

“Errors of judgement, not of intent”: The Southern  
Policy of Ulysses S. Grant

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**Declaration**

I, Richard Dotor Cespedes, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own.

Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Richard Dotor Cespedes', written in a cursive style.

## **Abstract**

The Reconstruction era has been subject to countless studies seeking to vilify or celebrate citizens and politicians of the time. From an initial consensus on its immorality and opportunism, to a revisionism where its achievements were celebrated, and a post-revisionism where the cause of its downfall became the focus, the racial, social and political aspects of Reconstruction have been subject to over a century of debate. Within this historiography, though, the significance of Ulysses S. Grant has been predominantly ignored.

Challenging the view that Grant lacked political and racial ideals, the aim of this thesis, and my original contribution to knowledge, is to define his Southern Policy in the context of a personal political and racial philosophy, rather than a record of achievement. An examination of the development of his viewpoint on Reconstruction, the rights of the freedmen, and the power of the President and Federal Government, reveals a struggle at the heart of Grant's Southern policy as he sought to protect the results of the Civil War whilst hastening a close to the work of Reconstruction. Furthermore, careful study of his correspondence reveal him to be an egalitarian who, if permitted, would have been willing to manage the South with greater force and in far more absolute terms.

The tension of his ideals and the dichotomy between thought and action resulted in an inconsistent approach to Southern state crises, counter-productive policy choices and ill-timed changes of course. The outcome was a Southern policy that was not only a political failure for Southern Republicans but, as revealed by a study of Grant's

philosophy on the political and racial issues of the day, a personal one for the President.

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## Abbreviations

DGW	Morse, John T. ed., <i>The Diary of Gideon Welles: Secretary of the Navy under Lincoln and Johnson</i> (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1911) 3 Volumes
DHF	<i>Diary of Hamilton Fish, Fish Papers</i> , Library of Congress
LOC	Library of Congress
PMUSG	Grant, Ulysses S., <i>Personal Memoirs of U.S. Grant</i> (New York: Charles L. Webster, 1885) 2 Volumes
PUSG	Simon, John Y. et al, eds., <i>The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant</i> (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1967-2009) 31 Volumes
USG	Ulysses S. Grant

## **Acknowledgments**

For supporting me academically, financially and emotionally, I would like to thank those individuals who have been instrumental in the completion of this thesis, over nine long - and as my supervisor warned me - tortuous years.

To my family, I would like to thank them for their encouragement and financial support throughout my undergraduate and post graduate studies. Without their help, none of this would have been possible. To my wife, I would like to express gratitude for the emotional support, encouragement and understanding she has displayed over the years. I would also like to thank her for appreciating that holiday time meant study time. Shortly after starting this thesis, I began working full-time in further education. The demands of teaching, marking, preparing lessons and managing programmes frustratingly made the study of Ulysses S. Grant very much a part-time activity. The struggle of balancing this workload, particularly in the last few years where my career has progressed, has always been appreciated by all that have supported me and again, I would like to express my gratitude.

To my supervisor, Professor Iwan Morgan, I would like to express sincere gratitude for the guidance, wisdom, patience and honesty he has shown to me over the years. As time has passed, and the thesis had progressed slowly towards completion, Professor Morgan has always been there to provide academic guidance above and beyond what was required, and to take a sincere interest in my personal and professional life.

I would like to thank the School of Advanced Study and University College London for facilitating a smooth transition between institutions. I would also like to thank the Institute for the Study of the Americas (SOAS) for funding my fieldwork in Washington D.C.

Lastly, I would like to thank Dr Andrew Moran at London Metropolitan University and Professor Nathan Abrams at Bangor University for encouraging me to embark on this journey.



## Introduction

Throughout Reconstruction historiography and presidential studies in general, the significance of Ulysses S. Grant on the post-Civil War American South has been inadequately explored. Whilst celebrated as a general in countless volumes about his military career, those studies that touch upon his presidency often fall short of comprehensiveness, tending to perpetuate an image of political ineptitude, unintelligence and insignificance. In reference to this historiography, the late John Y. Simon, Executive Director of the *Ulysses S. Grant Association*, wrote that “military historians analyzed a far different Grant than did political historians, and the two portraits hardly seemed to show the same person”.<sup>1</sup>

The majority of academics are comfortable with the assumption that Grant was ill-suited for the role of president and once in office, was insignificant in his impact. Thomas A. Bailey in *Presidential Greatness* (1966) concluded that his “eight long years in blunderland are generally regarded as a national disgrace” and that even if one was to “[e]liminate those crooks for whom Grant was not directly responsible... he is entitled to a Below Average [sic] rating, a few notches better than complete failure”.<sup>2</sup> This opinion is illustrated by Grant’s positioning in presidential rankings where he typically occupies the lower end of the table. A recent survey conducted by

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<sup>1</sup> John Y. Simon, “Ulysses S. Grant One Hundred Years Later”, *Illinois State Historical Society*, LXXIX (Winter 1986), p.256

<sup>2</sup> Thomas A. Bailey, *Presidential Greatness* (New York: Appleton-Century, 1966) pp.295-296

the Institute for the Study of the America's *United States Presidency Centre* placed Grant at number twenty eight of the forty presidents assessed, a rare high point.<sup>3</sup>

Whilst not vilified to the same extent as James Buchanan, Grant consistently occupies the bottom end of the presidential spectrum of achievement, dismissed as the “simple soldier, inexperienced in statecraft, impervious to sound advice, and oblivious to his own blundering”.<sup>4</sup> Grant certainly acknowledged his shortcomings as President. In his final annual message, he wrote of his “fortune, or misfortune, to be called to the office of Chief Executive without any previous political training.”<sup>5</sup> Reflecting on his time in the White House, he admitted to mistakes and failures, but believed them to have been “errors of judgment, not of intent”.<sup>6</sup> This statement is fundamental to this thesis as the counter-productive outcomes of Grant's Southern policy (in the context of protecting the results of war) were predominantly the result of mismanagement or insurmountable obstacles, rather than an intention to strip away the achievements of the Civil War and Reconstruction era.

The tendency to define the presidency of Ulysses S. Grant by failure or the corruption that surrounded him has perpetuated ignorance as to the more complex and arguably positive aspects of his political career. Particularly in reference to Southern affairs, a closer study of Grant during the Reconstruction era reveal him to be far more committed to the cause of civil rights in the South than many have given him credit

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<sup>3</sup> Institute for the Study of the Americas, United States Presidency Centre. UK Survey of US Presidents Results [Internet] [Accessed 29 July 2014]; Available from: <http://www.community-languages.org.uk/US-presidency-survey/overall.htm>

<sup>4</sup> Eugene H. Roseboom and Alfred E. Eckles jr, *A History of Presidential Elections: From George Washington to Jimmy Carter* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc, 1979) p.87

<sup>5</sup> The American Presidency Project. Ulysses S. Grant Eight Annual Message [Internet]. 1999-2014. [Accessed 29 July 2014]; Available from <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=29517>

<sup>6</sup> Ibid

for. As stated, in the field of presidential studies there exists an historical bias against Grant. Frank Scaturro in *President Grant Reconsidered* (1999) argues that this consensus stands “collectively as the most inaccurate component of this area of history”.<sup>7</sup> Brooks D. Simpson in *The Reconstruction Presidents* (1998) wrote, “[i]t is one of the puzzling lacuna in Reconstruction historiography (and that of political history in general) that no satisfactory study of the Grant presidency exists, which is all the more startling in light of the willingness of many scholars to pass judgement on it”.<sup>8</sup> Expressing his dissatisfaction again, John Y. Simon concluded, “[a] century of scholarship has created long bookshelves of Grant source materials and interpretations without inspiring confidence that the man himself has been understood”.<sup>9</sup>

### **Aims of the study**

This study aims to address the concerns of the eminent Grant historians and contribute to the fields of Reconstruction and presidential history a substantial and qualified revisionist analysis that will enhance understanding of Grant’s Southern policy. Rejecting the view that he lacked firm political beliefs and was entirely reactive in Southern matters, this study approaches the subject with the intent of defining Grant’s Southern policy predominantly through his words rather than his actions. The central questions this thesis seeks to answer are: to what degree did Grant’s political and racial philosophy determine his Southern policy and to what extent were the outcomes at variance with it. In order to achieve this aim, the study will meet the following three objectives: to define Grant’s Southern policy as a personal political and racial philosophy, to attribute political action to specific philosophical tenets, and to assess

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<sup>7</sup> Frank J. Scaturro, *President Grant Reconsidered* (Lanham: Madison Books, 1999), p.preface

<sup>8</sup> Brooks D Simpson., *The Reconstruction Presidents* (Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1998), p.265

<sup>9</sup> Simon, *Ulysses S. Grant One Hundred Years Later*, p.256

Grant's record in the South in relation to his personal political and racial beliefs. This will be achieved through a concentration on Grant's comments, paying attention to his phraseology, use of metaphors, the manner in which he described individuals and incidents during the Reconstruction era and the way in which his discussion of Southern affairs and his rhetoric evolved over time. This evidence will in turn be related to the actual implementation of policy in the South and the extent to which his political and racial philosophy reconciles with his professional record.

It is important to state that the term philosophy is more appropriate than ideology when analysing Grant's political and racial beliefs. From the Civil War onwards he was associated with the Republican Party but arguably never sat entirely within one camp or ideological grouping. Rather than adhering to a dogmatic set of ideological points, Grant's political outlook was based on a personal set of beliefs, values and tenets largely the result of his experiences during the Civil War. He adhered to many Republican principles and certainly for a brief time appeared very much the Radical Republican. But a common, and largely correct, assertion about Grant is that he was no politician. For that reason, it can be argued that what he adhered to was a personal political and racial philosophy, rather than political doctrine. David M. Jordan in *Roscoe Conkling of New York* recognises this when discussing Grant's nomination for the presidency and that his political allegiance occurred only "once Grant found out that he was a Republican"<sup>10</sup>.

But despite having no clear ideological allegiance, Grant had an identifiable set of personal beliefs and principles that guided his actions, specifically two key, but

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<sup>10</sup>, David M. Jordan, *Roscoe Conkling of New York: Voice in the Senate* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1971) p.107

conflicting, goals clearly stated by Grant. The first, made in correspondence with General William Tecumseh Sherman in 1868, was an assertion by Grant that if he was to turn down the presidency, the country would lose “the results of the costly war”.<sup>11</sup> The achievements of the Civil War that Grant referred to are exemplified by the course he pursued during the presidential and congressional Reconstruction of the mid-to-late 1860s. During these four tumultuous years he worked to protect the rights and lives of Unionists and blacks in the South and counteract the resurgence of Confederate ideals in Southern politics. Assuming responsibility for the fate of Reconstruction and the legacy of the Civil War, he clearly identified himself as being politically aligned with the congressional programme devised by the Radical Republicans.

The second statement, denoting a shift or dual priority in Southern policy, was given during Grant’s annual message of 1869, in reference to the last states to be readmitted to the Union. Seeking acceptance of a more conciliatory approach to Southern affairs, Grant urged compliance in accepting concessions to the South so as to “close the work of reconstruction”.<sup>12</sup> As President he was earnest in his desire to tie-up the loose ends of Reconstruction, most notably the readmission of the last three unreconstructed states and the ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment.

These two goals serve to define the Southern policy of Ulysses S. Grant in broad terms and provide reference points for Grant’s philosophical outlook on the South, and the policies he would pursue. Individual instances provide greater complexity but each political conundrum of the time had to be managed in a way that either sought to

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<sup>11</sup> USG to Lt. Gen. William T. Sherman, Jun 21, 1868, PUSG-XVIII, pp.292-293

<sup>12</sup> USG, Annual Message, Dec 6, 1869, PUSG-XX, pp.18-44

protect the results of war – and so prolong the process of Reconstruction – or facilitate an end to its work, often in a way that endangered what had been won on the battlefield. The challenge of pursuing these often at-odds policy goals is a central theme of this study. To protect the results of war was to ensure peace in the South, protect Unionists and safeguard the newly bestowed legal and political rights of blacks. To close the work of Reconstruction, as early as 1869, required putting a halt to the political, social and economic reshaping of the South, so as to move the nation on from the Civil War. It also meant inevitably surrendering the Southern states to a resurgent Democratic Party and a section of Southern society that used intimidation and violence as a means of societal control.

Arguably, to satisfactorily achieve one of the goals, the other would be detrimentally affected, often drawing criticism from historians. As Reconstruction quickly became a corollary of the Civil War, the tension to finalise the programme but also uphold what it had achieved represented a continuing conflict between sections of the country. As stated, Grant's policy represents an effort to facilitate an end to the process of Reconstruction but without entirely abandoning his moralistic duty of protecting the results of war. The incongruity or lack of continuity was predominantly the result of these conflicting goals, not a lack of regard for citizens in the South or an acceptance of racial inequality. His adherence to the responsibility of honouring the Civil War's dead caused, what this thesis contends to be, the spasmodic and oscillatory nature of his policy. The moral high points in terms of protection, equality and justice were the result of not only the legitimacy at the time of pursuing those issues, but also Grant's sense of duty (which in itself requires definition) where politics and party were secondary to that need to protect the results of war. Even the election of 1876, the most

cynical of political bargains, represented a policy choice that sought to honour the legacy of the Civil War. It is precisely this conflict of interests for Grant that determines his Southern policy.

As argued, it was the incompatibility of these two goals that created the incongruity that so many historians attribute to either a lack of skill, moral fortitude or sympathy for the future of blacks. Unlike his successor Rutherford B. Hayes, President Grant lacked a road-map for completion of his Southern policy. He managed Southern affairs in a manner that at different times prioritised the interest of different groups, be they the Republican Party (local or national), blacks in the South or the nation as a whole. Despite a proclivity to let Southern issues resolve themselves, an analysis of his record, both in terms of his political and racial discussions and implementation of policy, shows that on balance Grant sought ultimately to protect the results of war, by any means possible. This included: suppression of the press, federal intervention, foreign policy as a means by which blacks in the South could be valued, and finally the sacrifice of Republicans in the South in order to maintain the presidency.

Fundamental to this thesis is the recognition that Grant's political and racial philosophy often conflicted with the actual policy he implemented. Restrained by his party, the American political system, the voter and most importantly his own lack of resolve, Grant's philosophy, as surmised by the collected comments, sits uncomfortably next to many of his actions in regards to the South. It is the contention of this thesis, though, that there is a philosophical undercurrent that permeates Grant's entire presidency that accounts for the spasmodic behaviour. In a public career that spanned the entire Civil War and Reconstruction era, Grant's record is heterogeneous.

The one constant, though, was his belief that for the results of war to endure and the Civil War to be sanctified, the survival of Republican Party on a national level was crucial.

### **Methodology**

This thesis is in large part a response to a historiography that frequently disregards Grant's importance to the study of Reconstruction. Belonging amongst the revisionist works of Brooks D. Simpson, John Scaturro, Jean Edward Smith and more recently Joan Waugh, a key objective of this study is to facilitate a greater understanding of Grant's outlook on race, the defeated South and the programme of Reconstruction. It must be established at the outset, though, that the intention is not to develop a greater appreciation for the achievements of Ulysses Grant, although at times that might be the result. The overriding intention is to provide clarity to the subject of Ulysses S. Grant and his Southern policy, not to reassess his record with the aim of producing a more favourable judgement.

In order to associate a set of beliefs or principles to Ulysses S. Grant equitably, the majority of evidence will be taken from the Grant papers, now numbering thirty-one volumes. In addition, the diaries and papers of those who regularly came in contact with him will be consulted as will the reflections of key figures of the era. The purpose of this exclusive field is to avoid conclusions based on generalisations – so common within the Reconstruction historiography – and base judgements predominantly on the remarks of Grant and his closest allies. With the Grant papers as the chief source of evidence for this study, the methodology will be primarily a systematic and chronological analysis of letters, telegrams, orders and speeches (in draft as well as



final form), and their relationship to the established history of the Civil War and Reconstruction. Whilst not prone to outbursts of emotion or the need to overly discuss political points, the Grant papers provide sufficient evidence to gauge his opinion on the South, the rights of blacks and the role of the Republican Party in protecting the results of war. As General-in-chief, Grant wrote to his subordinates stationed in the South discussing local issues and presidential and congressional Reconstruction policy. The manner in which he translated orders from the President, advised his generals on managing their districts, requested information and forwarded reports, indicate certain priorities for Grant in managing the South.

As President his private correspondence includes numerous letters and telegrams to Governors and legislators in the South discussing issues of violence and electoral fraud. Being more guarded as President, his correspondence with Republicans in the South is restrained in the advice given and the language used. Often, though, these discussions reveal the reasoning for the policies he pursued on a state and national level. In limited circumstances there are more candid discussions of politics and race, specifically with confidants such as General William Tecumseh Sherman and Illinois Representative Elihu B. Washburne (Radical Republican and resident of Grant's home town Galena, Illinois). In these conversations Grant regularly passes judgement on political and racial issues revealing his frustrations as to the course of politics and Reconstruction.

In addition to the string of conversations between Grant and individuals relevant to this thesis, within the Grant papers are interviews which contain concise and outright statements on the South and the larger political issues of the day. Both during and after

his presidency, Grant was interviewed and asked about the course of Reconstruction. Often these interviews reveal a fixed outlook on the South discussing the issues within the context of a continuing Civil War. Lastly, within the collected papers are draft speeches which when compared with the actual ones that were issued, reveal a greater concentration on Southern issues.

Southern policy, as inferred from these papers, will be compared, supported and challenged through the application of additional primary sources and the consultation of key secondary works spanning the entire historiography. The most regularly referred to primary source is the diary of Secretary of State Hamilton Fish, available in its entirety in the Library of Congress but also referred to in the Grant papers and extensively quoted from in Allan Nevins's *Hamilton Fish: The Inner History of the Grant Administration*. Fish's diary provides the only real insight into how Grant worked with his cabinet and discussed Southern affairs.

The fundamental aim when consulting these primary and secondary sources is to attribute the comments contained within them to the two principle objectives of Grant's Southern policy: to protect the results of war and close the work of Reconstruction. Whether it was rhetoric or an official order, Grant's discussion of the South and the implementation of policy must be reconciled with his broader policy goals, therefore indicating priorities in his management of the South.

