republicans was a shame for all sides.

Part II Getting Started Again

Deals with Congressional Reconstruction . .

Some provisions of the new legislation:

Army Appropriations Act--Section II of the Act provided that the General-in-Chief's Headquarters should remain in DC. . .and he could not be removed anywhere without his own request unless the Senate gave prior approval. It was an effort to fix Grant in Washington to prevent Johnson from interfering with the Congressional Reconstruction by replacing Grant with a platoon in the Military Command post. Sefton confirms that AJ tried to earlier remove Grant by offering him a diplomatic post in Mexico. . .Grant refused. . .

Tenure of Office Act. . .This was effort by the Republicans to freeze Stanton as Secretary of War.

Under the Reconstruction Acts the Military found that their responsibilities were varied and covered all manner of duties--keeping the peace, preventing unfair court practices, seeing to schools, policing against "moonshiners," and road improvements. . .

Registering Voters and Removing Officials

Deals with the confusion that originated for the Military commanders growing out of the legalistic and legislative tangle of the first Two Reconstruction Acts. These acts were half-baked when they were passed. . . .But the job of interpreting their provisions and trying to make them work fell to the Army. It was not until the passage of the 3rd Reconstruction Act that the powers of the military commanders was defined. . .

Deals with AJ's removal of Generals Sheridan and Sickles. . .Both were generals Johnson distrusted as abominable Radicals. . .

Forrest G. Wood, Black Scare: The Racist Response to Emancipation and Reconstruction (1968) University of California Press.

Wood's book deals chiefly with Northern Democratic racist demagoguery during this key period.

One point of the study was the unrelenting racist attacks on the GOP attitudes toward the black man. This kind of political pressure was violent and limited. But it had its impact on the thinking of Republicans. And played a role in the ever narrowing concept of what the crusade aspect of the war was all about.

Wood's book is good in terms of the names and the papers that carried this fear of the blacks to garish extremes.

Some of the chapters Wood has are as follows: Emancipation Proclamation; Negroes in Union uniforms; the miscegenation crisis of 1764. In all these the Northern Democrats tried to stir up racial antipathy. Accuse the GOP of propagating the Africanization of America. . . of speaking and working for racial equality. Wood does not see this line of racist propaganda and incitement as having great impact. He has evidently under evaluated the racial attitudes in the Midwest and the Far West. Should be corrected by reading of Voegeli and Berwanger. . . .

His most useful chapter seems to be on the franchise issue. Wood points out that at the end of the Civil War only 7 of the 25 states in the Union had extended the vote to Negro males. By March 1876 when the 15th Amendment was ratified, 13 of the 26 states still denied the ballot to the Negro (California, Connecticut, Delaware, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, Maryland, Michigan, Nevada, New Jersey, Ohio, Oregon, and Pennsylvania. . . .

In referendums in 1867 the issue of impartial enfranchisement was defeated in Kansas, Minnesota, and Ohio. These were largely Republican states. Wood makes the point that Republicans in the Midwest were opposed to impartial enfranchisement without the excitement of the racist Democrats. . . .

The dual standards of the franchise question:

In the 1867 Reconstruction Acts the GOP Congress prescribed the franchise for the black man in the South. They argued that it was necessary to prevent the virtual enslavement of the freedmen. . . But they took the position that the vote in the North would be based on state decisions alone; not federal action.

Wood shows that even the most fervent defender of black equality like Garrison was moved to modify his position. Prior to the 1864 election Garrison came out in support of Lincoln and his "go-slow" policy on black enfranchisement. Garrison believed that Lincoln's re-election was necessary for the advancement of the Negro. But in dropping his noncompromise position he fuzzed the edges of the argument and destroyed his moral position. Illustrates to what degree other abolitionists of extreme character as Garrison allowed the voting issue to dilute.