

RECONSIDERING THE SCALAWAGS

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Standing as both partial cause and consequence of the renewal of this nation's commitment to racial equality has been a remarkable change in the consensus among professional historians respecting the era of reconstruction. Long maligned northern radicals have achieved a new respectability; Andrew Johnson's presidency has been more severely censured; and the consequences of emancipation and Negro suffrage have attracted careful reconsideration. Revisionism, most noticeably, has rejected white supremacist assumptions and accorded a new dignity to the motivations and accomplishments of the Radical reconstruction program. If nothing else, in the best competitive tradition, we are certainly denying the Soviets a monopoly in either the writing or rewriting of history in accordance with changing national needs and values.

Once traditional interpretation of reconstruction in the South have been altered not only by changing racial attitudes but also by careful and diligent research that has drastically modified long accepted stereotypes and oversimplifications. A much more appreciative general view of the nature and accomplishments of southern reconstruction has been presented by Vernon Wharton, Horace Mann Bond, Jack B. Scroggs, Carter Goodrich, Malcolm McMillan, and others. Wharton's classic study, together with the recent accomplishments of Willie Lee Rose, Joel Williamson, and Joe Richardson, has provided a balanced and greatly changed appraisal of race relations and the Negro. Jonathan Daniel's *Prince of Carpetbaggers* has proved no more a rascal than many of his political opponents; indeed, Richard Current has discovered that carpetbaggers were as positive a lot of men as any. As for that final cluster of supposed scoundrels—the scalawags, they emerge in several works as respectable ex-Whigs or men of admirable Jacksonian persuasion. Little wonder that, reflecting these and other alterations, we are presently being blessed with a variety of new and admirably balanced syntheses and documentary collections on reconstruction.¹

¹E.g., John Hope Franklin, *Reconstruction after the Civil War* (Chicago, 1961); James C. Randall and David Donald, *The Civil War and Reconstruction* (Boston, 1961); Kenneth M. Stampp, *The Era of Reconstruction* (New York,

Nevertheless, various particulars of southern reconstruction have hardly been tapped anew, and often we are but readjusting old accounts in accordance with newer prejudices, the gist of our discoveries having been outlined by DuBois in 1910 and by a one-time carpetbagger even eighteen years before that.² Uniquely new information, such as that provided by Frank Klingberg's study of the Claims Commission, or new topical studies, such as Otis Singletary's of the militia, have been rare. We still know little of military rule, of state politics (particularly for the years 1865 to 1867), of legal and economic history; and there is not yet one satisfactory general study of a state subjected to the Reconstruction Acts of 1867. The studies of the so-called Dunning school continue to stand as the standard accounts of reconstruction in almost every southern state and to constitute the fundamental but faulty base for evaluating the entire reconstruction epoch.

Among the most original and perceptive comments upon southern reconstruction have been those relating to the Whig origins of Republicanism, a thesis ably impressed upon the profession by David Donald's article on Mississippi and refined and extended in several areas by Thomas B. Alexander.³ But while the prominence of Whigs in scalawag ranks and the conservative and unionist logic of their being there has been indubitably established, there is much doubt as to the exact extent of their presence. Donald concludes that "nearly all" of the Republican voters in Mississippi were former Whigs, al-

1965); James P. Shenton (ed.), *The Reconstruction: A Documentary History of the South after the War* (New York, 1963); Grady McWhiney (ed.) *Reconstruction and the Freedmen* (Chicago, 1963); Harvey Wish (ed.), *Reconstruction in the South, 1865-1877* (New York, 1965); Harold M. Hyman (ed.), *The Radical Republicans and Reconstruction Policy, 1860-1870* (Indianapolis, 1966). The first three works may be consulted for bibliography. An abbreviated version of this paper was read on April 28, 1966, at the Fifty-ninth Annual Meeting of the Organization of American Historians, held in Cincinnati. A Faculty Research Grant from Morgan State College facilitated research for this paper; the author is indebted to Professor John V. Mering of the University of Florida for some invaluable suggestions and to Professor Stanley Kutler of the University of Wisconsin for helpful critical comments.

²William E. B. DuBois, "Reconstruction and Its Benefits," *American Historical Review*, XV (1909-1910), 354-365; Otto H. Olsen, "Tourgee on Reconstruction: A Revisionist Document of 1892," *Serif: Kent State University Library Quarterly*, II (1965), 20-28.

³David Donald, "The Scalawag in Mississippi Reconstruction," *Journal of Southern History*, X (1944), 447-460; Thomas B. Alexander, *Political Reconstruction in Tennessee* (Nashville, 1950); "Whiggery and Reconstruction in Tennessee," *Journal of Southern History*, XVI (1950), 291-305; "Persistent Whiggery in Alabama and the Lower South, 1860-1867," *Alabama Review*, XII (1959), 35-52; "Persistent Whiggery in the Confederate South, 1860-1877," *Journal of Southern History*, XXIX (1963), 445-468.

though the only pertinent citation discovered for this assertion is the testimony of one Mississippian that the majority of about two hundred Republicans in one county had been Whigs.⁴ This same man also testified that former Democrats were in the party and that the Republicans in the county were predominantly "men of property," the latter statement hardly corresponding to Wharton's conclusion that Mississippi Republicans were distinguished by their poverty. The most serious recent challenge to this entire Whig thesis is that presented in Allan Trelease's study of county voting, which identifies white Republicanism with the poorer whites and with Jacksonian Democracy in all but three southern states. Trelease's statistical method establishes, but probably minimizes, the prevalence of white Republican voting and has been particularly criticized for its concentration upon the presidential election of 1872 and for bypassing white Whig Republicanism in heavily Negro counties.⁵ A more serious weakness may lie in his vital assumption that one can assume which whites in a county voted Republican by determining the antebellum political complexion of the county; to wit, that if a Republican county of 1868 had been persistently Whig, it was Whigs who became the Republicans.⁶ One might, in fact, conclude just the opposite, that the minority party would be more inclined to seek control by endorsing new ideas or a new electorate.