**Format of the thesis**

The format of the thesis is predominantly chronological in order to demonstrate the evolution of Southern policy both philosophically and in practice. Commencing with an evaluation of the historiography, the initial chapter focuses on the judgements made in key Reconstruction and Grant specific texts, identifying themes, common accusations and the consensus on Grant's political career and racial beliefs. Following the review of literature, Grant's military and political career is analysed across six chapters beginning with a two-chapter study of the Civil War and the presidential and congressional Reconstruction of the mid-to-late 1860s. This work serves to outline the conditions that forged Grant's Southern policy as he moved towards the presidency. As General-in-chief and Secretary of War, Grant played a pivotal role in the management of the defeated South and the development and execution of congressional Reconstruction policy. By 1868, the year of the presidential election, his Southern policy was the product of four years of supporting Radical Republicans in Congress, undermining President Andrew Johnson's Reconstruction programme and responding to violence in the formerly rebellious states. Therefore, his role in managing the South, and the political and racial connotations of his actions, provide a basis by which to assess his presidential record in the context of protecting the results of the war.

After establishing Southern policy prior to political office, the succeeding four chapters assess the extent to which it developed during Grant's presidency in relation to his commitment to protecting the results of war but also his intention, once in office, to "close the work of reconstruction". An evaluation of the inherent conflict of these aims is kept live throughout these chapters with incongruous, contradictory and self-

defeating policy choices attributed to this struggle and the pursuit, at least at that time, of one of those key policy goals. Chapters four and five concern Grant's first term as president (1869 to 1872) looking at: his cabinet, the readmission of Southern states, early attempts at conciliation in Virginia, the ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment, the Enforcement Acts, the role of the Attorney General, the annexation of San Domingo as part of his Southern policy, political opposition to Grant, amnesty, annual messages and inaugural speeches as expressions of his political philosophy, and case studies of policy in North and South Carolina, Georgia and Louisiana.

Case studies of individual states comprise the majority of this study's methodology as it is within these individual histories that one sees the illustration of Southern policy either through political discussion or specific action. Throughout the South, threats to Republican rule, federal authority and the rights of blacks required presidential action such as settling disputed elections, dispatching troops or placing the state under military supervision. But despite commonalities in their circumstances, each state offered its own form of Republicanism and Democrat opposition that determined which policy goal Grant sought to prioritise at that particular moment. In addition to these case studies, presidential, state and congressional elections will be considered throughout the thesis in the context of their impact on Southern policy.

Continuing with the case study approach, chapters six and seven analyse policy in Grant's second term looking at Arkansas, Mississippi and continuing to assess policy choices in North and South Carolina and Louisiana. In addition to these state-based studies, there is the discussion of civil rights legislation and challenges to the Enforcement Acts. Chapter seven concludes with the presidential election of 1876 and

its place within Southern policy, and Grant's reflections on the South and Reconstruction, post-presidency. Finally, the thesis concludes with an initial study of Rutherford B. Hayes and the South with the purpose of distinguishing Grant's policy by way of contrasting it with his successor's.

Writing in 1999, Scaturro charged that "a reliable, comprehensive evaluation of Grant as president in the context of revisionism has yet to be written".<sup>13</sup> This thesis it is hoped helps to fill a major gap in the history of Grant's presidency in its analysis of his Southern policy. If it succeeds in doing so, it may aid scholars seeking better to understand Presidential Reconstruction beyond Abraham Lincoln and Andrew Johnson.

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<sup>13</sup> Scaturro, *President Grant Reconsidered*, p.113

## **Chapter 1: Ulysses S. Grant in History**

Within the vast study of Reconstruction and presidential history lie varying, and often conflicting, interpretations of Grant's beliefs, political acumen, moral fortitude and most importantly, his Southern policy and its record. This chapter intends to review the most notable (but not necessarily reliable) studies of Ulysses S. Grant, be they Grant specific or part of a broader study of the Reconstruction era. The analysis of this literature will be structured as follows: firstly, a chronological study of Reconstruction historiography outlining shifts in academic opinion and identifying different assessments of Grant within a field that saw significant revision throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Secondly, Grant specific texts will be reviewed following a thematic approach as by their nature they provide far greater detail and concentration on key elements of his military and political career. By establishing the conflicting arguments, the legitimate and unsubstantiated criticisms and the empathic assessments, certain commonalities can be identified, considered and judged. An identification of a consensus on Ulysses S. Grant's political reputation and racial opinions will place this thesis within a body of work with an intention to not solely review the existing literature but also justify the necessity for further revision.

### **Reconstruction Historiography**

If one is to attempt a satisfactorily conclusive assessment of the Grant historiography in relation to Southern affairs, one must begin with the study of the Reconstruction era and how that field has fundamentally changed. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Bourbon school led by William A. Dunning portrayed Reconstruction as an oppressive and corrupt programme that victimised innocent Southern whites and manipulated

ignorant blacks in order to serve partisan needs.<sup>14</sup> Historians such as Claude Bowers perpetuated this orthodoxy in the 1920s describing the era as one where never in the country's history had "American public men in responsible positions, directing the destiny of the Nation, been so brutal, hypocritical and corrupt".<sup>15</sup>

It was only with the onset of the 1960s that authors such as John Hope Franklin attempted to rehabilitate one of America's most turbulent and controversial periods. When David Donald revised James G. Randall's *The Civil War and Reconstruction* (1937) in 1961, he wrote: "I have...tried to show Negroes, carpetbaggers, and scalawags in a fuller, and I hope fairer, light".<sup>16</sup> Subsequent historians such as William Gillette and more recently Charles W. Calhoun, who represent a post-revisionism, would focus their attention and criticism on those complicit in Reconstruction's downfall, rather than seeing its architects as the villains of the time. It is within the key texts of William A. Dunning, John Hope Franklin, Eric Foner, William Gillette, Charles W. Calhoun, Michael W. Fitzgerald, and Brooks D. Simpson that we see how Reconstruction study has evolved, and most importantly, how Grant has received a mixed treatment.

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<sup>14</sup> William A. Dunning: Francis Lieber Professor of History and Political Philosophy at Columbia University. Under Dunning, white Southern graduate students commonly known as the Dunning School wrote extensively on the subject of Reconstruction.

<sup>15</sup> Claude Bowers, *The Tragic Era. The Revolution after Lincoln* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1929) , preface, p.iii. Claude Bowers: American writer, Democrat and ambassador to Spain and Chile. Bowers' *The Tragic era* stands as one of the most widely read books on the Reconstruction era. In addition to arguing for the vengeful nature of Radical Republicanism, Bowers stressed the unfitness of blacks to vote and the rights of states. See David E. Kyvig, "History as Present Politics: Claude Bowers' *The Tragic Era*", *Indiana Magazine of History*, Vol 73, No.1 (March 1977), pp.17-31

<sup>16</sup> J. G. Randall and David Donald , *The Civil War and Reconstruction* (Boston: D. C. Heath and Company, 1961), p.vii

In *Reconstruction, Political and Economic, 1865-1877* (1907), William H. Dunning criticised Republicans of the era for their vengeful and self-serving Reconstruction programme but neglected to acknowledge Grant as a proponent of it. In dismissing his significance, a less condemnatory assessment of the executive who presided longest over Reconstruction is made. In what would become a traditional summation of Grant's ability, Dunning wrote, "[i]n his military career Grant's natural reserve and taciturnity had been eminently appropriate and useful. In political life they proved much less so, and accentuated the difficulty which flowed from his lack of matured judgements on public affairs".<sup>17</sup>

Dunning describes Grant as an outsider, believing that "[h]e felt in a general way that he was a Republican; but his perception of what party really meant in the conduct of the administration was vague".<sup>18</sup> Dunning's suggestion has some validity as upon election Grant was very much the outsider, being a Republican largely out of necessity. In his assessment of the President, Dunning disregards any political evolution whereas future historians, such as William B. Hesseltine and William Gillette, would base their entire assessment of Grant on his transformation into what they considered to be a party politician.

This is not to say that Dunning does not produce some satisfactory analysis. Sympathetic to Grant's early desire for conciliation with white southerners, he suggests that in regards to Reconstruction, "the President's ideas were more clear and well-informed than upon perhaps any other issue of the day".<sup>19</sup> Specifically, Dunning

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<sup>17</sup> William A. Dunning, *Reconstruction, Political and Economic 1865-1877* (New York: Harper TorchBooks, 1962), p.178

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, p.178

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, p.179



concludes that when the President pursued the idea of conciliation, he “readily adopted the policy of pushing the work to completion with the least possible humiliation of the Southern whites”.<sup>20</sup> However, the author’s doctrine that Reconstruction was a “social and political system in which all the forces that made for civilization were dominated by a mass of barbarous freedmen” allows for quick condemnation.<sup>21</sup> Once Grant’s Southern policy incorporated the use of federal power, the opposition of the South and the Liberal Republican Party were, in Dunning’s assessment, both inevitable and warranted.

In reference to Congress’ passing of the First Enforcement Act to address racially and politically motivated crimes in the South, Dunning argues that by 1871 “there existed a perfectly serious and not unjustified feeling that the president was an unsafe if not a positively dangerous chief of the administration”.<sup>22</sup> However, failing to recognise the President’s support or involvement in the legislative change, Grant is portrayed as a pawn: “[h]is adhesion to the radical rather than the moderate Republicans was determined by his confidence in certain leaders; and this confidence resulted in some cases from wholly irrelevant canons of judgment, in some cases from unpredictable and inexplicable caprice, but very seldom from well-founded appreciation of their capacity and convictions”.<sup>23</sup>

There is a strong case for the detrimental effect that Grant’s judgement of men had on his presidency and reputation. However, in regards to Southern affairs, it can be said that nowhere else in his presidency, with perhaps the exception of the proactive

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid, p.179

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, p.212

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, p.195

<sup>23</sup>Ibid, pp.192-193

annexation of San Domingo, did Grant exhibit more independence and conviction. It is also highly debateable whether Dunning's opinion that Grant was oblivious to the real conditions in the South is true. By 1874, the President was all too aware of the intractability of the white South on racial matters. In his annual message of December 1874, Grant argued that to not intervene in the South to uphold civil rights and maintain order would be "[w]orse than a mockery and little better than a crime".<sup>24</sup> Dunning counteracts, suggesting that "what he [Grant] would not see, or was not permitted to see, was that the whole system of interference under the enforcement acts had become both a mockery and a crime".<sup>25</sup>

Whilst largely discredited now, Dunning's work served as a defining moment in Reconstruction historiography, establishing an orthodoxy that prevailed until the late 1950s. Its utter neglect of Grant's significance in Reconstruction shaped an historical assessment of the eighteenth President as well-meaning but fundamentally ignorant. Confined to being a figurehead for duplicitous and morally bankrupt Republicans, Dunning concludes, "Grant in 1868 had cried peace, but in his time, with the Radicals and the carpet-baggers in the saddle, there was no peace".<sup>26</sup>

Grant is afforded little attention in Dunning's assessment of Reconstruction. Viewing the President as neither the architect nor driving force behind the programme, he naturally has little quarrel with him. If he had examined and taken seriously Grant's actions between the war and the White House, his assessment might have been far different. By ignoring Grant's support for Reconstruction as General-in-chief and

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<sup>24</sup> James D. Richardson, *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 1789-1897* (Washington D.C.: Bureau of National Literature and Art, 1903), VIII, p.284

<sup>25</sup> Dunning, *Reconstruction, Political and Economic 1865-1877*, p.270

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, p.341

Secretary of War, Dunning failed to bring to light an extremely important force in the early days of Reconstruction.

Dunning's work fostered the early consensus that Reconstruction had been a disastrous, corrupt and vindictive process. With the revisionism of the 1960s attempting a rehabilitation and new understanding of its significance, it is curious that the eighteenth President, whose tenure covered most of the Reconstruction era, was not treated to a more detailed study.

John Hope Franklin's *Reconstruction: After the Civil War* (1961) is perhaps the most influential of the revisionist texts. Focusing on the political, cultural and social battle over Reconstruction at a national and local level, Franklin provides a concise, informative and well-argued assessment of the era. He does, nevertheless, largely disregard the role of Grant. Like the vast majority of Reconstruction historians up until the mid-1990s, Franklin does not adequately outline Grant's importance during the early years of the programme. He does, however, provide evidence of a moral commitment. Upon the removal of Major General Philip H. Sheridan from command of the military districts of Louisiana and Texas in 1867, Franklin refers to Grant's emotional plea to President Andrew Johnson that, "in the name of a patriotic people who have sacrificed hundreds of thousands of loyal lives", the President should not remove such a staunch supporter of congressional Reconstruction.<sup>27</sup>

It is interesting that Franklin acknowledges such a vocal and public commitment from Grant but fails to detail how such beliefs might have manifested themselves during his

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<sup>27</sup> John Hope Franklin, *Reconstruction: After the Civil War* (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1961), p.79

presidency. The author does, however, believe that once the Federal Government went after the Ku Klux Klan and Enforcement legislation was passed, a “fresh flood of reports of outrages had come to the attention of the President, and he was ready to take the initiative”.<sup>28</sup> Despite using uncommonly positive terminology such as “initiative” when describing Grant, the author is largely critical of his Southern policy. He writes, “[Grant] used his pardoning power freely between 1869 and 1877, thereby greatly contributing to the growing strength of Southerners who were busily using their political and economic power to overthrow Radical rule”.<sup>29</sup> The motives for Grant’s pardoning are open to interpretation and as will be discussed in later chapters, other writers are less critical of it. What should be noted is that Franklin neither identifies who specifically was pardoned nor what direct effects it had.

Franklin’s study presents Grant as neither a proponent nor active participant in Reconstruction’s pursuit of racial equality. He acknowledges that the President was an important figure but also that he was counteractive to the programme and showed little enthusiasm or commitment to it. Like many other authors, Franklin places great importance on Grant’s response to the request of Mississippi Governor Adelbert Ames for federal assistance against anti-Reconstruction violence: “[t]he whole public are tired of the annual autumnal outbreaks in the South”.<sup>30</sup> Even though this is a comment on public opinion, not his own, this statement is often invoked by writers keen to stress Grant’s lack of commitment to the freedmen. According to Franklin, “President Grant, even when mindful of the implications for the Republican party of strong

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid, p.167

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, p.203

<sup>30</sup> Allan Nevins, *Hamilton Fish The Inner History of the Grant Administration* (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co, 1936) cited in Franklin, *Reconstruction After the Civil War*, p.150

reconstruction [sic] measures, had little real enthusiasm for the Radical program”.<sup>31</sup> In a broad evaluation, he argues: “while Grantism might mean a kind of laxity in public morality, it also meant a welcome leniency in the enforcement of reconstruction”.<sup>32</sup> To describe Grant’s Southern policy in its historical context as lenient is debatable. If one is to recognise the controversial nature of the Enforcement Acts, the Grant Administration was exercising an unprecedented level of executive and federal power, however cautiously it may have been used.

In seeking to transform the image of Reconstruction and present the Republican programme as a noble failure, the revisionist works of the 1960s identified the Grant administration as a key factor in its tragic demise. Kenneth M. Stampp in *The Era of Reconstruction, 1865 – 1877* (1965) concludes: “the administration of President Grant set the moral tone for American government at all levels, national, state, and local. The best-remembered episodes of the Grant era are its numerous scandals”.<sup>33</sup> In his assessment, the corruption that existed in Southern state governments was a projection of Washington’s own. Somewhat sympathetic to Grant, he wrote that the President “lacked the moral dedication that was so vital an element in Republican radicalism...He failed to provide the firm leadership that was essential in a period of profound social change. In spite of his good intentions, he contributed little but political ineptitude”.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Franklin, *Reconstruction After the Civil War*, p.202

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, p.203

<sup>33</sup> Kenneth M. Stampp, *The Era of Reconstruction, 1865 – 1877* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1965), p.177

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, p.187

Taking a line followed by other scholars, Stamppp deems the election of 1868 as the death-toll for Reconstruction: “[t]he inauguration of Grant marked the approaching end of the Republican party’s creative role as the political instrument of what Charles A. Beard has called ‘the Second American Revolution’”.<sup>35</sup> It is certainly true that 1868 marked a turning point for the Republican Party. With the war over and slavery destroyed, some sort of political realignment was inevitable. However, Stamppp’s assessment lacks an appreciation for the achievements of the Republican Party during the Grant era. After 1868 the transformative agenda of Reconstruction endured with the ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment, the passing of enforcement legislation and the Civil Rights Acts.

Sat between the revisionism of Franklin and Stamppp and the post-revisionism of William Gillette, historian Martin E. Mantell, in the early 1970s, looked at the importance of the military, and particularly Grant, in the early days of Reconstruction. In *Johnson, Grant, and the Politics of Reconstruction* (1973), Mantell suggests that Reconstruction “could only be done if the army officers responsible for the enforcement of the Acts were sympathetic to the Congressional policy and prepared to resist presidential obstruction”.<sup>36</sup> The army, Mantell suggests, was “more aware than any other group of the price that had been paid for victory and thus more responsive than any other to the felt need to ‘protect the results of war’”.<sup>37</sup>

Whilst not instrumental in its drafting and not actually accorded any legal power by the first Reconstruction Act, in Mantell’s assessment, Grant’s “views were actually

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid, p.187

<sup>36</sup> Martin E. Mantell, *Johnson, Grant, and the Politics of Reconstruction* (New York & London: Columbia University Press, 1973), p.27

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, p.27

doubly important because of his influence on the other Generals and his popularity with Northern voters".<sup>38</sup> He presents Grant as trying to police the South in opposition to the policies of President Johnson. As the Executive fought for the absolute power of local governments in charging and trying criminals, through General Order No.44, Grant instructed his Southern commanders to charge and try criminals in cases where reliable courts did not exist, and to become involved politically by building support for the Fourteenth Amendment.<sup>39</sup>

Mantell's study is of great use in understanding Grant's role in Reconstruction during the years 1865 to 1868. Detailing the cause and effect of Grant's actions, the author convincingly argues for the General-in-chief's instrumental role in congressional Reconstruction. Unfortunately, his study is perhaps too clinical to be of use in understanding Grant's political philosophy. There is no effort to understand the man and his motives as the author concentrates on the outcomes of Grant's actions, rather than their reasoning. Nevertheless, Mantell does provide a concise and well-balanced summation of his time in office. He concludes: "[t]he conflict for control of the South changed from a question of who would establish the basis for reconstruction to a series of struggles for political control within each state... it continued to be as bitter and violent as ever, and in eight years of his presidency Grant was to be unable to fulfil his promise to restore peace to the nation".<sup>40</sup>

Whilst the revisionist history of Reconstruction sought to present it as a noble failure, post-revisionism focussed on making those responsible for its downfall accountable.

