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Review of *The West and Reconstruction* By Eugene H. Berwanger

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The West and Reconstruction. By Eugene H. Berwanger. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1981. Notes, appendix, bibliography, index. 284 pp. \$18.95.

Since 1967, historians of the Reconstruction era have turned away from the Confederate states and Washington to focus their attention on the Northern states. David Montgomery, Felice A. Bonadio, James C. Mohr, and others have studied labor, Ohio, New York, and the border states during Reconstruction. The present book adds to that body of literature a broad-gauged examination of the trans-Mississippi West during the years from 1865 to 1870, omitting the former slave states and Iowa, which are considered more middle western than western. The author of a previous work, *The Frontier Against Slavery*, Berwanger brings a distinguished background to his new book.

Earlier studies of the North during Reconstruction have defined the leading issues as trade unionism, prohibition, prostitution, and legal equality for blacks. Earlier studies of the trans-Mississippi West during Reconstruction have focused upon Indians, cowboys, miners, cattlemen, and nesters. It was a West in which the concerns engaging the attention of eastern states and Washington lawmakers had little place.

Lincoln's assassination, according to Berwanger's findings, sparked the West's interest in Reconstruction; and Andrew Johnson's stubbornness and unseemly conduct were alienating western Republicans by the end of 1866. The president's inept handling of patronage disappointed Republicans and Democrats alike. As Congress began to gain ascendancy, westerners supported the Republican party and congressional policy.

Congress bestowed suffrage upon blacks in the territories nearly two months before it decreed suffrage for blacks in the unreconstructed states. It has been little noticed by historians that the Territorial Suffrage Act was strongly influenced by a protest from Colorado blacks against a proposed state constitution that would leave them unenfranchised. Though Congress failed to override a presidential veto of the Colorado admission bill in 1866, it soon thereafter enfranchised adult black males in the federal territories and forced Nebraska to amend its proposed constitution and provide black suffrage as a "fundamental condition" of admission.

The West witnessed this victory of black suffrage with a lack of enthusiasm. The Territorial Suffrage Act and the Nebraska admission measure enfranchised about eight hundred blacks. In the western states from Minnesota to the Pacific Coast there remained sixty-four hundred blacks who did not have the right to vote. Kansas rejected equal suffrage in 1867; Minnesota, after twice rejecting black suffrage, agreed to it only upon a maneuver to combine the measure with the presidential ballot and to describe it only as a revision of a specific part of the state constitution.

In the making of Congress's policy of military reconstruction, forcing black suffrage upon the ten Southern states that had rejected the Fourteenth Amendment, the West was a force for moderation. Radical schemes to confiscate land and mete out harsh punishment won little favor among westerners. The western vote for military reconstruction was unanimous in the House; in the Senate there were three absences, one negative vote, and six affirmative votes.

Western Republicans believed that black suffrage was a necessity in the South. It was seen as the only means to provide protection to blacks and, in the eyes of some, as a punishment for white rebels. A few politicians insisted that black suffrage would never be forced on loyal, Northern states. When the Fifteenth Amendment came to the six western states and long afterward for ratification, two of them, California and Oregon, rejected the amendment.

All these measures dealing with the South and black suffrage were the subject of lively discussion in the West. After 1867, however, interest in Reconstruction waned. Senator Ross's vote to acquit President Johnson is explained in part in terms of Ross's calculation—or miscalculation, as it turned out—of his chances for reelection.

Berwanger has told his story with insight and lucidity. A couple of factual slips should be noted. It was not the suspension but the removal of Secretary of War Stanton that triggered impeachment; and Congress did not fail to pass the civil rights bill in 1875. Apart from this the book is an admirable work of painstaking scholarship. The author's bibliography is impressive; and his patience in perusing apparently all the western newspapers for his period is staggering. The result is gratifying—a contribution of great value to our understanding of western and Reconstruction history.

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