While the claims of both schools may be exaggerated, each has, among other things, convincingly suggested how and why former Whigs in the one case and former Democrats in the other were attracted to Unionism and Republicanism. Yet it is unclear to what extent this transition occurred on an organized or an individual basis, the degree to which the Democratic or Whig heritage predominated, either among the white leaders or followers of the Republican party, has not been established; and we do not have any such impressive account of individual Democratic activity as has been provided by Donald and Alexander for the Whigs. A more detailed restudy of state and local politics would seem pertinent, and the following discussion of one state is intended to illustrate how the secession crisis and the question of reform inspired factions in each party that decisively contributed to reconstruction Republicanism.

⁴ Donald, "Scalawag in Mississippi Reconstruction," 449-450, cites two sources, but the reference to W. H. Braden, "Reconstruction in Lee County," *Mississippi Historical Society Publications*, X (1909), 139, does not appear applicable.

⁵ *Senate Miscellaneous Documents*, 44 Cong., 2 sess., no. 45, pp. 745-746. Vernon Wharton, *The Negro in Mississippi, 1865-1890* (Chapel Hill, 1947), p. 157.

⁶ Trelease, "Who Were the Scalawags," *Journal of Southern History*, XXIX (1963), 445-468; letter from David Donald, *ibid.*, XXX (1964), 255.

⁷ Trelease, "Who Were the Scalawags," 460-462.

The leading reconstruction Republican in the state of North Carolina was a man of humble birth and Jacksonian convictions, William Woods Holden. Although once a Republican Whig, Holden had become a Democratic party leader and editor by 1843 and led that party to state dominance during the 1850's as a champion of free manhood suffrage and the sectional interests of the South.⁸ But success, together with an increasing devotion to the defense of slavery, undermined Democratic reformism and saw that party increasingly fall into the hands of the slaveowning gentry. The fact that the national sectional dispute propelled proslavery Whigs into the ranks of the Democracy contributed to this trend. It is accepted that it was because of these developments that the brilliant Holden (not of the gentry and identified with reformism and the common man) was not accorded the gubernatorial nomination by his party in 1858 and 1860, but was bypassed for a more trustworthy, if mediocre, representative of the slavery interests. Primarily responsible for Holden's defeat were old Democrats from the slave counties and recent acquisitions from the ranks of the Whigs. His nomination had been supported by twenty-seven counties, only one of which had a Negro majority, nineteen of which had a slave population of less than one third, and only three of which were not in the west.⁹ One may detect here certain early roots of Republicanism in Holden's resentment toward an increasingly dominant Whig and Democratic gentry and in antagonisms involving reform, class, and sectional interests. Of the twenty-seven counties supporting Holden in 1858, twenty registered Republican victories even after 1867, and an additional three registered formidable Republican votes. There is no correlation between the

⁸ Summaries of war and prewar politics in North Carolina are taken primarily from Samuel A'Court Ashe, *History of North Carolina* (Raleigh, 1908-1925); Robert D. W. Connor, *North Carolina, Rebuilding an Ancient Commonwealth* (Chicago, 1929), II; Guion G. Johnson, *Ante-Bellum North Carolina: A Social History* (Chapel Hill, 1937); Joseph C. de Roulhae Hamilton, *Reconstruction in North Carolina* (New York, 1914) and *Party Politics in North Carolina, 1835-1860* (Durham, 1916); H. M. Wagstaff, *State Rights and Political Parties in North Carolina, 1776-1861* (Baltimore, 1906); Clarence C. Norton, *The Democratic Party in Ante-Bellum North Carolina, 1835-1861* (Chapel Hill, 1930); Joseph C. Sitterson, *The Secession Movement in North Carolina* (Chapel Hill, 1939); Richard E. Yates, *The Confederacy and Zeb Vance* (Tuscaloosa, 1958); and Horace W. Raper, "William Woods Holden: A Political Biography" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of North Carolina, 1951) and "William W. Holden and the Peace Movement in North Carolina," *North Carolina Historical Review*, XXXI (1954), 493-516.

⁹ Norton, *Democratic Party in North Carolina*, p. 230; *Raleigh North Carolina Standard*, Apr. 21, 1858. These and the following computations are based upon census and electoral returns, the latter as found in R. D. W. Connor (ed.), *A Manual of North Carolina* (Raleigh, 1913); *Journal of the Constitutional Convention of the State of North Carolina at its Session, 1868* (Raleigh, 1868); Donald R. Matthews (ed.), *North Carolina Votes* (Chapel Hill, 1962).

prewar party leaning of these pro-Holden counties and whether or not they subsequently became Republican. The most significant correlation discovered, and it is a slight one, was that among western Democratic counties that were predominantly Democratic in the antebellum period, those supporting Holden in 1858 were more apt to become Republican than those not supporting him.