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid, pp.27-28

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, pp.28-30

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, p.149

In 1979, William Gillette published *Retreat From Reconstruction 1869 – 1879*. Alongside Charles W. Calhoun's *Conceiving a New Republic* (2006), Gillette's work still stands as one of the most detailed and comprehensive studies of the Grant administration and the South. Gillette delves into the Grant presidency in far greater detail than any scholar before him, devoting entire chapters to individual states and political events such as the congressional elections of 1874 and the Civil Rights Act of 1875. At the core of his argument is the belief that the inherent racism and partisan calculation of the day led to an abandonment of Reconstruction by the Republican Party supported by a complicit, and somewhat unethical, executive.

According to Gillette, Grant's Southern policy is "a study in incongruity: a curious, confusing, changeable mix of boldness and timidity, decision and indecision, activity and passivity, as he shifted between reinforcement and retrenchment, coercion and conciliation".<sup>41</sup> Denying that it was based in any way on idealism, Gillette believes that the "underlying intention was to promote the fortunes of both President Grant and the Republican party through the process of reconstruction and also to carry on the business of government by maintaining order and guaranteeing republican [sic] rule".<sup>42</sup> This statement reflects the author's bewilderment that politicians would act primarily out of a need to maintain party fortunes. The lack of altruism on the part of the Republican Party and Grant is a cardinal criticism by Gillette but it is one that ultimately undermines his argument. With an excessive expectation of what could and should have been achieved during the process of Reconstruction, the author inevitably produces an unforgivable assessment.

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<sup>41</sup> William Gillette, *Retreat From Reconstruction 1869 -1879* (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1979), pp.166-167

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid*, p.167



Stressing a somewhat obvious point, Gillette states that “political considerations frequently determined President Grant’s position at a particular juncture”.<sup>43</sup> Furthermore, he asserts that by lacking a uniform approach to Southern affairs, “the Grant government occasionally permitted the two extremes, arbitrary rule and unchecked anarchy, to prevail in the South”.<sup>44</sup> In his assessment, Southern policy was not only dictated by political viability but also nepotism and cronyism, particularly in Louisiana. Such accusations are common amongst Grant’s critics but these are readily contested. One needs only cite the President’s rejection of any political coalition with his brother-in-law “Judge” Lewis Dent in Mississippi, simply because of his relation’s Democratic affiliation.

Gillette considers Reconstruction to be a task that the Republican leaders of the time and Grant were unsuited to, both morally and in terms of their capabilities. Attributing too much power to the office of the executive in the nineteenth century, Gillette believes the President, “being the first to formulate policy and to take action, had to act in effect as a chief legislator who shaped the law and as a chief justice who interpreted it”.<sup>45</sup> By charging Grant with such a responsibility, especially when executive power had so recently been challenged during his predecessor’s presidency, Gillette sets him up for an easy fall. Grant historian Frank Sacturro recognises this commenting that within Gillette’s study, the “assessment of Grant’s Southern policy is largely confined to... discussion of the executive and legislative branches almost as if they existed in a vacuum”.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid

<sup>44</sup> Ibid

<sup>45</sup> Ibid, p.170

<sup>46</sup> Frank J Scaturro, *President Grant Reconsidered* (Lanham: Madison Books, 1999), p.104

In an attempt to account for Grant's lacklustre performance, Gillette concludes that "the political and constitutional task was simply too much for him".<sup>47</sup> The oft repeated apology for Grant, that he lacked political ability, has perhaps saved him from further criticism. Whilst attacking his presidential record, scholars are comfortable in accepting his shortcomings. As a consequence few historians feel the need to look deeper into the political mind of Ulysses S. Grant, assuming that a poor record implies lack of ambition or thought.

In his assessment of how the Grant administration maintained congressional Reconstruction, Gillette largely disregards the issue of how federal intervention would have played politically, concentrating his argument on the ineffectiveness of the use of troops in the South. In his estimation, the piecemeal manner in which federal support was handed out - and the ineffectiveness of its use - made it both unreliable in its employment and predictable in its outcome. Gillette's sympathies are often with state Republicans: "[t]o southern Republicans the bitter experience of falling victim to timidity, severity, or a baffling mixture of both, weakened their confidence in him [Grant] and, in time, brought his administration into open contempt".<sup>48</sup> This interpretation is open to question. Was Reconstruction's defeat simply due to the political incongruities of the Grant administration? Are we to ignore the fierce commitment by white supremacists to fight Reconstruction to the death, and the opposition of not only Democrats and some Republicans but also the Northern voter and newspapers around the country?

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<sup>47</sup> Gillette, *Retreat From Reconstruction 1869 -1879*, p.170

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid*, p.172

Gillette portrays Grant as duplicitous in his treatment of Southern Republicans, faltering in his commitment to blacks and engaged in petty factionalism, much to the detriment of both Reconstruction and its allies in the South. The contradictions in his personality and the paradoxes they produced in his Southern policy, both made for what the author sees as a non-ideological approach to Reconstruction and a distasteful support for illegitimate regimes in the South.<sup>49</sup> Nowhere is this more evident, in the author's opinion, than in his support for the regime in Louisiana and his shameful abandonment of Republicans in Mississippi.

In a cynical rebuttal to the widely held notion that Grant lacked political skill, Gillette suggests that he “possessed an instinct for self-preservation; he not only recognized and respected power but had an intuitive feel about where it could be found, and he showed an ability to change as influence, problems, and public opinion changed”.<sup>50</sup> It should be noted, however, that the author does compliment Grant on occasion, describing him as “more active, stronger, firmer, and far better at getting his own way when faced with problems, at least in the short-run, than has been generally realized”.<sup>51</sup> He goes further, affirming that Grant “made critical decisions and was often successful in his tactical skirmishing” and that “at times he intervened more bluntly and arbitrarily than any peacetime president before or since”.<sup>52</sup> Unfortunately, he concludes that Grant was ultimately unsuccessful in all his ventures “since the more important strategic triumphs seemed beyond his reach”.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid, pp.172-174

<sup>50</sup> Ibid, p.174

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, p.175

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, p.175; Ibid, pp. 173-174

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, p.175

Gillette accepts that Grant's task "was indeed formidable, and few could have achieved it" but concludes that he "brought to the numerous crises neither enduring resolve nor settled purpose but instead demonstrated temporary expedients".<sup>54</sup> The President, he states, "could not decide whether to be a caretaker or a catalyst, and so alternated, playing each role in turn".<sup>55</sup> In his opinion, Grant's lack of a grand scheme ensured his failure "to come up with a workable set of priorities for his numerous and often conflicting aims or a method to deal with recurring problems in any systematic way".<sup>56</sup> For Reconstruction, Grant "had wished to keep the South Republican, but he failed for want of any concerted strategy, of any sustained energy in building up enough presidential and partisan power to enforce reconstruction, and of any vital interests beyond momentary objectives – political or personal".<sup>57</sup> On the manner in which he conducted himself, the author concludes: "too often his silence caused unnecessary confusion and difficulties", and that whilst it, "helped him pick up support from opposing sides... it eventually undermined his political influence and executive authority".<sup>58</sup>

Gillette quite rightly observes that Grant's military career led to a problematic conception of politics; he saw his cabinet as his staff and "sometimes regarded as impertinent and insubordinate the talented, gritty officials in his administration who spoke their minds, raising troublesome questions and unpleasant issues that he did not wish to hear".<sup>59</sup> Excusing his shortcoming, the author admits that "it was because of the American people's political illusions that Grant had been catapulted into the White

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid, p.176

<sup>55</sup> Ibid, p.177

<sup>56</sup> Ibid, p.176

<sup>57</sup> Ibid, p.185

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, p.177

<sup>59</sup> Ibid, p.179

House” and asks therefore if it was fair “to reproach Grant for not being what he never was and never promised to be?”<sup>60</sup>

Ultimately, Gillette’s study is indispensable for the Grant historian looking for detail; his is an exhaustive study of the minutiae of intra-party factionalism, the Southern policy of the Grant Administration and the entire programme of Reconstruction from 1869-1879. The overall argument is weakened, though, by Gillette’s regular assertion that for Reconstruction to have produced more long lasting results, Republicans, and Grant specifically, needed only to rise above their own limitations.

In *Reconstruction, America’s Unfinished Revolution 1863 – 1877* (1988), Eric Foner, most likely influenced by Gillette’s assessment and the then recently published *Grant, A Biography* (1981) by William S. McFeely, is highly critical of the President. The extent to which Grant paid little attention to Reconstruction is, in Foner’s opinion, illustrated by the fact that his “cabinet seemed oddly detached from the debate”.<sup>61</sup> However, the author acknowledges that this was perhaps indicative of the waning support for continual Reconstruction legislation and that the make-up of Grant’s cabinet “reveals a grasp of political realities”.<sup>62</sup>

Foner largely ignores Grant in his study but does offer some evaluation of his impact on Reconstruction stating that having won re-election, the President “quickly moved to avoid further national intervention”.<sup>63</sup> On the issue of race, he asserts that the

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid, p.179

<sup>61</sup> Eric Foner, *Reconstruction, America’s Unfinished Revolution 1863 – 1877* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1988), p.445

<sup>62</sup> Ibid, p.445

<sup>63</sup> Ibid, p.528

President was no friend of the freedman and “because his own son was among the offenders” in the bullying of a black cadet at West Point, Foner alleges that Grant’s handling of the affair revealed a racial apathy.<sup>64</sup> In a more sympathetic assessment, whilst highly critical of Grant’s handling of electoral crises in Louisiana and Mississippi, Foner is keen to identify the difficulties he encountered: “[e]ven had the will for an interventionist Southern policy survived in the White House, a series of Supreme Court decisions during Grant’s second term undercut the legal rationale for such action”.<sup>65</sup> The decisions that Foner refers to were limitations placed on the Enforcement Acts that did not actually come into effect until after Grant was out of office.

Continuing to focus on the challenges to formulating policy, Foner states that in the wake of economic depression, political scandal, and waning public interest in Reconstruction, “the second Grant Administration found it impossible to devise a coherent policy towards the South”.<sup>66</sup> Within his dense and extremely accomplished study, Foner makes a solid case for the failure of Reconstruction and ties Grant’s political mismanagement and neglect into his final assessment. There is much to learn about Reconstruction from Foner but the quality of his assessment of Grant is predetermined by a failure to look at his presidency in detail, indicative of the importance the author places upon it.

Only one hundred and fifteen years after Grant’s death does one find a truly balanced, insightful and satisfactory assessment of his approach to the South. Brooks D.

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid, p.531

<sup>65</sup> Ibid, p.529

<sup>66</sup> Ibid, p.528

Simpson's *The Reconstruction Presidents* (1998) looks at the policies of Lincoln, Johnson, Grant and Hayes, and in a relatively short assessment, accounts for the Southern policy of Ulysses S. Grant more convincingly than any other writer.

Simpson's assertion is that Grant "simultaneously sought to protect black civil and political rights and conciliate white Southerners in aiming to establish a stable post war political order resting on the consent of all the governed, white and black".<sup>67</sup> Rather than seeing the eighteenth President's Southern policy as the product of ignorance or political chicanery to maintain Republican power, he contends: "Grant's action concerning the South would be tempered by the limits of what was possible politically, reflecting a sense of the pragmatic and a healthy (and, as it turned out, warranted) scepticism about the willingness of northern whites to do what was right".<sup>68</sup> The unwillingness of President Andrew Johnson to reshape the South: politically, socially and economically immediately after the war, left Grant with little power to initiate continual Reconstruction legislation, but he could at least uphold the Fourteenth and Fifteenth amendments and safeguard civil rights in the South.<sup>69</sup>

In his analysis, Simpson places Grant in a 'catch-22' dilemma when dealing with threats to Republicanism and liberty. Whilst non-intervention often doomed friendly governments in the South to failure, intervention provoked arguments over the rightful authority of Southern Republican governments. Additionally, Grant's efforts at conciliation indicated how he "was unable to offer much in the way of incentives for white southerners to join the party unless he was first willing to soft-pedal issues of

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<sup>67</sup> Brooks D. Simpson, *The Reconstruction Presidents* (Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1998), p.135

<sup>68</sup> Ibid, p.135

<sup>69</sup> Ibid, p.136

interest to blacks”.<sup>70</sup> In contrast to Gillette, Simpson emphasises that the recurrent crises and the challenge of uniformity when dealing with Southern affairs “contributed to what some have seen as the incoherence of Grant’s policy”.<sup>71</sup> The President’s pragmatic approach, seemingly lacking an overall strategy and a predictable framework within which to work, persuaded many writers to believe that Grant had no policy other than to react to a succession of crises. Contrastingly, Simpson compliments Grant’s lack of predictability, regarding the President’s early attempt at conciliation as trying to placate moderate whites in the hope of support.

In discussing Grant’s attempt to close the work of Reconstruction, Simpson argues that he “saw in the Fifteenth Amendment a way to erase the color line at the ballot box”.<sup>72</sup> He does, however, accuse the President of some naivety in his belief that “with the passage of the amendment debate over Southern policy would fade into the background, and before long parties and voters would turn to new issues”.<sup>73</sup> Illustrating Grant’s impatience and arguably his lack of foresight, Simpson notes that the President “initially believed that the ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment went a long way to completing reconstruction. He had even considered issuing a general amnesty in his proclamation celebrating ratification but continuing antiblack violence caused him to withhold it”.<sup>74</sup>

Permeating Simpson’s entire work is the notion that Grant faced an impossible task in pacifying the South and upholding the rights of blacks. He describes the President’s

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid, p.163

<sup>71</sup> Ibid, p.138

<sup>72</sup> Ibid, p.143

<sup>73</sup> Ibid, p.143

<sup>74</sup> Ibid, p.145



first term as a “holding action” against the inevitable defeat of Reconstruction.<sup>75</sup> He accepts the incongruity of Grant’s Southern policy and that in “failing to preserve party fortunes in each state, he [Grant] acted in ways that appeared vacillating and inconsistent, undercutting Republican prospects elsewhere”.<sup>76</sup> He accounts for this inconsistency, though, not as a product of Grant’s own limitations but due to insurmountable external factors such as the resistance of the South and the interest of the North.

Of great significance for the Grant historiography is Simpson’s exploration of how foreign policy connected with efforts in the South. Grant’s determination to annex the island of San Domingo had traditionally been judged to be detrimental to Grant’s position within the Party due to issues of corruption and the manner in which he pursued it. Simpson, however, pays more attention than other writers to the racial element of Grant’s most significant exercise in foreign policy. With the freedmen’s civil rights being trampled on but their labour a necessity, Simpson explores Grant’s belief that “annexation would provide blacks with economic leverage that they had lost with the collapse of confiscation and redistribution of Southern lands”.<sup>77</sup>

What is most significant about Simpson’s work is that he portrays Grant as one of the last voices of support for Reconstruction and intervention in the South. As Congress went to the Democrats and economic issues played on Northern voters’ minds, Grant, in 1875, delivered a message to Congress that was according to the author “a forthright statement of conditions in the South, in some of the most impassioned language used

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid, p.163

<sup>76</sup> Ibid, p.163

<sup>77</sup> Ibid, p.145

by any president”.<sup>78</sup> Reacting to an increase in violence in the South, Grant “wanted a new law to provide a broad legal basis for federal intervention”.<sup>79</sup> But as emphasised by Simpson towards the end of his study, further efforts to expand federal power was an increasingly unpopular notion amongst the voting public, politicians and the press. Illustrating the President’s frustration as to the hypocrisy of the situation, Simpson concludes that Grant “could not understand why Southern atrocities were overlooked and excused while federal policy received so much criticism”.<sup>80</sup>

It is true that as a president Grant failed to provide leadership for the Party. Recognising that, Simpson states: “[a]lthough Grant’s actions as president helped shape how Republican divisions came to the fore, any Republican in the White House would have had to face eroding party unity”.<sup>81</sup> With the war won, slavery destroyed and the fight against Johnson over, the Republican Party in the 1870s faced an identity crisis that would have confronted any executive. In reference to the disputed election of 1876, rather than accusing Grant of being complicit in a stealing of the White House, Simpson declares that he “headed off the threat of a second Civil War...blending a commitment to principle with due attention to Republican interests-an accomplishment overlooked by critics of his southern policy”.<sup>82</sup>

In his conclusion, Simpson states that historians have criticised Grant for being too weak or too harsh, but none could suggest “how he could have forged a policy that would have achieved both sectional reconciliation and justice for black Americans”.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid, p.179

<sup>79</sup> Ibid, p.180

<sup>80</sup> Ibid, p.181

<sup>81</sup> Ibid, p.159

<sup>82</sup> Ibid, p.196

<sup>83</sup> Ibid, p.196

Whereas Gillette sees Grant as determining the course of Reconstruction, Simpson places him in the middle of an unsolvable problem with an almost predetermined outcome. He concludes that “neither he [Grant] nor congressional Republicans could have created the means necessary to sustain an effective policy of protecting Southern Republicans from violence” and that the President “understood that politics was the art of the possible, displaying a fairly good sense of what the northern public would tolerate even when he tried their patience”.<sup>84</sup>

In response to the writings of Franklin, Foner and Gillette, Brooks D. Simpson contends that “[p]roponents of a more vigorous and assertive federal policy toward Southern terrorism forget the limits imposed upon Grant by legislation and public opinion or the way in which intervention undermined the very legitimacy of the regimes it was designed to save”.<sup>85</sup> In contrast to Lincoln and Johnson, Grant had to “wrestle with civil governments in the south without the extraordinary resources afforded by presidential war powers”.<sup>86</sup> He concludes that when studying Ulysses S. Grant, “what is needed is not necessarily sympathy but perhaps a little empathy”.<sup>87</sup>

More recent works on Reconstruction have tended to focus on either the local impact of the presidential and congressional programmes or the legacy of the era. Heather Cox Richardson in *The Death of Reconstruction, Race, Labor, and Politics in the Post-Civil War North, 1865 – 1901* (2001) looks at the transformative impact of Reconstruction, concentrating largely on economic policy and labour. Reference to Grant is limited with Richardson describing the General-in-chief in 1865 as “a

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid, p.231; Ibid, pp.231-232

<sup>85</sup> Ibid, p.232

<sup>86</sup> Ibid, p.232

<sup>87</sup> Ibid, p.232

moderate man who was determined to destroy the South's ability to make war but who bore no ill will toward his former enemies".<sup>88</sup> Such an assessment is fair, although her statement that Grant only worked with the Radicals "when necessary to protect himself or his army position" quickly dismisses any notion of political initiative on his part.<sup>89</sup> Despite such dismissive comments, Richardson is warranted in concluding that in 1865, "Grant's leanings were nonetheless against extremism, and he hoped to promote a peaceable reconciliation between the sections".<sup>90</sup>

Richardson's consideration of Ulysses S. Grant's role in Reconstruction pre-1868 is confined to the aforementioned comments. As president he is exclusively discussed in the context of economic policy; his election "indicated that the path of Reconstruction would be one that reflected the Republicans' vision of a harmonious free labor world".<sup>91</sup> On issues of civil rights and the political makeup of the reconstructed states, Richardson concludes that "Grant's election appeared to put in place the Republican plans for the South that Johnson had thwarted".<sup>92</sup> No discussion is given as to whether or not Grant was anything more than the Radicals' poodle or harboured thoughts of his own. His impact on the South is only explored in the context of how the corruption and political and economic failings of the Grant administration served to undermine Southern Republicans.