This correlation is related to two issues that dominated North Carolina political rivalries in the period immediately preceding the Civil War—the issues of reform and disunion. Historians are in general agreement that antebellum politics was characterized by the successful efforts of a slaveholding and business gentry to retain political domination and privilege against challenges from the larger masses of lower- and middle-class whites.¹⁰ When Democrats rode into power in the fifties by advocating free manhood suffrage, they provided a further impetus to cries for reform in a state where representation for slaves and property continued to enhance the domination of the gentry, where slave property was not being fairly taxed, where there was little local self-government, and where the legal system was in some ways archaic. Typical of political history, it was the out-who now turned toward reformism as a means of exploiting popular discontent and ousting the entrenched and increasingly conservative Democrats. Thus, the opposition gubernatorial candidate of 1860 John Pool, a longtime Whig, championed ad valorem taxation as a means of taxing slaves in just proportion to land. The emergence of this reformism, in addition to more frequently recognized economic and nationalist principles, would help lead John Pool, Alfred Dockery, Tod R. Caldwell, and other Whigs into the Republican party. It is also true, however, that John Pool was nominated in 1860 not by a Whig convention but by an "Opposition Convention" that met on George Washington's birthday, soon identified itself with the national Constitutional-Union party, and was evidently designed to attract the support of moderates and unionists. It is admitted that many Democrats voted for Pool in that election, but the appeal of a conservative and nationalist position on the sectional dispute, as distinct from the appeal of ad valorem taxation, has not been adequately recognized as a contribution to this result.¹¹

¹⁰ Connor, *North Carolina*, II, 77-83; Johnson, *Ante-Bellum North Carolina*, pp. 33-36, 73-79.

¹¹ The author is indebted to John V. Mering for suggesting the distinction between the Whig and Constitutional-Union parties. His study of the latter will contribute much to our understanding of southern politics in this period. The standard accounts persist in presenting Pool as a Whig candidate, although Ashe, *History of North Carolina*, II, 534-545, mentions but does not discuss the Constitutional-Union label. See the Hillsborough *Recorder* and Charlotte

As the nation then became immersed in the secession crisis, reformism dwindled in immediate importance and political alliances were even further disrupted. While former Whigs remained particularly prominent in resisting the drift toward disunion, they were now strongly supported by Holden and a number of other leading Democrats, many of whom had urged the nomination of Stephen A. Douglas in 1860.¹² But the clash at Sumter and President Lincoln's call for troops generated an insurmountable tide, and the leadership of both parties, including a reluctant Holden, ostensibly joined hands in endorsing secession and war.

Nevertheless, unionism and regret persisted, and reinforced by old antagonisms and the strains of war eventually developed into bitter opposition to the Confederate cause. The more extreme unionists flatly denied and violently resisted Confederate authority, and soon after secession a Conservative party, with a Whig gubernatorial candidate, captured power in North Carolina by catering to popular discontent with the entire state of affairs. Members of both old parties cooperated in this new party, but since its conservatism was directed against a radicalism that had brought on the war rather than against the war itself, it tended to alienate former Democrats as well as those disposed to peace. State rights Democrats might also have been alienated by the extent to which the Conservative administration accepted the often controversial authority of the Confederate central government. Reflecting these varied considerations, Holden, an original leader in the Conservative party, broke from the movement and utilized his influential newspaper, the *Raleigh North Carolina Standard*, to build a new peace force. When, by 1863, Holden and his allies drifted toward a preference for peace rather than war, even at the cost of reunion and the abolition of slavery, they assumed a stand alienating them from the bulk of the state's leadership and, perhaps, white population.¹³ The dominant Conservatives, on the other hand, while often resisting the ambitions of the Confederate government, remained dedicated to the prosecution of the war, the defense of slavery, and the achievement of southern independence. With such developments, old party allegiances were broken and avoided as each side sought to attract support on new

North Carolina Whig, Mar.-Aug., 1860, and Pool's acceptance speech *ibid.*, Mar. 13, 1860. It is also pertinent that ad valorem taxation was largely originated and pushed as an issue by the Raleigh Workingmen's Association, hardly a group associated with the Whig tradition. Wagstaff, *State Rights*, p. 109.

¹² Sitterson, *Secessionist Movement*, pp. 215-216, 218. Breckenridge was subsequently supported as the only hope of preventing secession. Compare the assumptions of Trelease, "Who Were the Scalawags," 462.

¹³ Hamilton, *Reconstruction*, pp. 55, 61, 64.

issues. While an individual's previous political position and memberships undoubtedly affected his stand, it does not appear possible to interpret these events in terms of the continuation or previous party organizations. Conservatives retained the support of the bulk of the old parties, while Holden's peace movement attracted those Whigs and Democrats, including some secessionists, who were most opposed to Confederate authority or the continuance of the war.

Wartime political conflict was, of course, often bitter and sometimes violent, and since many of the peace and union men would be found in Republican ranks, this rivalry among the whites did much to contribute to the intense hatreds of the reconstruction era. There were, so to speak, contrasting concepts of patriotism involved, and indicative of the lasting impact of one form of nationalism, as well as of a neglected, if minor, form of determinism, was to be the prominence in Republican ranks of such North Carolinians as Andrew Hamilton Jones, John Quincy Adams Bryan, Andrew Jackson Jones, and George Washington Logan, a man whose career was shaped to some extent by the February 22 date of his birth. Somewhat more nebulous was the relationship between reformism and unionism that was often conservative in origin but which was strongest in precisely those non-slave areas that were traditionally friendly to democratic reform. Secession may very well have been encouraged, as Clement Eaton has suggested, by an emotionalism fostered by democracy, but there is also much to suggest that the final crisis, like other wars, aided this democracy and enhanced the strength of what one might call a power elite or military-slave complex. If the Confederacy "Died of Democracy," the process may well have involved resistance to a very undemocratic trend, as is suggested, for example, by the 1863 lament of a determined mountain unionist that "these bombastic, highfalutin, aristocratic fools have been in the habit of driving negroes and poor helpless white people until they think they can control the world of mankind."¹⁴ This unionist soon found his way into the ranks of Republican leadership.

With the collapse of the Confederacy, William Holden was appointed provisional governor of the state under Johnson's plan of reconstruction and from this position initiated a temporarily successful union movement that was friendly to reform and hostile to the last ditch Confederates. Hostility was intensified as the postwar situation encouraged the political revival of the Confederate-Conservative leadership. Disposed to consider peace men and unionists as radicals and traitors to the South, this traditional leadership

¹⁴ Alexander H. Jones, *Knocking at the Door* (Washington, D.C., 1875), p. 13.

also opposed the Union party's advocacy of internal reform and acquiescence to whatever restoration demands were made by the federal government.¹⁵ Although Conservatives had dominated the state throughout the war they felt no guilt, because they attributed the origins of that war to radicalism in both the North and South, and they extended their conservative logic by opposing any changes (other than those demanded by President Johnson) from prewar conditions on the state or national level. Aided by their overwhelming control of the state press,¹⁶ the Conservatives rode back into power before the end of 1865, but it was indicative of the unpopularity of the Lost Cause at this time that both parties condemned secession and denied responsibility for the war.

As the conflict between the President and the Congress sharpened during 1866, Holden's Union party essentially broke with the President by continuing to advise the acceptance of congressional demands as the only means of rapid settlement and restoration. Only after readmission could the state freely handle its own affairs or significantly affect national policy, Holden insisted; continued resistance, especially to the Fourteenth Amendment, would only provoke more drastic results. "May a kind Providence avert these evils from our unhappy country!" proclaimed the *Standard*: "But if they should come, remember that our skirts are clean. We have done our duty. We have done it in the face of opposition and excitement. When negro suffrage comes, as it will, if these warnings are not regarded, let no man say that we are to blame for it."¹⁷

While such arguments increasingly attracted the moderate and the pragmatic to the Union party fold, the demand for reform was revived with a number of proposed democratic amendments to the state constitution. The most controversial of these amendments provided a white basis of apportionment for the lower legislative house, a measure designed to lessen the political domination of the eastern gentry. In the fall of 1866 the amendments, although almost solidly triumphant in the West, were defeated, and there was a drastic decrease in the Union party vote.¹⁸ Western whites and Union party men were thus ripe for an alliance with other forces about to be provided by the Reconstruction Acts of 1867.

The most momentous of these new allies was, of course, the Negro. North Carolina Negroes had been organized and demanding equal

¹⁵ *Raleigh Daily Sentinel*, Aug. 1, 1866; Hamilton (ed.), *Correspondence of Jonathan Worth* (Raleigh, 1909), I, 492, 510; II, 748-752.

¹⁶ *Raleigh Daily Sentinel*, Aug. 24, 1866; Hamilton (ed.), *Correspondence of Jonathan Worth*, II, 704.

¹⁷ *Raleigh North Carolina Standard*, Sept. 29, 1866.

¹⁸ Connor, *A Manual of North Carolina*, pp. 1000, 1002.

rights since 1865, and the independence and Republican logic of their position conforms to that established elsewhere by the studies of Vernon Wharton and Joel Williamson. Another pertinent, if lesser, political force consisted of the straitest sect unionists, craftsmen who had never recognized the Confederacy, who had expected tangible benefits from their unswerving loyalty to the nation, and who had resented the restoration of former Confederates, including Holden, to postwar positions of authority. While proscriptive and reformist views appeared to dominate among the various league organizations of these men, their attitudes varied from the conservative and racist views of the native abolitionist, Daniel R. Goodloe, to the thorough egalitarianism of the carpetbagger, Albion Tourgee, or the mountain unionist, Alexander H. Jones.¹⁹

It was at the instigation of Holden and his followers that on March 27, 1867, remnants of the Union party met with representatives of the Negroes and the straitest sect unionists and conspicuously granting an equality of voice and honor to the Negroes, established the Republican party of North Carolina. The Holdenites already had a record of unusual, though limited, sympathy for Negro aspirations, and the *Raleigh Standard* now boasted that white and colored met "upon the same floor on the same footing, and cooperated together in the most cordial and harmonious manner. . . . The former master met his former slave as his equal in all that pertains to manhood and the rights of self government."²⁰ The Republican party thus established proceeded to capture almost the entire Negro vote and a large bloc of the white vote, obtaining overwhelming domination at the constitutional convention of 1868, the ratification of the constitution prepared therein, and the establishment of a Republican state administration under the leadership of Governor William W. Holden.