In *Conceiving a New Republic: The Republican Party and the Southern Question, 1869 – 1900* (2006), Charles W. Calhoun offers the most exhaustive study of the Grant

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<sup>88</sup> Heather Cox Richardson, *The Death of Reconstruction, Race, Labor, and Politics in the Post-Civil War North, 1865 -1901* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2001), p.20

<sup>89</sup> Ibid, p.20

<sup>90</sup> Ibid, p.20

<sup>91</sup> Ibid, p.75

<sup>92</sup> Ibid, p.77

era since William Gillette. Calhoun's specific arguments concerning episodes of interest in the eighteenth President's Southern policy will be referred to in subsequent chapters. In general and much like this thesis, Calhoun's approach "is not to present a comprehensive recapitulation" of the era, but to study the thoughts of its key figures. His concern is with the Republican Party as a whole but he succeeds in affording Grant the attention he deserves. Seeing 1869 as a new era rather than the beginning of the end, Calhoun offers the familiar conclusion: "[t]he Grant administration struggled with implementing the new order in the South but met with limited success, in part because of the failings and inadequacies of the supposed agents of change in the South and in part because of growing criticism from within the Republican ranks".<sup>93</sup>

Andrew L. Slap in *The Doom of Reconstruction, The Liberal Republicans in the Civil War Era* (2006), focusses on the course of the anti-Grant Party and by doing so produces a detailed study of the administration's policies and their impact. Exploring the origins of Liberal Republicanism, its ideology and political fortunes, Slap illustrates the attacks on the President on issues of corruption, patronage and enforcement in the South. Similar to Calhoun, this work will be referred to within subsequent chapters. As part of Reconstruction historiography, Slap acknowledges Grant's significance in 1870s politics, but mostly in pejorative terms. Despite stressing that the Liberal Republican Party existed in spirit before Grant came to power, its formation into a cohesive body in 1872 serves to identify the perceived excesses and immoralities of "Grantism", and what Slap deems the President's "use of corrupt means to gain personal ends".<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Charles W. Calhoun, *Conceiving a New Republic: The Republican Party and the Southern Question, 1869-1900* (Kansas, University Press of Kansas, 2006), p.4

<sup>94</sup> Andrew L. Slap, *The Doom of Reconstruction, The Liberal Republicans in the Civil War Era* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006), P.122

Michael W. Fitzgerald's *Splendid Failure, Postwar Reconstruction in the American South* (2007) is in the spirit of John Hope Franklin's *Reconstruction: After the Civil War*. In his attempt to portray the story of Reconstruction as one of noble defeat, a post mortem of the egalitarianism of the late 1860s is presented in an effort to account for the "capitulation of National opinion to white supremacy".<sup>95</sup> The importance of Grant is seen in Fitzgerald's emphasis of the necessity of the effective use of presidential power: "Grant's position was crucial because he controlled the federal bureaucracy, the lifeblood of the formal political process. In this era, control of government employment generally secured the party machinery for whatever ends".<sup>96</sup>

The majority of Fitzgerald's study considers the impact of Grant, not his political philosophy or ideology, apart from an assertion that on the surface he appeared to have none. The author portrays the Grant administration as morally bankrupt, especially in regards to Reconstruction. Fitzgerald refers to Grant's willingness to seek reconciliation with former Confederates who openly espoused racist doctrine arguing that "the Grant administration, with its affinity for wealth and station, proved receptive to such recruits."<sup>97</sup> This immorality, combined with Grant's mismanaged Supreme Court appointments, poorly timed pardoning, and inaction when faced with Southern terrorism, leads Fitzgerald to conclude that by the mid-1870s, "[t]he long march towards *Plessy v Ferguson* was under way, and administration leaders should have seen it coming".<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Michael W. Fitzgerald, *Splendid Failure: Postwar Reconstruction in the American South* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2007), p.x

<sup>96</sup> Ibid, p.124

<sup>97</sup> Ibid, pp.98-99

<sup>98</sup> Ibid, p.181

Modern Reconstruction historiography maintains the principles of 1960s revisionism but adapts and expands Grant's significance during the era. Critics of him tend to make sweeping and critical judgements, usually with little supporting evidence. The validity of their argument, whether damning or complimentary, is unconvincing due to a lack of investigation. The Grant historiography, whilst similarly mixed in the quality of judgements, naturally provides a more robust argument and often contradicts the dismissiveness common in much of the Reconstruction works.

### **The Grant Historiography**

Although many books have been written on Ulysses S. Grant, there exist only a handful of studies that deal with his presidency in a detailed and comprehensive manner. Like Grant's memoirs, the majority of books focus on his military career and when they do expand their study to his presidency, it is often in less detail. Those works that do offer a sufficiently detailed assessment of Grant's politics are addressed in this study and will be reviewed thematically, identifying how historians vary in their consideration of his achievements and his political acumen.

As previously stated, a common difficulty for historians studying Grant has been the lack of sources. Historian William B. Hesseltine, in the introduction to *Ulysses S. Grant, Politician* (1933), wrote that in attempting to examine Grant's political career, "[t]he task has been rendered difficult by the almost complete lack of Grant manuscripts".<sup>99</sup> Seeking a connection between this and his reputation amongst scholars, Hesseltine argues that "Grant's enemies were more literate than his friends.

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<sup>99</sup> William B. Hesseltine, *Ulysses S. Grant, Politician* (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1957), p.vii

Consciously or unconsciously they stuffed the ballot boxes of history against Grant”.<sup>100</sup>

In a criticism that arguably still rings true today, Hesseltine asserts: “[h]istorians and biographers, following closely in the traditions of Grant’s political opponents, have kept alive much of the partisan criticism of his enemies and, have written him down as the least worthy of the Presidents”.<sup>101</sup> Over fifty years later, Frank Scaturro echoes that argument observing that assertions of Grant’s limited mental capacity are commonly accepted and therefore “it would not be rash to conclude that historians have grown comfortable in expressing outright contempt for Grant”.<sup>102</sup>

Scaturro’s study attempts to expose the hypocrisy and misunderstanding that exists within the Grant historiography. Challenging traditional accusations of Grant’s apathy to political affairs, inherent corruption, and poorly managed Southern policy, he reevaluates and in large part champions his place in history. In trying to account for Grant’s unfair treatment, Scaturro suggests that his “contemporary Northern critics were, in a sense, the intellectual ancestors of later historians, and there is a serious issue of professional bias”.<sup>103</sup> This hostile attitude is perhaps motivated by the idea that “the Grant administration retains a seemingly anti-intellectual character...Grant alienated that portion of the nineteenth-century ‘intelligentsia’ that comprised the intellectual ancestors of the twentieth-century American historical profession”.<sup>104</sup> Based on Scaturro’s assessment, is it not then the responsibility of the modern Grant

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid, p.vii

<sup>101</sup> Ibid, p.vii

<sup>102</sup> Scaturro, *President Grant Reconsidered*, pp.5-6

<sup>103</sup> Ibid, p.6

<sup>104</sup> Ibid, p.13



researcher to confront the traditionally pejorative connotations of the Grant presidency?

### **Grant the politician**

Historians differ over Grant's political ability and ambitions, perhaps more than on any other element. David Donald in *Charles Sumner and the Rights of Man* (1970) writes that "Grant's mental processes are obscure, for in politics as in war he moved silently towards his objectives".<sup>105</sup> Focussing his entire study on Grant as a politician, Hesseltine concluded that "[a]lthough he grew as a President his growth was that of a party politician, and he changed from the man who would be the President of all the people in 1869 into the man who could support the Republican party in the theft of the election of 1876".<sup>106</sup>

In his brief but regularly cited study, Bruce Catton in *U. S. Grant and the American Military Tradition* (1954) appreciates the inherent difficulties that the President faced upon inauguration, asserting that "in all American history no more delicate job of guidance had been required than would be needed now".<sup>107</sup> On his character, Catton commends Grant, declaring, "[h]is devotion and integrity were beyond question, and it was clear that he wanted nothing for himself except a chance to serve his country".<sup>108</sup> Rather than see him as a political ignoramus, Catton portrays him as a political innocent. He "was a straightforward soldier without a politician's instinct in his whole

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<sup>105</sup> David Donald, *Charles Sumner and the Rights of Man* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1970), p.445

<sup>106</sup> Hesseltine, *Ulysses S. Grant, Politician*, p.viii

<sup>107</sup> Bruce Catton, *U. S. Grant and the American Military Tradition* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1954), p.154

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid*, p.154

make-up” and he “approached Reconstruction with several advantages, including instinctive fairness and humanity”.<sup>109</sup>

It is indicative of the contentiousness that embodies the Grant historiography that the most celebrated work on the subject is perhaps the most controversial. In the introduction to his Pulitzer Prize winning *Grant A Biography* (1981), William S. McFeely asks “WHY GRANT?” and presents his subject as one that “had no organic, artistic, or intellectual specialness”.<sup>110</sup> With such an opening statement, it is unsurprising that McFeely portrays Grant in war as a butcher and as President, a racist.

Despite predominantly disparaging judgements of his inherent inability or inappropriateness for public office, most historians acknowledge at least some transformation in Grant from a soldier to politician. Writers on the subject offer differing interpretations of his political beliefs, his racial attitudes and his desire for the presidency in the period between the Civil War and his presidency.

Adhering to the ethos of Reconstruction revisionism, John Carpenter devotes a large portion of his study of Grant to this era. Hoping to challenge the notion that he was completely unfit for the presidency, Carpenter, by exploring the political battle between Congress and President Johnson, asserts that the mid-to-late 1860s “served as Grant’s apprenticeship to his later career in national politics”.<sup>111</sup> He argues further that “[f]our years of witness to and participation in the most vicious political infighting

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid, p.155; pp.173-174

<sup>110</sup> William S. McFeely *Grant, A Biography* (New York. London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1981), p.xi

<sup>111</sup> John A Carpenter, *Ulysses S. Grant* (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc, 1970), p.63

conceivable must have made Grant better equipped in 1869 than he was in 1865 for his presidential experience”.<sup>112</sup>

In contrast to Carpenter, Bruce Catton offers an opinion that leading up to the presidency, Grant’s “last two years as general gave him the worst possible training for the place”.<sup>113</sup> This argument is contested in Brooks D. Simpson’s *Let Us Have Peace: Ulysses S. Grant and the Politics of War and Reconstruction, 1861 – 1868* (1991). By exploring the political tactics, power plays and the manner in which he interpreted presidential orders, Simpson makes a solid case for Grant’s political development. In his view, “Grant had been practicing politics for years; the Civil War and Reconstruction inevitably mixed together political and military questions”.<sup>114</sup> He presents Grant as being involved in Reconstruction at all levels, from the Freedmen’s Bureau to the governing of the five military districts established through the Reconstruction Acts.

The years 1865 to 1868 serve in Hesseltine's mind to show how in regards to the South, Grant the moderate was transformed into Grant the Radical. He describes Grant’s attitude in 1865 as “one of practical humanity, unclouded by philosophical speculations on constitutional theory”.<sup>115</sup> Much like William A. Dunning, Hesseltine portrays Grant as a victim of the corrupting influence of Radicalism, who at one time appeared as “the friend of the South – living up to the role he had assumed at

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid, p.63

<sup>113</sup> Catton, *U. S. Grant and the American Military Tradition*, p.150

<sup>114</sup> Brooks D. Simpson, *Let Us Have Peace, Ulysses S. Grant and the Politics of War and Reconstruction, 1861 – 1868* (Chapel Hill & London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1991), p.254

<sup>115</sup> Hesseltine, *Ulysses S. Grant, Politician*, p.54

Appomattox”.<sup>116</sup> As the public grew hostile to Johnson, and Grant began to dislike the policies of the President, “he acquiesced in the decision of the majority and became a supporter of Congress”.<sup>117</sup> Portraying him as something of a political illiterate, Hesseltine notes, “[t]o those whose opinions on reconstruction were based on constitutional principles, Grant’s peculiar viewpoint was incomprehensible”.<sup>118</sup> Echoing the lectures Andrew Johnson gave Grant at the time, Hesseltine states, “[w]ith no knowledge or understanding of the fundamental nature of the American Constitution, Grant shared the erroneous belief that the supreme law of the land was the will of the people, not the constitution”.<sup>119</sup>

Despite Hesseltine’s work being published thirty years before the revisionism of the 1960s and over sixty years before Grant enjoyed a similarly favourable reappraisal, the reader would be left with little doubt that Grant was a significant factor in Reconstruction. On the division of the South into five military districts through the Reconstruction Acts, Hesseltine asserts that at “every stage of its preparation, Grant was consulted by its sponsors”.<sup>120</sup> Even before becoming President, the author depicts Grant as playing politics, advising a delegation from Arkansas: “go home, ratify the Fourteenth Amendment, and grant Negro suffrage. The North was heartily in favour of the program, said the general, and if it were not adopted by the South, Congress would impose more stringent terms”.<sup>121</sup> A small discussion of Grant’s view on race is given with the author alleging that in regards to “unlimited Negro suffrage, Grant was not in accord with the Radicals. Holding that the Negro would eventually obtain the

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid, p.51

<sup>117</sup> Ibid, p.75

<sup>118</sup> Ibid, p.80

<sup>119</sup> Ibid, p.75

<sup>120</sup> Ibid, p.81

<sup>121</sup> Ibid, p.80

vote, the General doubted the wisdom in conferring it immediately. Gradually, however he concurred in what seemed to be the consensus of Northern opinion”.<sup>122</sup> Executive Director of the *Ulysses S. Grant Association* John Y. Simon wrote that Hesseltine’s study was written with “verve and contempt” and deemed it the “low point of Grant’s reputation”.<sup>123</sup>

Arguably far more disparaging is William S. McFeely’s study that portrays Grant’s pursuit of the presidency as the desperate attempts of an insecure and petty man, addicted to the adulation of the masses and seduced by the prestige of the office of the executive. He interprets Grant’s actions and motives between the years 1865 to 1868 as a shrewd and skilfully played game to raise his profile, eliminate his enemies and climb the ladder of authority in America. Historians have predominantly attributed Grant’s lack of public comment on his political affiliation (prior to his nomination) due to his belief that as a military man he should stay out of politics. McFeely writes: “Grant was magnificently cagey at not tipping his hand. And as long as he did not do so, cards of speculation were sure to fall according to the dealer’s political desires”.<sup>124</sup>

In 1868, Grant accepted the post of Secretary of War under President Andrew Johnson. The reasoning and significance of this will be explored in detail in chapter three but it requires some immediate discussion as part of this review of literature. Most historians have concluded that in spite of himself, Grant took this post to prevent its occupation by someone hostile to congressional Reconstruction. McFeely contends that had Grant “truly wanted to remain the simple soldier who carried out statesmen’s orders, there

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid, p.81

<sup>123</sup> John Y. Simon, “Ulysses S. Grant One Hundred Years Later”, *Illinois State Historical Society*, LXXIX (Winter 1986), p.256

<sup>124</sup> McFeely, *Grant, A Biography*, p.261

would have been no insurmountable barrier to his refusing the appointment on the ground that it was inappropriate for him to move to a civilian desk in the War Department".<sup>125</sup> When referring to Johnson's attempt to appoint General William Tecumseh Sherman as secretary, McFeely suggest that not only did Grant worry that his friend and colleague might steal the limelight, but that "he might also steal the nomination".<sup>126</sup> Whilst Simpson argues that Democrat and Republican alike were uncertain of Grant's political ambition, McFeely suggests that "[e]ven those who thought the general a dullard were convinced that he too had his eye on the presidency".<sup>127</sup>

In surmising Grant's political character, John Carpenter describes him as "[c]onservative by nature, and no extremist on the race question".<sup>128</sup> Despite this, Carpenter is of the belief that for Grant, anything resembling a return to slavery or the Confederacy was a direct insult on those who had fought and died in Civil War.<sup>129</sup> By charging himself with the responsibility that "the sacrifice of 360,000 Union soldiers ought not to be casually ignored" Grant's elevation to the White House was understandable.<sup>130</sup> He continues, offering this convincing analysis:

Grant's behaviour in the four years after the close of the war was perfectly consistent; he did not start out a conservative and end up a Radical. Rather, he entered this period as a moderate in his attitude toward the South and toward the Negro. Rejecting the policies of the

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<sup>125</sup> Ibid, p.263

<sup>126</sup> Ibid, p.263

<sup>127</sup> Ibid, p.263

<sup>128</sup> Carpenter, *Ulysses S. Grant*, p.65

<sup>129</sup> Ibid, p.65

<sup>130</sup> Ibid, p.65

President when these policies appeared to be resulting in the sacrifice of the results of the war, he embraced those of the Radicals as the only feasible alternatives, or as the expressed will of the people speaking through Congress.<sup>131</sup>

Historians who credit Grant with pursuing a policy that sought to protect the achievements of the Civil War are common in their disappointment with his presidential record. It is the extent to which they attribute the failure to Grant that differentiates them.