The strength displayed in these victories was founded essentially upon unionist or anti-Confederate sentiment, democratic reformism, a substantial acceptance of Negro equality, and the promise of restoration and an end to federal interference within the state. Obviously, however, these various factors could not be perfectly balanced, and during 1867 it was particularly noticeable that a Republican emphasis upon reform and equality alienated a goodly number of the more conservative unionists. Also, state rights unionists, once so hostile to

¹⁹ Daniel R. Goodloe to Benjamin S. Hedrick, Mar. 27, 1868, Benjamin S. Hedrick Papers, Duke University Library; A. H. Jones, *Knocking at the Door*, *passim*; O. H. Olsen, *Carpetbagger's Crusade: The Life of Albion W. Tourgee* (Baltimore, 1965), *passim*.

²⁰ *Raleigh North Carolina Standard*, Mar. 30, 1867; Richard L. Hoffman, "The Republican Party in North Carolina, 1867-1871" (M.A. thesis, University of North Carolina, 1960), pp. 13-14.

Confederate authority, were now easily alienated by Republican identification with external federal authority.

The Republican leadership was extremely diverse. Negroes, carpetbaggers, and members of the straitest sect were granted prominent places on committees and tickets. But by 1868 the party was clearly dominated by forty or so leaders who had been identified with Holden's Peace and Union parties, and who were representatives of various past persuasions. Old Democrats were particularly prominent in the persons of Holden, William B. Rodman, Curtis H. Brogden, and certain Douglas Democrats of 1860—Thomas Settle, Robert P. Dick, Samuel W. Watts, and John N. Bunting. There were former Whigs, too—John Pool, Alfred Dockery, Ralph P. Buxton, and William P. Bynum, all noted reformers; there were last ditch opponents of secession such as Ceburn L. Harris, Tod R. Caldwell, and Nathaniel Boyden; and there would be occasional secessionists such as Victor C. Barringer. Judging from the Republican state ticket of 1868, antebellum Democrats dominated the Republican party, whereas the Conservative ticket, although including former Democrat Thomas S. Ashe as its gubernatorial candidate, was almost entirely an ex-Whig ticket. For that matter, two Whigs had turned down the gubernatorial nod before it was offered to Ashe.²¹ It might not be too much to say, that Whigs had obtained control of the state during the war and that a minority faction of former Democratic leaders was now leading the effort to displace them. Traces of the Republican activity of former Democrats have also been discovered on the local level, and it was undoubtedly of some significance that at least two economic leaders prominent in Republican railroad projects, though not formally identified with that party, had been active antebellum Democrats.²²

Well reflecting their origins, Republicans in 1867 damned their opponents' adherence to the Confederacy and war; mocked their obstreperous tactics for perpetuating and increasing federal intervention; and promised, in Republicanism, not only certain restoration but federal sympathy and assistance in solving the postwar problems of the South. In local meetings throughout the state Republicans bubbled with a spirit of economic and political reform, which envisioned rapid and great progress through free labor, free speech, and political reform. To some extent their hopes were indigenous and

²¹ Hamilton, *Reconstruction*, pp. 279-280; Ashe, *History of North Carolina*, II, 1068.

²² William Sloan and Samuel McDowell Tate, *Raleigh North Carolina Standard*, Apr. 21, 1858 and Sept. 1, 1860. Two sons of Stephen A. Douglas, Stephen A., Jr. and Robert M. Douglas, were also soon active North Carolina Republicans.

to some extent identified with the North.²³ The promises of free enterprise and restoration weighed especially strong with the moderate and business minded, and judging by the extent to which this included former Democrats as well as former Whigs, our historical pursuit of the Whigs has exaggerated the peculiar traits of that group.

Although to modern minds the Republican reform proposals of 1867 appear quite mild, they fomented an extremely bitter opposition. Landowners in the state were already exasperated by a variety of conflicts with free Negro labor, and as it became clear that the Negroes overwhelmingly supported the only party and the only white leaders offering them meaningful equality, there occurred a fusion of wartime hatreds with class and racial fears that turned the Conservative party adamantly against Republicanism, the Reconstruction Acts, and the new constitution before it was even prepared. In political democracy Conservatives envisioned anarchy, confiscation, and ruin. For two years their unrestrained bitterness (one actually expressed preference for a monarchy)²⁴ contributed greatly to Republican strength. This was especially true in 1868, when Conservatives anticipated the forceful displacement of the southern Republican government by a Seymour-Blair administration and literally threatened another war if they were not elected, a stand which induced one of their own party congressmen to endorse the candidacy of Grant.²⁵ But while extremism was alienating some Conservatives, it also initiated a more lasting and eventually successful commitment to the political weapon of white supremacy. "The great and all absorbing issue," that party announced in February 1868, "now soon to be presented to the people of the State, is negro suffrage and negro equality, if not supremacy, and whether hereafter in North Carolina and the South, the white man is to be placed politically, and as a consequence, socially, upon a footing of equality with the negro." The state's leading Conservative newspaper agreed: "THE GREAT and paramount issue is: SHALL NEGROES or WHITE MEN RULE NORTH CAROLINA? All other issues are secondary and subordinate and should be kept so."²⁶ Such racism was clearly prevalent among those who had been cultivating it for generations, the Confederate-slave gentry, and it was still politically useful. Thereafter the free Negro was to be used as successfully as had been the slave to further pervert the mind of almost the entire white population of the South.

²³ See *Raleigh North Carolina Standard*, Aug.-Oct., 1867.

²⁴ *Hillsborough Recorder*, Apr. 28, 1869.

²⁵ Nathaniel Boyden in *Raleigh North Carolina Standard*, Sept. 16, 1868.

²⁶ *Raleigh Daily Sentinel*, Feb. 6, 7, Mar. 10, 1868.

In 1867 Conservative triumph was yet far off, however, as twenty to thirty thousand whites, particularly those westerners whose desires had been frustrated in 1866, joined twice that number of Negro allies to elect as Republicans all but thirteen of the 120 delegates to the constitutional convention of 1868. That this was a smashing victory for reform was illustrated by the constitution these delegates produced. Among the many indications of the favorable impact of that constitution was a public letter from a Harvard educated antebellum Democrat and recent Confederate colonel, Edward Cantwell.

The Constitution is Republican and Democratic. In fact, it embraces all the cardinal principles for which the Democratic party in Europe and in this country have so long and so successfully contended, viz: universal suffrage; civil and religious liberty; universal amnesty; universal education; the equality of all men in the sight of the law; the election of Judges and other officers by the people; a mechanics lien; limitation of the Legislative power over taxation and appropriations; annual sessions; a home-stead exempt from execution; no imprisonment for debt; no property qualifications for office, and a frequent recourse to the source of power at the polls.

Most of these things, Cantwell concluded, were innovations, but they were "innovations of a character, indispensable, amidst the events by which we are surrounded, to enable us to keep step with the advance of civilization and the progress of the human race."²⁷

That equality and reformism remained prominent themes during the campaign to secure ratification of that constitution and the election of a Republican administration was best revealed, perhaps, by the well-circulated Republican "Address to the White Working Men of North Carolina." In twenty-one specific articles workers were reminded that they had been kept politically impotent, stigmatized as "poor white" trash and greasy mechanics, forced into a rich man's war and a poor man's fight, and "imposed upon socially, politically, and pecuniarily by southern aristocrats and secession oligarchs." Hitherto, Republicans asserted, there had been no party seeking "to elevate you in society, to make your labor honorable, educate your children, protect your industry, or reward your efforts toward political advancement by promoting you to high and responsible position." Now was the "time to proclaim your rights. 'Awake, arise, or be forever fallen.'"²⁸

Again the Republicans triumphed, and while their administration would fall on evil days, the constitution would become exceedingly popular; so much so that political expediency eventually secured approval from a once immovable opposition. An earlier and more sincere approval came from the former Confederate general, Rufus

²⁷ *Ibid.*, Apr. 7, 1868.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

Barringer, who wrote in 1868: "I am bold to say that the lesson of all our troubles has given me more faith in the humbler American freeman, more confidence in liberal institutions, and, I am not afraid to say, more respect for even Black Republican principles."²⁹ Generally speaking it was this recognition that Negro suffrage was not so foreboding, that it even could be helpful, together with a demonstrated willingness to accord equal rights, that particularly distinguished the scalawag from his neighbors. But there were also apparent limitations and qualifications to such sentiments. When the state supreme court's chief justice endorsed Republicanism in 1868, he stated that in accepting Negro rights he intended to encourage an end to the alliance between the Negro and the lower-class white which was the other side of the Republican coin.³⁰ Furthermore, while white Republicans did firmly support technical, political, and civil equality and reject the cry of social equality as a humbug, they also bowed to white supremacy and segregation demands because they were frightened and immersed in a milder form of race prejudice themselves. They joined in denouncing social equality and intermarriage, they discouraged Negroes from running for certain offices; and they accepted segregation in the schools, militia, and elsewhere.

It is hoped that the preceding pages have revealed how Republicanism in one state involved older political rivalries, long-standing demands for reform, unionism, anti-Confederate sentiments, class appeals, sectional divisions, pragmatic tactics, Negro rights, and Conservative party extremism. All contributed to a biracial unity that led to Republican victory and impressive accomplishment in North Carolina by the spring of 1868. The future was to prove quite different, however, as the tale of Republicanism turned from the substance of success to that of failure, and the central means of recent progress, the Negro voter, remained the major source of dispute. Space will not permit a continuing detailed analysis of this collapse but may allow one exploratory suggestion about the entire reconstruction South.

While the degree of federal responsibility for the failures of reconstruction has been rather thoroughly debated, an analysis of the failings of southern Republicans has received less attention and has remained almost entirely confined to perpetuating, in drastically modified form, of course, certain criticisms made by the Redeemers, to recognizing the overwhelming power and advantages possessed by these same Redeemers, and to vaguely detecting certain inter-Republican divisions. It will be suggested here that moderation, on the state, as well as federal level, helped destroy southern Republicanism.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, Sept. 26, 1868.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, Aug. 11, 1868.