### **President Grant**

Bruce Catton argues that with Grant's election there came "a relief, at last, to get away from the everlasting talkers and persuaders and promises and turn to a decent, straightforward man who would clean things up and take on himself the burden which everybody was tired of carrying".<sup>132</sup> Catton suggests that Grant "looked upon his election as essentially a reward by a grateful country to its foremost soldier".<sup>133</sup> As President, "[w]hat Grant wanted was simple and good: to make a decent transition from war to peace...and at the same time to make reunion of North and South real and lasting without sacrificing the Negro in the process".<sup>134</sup> Simpson recognises that such self-sacrifice might be hard for some to take seriously.<sup>135</sup> Despite that he maintains that by 1868, Grant "came to believe that perhaps the only way to ensure that

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid, p.65

<sup>132</sup> Catton, *U. S. Grant and the American Military Tradition*, p.154

<sup>133</sup> Ibid, p.156

<sup>134</sup> Ibid, p.159

<sup>135</sup> Simpson, *Let Us Have Peace, Ulysses S. Grant and the Politics of War and Reconstruction, 1861 – 1868*, p.245

Reconstruction would follow its proper course was to accept the highest office in the land".<sup>136</sup>

Hostile to the image of Grant as the simple soldier caught up in Washington politics and swept into office against his own wishes, McFeely suggests that Grant "did not dare turn down any job, lest he end with none".<sup>137</sup> Simpson challenges this assertion emphasising the professional gamble Grant was taking by leaving a secure and prestigious role in the military for what could be a short-lived career in politics.<sup>138</sup> Reinforcing the idea that Grant pursued the presidency altruistically, Simpson cites his letter to Sherman explaining his acceptance of the nomination, concluding that the General-in-chief was "very concerned lest the achievements of the war be jeopardized, even lost, by the course of post-war partisan politics".<sup>139</sup>

In a broad assessment of Grant's presidential Southern policy, Hesselstine asserts that despite its inconsistency, there existed an underlining intention to have the Southern problem removed from politics".<sup>140</sup> He looks to Grant's efforts at conciliation, specifically in Virginia, as evidence of the new President's desire to have Reconstruction finalised "as quickly or as quietly as possible".<sup>141</sup> Hesselstine asserts that much of Grant's efforts were so that the "South would no longer be a sore spot in politics".<sup>142</sup> In contrast, John Scaturro contends that the President "came to see that Reconstruction would require ongoing attention as new challenges were raised, and

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<sup>136</sup> Ibid, p.262

<sup>137</sup> McFeely, *Grant, A Biography*, p.263

<sup>138</sup> Simpson, *Let Us Have Peace, Ulysses S. Grant and the Politics of War and Reconstruction, 1861 – 1868*, p.245

<sup>139</sup> Ibid, p.245

<sup>140</sup> Hesselstine, *Ulysses S. Grant, Politician*, p.186

<sup>141</sup> Ibid, p.84

<sup>142</sup> Ibid, p.186



he adjusted his own course accordingly”.<sup>143</sup> Hesselstine’s assessment of presidential Southern policy is, as the author makes clear, the result of an adherence to the Dunning school of thought. With this mind-set, he concludes that Grant’s Southern policy was ultimately concerned with Republican fortunes, abandoning state politicians when the cause was hopeless. Hesselstine bases much of his negative assessment on the Party’s dealings in Louisiana, stating that it was a source of embarrassment for Grant and was a clear example of the President’s nepotism.<sup>144</sup>

Arguably one of the most important secondary works on the Grant Administration is Allan Nevins’s *Hamilton Fish: The Inner History of the Grant Administration* (1936). Nevins offers his own interpretation of events, largely concluding that during Reconstruction, “[t]he nation was subjecting the Southern States by force to the perils and hardships of Negro suffrage”.<sup>145</sup> Regardless of Nevins’ own ruminations on Reconstruction, the primary sources, in the form of the Secretary of State’s diary entries, provide an invaluable insight into the Grant cabinet. Scaturro suggest, however, that “reliance on Fish’s diary gives rise to an unbalanced, naïve account of the Grant presidency that too often provides little perspective beyond that of the Secretary of State and the author”.<sup>146</sup>

With a healthy appreciation of the realities of the era, Bruce Catton wrote that in Reconstruction politics, “[I]ofty idealism walked arm in arm with the most brutal self – seeking”.<sup>147</sup> Southern Republicanism was inherently self-serving and carpetbaggers,

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<sup>143</sup> Scaturro, *President Grant Reconsidered*, p.119

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid*, p.342

<sup>145</sup> Allan Nevins, *Hamilton Fish: The Inner History of the Grant Administration* (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co, 1936), II, p.744

<sup>146</sup> Scaturro, *President Grant Reconsidered*, p.3

<sup>147</sup> Catton, *U. S. Grant and the American Military Tradition*, p.130

Radicals and opportunists alike knew just how to appeal to a president who had the “determination that the verdict of the war was not to be reversed in the process of reconstruction”.<sup>148</sup> Catton deems Grant’s Reconstruction policy as morally commendable but misdirected, believing that unscrupulous politicians in the South cynically waved the bloody flag to gain the President’s support. He excuses Grant, though, suggesting: “[i]f his program for reconstruction was finally handled wrongly, by bad people, for untrustworthy motives, he at least had tried to point it in the right direction”.<sup>149</sup>

Catton’s portrayal of the Grant presidency and Reconstruction is that of Grant the innocent, being manipulated by self-seeking politicians, both Northern and Southern. By not attributing any achievements or failures to Grant specifically, his significance in Reconstruction is almost non-existent. Catton’s work is representative of a tendency to apologise for Grant in such a manner that his guilt or culpability over Reconstruction’s failure is nullified due to his irrelevance. As John Y. Simon suggests, “some have attempted to understand Grant by diminishing him to manageable proportions, since mediocrity is more readily explained than greatness”.<sup>150</sup>

John A. Carpenter charges that in its efforts to protect the freedmen, “the record of the Grant administration is spotty at best, for it was in these eight years that the downward trend in the status of the Negro in the South set in”.<sup>151</sup> Such a statement is misleading as the trend declined from a point of unprecedented and, as would turn out, unmaintainable equality. To suggest that the Grant administration was largely

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<sup>148</sup> Ibid, p.176

<sup>149</sup> Ibid, p.177

<sup>150</sup> Simon, *Ulysses S. Grant One Hundred Years Later*, p.256

<sup>151</sup> Carpenter, *Ulysses S. Grant*, p.86

responsible for a worsening of the lot of the freedmen is an oversimplification. What occurred during this time was that the South returned blacks to a status largely preferred by white America. The Grant administration promoted and supported some of the most sweeping constitutional and legislative changes designed to raise the status of blacks in America. Carpenter is warranted, though, in his discussion of Grant's hesitation in leading on Southern matters; "[w]hat he wanted, of course, was Congressional action without the President's request".<sup>152</sup>

In his assessment of the eighteenth President, Carpenter concludes that Grant lacked the skill or resolve to maintain military rule, disliked intervention (especially due to racial issues) and "felt that it was best for each state to handle its own internal affairs according to the precepts of the federal system".<sup>153</sup>

Whilst not providing substantial evidence of Grant's personal commitment to federal intervention, Frank Scaturro asserts that he "executed a display of peacetime authority unequalled by either his predecessors or his successors" and declares the Enforcement Acts the "farthest reaching (and most widely litigated) provisions under which a person can realize or vindicate constitutional rights".<sup>154</sup> Furthermore, Scaturro judges the Grant Administration's suspension of the writ of habeas corpus in South Carolina in October 1871 to be "possibly the boldest display of peacetime presidential power in American history".<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> Ibid, p.87

<sup>153</sup> Ibid, pp.89-90

<sup>154</sup> Scaturro, *President Grant Reconsidered*, p.73; *ibid*, p.71

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid*, p.71

On the subject of Grant's record on the South, Carpenter concludes that not only were "the forces and the funds...not equal to the task" but that there was little possibility for "a full-scale program of rigid control over the lives of the Southern people during these years".<sup>156</sup> He accepts the notion of the inevitability of Reconstruction's demise but still wishes that there might have been a more concerted effort to safeguard civil rights in the South. Grant's restraint is forgiven due to what he deems as having been faced with an impossible task. The President encountered considerable challenges upon entering office not only due to the continuing legacy of the Civil War but also what the author sees as the "deep-seated prejudice of the Northern whites".<sup>157</sup>

For the historian wishing to rehabilitate Grant, Carpenter's assessment, along with those of Simpson and Scaturro, acknowledges the realities of the time and displays the empathy needed to assess the eighteenth President fairly. Other works, as Scaturro quite rightly states, "fail to take into account the full political and legal context in which Grant was working".<sup>158</sup> An example of such a study is that of William S. McFeely. Unsurprisingly, his assessment of Grant's Southern policy is limited, for he devotes more attention to Julia Dent Grant's social life in Washington. Within McFeely's work there is little actual analysis of Reconstruction history; only a detailed assessment of Attorney General Amos T. Akerman explores the Southern issue in sufficient detail, all with the intention of further disparaging Grant.

McFeely is of the belief that Grant had little time or interest in Southern affairs and hangs much of his argument on the dismissal of Akerman. That the Attorney General

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<sup>156</sup> Carpenter, *Ulysses S. Grant*, p.86

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid*, p.91

<sup>158</sup> Scaturro, *President Grant Reconsidered*, p.87

was the “finest champion of human rights in the Grant administration” and that Grant was “uneasy about Akerman’s zeal” confirms, in his opinion, the President’s apathy towards civil rights in the South.<sup>159</sup> In reference to enforcement legislation, the author suggests that Grant was “wary of charges that he wanted to make himself a military dictator” and therefore was “reluctant to support the legislation”.<sup>160</sup> Scaturro challenges this believing that Grant “sometimes interfered with state governments and elections more boldly than any other president” and that he “actually compromised his own political health for the sake of realizing what he saw as the broader meaning of Union victory”.<sup>161</sup> He concludes that Grant’s commitment to Reconstruction made him a political pariah in a Republican party that was keen to distance itself from the image of intervention and bayonet rule.<sup>162</sup>

Whereas most historians dismiss or discredit Grant’s record on the South, Scaturro declares that the Grant administration “effected a remarkable culmination of egalitarian breakthroughs after the Civil War, and his adherence to the principle embodied in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments led to some of the boldest peacetime assertions of federal authority in American history”.<sup>163</sup> Whilst quite right in arguing for the significance of Grant’s actions, his assessment is somewhat idealistic, failing to acknowledge the President’s personal failings and his inherent conservatism. His belief that Grant “adhered to a policy of intervention” is easily challenged on the basis of the President’s record.<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>159</sup> McFeely, *Grant, A Biography*, p.373

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid*, p.369

<sup>161</sup> Scaturro, *President Grant Reconsidered*, p.80

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid*, p.97

<sup>163</sup> Scaturro, *President Grant Reconsidered*, p.101

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid*, p.151

Sharing Scaturro's celebratory assessment is Jean Edward Smith who in 2001 published *Grant*, the most substantial biography that includes a study of his presidency. Devoting nearly half of its twenty chapters to Grant's political career, Smith details the personal and professional development of the soldier and president with the overriding intention of championing his achievements in office.

Arguing that there exists an historical bias against Grant, Smith suggest that he "was condemned because of what he stood for".<sup>165</sup> Basing his study on a "strength of character" that he sees as a constant in Grant's life, Smith's portrayal is somewhat romanticised and as will be discussed in subsequent chapters, selective with its details.<sup>166</sup> Smith suggests that under Grant's leadership, "the wounds of war eventually began to heal" and he "deployed the army to ensure that the verdict of Appomattox was not frittered".<sup>167</sup> Such a statement accords the President far too much praise and ignores the realities of the Reconstruction era. Smith acknowledges an imbalance in the Grant historiography but is arguably mistaken in his understanding of it. Believing that "for almost a hundred years, mainstream historians, unsympathetic to black equality, brutalized Grant's presidency" ignores legitimate criticisms of the Grant presidency in all its facets.<sup>168</sup> Such criticisms are not intended to wholly dismiss Smith's work but his study veers too close to the kind of hero worship common within military histories of Ulysses S. Grant.

The presidency of Ulysses S. Grant culminated in what was one of the most controversial moments in American political history. But when assessing the

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<sup>165</sup> Jean Edward Smith, *Grant*, (Simon & Schuster: New York, 2001), p.14

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid*, p.15

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid*, p.18

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid*, pp.14-15

significance of the election of 1876, many historians either ignore Grant's role within the crisis or paint him as complicit in the Republican Party's less than honourable compromise. Simpson concludes, "[w]ith Hayes installed as his successor, Grant could leave office satisfied that at least he had made sure that the determination of the election of 1876 had not followed the course of events over the past ten years in several southern states".<sup>169</sup> Scaturro stresses the change in policy that was to occur, writing, "no presidential transition in American history has equalled Grant's exit in 1877, which truly marked the end of Reconstruction, as a decisive national shift on a major issue of American democracy".<sup>170</sup>

### **Grant and Race**

That Grant was conservative on the issue of race has led some historians to simply conclude that he was a racist. McFeely is of the mind that Grant "did not see American Negroes as people to sympathize with".<sup>171</sup> Referring to Julia Dent and her family's history of slave ownership, he suggests that "Ulysses honoured his wife's prejudices".<sup>172</sup> His evidence hinges on Grant's letter to his wife on the eve of the Civil War, in which spoke of the possibility of slave revolts saying: "[s]uch would be deeply deplorable and I have no doubt but a Northern army would hasten South to suppress anything of the kind".<sup>173</sup> Even though Grant does not elaborate as to why it would be deplorable, McFeely jumps to the conclusion that in 1861 "it looked as if Ulysses S. Grant was ready to march not to John Brown's drum, but to that of the men who hanged him".<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>169</sup> Simpson, *The Reconstruction Presidents*, p.196

<sup>170</sup> Scaturro, *President Grant Reconsidered*, p.101

<sup>171</sup> McFeely, *Grant, A Biography*, p.71

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid*, p.155

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid*, pp.72-73

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid*, p.73

Further evidence to support the argument that Grant saw equality for blacks as undesirable can be found in his reluctance to support universal suffrage before becoming president. Simpson challenges this suggesting that “Grant was.... displeased with Northern self-righteousness over the issue” as many Republicans did not support such equality in their own states.<sup>175</sup> Grant’s conservatism on black suffrage was not based on the belief that blacks were inherently inferior. It was more dictated by practicalities, believing that the freedmen were entitled to the vote, but at the right time. This concern endured beyond his presidency. During his tour of the world after leaving the White House, Grant stated: “[i]n giving the South negro suffrage, we have given the old slave-holders forty votes in the electoral college. They keep the votes but, disenfranchise the negroes”.<sup>176</sup> In retirement he believed that the South had to be reshaped over a long period so as to cultivate an acceptance of black suffrage. With hindsight, he stated, “I am clear now that it would have been better for the North to have postponed suffrage, reconstruction, state governments, for ten years and held the South in a territorial condition”.<sup>177</sup>

Keen to stress Grant’s inherent racism, McFeely cites the President’s reaction to his son’s involvement in the bullying of a black West Point cadet, James Webster Smith, as further evidence. As President and as a former student, Grant could have been instrumental in bringing equality to the military institution. That he did nothing is, in McFeely’s eyes, confirmation of his disregard for the rights of blacks. In *Butcher?*

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<sup>175</sup> Simpson, *Let us have Peace, Ulysses S. Grant and the Politics of War and Reconstruction, 1861 – 1868*, p.169

<sup>176</sup> John R. Young, *Around the World with General Grant*, (New York, American News Co., 1879), Volume 2, p.362

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid*, p.363



*Racist? An examination of William S. McFeely's Grant: A Biography* (1987), Brooks D. Simpson responded to these accusations. He challenged the image of Grant as a racist declaring that during the war he was in favour of black regiments and equal rights for prisoners of war, white and black.<sup>178</sup> In regards to Grant's handling of the West Point affair, Simpson acknowledges his "efforts to protect Smith by overturning several courts-martial decisions which had called for Smith's expulsion".<sup>179</sup>

On Grant's pre-war slave ownership, Simpson defends him, suggesting that "the question of slavery, at least on a personal level, became tangled with his concern for his wife and his need to maintain relations with his in-laws".<sup>180</sup> He raises an important point in noting that in 1859, during a time of economic hardship, Grant had manumitted his one slave, forgoing the 1000 dollars he desperately needed in order to pay off his debts.<sup>181</sup> In response to a criticism made by McFeely's that whilst touring the South Grant failed to visit the Sea Islands to observe the black farmers working there, Simpson states that he did in fact visit the islands and "[h]ad McFeely read Grant's letter more carefully", he would have noted this.<sup>182</sup>

Not one to underplay Grant's significance in American history, Scaturro challenges the notion of Grant's lacklustre support for racial equality, comparing him to Lyndon Johnson and stating, "Grant frequently acted on racial issues on a larger scale and in the face of greater resistance".<sup>183</sup> He refers specifically to the 249 black appointments

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<sup>178</sup> Brooks D. Simpson, "Butcher? Racist? An examination of William S. McFeely's *Grant: A Biography*", *Civil War History*, XXXIII (March, 1987), p.73

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid*, p.82

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid*, p.75

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid*, p.77

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid*, p.78

<sup>183</sup> Scaturro, *President Grant Reconsidered*, p.64

Grant made during his first term as president.<sup>184</sup> In support of Scaturro, Jean Edward Smith maintains that Grant “fought for black equality long after his countrymen had tired”.<sup>185</sup> A comment like this is warranted as at times Grant certainly appeared to be a lone voice in highlighting Southern outrages. However, Smith’s subsequent, and difficult to substantiate, argument that Grant “defended the rights of African-Americans in the South with the same tenacity that held the Union line at Shiloh” undermines his overall assessment.<sup>186</sup>

A continuation of this positive revisionism of President Grant is evident in Josiah Bunting III’s *Ulysses S. Grant* (2004). Comparing the Grant presidency’s record on Reconstruction with that of Rutherford B. Hayes, Bunting surmises that its efforts “seem honourably (if not always intelligently) framed to preserve the war’s best legacy”.<sup>187</sup> Much like Smith, he is keen to champion Grant as an advocate of Reconstruction and “the central force in the achievement of civil rights for blacks”.<sup>188</sup> Truth be told, Grant’s record as the protector of Reconstruction and the freedmen supports neither Smith’s nor Bunting’s grander claims. Similarly, the courage of conviction both see is not apparent when one looks at the way in which Grant vacillated, flip-flopped or contradicted prior decisions. Nevertheless, one could argue that their claims are not without merit when both stress Grant’s significance to the history of African-Americans. Despite his failings, the eighteenth President is arguably the most racially conscious and considerate of all American Presidents up until the 1960s.

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<sup>184</sup> Ibid, p.103

<sup>185</sup> Smith, *Grant*, p.14

<sup>186</sup> Ibid, p.14

<sup>187</sup> Josiah Bunting III, *Ulysses S. Grant* (New York: Times Books, 2004), pp.110-111

<sup>188</sup> Ibid, p.115

## **Conclusion**

What then is the historical consensus on Ulysses S. Grant and his Southern policy? What are the key themes that are common in those works pertaining to him or the Reconstruction era? It is widely but not unanimously accepted that he lacked both the experience and skill to be President at such a challenging time. This inexperience, or as some would argue, inherent inability, resulted in what appears to be a contradictory, unfocused and unguided Southern policy that neither protected blacks nor adequately supported Southern Republicanism. The conclusion that as President he failed to be a unifying force in a fracturing party, and as a political thinker provided little guidance on Reconstruction policy, is common. In addition, there is a general belief that his commitment to Southern blacks was tempered by his own conservatism with writers such as William S. McFeely suggesting that his racist attitudes proved costly for those freed by the Civil War.

In contrast, those empathetic to Grant's predicament see his failings as inevitable. To charge Grant with the responsibility of being an architect of Reconstruction and protector of the freedmen ignores the insurmountable obstacles that he faced. It is quite acceptable to conclude that Grant's presidency did not amount to much success. However, writers such as Brooks D. Simpson seek to emphasise that this was not from want of trying. Subsequent scholars such as Frank Scaturro, Jean Edward Smith and Josiah Bunting III recognise the challenge but rather than focus on the tragedy, celebrate a spirit and strength in office previously unattributed to Grant.

Within Reconstruction historiography, assessments of Grant are determined by how authors frame their studies of the era. The tendency to define Reconstruction by the roles of Congress and Southern state politicians serves to ignore the relevance of Grant in its evolution. The impact of this is that his role in nineteenth century politics is that of a passenger. In this reading of Reconstruction, Grant is largely disregarded as having a significant role in its history. Frank Scaturro writes that “[a]s long as scholars can be expected to fail to transcend the analytical immaturity of the traditional consensus, readers can be expected to enter and exit studies of the Grant presidency without a grasp of the issues involved”.<sup>189</sup>

In the Reconstruction literature, there are varying interpretations of the Grant presidency but the majority lack the evidence to support their conclusions. Only Simpson, Calhoun and Gillette provide enough in-depth analysis to make their work fundamental to the study of the Southern policy of Ulysses S. Grant. Despite the disparity of opinion between Simpson and Gillette, the comprehensiveness of their studies tends to make them the predominant focus of any secondary research on the subject. What is evident from the historiography is that those authors that are critical of Grant, rarely produce relevant evidence in support of their case. Instead they fall victim to misinterpretation, ignorance or a complete disregard for facts demonstrating the contrary. Historians tend to conclude in either of two ways: one is to discredit Grant for the corruption that occurred around him, his political shortcomings and its effect on Reconstruction; the second is to empathise with the almost impossible task that was laid at his feet. By accepting the very realistic idea that no president could have achieved the kind of order and equality needed at the time, Grant can be viewed

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<sup>189</sup> Scaturro, *President Grant Reconsidered*, p.120

in a more empathetic light, open to further research into what he represented, what he believed in and how he acted on those beliefs

Of the Grant specific texts that look in significant detail at his presidency, William B. Hesseltine's *Ulysses S. Grant, Politician* is still the most comprehensive and focused study. However, by asserting that what was most significant about Grant's political career was his development into a party politician, his argument, whilst detailed, is largely unconcerned with Grant's role in the South, and more interested in Grant's relationships with politicians in the North. Hesseltine's narrative approach, whilst informative, offers very little analysis in helping one understand Grant's political or racial beliefs and this is arguably the result of a lack of primary research (or perhaps available sources). Those studies written by Catton and Carpenter are insightful but are limited in their scope, and whilst William S. McFeely's work is an attempt at a personal study of Grant, his attention to Reconstruction is minimal, and his work is very clearly influenced by his contempt for the subject.

From the differing analyses of Grant's time in office, one can easily agree with Frank Scaturro's summation that "it was a very complex, checkered, almost schizophrenic presidency".<sup>190</sup> To make sense of this confusion one must find an anchor on which to tie Grant's actions. John Y. Simon wrote, "[t]hose who regard him as a symbol of the age and render judgement on him for reasons extraneous to the man and his career, do not even perceive the mystery, much less solve it".<sup>191</sup> Quite simply, if one is to understand the great mystery we must understand the man himself, better than has been done before. Whilst it is possible to render judgement on Grant's tangible record

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<sup>190</sup> Scaturro, *President Grant Reconsidered*, p.169

<sup>191</sup> Simon, *Ulysses S. Grant One Hundred Years Later*, p.256

on Reconstruction, there is a lack of understanding of his intentions towards the South, however fruitless they ultimately may have been. Grant occupies perhaps the most important post during the Reconstruction era but is often lost in historians' assessments and interpretations. Simon concludes, "[L]ike Lincoln, he remains on the historical horizon, always in view but never clearly visible".<sup>192</sup>

In summary, Grant in history remains a contradictory, unbalanced and often frustrating subject. Simpson, Gillette, Calhoun, Smith and Hesselstine offer the most comprehensive studies. Simpson is by far the most balanced and offers a convincing and fair judgement of Grant's political and racial philosophy and his effectiveness in and out of political office. Gillette provides unmatched depth of research on the Grant presidency but his conclusions are arguably based on an idealistic opinion of what might have been achieved at the time. Whilst both Simpson and Gillette base much of their judgement on assumptions (owing to the lack of clarification from the subject himself), it is Simpson whose conclusions are more convincing, owing to a more reasoned argument. Whereas Simpson approaches the subject by highlighting the impact of political realities on policy, Gillette's clear intention is to assign blame and culpability for the retreat from Reconstruction. Despite the strength of his argument, however, Simpson's work on the Grant presidency is limited, amounting to only two chapters in a larger study. Hesselstine's work, nearly eighty years earlier, still stands as the only book exclusively about Ulysses S. Grant, the politician.

Calhoun's study of the Republican Party and the South is perhaps the most reliable of the Reconstruction texts, both in detail and argument. Much like Simpson, though,

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<sup>192</sup> Ibid, p.256

Grant is handled well but is not the sole focus of Calhoun's study. More modern studies of Grant, such as those of Bunting and Smith, are overly generous in their assessment of his achievements and political conviction. This thesis occupies the middle ground accounting for Grant's ideals and intentions but mindful of not attributing too much significance to his role in the actual politics and machinery of Reconstruction. The focus of this study is to define Grant's Southern policy as a political and racial philosophy and to assess the extent to which it was at variance with the political outcomes. By charting the evolution of Southern policy from its formulation, to its adaptation, and finally what could be argued, its abandonment, a more balanced understanding of the Southern policy of Ulysses S. Grant will be achieved.

## **Chapter 2: Slavery, Race and War**

On April 9, 1865, Ulysses S. Grant agreed terms with Robert E. Lee at Appomattox Court House, thus bringing to an end the most significant chapter in his life. The Civil War had brought the success he had long striven for, and in turn, had made him famous to every American citizen, North and South. But as the war on the battlefield was being brought to an end, its legacy was to be fought for in the minds of the people, and in the halls of power both at a national and state level.

Grant's experience over the course of 1865-1868 served to permanently change him: professionally, personally and politically. Those interim years served not simply to politicise Ulysses S. Grant but to a certain extent they radicalised, albeit briefly, an inherently conservative man. His experiences and the choices he made, from his appointment as General-in-chief to his election as Commander-in-chief, necessitated a reluctant acceptance of public office and a willingness to put his hard-won reputation on the line. From his wartime experiences and his position as head of the Union Forces, Grant held certain beliefs about how the problem of the post-war South should be solved. It is in the years 1865 to 1868 where we see an evolution of Grant's Southern policy from a naive pursuit of conciliation to, at times, a willingness to engage in an almost militaristic totalitarianism.

This chapter focuses on the evolution of Grant's thinking on the Southern issue and his eventual involvement in its management. By charting and accounting for his beliefs in regards to the South, race and Reconstruction policy, one can see the emergence of



a policy that served as the overriding motivator for him accepting the nomination for president. It is the purpose of this chapter and the next to detail Grant's policy towards the South during these interim years so as to provide context for the analysis of his policy as President. Chapter three concludes with discussion of Grant's belief that he must "protect the costly results of war".<sup>1</sup> It is these years that see the greatest threat to the results of the Civil War and through his actions, provide the clearest indication of what Grant held to be so precious.

When one approaches the subject of Reconstruction, it can be defined by four interlocking themes: race, politics, society and economics. It is the intention of this study to focus specifically on the political and racial elements but concurrently not to ignore the economic or social ones, where relevant. Fundamental to this thesis is an understanding of Grant's racial views, specifically how he saw African Americans, free or slave. When Reconstruction began it was certainly not the first time circumstances dictated that Grant deal with the issue of race. His record on this subject points to a man whose racial philosophy suggested a willingness to accept blacks into American society and a paternalistic concern for the protection and well-being of America's second class citizens. This belief, despite its inconsistencies, informs much of Grant's Southern Policy both as a general and as President.

Born on April 22, 1822, in Point Pleasant, Ohio, and the first of Jesse Root Grant and Hannah Simpson Grant's six children, Ulysses' upbringing saw him exposed to the abolitionist movement. Grant's father, a tanner by profession and a Whig by political

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<sup>1</sup> USG to Lieutenant General William T. Sherman, Jun 21, 1868, PUSG-XVIII, pp.292-293

association, wrote regularly for the abolitionist newspaper *The Castigator*.<sup>2</sup> However, the extent to which Grant's father attempted to instil within his son an abolitionist commitment is debateable. Certainly Grant's ownership of a slave through his marriage to Julia Dent itself contradicts such a notion. He was, though, known to treat his slave with what was considered at the time to be embarrassing consideration and was to eventually manumit him in a time of severe personal financial crisis.<sup>3</sup> Grant's brief but willing involvement in slave ownership likely owes more to a desire to appease his in-laws than it did an agreement with the institution itself.<sup>4</sup> Also, with an abolitionist as a father and a fierce supporter of the peculiar institution as a father-in-law, Grant was exposed to both sides of the argument, creating an impartiality in him that would facilitate a level-headed approach to the issue.

As brief as Grant's involvement in slavery was, his participation in mid-nineteenth century politics was just as fleeting. Before the war, if anything, Grant had been a Democrat. But as was so common in his life, this was only out of necessity. In the election of 1856, he had voted for James Buchanan, simply out of opposition to anti-slavery Republican candidate John C. Fremont.<sup>5</sup> It is unclear as to why he opposed the policies of Fremont but most likely he feared the tumultuous impact of a successful free soil and free men campaign. Before the war he displayed a pragmatic approach to politics, writing in September 1859, "I never voted an out-an-out Democratic ticket in my life...In all other elections I have universally selected the candidates that, in my

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<sup>2</sup> William S. McFeely, *Grant, A Biography* (New York. London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1981), p.8

<sup>3</sup> Brooks D. Simpson, *Let Us Have Peace, Ulysses S. Grant and the Politics of War and Reconstruction, 1861 – 1868* (Chapel Hill & London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1991), pp.3-4

<sup>4</sup> *ibid*, p.4

<sup>5</sup> John R. Young, *Around the World with General Grant* (New York: American News Co., 1879) Volume II, p.268

estimation, were the best fitted for the different offices; and it never happens that such men are all arranged on one side”.<sup>6</sup> Later in life Grant stated, “[i]f I had ever had any political sympathies they would have been with the Whigs. I was raised in that school”.<sup>7</sup>

It was precisely this lack of partisanship that led Grant, at times, to justify his actions as being necessary for the country, rather than a party or political cause. It was the war, however, that forever tarnished in his eyes the image of the Democratic Party, particularly those Copperheads in the North who sought peace with the South and undermined the Republican war effort. As the Republican Party at that juncture best represented his own ideals, he would naturally gravitate towards it.

Whatever side of the political fence Grant had stood on before the war, during that conflict he supported union over disunion, and ultimately abolition over slavery. Writing to his father in 1861, as the country sat on the precipice of war, Grant predicted with some confidence that the net result of a conflict would be the depreciation of slaves, stating that “[t]he Negro will never disturb the country again”.<sup>8</sup> As Brooks D. Simpsons observes, Grant believed that slavery would be “destroyed as a consequence of prolonged conflict, becoming a casualty of events rather than the target of Union policy”.<sup>9</sup> Target or not, for the duration of the war slaves in the South increasingly came to “disturb” Grant as they sought refuge within Union Army lines. It is Grant’s

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<sup>6</sup> M.J., Cramer, *Ulysses S. Grant: Conversations and Unpublished Letters* (New York: Eaton & Mains, 1897) pp.24-25

<sup>7</sup> Young, *Around the World with General Grant*, II, pp.268-269

<sup>8</sup> Cramer, *Ulysses S. Grant: Conversations and Unpublished Letters*, p.34

<sup>9</sup> Brooks D. Simpson, *Let Us Have Peace, Ulysses S. Grant and the Politics of War and Reconstruction, 1861 – 1868* (Chapel Hill & London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1991) p.11

treatment of fugitive slaves that marks his first official duty in regard to the South. The manner in which he dealt with this issue is a reflection of his racial views and ultimately his Southern policy.

Former slave, social reformer and eventual candidate for the vice-presidency, Frederick Douglass, described Grant's treatment of the human contraband that was amassing in his camps in the early years of the war as "the full germ of *the Freedman's Bureau...before* the Emancipation Proclamation, not as a theory, but as a practical solution".<sup>10</sup> In actuality, Grant's policy towards fugitive slaves had been one of restraint due to the controversial and illegal nature of seizing the property of Southern slave owners. As much as he desired for the army to not be "used as negro catchers", he and the other generals were required to interpret for themselves the legality of seizing slave-owners' property.<sup>11</sup> It was only with the passing of the Second Confiscation Act of July 17, 1862, declaring free all those slaves owned by Confederate sympathisers, that Grant was able to implement and follow a clear course in regard to fugitive slaves. Friend and Republican Congressman Elihu B. Washburne (Illinois) wrote him, "[t]he negroes must now be made our auxiliaries in every possible way they can be, whether by working or fighting".<sup>12</sup>

To temper the situation, Grant issued General Order No. 72 which reiterated Congress' confiscation legislation but also clearly stated that unemployed blacks were to be excluded from Union lines and soldiers were not to go about enticing slaves to leave their masters. Comfortable in the framework or limitations of the confiscation

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<sup>10</sup> Frederick Douglass, *U.S Grant and the Colored People*, Speech given by Frederick Douglass, Washington, July 17, 1872 (Library of Congress, Rare Books Collection), p.3

<sup>11</sup> USG to Col. John L. Cook, Dec 25, 1861, PUSG-III, p.342-43

<sup>12</sup> Elihu B. Washburne to USG, July 25, 1862, PUSG-V, p.226

legislation, Grant was able to employ and treat fugitive slaves without confusion. An overwhelming influx of slaves, however, caused not simply a crisis of management but also a potential health risk. Grant attempted to solve the problem by establishing refugee camps, allowing blacks to farm and provide for themselves. It is through the management of these camps and the care for the fugitive slaves that one finds evidence of Grant's egalitarianism.

Through Special Orders No.13 and 15, Grant successfully organised absentee slaves into companies for work and sought to provide care, and most importantly, protection for them.<sup>13</sup> He had written to President Lincoln in the summer of 1863 about their plight, detailing his concern about their "abusive treatment according to the peculiar views of the troops".<sup>14</sup> Unable to give "that personal attention to their care and use the matter demanded", he told Lincoln that he had chosen to appoint a General Superintendent to guarantee the desired protection.<sup>15</sup> That superintendent was Chaplain John Eaton, requested by Grant under Special Orders No.15 of December, 1862 to "take charge of the contrabands that come into camp"<sup>16</sup>.