After all, the moment of greatest Republican success and accomplishment, in most of the South, was precisely that initial period when it was most radical, reformist, and determined in its stand. Thereafter, it is often possible to detect behind Republican failures a certain decisive timidity that reflected economic, political, and racial orthodoxy and which was encouraged by the flow of influential moderates into Republican ranks. There is much to suggest that the key weaknesses were not that Republicanism was so corrupt, but that it was so honest; not that it was evil, but that it was so naive and idealistic; not that it was extreme, but that it was so conciliatory, so politically and economically proper; and not that it was committed to Negro equality, but that it was not.

For example, that greatest of reconstruction fiascoes, appropriations to the railroads, was less a reflection of radicalism and fraud than a quest for economic progress and respectability. In the best Hamiltonian and southern tradition, Republicans rushed to embrace and assist the wealthy and respected, only to find betrayal and disgrace. Their projects brought increased indignation and taxation, sectional factions within the party, and a party housecleaning by puritanical Republicans that was as admirably honest as it was politically disastrous. What was finally undermined, of course, was not the exploitation and corruption at issue but the egalitarian political philosophy itself. In North Carolina it was a moral victory at least, that one of the Conservative party investigators appointed by Republicans to expose misdealing and fraud subsequently joined the Republicans, in part because it was only they who had cleared the corrupters from their ranks.³¹

Another key Republican weakness appears to have been a failure to maintain an adequate program to retain mass white support. Once in power Republicans were undermined not only by the mistakes they made but because having caught up with standards familiar to the nation they seemed to have nowhere to go. In a time of crisis they were on the defensive, making excuses, apologies, or denials and boasting of past accomplishments. Most scalawags had not fought for Negro rights but had accepted them as a weapon or an inescapable necessity forced upon them by the federal government; and once reform and restoration were achieved and as federal control slackened, white Republicans proved ready to abandon the uncomfortable task of championing the Negro. The commitment of the carpetbagger was only occasionally stronger. Simultaneously, Conservatives exploited this situation by technically accepting Negro

³¹ Samuel F. Phillips, *ibid.*, June 17, 1870. Conversely, many Republicans saw in railroad patronage the way to independence and success.

rights and most of the reforms of 1868. A white man who would vote against either federal law, rights for Negroes, or the reforms of 1868, might still be willing to vote for a white man's party, unless its disadvantages were clear. The closing of that wide gap which had been aiding Republicans now enabled many to drift back into the white fold, while extremism was left to function outside the Conservative party through such organizations as the Ku Klux Klan. In the face of this situation it was incumbent upon Republican leaders to fashion a program to retain masses of white votes, to find continuing common ground between white and Negro workers and farmers, even to anticipate the directions of Populism a generation later. To some extent it was the orthodoxy and business orientation of Republican leaders that blocked such developments, just as it was their racism that interfered with better cooperation or progress in that realm. All things considered, it is not difficult to understand Republican tactics on the race question; but to the extent that these tactics catered to rather than fought white supremacy they were undermining biracial unity and aiding the opposition. And to the extent that race relations were more flexible in the South than they later became, reconstruction may have been an opportune time for a stronger egalitarian push.³²

What may have been the most disastrous and inexcusable weakness of southern Republicans, however, was their failure to protect their own electorate against violence. In this respect, especially, had they only been as radical as the Redeemers were fond of asserting, they might have been much more successful. Instead, they were overly dependent upon the federal government and corrupted by prejudice, while the very idealism that so often generated Republicanism appeared to foster a propriety and naive faith in the political process that was hardly appropriate to conditions in the postwar South. Southern aristocrats may have been Lancelots on the battlefields of war, but they were as ruthless and as deadly as a Richard II or an Ivan IV in politics, and the Republicans proved no match. One is tempted to think that those enthusiastic missionaries and teachers of freedmen, whose very presence aroused such frenzy, might better have been dispensing bits of Machiavelli than teaching Negroes the responsibilities of freedom and marriage, neither of which received proper respect from their white opponents. As for the Union Leagues, whose North Carolina sins were trifling, they did an impressive job of dispelling the heritage of anarchism and theft and of impressing freedmen with the sanctity of voting and legal and

³² A point related to the controversy still bubbling over C. Vann Woodward's *Strange Career of Jim Crow* (New York, 1955).

property rights; but they did next to nothing to protect these rights against the terrors of the Ku Klux Klan.³³ Most astonishing of all was the fact that while prominent Republicans were repeatedly restraining their own followers from any counter violence, Republican governments, possessed of all the advantages of legal authority and power, were not only ineffective but too often inactive in preventing or prosecuting anti-Republican terrorism. They literally begged ruthless opponents to be cooperative; they undermined their own political existence by agreeing to dissolve the perfectly legitimate Union Leagues; and they even prosecuted Negroes more vigorously in the courts to prove their own decorum.³⁴ There were, it is true, more forceful actions, the most promising of which was the organization of a state militia; but, as Otis Singletary has shown, while Republican administrations usually proceeded far enough to incur antagonism, they repeatedly failed to utilize these forces. "The main deterrent," Singletary concludes, "was fear," essentially a fear of race war.³⁵ But just as victory in the Civil War was dependent upon a willingness to join Negroes in fighting whites, so, too, it would seem that the success of the southern experiment was dependent upon the same choice. President Grant was apparently torn between a desire to assist southern Republicans and the restraining counsel of moderate northern Republicans, but the southerners proved unwilling to risk their necks to force his hand.³⁶ If any large scale racial clash had erupted, the federal government would have had to intervene in behalf of the constituted authorities, as on occasion it did. For a good number of years, then, Republicans might well have been able to force more effective federal action and stimulate continued northern concern, but they made little effort to do so.³⁷ Had they

³³ Olsen, *Carpetbagger's Crusade*, pp. 83-84, 149.