Eaton was both honoured and confused as to the circumstances that had led Grant to name him the man for the job. Upon their first meeting, Grant identified the Chaplain as "the man who has all these darkies on his shoulders" and conversed with Eaton over the failure of the National Government to promptly create a concise and uniform policy towards fugitive slaves.<sup>17</sup> Grant believed that it was not simply the needs of the

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<sup>13</sup> Douglass, *U.S Grant and the Colored People*, p.2

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, p.3

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, p.3

<sup>16</sup> John Eaton, *Grant, Lincoln and the Freedmen: Reminiscences of the Civil War* (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1907), p.5

<sup>17</sup> *ibid*, p.9

military in its desire for labour, or an end to the chaos, that demanded a clear policy. Eaton recalls the General suggesting that “the dictates of mere humanity demanded that these helpless people should be themselves protected, so far as possible, and spared all possible suffering”.<sup>18</sup> Grant’s concerns were not pure altruism, though. He was adamant that the “blacks might be transformed from a menace into a positive assistance to the Union forces”.<sup>19</sup> Significantly, from Eaton’s records this positive assistance was not limited to an effective use of surplus labour. Grant, Eaton recalled, “went on to say that when it had been made clear that the Negro, as an independent laborer – for he was not yet a freedman – could do these things well, it would be very easy to put a musket in his hands and make a soldier of him”.<sup>20</sup> Such hopes were arguably motivated by the realisation of the benefits of a newly militarised group of the United States, fighting on the Union side.

What is most interesting about Eaton’s early discussions with Grant is that his vision went beyond simple pragmatism and opportunism. One instance reflects the extent to which Grant not only supported the end of slavery but also equality for blacks. In his evolution from slave to Union soldier, it was only right, Grant stated, that the American government should “put the ballot in his hands and make him a citizen”.<sup>21</sup> Eaton confessed, “[n]ever before in those early and bewildering days had I heard the problem of the future of the Negro attacked so vigorously and with such humanity”.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> *ibid*, p.13

<sup>19</sup> *ibid*, p.14

<sup>20</sup> *ibid*, p.15

<sup>21</sup> *ibid*, p.15

<sup>22</sup> *ibid*, p.15

Once Eaton was put to work and natural humanitarian concerns were addressed, the Chaplain was often struck by Grant's personal interest in the welfare of slaves during their transitional phase. When the General put 4000 men (mostly black) to work during the siege of Vicksburg, Eaton noted that on that occasion, amidst the concerns of battle, Grant took time to inquire after the state of those labourers he was utilising. He recalled, "the incident has always remained with me as one more illustration of the fact that Grant was never too anxious, never too preoccupied with the great problems that beset him, to take sincere and humane interest in the welfare of the most subordinate laborer dependent upon him".<sup>23</sup>

Eaton was often reminded of Grant's humanity by the way in which his concern contrasted with others in authority. He recalls a particular meeting with then Military Governor of Tennessee, Andrew Johnson, and how such experiences served to remind him of Grant's "sympathy and foresight".<sup>24</sup> Despite telling blacks in Tennessee that he was their "Moses", Johnson convinced Lincoln to exclude his state from the Emancipation Proclamation delaying the abolition of slavery until 1865.<sup>25</sup>

During the Civil War, Grant had reluctantly but effectively dealt with the issue of the freedmen and was to be commended years later by the likes of Frederick Douglass. But the issue grew more complex after the war and "tried the patience of the most patient man" as "all the results of war [were] deliberately laid at the feet of the South".<sup>26</sup> Upon news of Lincoln's assassination, Grant confessed to his wife Julia that

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<sup>23</sup> *ibid*, p.44

<sup>24</sup> *ibid*, p.45

<sup>25</sup> Brooks D. Simpson, *The Reconstruction Presidents* (Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1998) p.68

<sup>26</sup> Young, *Around the World with General Grant*, II, p.358

the martyred President “was inclined to be kind and magnanimous, and his death at this time is an irreparable loss to the South”.<sup>27</sup> On the prospect of Vice President Andrew Johnson assuming the responsibility of bringing the defeated South back into proper relations with the United States Government, he confessed: “I dread the change”.<sup>28</sup>

In his memoirs, Grant stated that it was Johnson’s treatment of the South in the spring of 1865 that forever derailed the possibility of a peaceful reconciliation. He wrote that at the end of the war, “the great majority of the Northern people, and the soldiers unanimately, would have been in favour of a speedy reconstruction on terms that would be the least humiliating to the people who had rebelled against their government”.<sup>29</sup> Grant believed that the best course for the country at this time was a speedy and conciliatory reconstruction and re-admittance of the Southern states. His eventual support for the prolonged and far-reaching Radical programme of Reconstruction is representative of the transformative nature of the circumstances he found himself in, soon after the war.

Grant wrote that Johnson’s early calls to hang traitors and his obsession with punishing those he felt responsible for the war was a policy that “would be such as to repel, and make them unwilling citizens”.<sup>30</sup> As Southerners were “driven to a point almost beyond endurance”, the course as set out by Lincoln seemed to be derailed.<sup>31</sup> The “Lincolnian” policy of Reconstruction had been to require a number of people in a

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<sup>27</sup> John Y. Simon, *The Personal Memoirs of Julia Dent Grant* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1975), p.156

<sup>28</sup> *ibid*, p.156

<sup>29</sup> PMUSG, II, p.511

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*, p.509

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, p.510



state, equal to 10 per cent of the votes cast in the presidential election of 1860, to take an oath of loyalty to the Union. Following that, the process of re-admitting the state back in to the Union would begin. The Radical Republicans' Wade-Davis Bill offered a similar declaration of loyalty but only if a majority of the state population, who were not disqualified on the grounds of political or military service to the Confederacy, could and would take the oath.

Lincoln's plan of restoration was based on the idea that there would be a swift changeover of power within states that had been in rebellion not a punitive and protracted reconstruction of all political bodies. Despite Grant's immediate concern that those men protected under the agreement at Appomattox Court House would not be subject to future prosecution, his reaction to Johnson's immediate actions indicated that the General favoured Lincoln's "Ten- Percent Plan" for Reconstruction. As time went on, the General would more closely associate himself with the policy of the Radical Republicans and their Wade-Davis policy.

In early summer of 1865, President Johnson was still determined to punish those select individuals he thought were without recourse. At the same time and on the advice of chief of staff (and former General-in-chief) General H. W. Halleck, Grant was seeking amnesty for Robert E. Lee, believing that it would have "the best possible effect towards restoring good feeling and peace in the South".<sup>32</sup> Johnson's opposition to such leniency was motivated by a desire to see men such as Lee prosecuted for their rebellious crimes. As the architect of the Appomattox agreement, Grant saw the President's intent as an about-face on what had been agreed between the two generals.

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<sup>32</sup> USG to Halleck, May 6, 1865, PUSG-XV, p.11

It was only Grant's threat of resignation that kept Johnson from pursuing such a detrimental course. Grant wrote that the escalation of Southern intransigence during the interim years owed itself to the first few months of Johnson's administration. The attempted prosecution of Lee and the denial of pardons to Southerners such as George Pickett facilitated the civil disobedience which was to follow. In his memoirs, Grant concluded that southerners "surely would not make good citizens if they felt that they had a yoke around their necks".<sup>33</sup>

Grant's evaluation of this early period in Reconstruction placed far too much blame on the wrong aspect of Johnson's Southern policy. Throughout the spring and summer of 1865, those "good citizens" had been busy returning Southern society and politics to antebellum times, largely due to the President's encouragement. Despite Grant's criticism of Johnson's excesses at the beginning of his presidency, it is arguably the second phase of the President's Southern policy where, as Trefousse argues, Johnson "reanimated Southern resistance and fatally undermined efforts to integrate the freedmen into society".<sup>34</sup> What made Johnson's policy all the more disastrous was that he had the greatest potential to affect the course of Reconstruction. Brooks D. Simpson suggests that it was Johnson that defined this era; four presidents presided over Reconstruction but in the author's summation, "Johnson enjoyed the most freedom of action and the greatest opportunity to leave his mark on determining its course".<sup>35</sup> Unfortunately, whereas Lincoln had emphasised flexibility, Johnson was "the least flexible leader possible at the most sensitive moment in the nation's peacetime

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<sup>33</sup> PMUSG, II, p.511

<sup>34</sup> Hans L. Trefousse, *Andrew Johnson: A Biography* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1989), p.233

<sup>35</sup> Simpson, *The Reconstruction Presidents*, p.67

history”, and eventually sought strict application of a very lenient policy of Reconstruction.<sup>36</sup>

Fundamentally, Johnson’s policy was always to be determined by his understanding of the Southern states’ position following secession and the close of the war. As Trefousse suggests, The President considered the formerly rebellious states as still part of the Union and, therefore, “he considered interference on his part a violation of his firmly held beliefs in states’ rights”.<sup>37</sup> His haste was in large part influenced by his desire to restore all Southern states before Congress was in session. In two proclamations he set about restoring the South, hastily appointing provisional governors with little regard for their political record.

Johnson’s earlier call to hang traitors was temporary and only aimed at the upper echelon of the Confederacy. As two historians commented, “[t]o deal with a whole people in a spirit of revenge for the past he regarded as not only unjust but impossible”.<sup>38</sup> To that end, he offered amnesty to all Confederates, bar fourteen classes made up of high ranking military personnel, war criminals, those that had surrendered their commission in the United States Army, and certain civil and judicial positions.<sup>39</sup> Trefousse surmises that Johnson’s Southern policy was one where he was “so anxious to complete the process of restoration that he abandoned all political prudence”.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Michael W. Fitzgerald, *Splendid Failure: Postwar Reconstruction in the American South* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2007), P.22

<sup>37</sup> Trefousse, *Andrew Johnson: A Biography*, p.215.

<sup>38</sup> J.G. Randall and Donald, David, *The Civil War and Reconstruction* (Boston: D. C. Heath and Company, 1961), p.558

<sup>39</sup> Tref. p.216

<sup>40</sup> Tref. p.231

Firmly believing in his supremacy on the issue, Johnson took advantage of the long recess of Congress, cherry picking aspects of Lincoln's "Ten-Percent Plan" and the Radicals' Wade-Davis Bill, to successfully orchestrate the election of representatives and senators in all of the seceded states. With Congress out of session, Southern states were able to complete the process of restoration with little imposed on them. The President's policy required states to call conventions that abolished slavery, nullified the ordinance of secession and repudiated the Confederate debt (which some failed to do). Soon after and across the defeated South, legislatures and members of Congress were elected who "tended to be dominated by arch-conservatives and secessionists...[i]mbued with reverence for the lost cause".

J.G. Randall and David Donald in *The Civil War and Reconstruction* summarise Johnson's policy as one where the "fundamental principle was that the new governments were based not upon a denial of political rights because of past conduct, but upon a policy which recognized a return to federal allegiance as a sufficient prerequisite to political enfranchisement".<sup>41</sup> Despite being arguably Lincolnian in its perspective, Johnson's execution of his Southern policy lacked the necessary careful application. The end result was that "most of the leaders elected under Presidential Reconstruction had been complicit in the Confederate war effort".<sup>42</sup>

The hasty return to the pre-war status quo bred arrogance on the part of Southern governments. Trefousse argues that the extent to which the President was willing to accept or ignore a reorganisation in the South that had become more of a reassembling of antebellum leaders, "caused the South to reassess its relations with the victorious

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<sup>41</sup> Randall and Donald, *The Civil War and Reconstruction*, p.536

<sup>42</sup> Fitzgerald, *Splendid Failure: Postwar Reconstruction in the American South*, p.34

government” and grow more confident on the extent to which it could determine the post-war settlement.<sup>43</sup> Whilst defeat was accepted, there was still an insurmountable problem in establishing an economic, social, political and racial reconstruction that could achieve some form of equality. Their arms were laid down but “very few white Southerners were prepared to recognise that military defeat required them to repudiate the past and to change their attitudes toward the future”.<sup>44</sup> The natural refusal of much of Southern society to align their attitudes with that of the North is the underlying cause for all conflict and controversy that Grant would experience as General-in-chief and as President.

The provisional governments established by presidential proclamation were blatant in their intent to model the new South, as far as possible, on the old one, most infamously through the “Black Codes”. It should be noted, however, that the South’s handling of the freedmen owed much to examples set by the North. During the war, Union forces had sanctioned labour codes for runaway slaves. The low-pay and intensive work contracts were mimicked in the South’s Black Codes where freedmen who quit their work would be forcibly returned to their employers or auctioned off for vagrancy. Even children who were judged to be not properly provided for could be made apprentices.<sup>45</sup>

This situation was exacerbated by the Freedmen’s Bureau which despite providing food, setting up schools and serving as recourse against physical abuse, played its part in turning the economic future of the freedmen over to their old masters. The agency,

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<sup>43</sup> Trefousse, *Andrew Johnson: A Biography*, p.232

<sup>44</sup> Randall and Donald, *The Civil War and Reconstruction*, p.564

<sup>45</sup> Trefousse, *Andrew Johnson: A Biography*, p.230

hasty in its desire to see vagrancy minimised through easy access for the freedmen to annual labour contracts, put the onus on Southerners to guard against it. The government and the Freedmen's Bureau's reliance on the old slavocracy gave the latter reason to assume that it was for them to decide the status of freed slaves in Southern society. The resulting Black Codes (which varied from state to state) established: segregation in public transport and the legal system, additional poll taxes for suffrage qualification, and annual labour contracts that blacks were required to sign on pain of being arrested and lent out to farms to work off their fine.<sup>46</sup> With their widespread adoption at state constitutional conventions, unsurprisingly, "the Black Codes became a lightning rod for Northern criticism".<sup>47</sup>

Evidently such a system as the Black Codes was acceptable to the President. Despite an initial campaign against the warmongering slavocracy of the South, Johnson believed in racial supremacy declaring: "[t]he country is for white men and by God, as long as I am President, it shall be governed by white men".<sup>48</sup> After meeting with Frederick Douglass and a delegation of African Americans on the subject of black suffrage, Johnson is recorded as saying, "[t]hose damned sons of bitches thought they had me in a trap".<sup>49</sup> On Douglass in particular, he said: "he's just like any nigger, and he would sooner cut a white man's throat than not".<sup>50</sup> The President's lack of concern for the freedmen was also evident in his policy on land redistribution. He ordered that property now held by former slaves was to be returned their masters, including a

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<sup>46</sup> Fitzgerald, *Splendid Failure: Postwar Reconstruction in the American South*, pp.32-33

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid*, p.33

<sup>48</sup> *Cincinnati Enquirer*, September 30, 1866, cited in Eric L. McKittrick, *Andrew Johnson and Reconstruction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), p.184

<sup>49</sup> Trefousse, *Andrew Johnson: A Biography*, p.242

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid*, p.242

stretch of coastal land that went across South Carolina, Georgia and Florida, set aside by General Sherman.<sup>51</sup>

Reaction to the President's lenient policy was a mixture of pleasant surprise and outrage. When Johnson first moved to restore North Carolina, conservative Republicans and Democrats rejoiced whilst alarmed Radicals, like Thaddeus Stevens, asked if they could arrest the President.<sup>52</sup> Northern newspapers highlighted the outrages in Southern society and the establishment of state governments not that dissimilar to those that had existed under the Confederacy. The President was now at odds with the Radicals within the Republican Party over his lenient Reconstruction policy and, what would become the main contentious point, black suffrage in the South. It is not surprising then that Johnson would, at this time, covet the support of an impartial, but respected individual such as Grant. Despite his apparent neutrality on the issue, the President sought to send Grant to the South to compile a report on Southern conditions. The President hoped that it would support his own policy of restoration and the country could be somewhat pacified on the issue. What evidence, though, was there that Grant was likely to return a favourable assessment to Johnson?

As discussed, during the war, Grant had displayed a humanitarian concern for the freedman. Post hostilities he had fought an honourable defence of those protected by the conditions laid out at Appomattox. With the war on the battlefield essentially over and Grant taking almost permanent residence in Washington, his orders and advice relating to the South were orientated towards a policy of restraint and a pacification of potentially dangerous elements, regardless of where they came from. In August of

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid, pp.226-227

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, p.217

1865, Grant had recommended the removal of the Principal agent of the Freedmen's Bureau in Georgia, General Wild, on the grounds that "[m]en should be appointed who can act from facts and not always be guided by prejudice in favour of color".<sup>53</sup> Grant had moved against Wild due to his excessive zeal in the treatment of white citizens, specifically his search for Confederate gold which on occasion utilised torture.<sup>54</sup> Major General Steedman in Georgia had in conversation with Carl Schurz referred to these extremes and the unsuitability of Wild, concluding, "[h]e displays much vigor where it is not wanted, and shows but very little judgement where it is".<sup>55</sup>

In late October, Grant submitted a report to Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton on the reduction and reorganisation of the army. This reorganisation took into account the "possibility of future local disturbances arising from ill feeling left by the war or the unsettled questions between the white and black races at the south".<sup>56</sup> In the report, Grant was confident enough to state that in the South, "every where [sic] submission was perfect" and that a reduction of troops was warranted.<sup>57</sup> This evaluation reflected the absence of a large scale collision between returning rebels and demobilising unionists. Following this note, Grant was explicit in his desire to muster out black regiments in the North. Those who were not to be relieved of duty could find themselves out of sight, being "as far west as possible" in the interest of the nation's mining and railroad endeavours.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> USG to Edwin M. Stanton, Aug 20 [28], 1865, PUSG-XV, p.310

<sup>54</sup> Brooks D. Simpson, "Ulysses S. Grant and the Freedmen's Bureau" in Paul A. Cimballa and Randall M. Miller, *The Freedmen's Bureau and Reconstruction: Reconsiderations* (New York, Fordham University Press, 1999), p.6

<sup>55</sup> Schurz, Carl. Report on the Condition of the South [Internet] 1865 [Accessed 29 July 2014] available from: <https://archive.org/stream/reportonthecondi08872gut/cnsth10.txt>

<sup>56</sup> USG to Edwin M. Stanton, Oct 20, 1865, PUSG-XV, pp.357-359

<sup>57</sup> *ibid*

<sup>58</sup> USG to Gen. William T. Sherman, Oct 31, 1865, PUSG-XV, pp.377-378



Despite assuring Stanton that peace was in hand, Grant recommended maintenance of a limited black military presence in the South. This would not only provide some occupation for blacks, thereby reducing vagrancy, but it would also give them protection. Furthermore, and indicative of a wider concern for the welfare of the South, Grant sought maintenance of a sufficient military presence as a whole. As much as he seemingly believed that all was well, any reductions were to be “in proportion as continued quiet and good order have justified it”.<sup>59</sup> Despite somewhat contradictory orders and requests, Grant apparently saw the South as at peace but in need of very clear protective measures should there be any disturbances.