³⁴ Albion W. Tourgee, *An Appeal to Caesar* (New York, 1884), pp. 214-215; Charles L. Stearns, *The Black Man of the South, and the Rebels* (New York, 1872), pp. 451, 460; Tourgee to R. M. Tuttle, May 26, 1870, Tourgee Papers, Westfield, N.Y.

³⁵ Otis A. Singletary, *Negro Militia and Reconstruction* (New York, 1962), p. 146.

³⁶ John R. Lynch, *The Facts of Reconstruction* (New York, 1913), pp. 149-151; Wharton, *The Negro in Mississippi*, pp. 190-195; John Z. Sloan, "The Ku Klux Klan and the Alabama Election of 1872," *Alabama Review*, XVIII (1965), 113-123.

³⁷ The nation did move, of course, away from its commitment to utilize the federal government to protect the rights of citizenship and the Negro, but the final stand was as yet undefined during the reconstruction era and was in part dependent upon events in the South. Blatant racist tactics did not succeed in decisively defeating northern Republicans, and illustrations of the fluctuating possibilities of federal action ranged from the Reconstruction Acts themselves to the various Civil Rights Acts, to the exertions of General Philip Sheridan in Louisiana in 1875, and, less directly, to the subsequent utilization of federal

tried, chances are that the Conservatives would have backed down for the last thing they desired was further federal intervention; hence Conservative anxiety to negotiate worthless promises to maintain law and order, a form of negotiation that Republican authorities should not have tolerated for a moment had they any real thought of success. Nor did Conservatives fail to note this basic weakness or cowardice in their enemy.³⁸

The North Carolina record is a bit more militant than that of most states in this respect, but the effects of that militancy are difficult to decipher. Republicans there responded in kind to violence and threats in several instances, with some apparent success; and in 1870, following the brutal murder of two local Republican leaders by the Ku Klux Klan, Governor Holden did declare martial law and utilize a predominantly white militia.³⁹ This effort, although successfully stifling the political impact of the Klan, was undermined by Holden's flouting of the state constitution, followed by the ironic invocation of the Fourteenth Amendment in behalf of Klansmen by the federal district court, a setback that obscured the success of the militia move. The Republicans lost legislative power in the succeeding election, and the Conservatives, who shifted but never for a moment relaxed their own ruthlessness, succeeded in impeaching Holden. Nevertheless, the North had been aroused to further and peace reigned in the state; and the Republicans went on to obtain a majority of the state's vote in 1871, 1872, and 1875, the benefits of which were largely negated by Conservative chicanery. Republicans in the state were not really eclipsed until the great betrayal of 1876; and if the Republican path in North Carolina and other southern states had been more frequently militant, the final result might just have been different.

troops in handling labor disputes. For an excellent illustration of the beneficial effect of Sheridan's activities see Ephraim S. Stoddard to H. R. Stoddard, Jan. 10, 1875, E. S. Stoddard Papers, Tulane University Library.

³⁸ Wharton, *The Negro in Mississippi*, pp. 194-196.

³⁹ Olsen, "The Ku Klux Klan: A Study in Reconstruction Politics and Propaganda," *North Carolina Historical Review*, XXXIX (1962), 350, 359-360.



THE ROANOKE ISLAND

EXPEDITION: Observations of a Massachusetts Soldier

Edited by James I. Robertson, Jr.

On February 10, 1862, a North Carolina matron, Mrs. Catherine Edmondston, confided in her diary: "Tonight's mail brought the news of the fall of Roanoke Island. I fairly burst into tears as I read it."¹

Mrs. Edmondston was not alone. The entire Confederacy came to mourn the loss of this inconspicuous little island close to the coast of North Carolina. Its fall on February 8, 1862, marked the first major military setback suffered by the South. Included with its surrender were 2,675 men, 32 cannon, and 3,000 stand of small arms—men and weapons the Confederacy could ill afford to lose. Even worse, its fall opened the entire North Carolina coast and inland areas to assault; it afforded Federal forces a second front for operations against Virginia; it provided a direct backdoor entrance for a move on the vital port of Norfolk; and it gave the Union's Atlantic blockading fleet a strategic base for operations against the Confederacy's European lifelines. Lastly, this Federal success with an unparalleled and unique amphibious force aroused "the immediate apprehension of every rebel posted within gunshot of salt water."²

It was in September, 1861, that Federal authorities first discussed plans for a thrust against Roanoke Island. The man most responsible for the idea was a thirty-seven-year-old brigadier, Ambrose E. Burnside. This stout and affable Rhode Islander is largely remembered for the disaster at Fredericksburg. Yet, an expedition to Roanoke Island was well within Burnside's limited ability; and he performed competently in this, his first independent command.

Late in October, with the permission of both Lincoln and McClellan, Burnside began amassing troops at Annapolis. His army ulti-

¹ Margaret M. Jones (ed.), *The Journal of Catherine Devereux Edmonston, 1860-1866* (Mebane, N.C., n.d.), p. 38.

² Shelby Foote, *The Civil War* (New York, 1958-), I, 230.