Although Grant had envisaged the eventual enfranchisement of blacks as an acceptable inevitability, that moment was still very distant in 1865. In correspondence with his subordinate, Major General John M. Schofield, Grant expressed complete agreement with his colleague’s belief in the “absolute unfitness of the negroes, as a class, for any such responsibility”.<sup>60</sup> Schofield wrote that “to raise the negro, in his present ignorant and degraded condition, to be their (Whites) political equals would be, in their opinion, to enslave them”.<sup>61</sup> It can be argued that Grant’s views were not a product of racial prejudice for he believed that blacks were deserving of enfranchisement, they were just not yet ready for it. The timing and the tools available to the Federal Government were not enough to convince Grant of the need for hastily empowering blacks with the right to vote. Such actions, in the general’s opinion, would “undoubtedly produce war between the two races”.<sup>62</sup> Stability and order were

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<sup>59</sup> USG to Edwin M. Stanton, Oct 20, 1865, PUSG-XV, pp.357-359

<sup>60</sup> Maj. Gen. John M. Schofield to USG, May 10, 1865, PUSG-XV, pp.64-66; USG to Maj. Gen. John M. Schofield, May 18, 1865, *ibid*, p.64

<sup>61</sup> *ibid*

<sup>62</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, June 14, 1865 cited in Simpson, *Let us Have Peace, Ulysses S. Grant and the Politics of War and Reconstruction, 1861 – 1868*, p.114

the priority. A reorganisation of race relations in the South was undesirable and the continued prosecution and example making of Confederate generals and politicians by Johnson was not conducive to any rapprochement.

Regardless of Grant's own thoughts on the most pertinent issue of the time, he agreed to President Johnson's request and visited the South in a tour that was notable for its brevity. Taking in Richmond, Raleigh, Wilmington, Charleston, Hilton Head, Savannah, Augusta, Atlanta, Knoxville and Lynchburg in only five days, it was destined to be little more than a public display of interest, rather than a revealing investigation. There was no opportunity or desire on the part of Grant and his staff, Cyrus B. Comstock, Orville Babcock and Military Secretary Adam Badeau, to travel to rural areas of the South other than a brief visit to the Sea Islands to see the black colony established there. Grant conducted the majority of his business in crowded rooms or in the carriage of his train, assailed by newspaper men, legislators, representatives and "reformed" Confederates. From his correspondence with wife Julia, he seemed more satisfied than surprised in the "greatest desire expressed, by both Secessionists and Unionists, to act in such a way as to secure admittance back and to please the general Government".<sup>63</sup> In Savannah, Georgia, Grant wrote that "people all seem pleasant" and were likely to "enter faithfully upon a course to restore harmony between the sections".<sup>64</sup> Leaving Charleston, South Carolina, the General found relief in the South's honour in defeat "and their cheerful adaptation to the new order of affairs".<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> USG to Julia Dent Grant, Nov 29, 1865, PUSG-XV, pp.423-424

<sup>64</sup> USG to Julia Dent Grant, Dec 1, 1865, *ibid*, pp.427-428

<sup>65</sup> Simpson, *Let us have Peace, Ulysses S. Grant and the Politics of War and Reconstruction, 1861 – 1868*, p.120

It is not surprising that Grant found those Southern leaders he met during his brief tour fully in tune with the national government. Outside of those who stood at the very top of the Confederacy, there had been few prosecutions and little change forced upon the South. Disappointingly, Grant did not afford himself the opportunity to see the ugliness that was occurring in the South. His time was spent meeting legislators and other representatives of the South's political and judicial elite and attending social events. It was only Comstock who engaged in some investigation by conferring with Charles Howard, brother of the head of the Freedmen's Bureau.

Although Grant's tour of the South was limited in its potential to enlighten him on the facts, the time spent in the South offered some scope for discussion regarding the broader issues of the day. In conversation with General James H. Wilson, Grant reiterated his disappointment at Johnson's ascension to the White House, repeating that Lincoln's death had been an "irreparable blow to the orderly and conservative reconstruction of the Southern States".<sup>66</sup>

It must be questioned, though, just what conservatism Grant was referring to. It was too early for him to be overly concerned with any excesses within Radical policy, so he must have been referring to Johnson's initial witch hunt. What is significant is that Wilson notes Grant as being both critical of Johnson's ability and policies but also suspicious of the "senatorial groups with which [Secretary of War] Stanton was associated".<sup>67</sup> This distrust likely reflected Grant's own concerns over Stanton's desire to wrest control of the army from him and the persecution he had suffered by

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<sup>66</sup> J.H. Wilson, *Under the old flag* vol.2 (New York, 1912), p.37, cited in Simpson, *Let us have Peace, Ulysses S. Grant and the Politics of War and Reconstruction, 1861 – 1868*, p.121

<sup>67</sup> *ibid*

some Radicals during the war. Regardless of what camp Grant was to fall into, Wilson was pleased in his summation that the war hero was “not only thoroughly conservative but thoroughly kind” towards the South.<sup>68</sup> This kindness and conservatism was simply a policy not to lean towards any action that could be construed as extreme, be it the prosecution of former high-ranking confederates or the forcing of black suffrage. Wilson’s assessment is reliable as at this time, Grant was positioning himself as a moderate between the President and the Radical Republicans who felt that Congress should take control of Reconstruction.

At this juncture it can be argued that Grant, even though associated with it, still stood outside of the Republican Party, be it the Johnson camp or that of the Radicals. Certainly the latter was more likely to be the General’s eventual political ally. It is important to stress, though, that in 1865, the issue of Reconstruction policy was not necessarily easy to define in party or factional terms. The Radicals during the Civil War had been Lincoln’s greatest antagonist on the issue of Reconstruction. On Lincoln’s death, Radicals welcomed Johnson’s early vengeful spirit, only to be frustrated with his quick retreat into a far more conservative approach than the late President’s.

Despite the escalating division between the President and a large section of his party, the dye had not yet been fully cast by late 1865. If Johnson’s intention had been for Grant’s short trip to legitimise his presidential authority on the Southern issue, he was satisfied enough in the result for him to present the General’s report to the Senate on December 19, 1865. On returning from his trip, Grant met with Johnson and Secretary

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<sup>68</sup> *ibid*

of the Navy Gideon Welles. The Secretary found Grant “sensible, patriotic, and wise” in his conclusion that the people of the South were “more loyal and better – disposed than he expected to find them, and that every consideration calls for the early reestablishment of the Union”.<sup>69</sup> In his report, Grant highlighted its limitations writing that the expedition’s intention was to learn, “as far as possible”, the current sentiment and intent of southerners towards the general government.<sup>70</sup> But despite his conclusion being based solely on his meetings and experiences over his five day trip, he was convinced enough to conclude that “the mass of thinking men of the South accept the present situation”.<sup>71</sup>

However narrow Grant’s investigation had been, he clearly believed that he had witnessed within a certain (and evidently small) section of Southern society a “universal acquiescence in the authority of the general government”.<sup>72</sup> His report accepted Southern intransigence and black suffering as natural consequence of four years of war and emancipation and recommended that the presence of small garrisons in the South were necessary until “labor returns to the proper channel, and civil authority is fully established”.<sup>73</sup> He stressed the necessity of such a military presence stating both races “mutually require the protection of the general government”.<sup>74</sup> In his report he assessed the issue of race in a balanced and logical manner, accepting the realities of the situation but also justifying recommendations with a certain level of restraint. He argued that a predominantly white military force should be stationed in

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<sup>69</sup> DGW, Dec 15, 1865, II, pp.396-397

<sup>70</sup> *Grant and Schurz on the South*, LOC, p.1

<sup>71</sup> *ibid*

<sup>72</sup> *ibid*

<sup>73</sup> *ibid*

<sup>74</sup> *ibid*

the south because “white troops generally excite no opposition”.<sup>75</sup> Conversely, Grant was evidently uncomfortable with the idea of abandoning the freedmen to the mercy of Southern governments and a potentially apathetic military. He advised that black troops should be maintained in a number sufficient to defend themselves; “[i]t is not the thinking man who would use violence towards any class of troops” he believed, but “the ignorant in some places might”.<sup>76</sup>

Despite these recommendations, the situation left Grant concluding that, in general, the presence of black troops “demoralizes labor, both by their advice and by furnishing in their camps a resort for the freedmen for long distances”.<sup>77</sup> On the Freedmen’s Bureau, he concluded that it had not exercised its powers effectively and by instilling in certain portions of the black population the notion that they would inherit land, it had encouraged idleness. He concluded that the Bureau was an “absolute necessity until civil law is established and enforced”, but in order for it to provide effective and efficient care for those in need, it should come under military jurisdiction and so “create a responsibility that would secure uniformity of action throughout all the South”.<sup>78</sup> This recommendation is significant as it placed the welfare and future of the freedmen directly under Grant’s umbrella of responsibilities; a first step in assuming responsibility for Reconstruction outside of issues pertaining to the use of the military to suppress violence.

If one opinion was to be taken from Grant’s report on the South, it was that the vast majority of southerners were willing to come back into proper alignment with the

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<sup>75</sup> *ibid*

<sup>76</sup> *ibid*

<sup>77</sup> *ibid*

<sup>78</sup> *Grant and Schurz on the South*, p.2

general government. Soon enough, however, he would come to realise that regardless of how Washington might seek to deal with the formerly rebellious states, those “thinking men” he referred to were determined to re-establish the old South and that any conciliation towards the Southern states was to be increasingly exploited.

Grant’s tour of the South and the presentation of his findings is a watershed moment in his Southern policy. Johnson’s intention all along had been for the General’s report to counterbalance one from Republican Carl Schurz which detailed the real extent of violence perpetrated toward freedmen in the South. Whereas Grant’s opinion was based on the goodwill of those with whom he had conversed, Schurz’s provided evidence of violence and murder, few could ignore. Leading Radical Republican Senator Charles Sumner (Massachusetts), called Grant’s report a “[w]hitewashing” akin to President Pierce’s handling of affairs in Kansas.<sup>79</sup> *The Springfield Republican* wondered if Grant had spoken with any freedmen as to the state of affairs; “[n]o; they are not ‘thinking men’” the paper wrote.<sup>80</sup>

At the time, Grant read Schurz’s report and the papers that criticised his own. Two years later he confessed to Schurz, “I travelled as the general-in-chief and people who came to see me tried to appear to the best advantage. But I have since come to the conclusion that you were right and I was wrong”.<sup>81</sup> Whilst many saw the direct result of this report as confirmation of an alliance between Johnson and Grant, in actuality this was the turning point in Grant’s policy. As the realities of the new South became

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<sup>79</sup> James G. Blaine, *Twenty Years of Congress: From Lincoln to Garfield* (Norwich, Connecticut: The Henry Bill Publishing Company, 1886), I, p.149

<sup>80</sup> Springfield, Mass., *Republican*, Dec 23, 1865, cited in Simpson, *Let us have Peace, Ulysses S. Grant and the Politics of War and Reconstruction, 1861 – 1868*, p.126

<sup>81</sup> Joseph Schafer, ed., *Intimate Letters of Carl Schurz, 1841-1869* (Madison: State Historical society of Wisconsin, 1928), Dec 20, 1868, p.357

harder to ignore, Reconstruction became a dividing line within the Republican Party, most notably between the Radicals and the President. But as the programme of managing the Southern states evolved, aside from Johnson, Grant quickly became the most important individual in that process.

As the final year of the war came to a close, Americans rang in a new era of peace, at least on the battlefield. When the House of Representatives reconvened, Johnson's handy work was evident when "sixteen former Confederate officeholders, four generals, and five colonels" arrived only for their names to be omitted.<sup>82</sup> Following that, a Joint Committee on Reconstruction was tasked with assessing the states eligibility for representation. At this pivotal time, Grant undertook within a single month a series of actions that represented a significant shift in his policy towards the South. In the aftermath of his tour of the region, he would henceforth seek to bring order, force southerners to accept the new position of the freedmen, and most importantly, reinforce the authority of the Federal Government. As the true picture of the South became clearer, not only through newspaper reports and Carl Schurz but from his own trusted generals, Ulysses S. Grant began implementing an individual policy for how to deal with threats in the South.

On January 12, 1866, Grant issued General Order No.3, a direct reaction and complement to Senator Lyman Trumbull's proposed Civil Rights Bill. The bill not only sought citizenship for all persons born in the United States, but more importantly, it proposed that blacks received "full and equal benefit of all laws and proceedings for

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<sup>82</sup> Jean Edward Smith, *Grant*, (Simon & Schuster: New York, 2001), p.422



the security of person and property, as is enjoyed by white citizens”.<sup>83</sup> Grant echoed this in his order to “protect loyal persons against improper civil suits and penalties in late rebellious States”.<sup>84</sup> Those improper suits covered Union soldiers under threat of prosecution in the South owing to “offenses done against the rebel forces, directly or indirectly, during the existence of the rebellion”.<sup>85</sup>

It was expected that Grant would prioritise the safety of those men who had shown such loyalty to the Union and to himself. What was not as predictable is that Grant would attempt to apply the same kind of protection to a population outside of the military. His concern for “loyal persons” extended beyond Union ranks with him ordering the specific protection of blacks “from prosecutions in any of said States charged with offenses for which white persons are not prosecuted or punished in the same manner and degree”.<sup>86</sup> Certainly many blacks would have expected such consideration as recompense for their enrolment in the Union Army. But as the war had shown, the freed people’s commitment to the Union course, either on the battlefield or within military camps serving as cooks or labourers, did not guarantee equal treatment during or after the conflict. Black soldiers were denied the opportunity to progress up the military ranks and for much of the war were paid less than their white counterparts. In addition, the promise of land redistribution was dashed despite the potential shown by black labourers who were quick to work their masters confiscated land.<sup>87</sup> During the war Grant had stated that all seized land was “property

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<sup>83</sup> John Hope Franklin, *Reconstruction: After the Civil War* (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1961), p.60

<sup>84</sup> USG, General Orders No.3, Jan 12, 1866, PUSG-XVI, pp.7-8

<sup>85</sup> *ibid*

<sup>86</sup> *ibid*

<sup>87</sup> Eric Mathisen, “Freedpeople, Politics, and the State in Civil War America”, included in Iwan W. Morgan and Philip John Davies, eds., *Reconfiguring the Union: Civil War Transformations* (United States & Great Britain: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp.59-77

of the United States” but this was not necessarily an opinion based specifically on an opposition to black ownership.<sup>88</sup>

In 1861 Grant had erroneously predicted that once slavery was abolished, blacks would not trouble the country. The reality of the post-war South had convinced the General that his own office bore the responsibility of tackling the continual problem of race. Through General Order No.3, Grant was aligning the fate of the freedmen with that of his most treasured institution, the United States Army. By issuing this order, he was dictating to his subordinates that the legal rights of black were to be protected, and that as severe as the threat of Southern courts were to the security of Union forces in the south, it was just as essential that freed slaves were afforded the same protection.

To justify his efforts in protecting blacks in the South, on December 25, 1865, Grant ordered Major Generals George H. Thomas, Daniel E. Sickles, Thomas Ruger, and Alfred H. Terry to send reports of “all known outrages occurring...committed by White people against the blacks and the reverse”.<sup>89</sup> Grant submitted reports to Andrew Johnson on February 17, 1866 that showed considerable evidence of violence against blacks.<sup>90</sup> These reports had been requested with an urgency that they should be received as soon as possible after the meeting of Congress.<sup>91</sup> This was almost certainly a reference to the meeting of January 17, 1866, to discuss the proposed Civil Rights Bill which Johnson was quick to veto, albeit unsuccessfully. Clearly Grant felt that

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid, p.71

<sup>89</sup> USG to: Maj. Gens. George H. Thomas, Thomas H. Ruger, Alfred H. Terry, and Daniel Sickles, Dec 25, 1865, PUSG-XVI, pp.69-70

<sup>90</sup> USG to Andrew Johnson, Feb 17, 1866, PUSG-XVI, p.69

<sup>91</sup> USG to Maj. Gens. George H. Thomas, Thomas H. Ruger, Alfred H. Terry, and Daniel Sickles, Dec 25, 1865, PUSG-XVI, pp.69-70

evidence of violence in the South, perpetrated by whites against blacks, could be instrumental in assuring the bill's passage.

As Grant attempted through his own offices to highlight the violence that was rife in the South, he also set about attacking what he perceived to be one of the roots of such hostility: the “dangerously inflammatory course” of Southern newspapers.<sup>92</sup> On February 13, 1866, Grant ordered Major General Alfred H. Terry to take “immediate military possession” of the *Richmond Examiner* owing to its increasingly insulting treatment of the government and Union forces which culminated in a derogatory article about Southern ladies attending parties with Union Officers.<sup>93</sup>

As the *Richmond Examiner's* presses were closed down, editor H. Rives Pollard visited the President who in turn appealed to Grant that Pollard was “thoroughly penitent”<sup>94</sup>. The editor promised to follow a course “devoted to the support of the Union, the Constitution, and the laws.”<sup>95</sup> Grant argued that where martial law exists, so does the power to suppress papers that “foster and increase the ill feeling existing towards the Government of the United States by the discontented portion of the Southern people”.<sup>96</sup>

That he ultimately acquiesced in Johnson's request bears little importance in the significance of these events. What is notable is that Grant was in favour of the censorship of a large section of Southern society that he would have no doubt included

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<sup>92</sup> Bvt. Col. Theodore S. Bowers to Maj. Gen. Alfred H. Terry, Feb 13, 1866, PUSG-XVI, p.71

<sup>93</sup> *ibid*

<sup>94</sup> Andrew Johnson to USG, Feb 17, 1866, PUSG-XVI, p.71

<sup>95</sup> *Richmond Dispatch*, Feb 17, 1866, cited in Simpson, *Let us have Peace, Ulysses S. Grant and the Politics of War and Reconstruction, 1861 – 1868*, p.131

<sup>96</sup> USG, Endorsement, Feb 17, 1866, PUSG-XVI, p.70

in his ‘thinking men’ category the previous year. Had the *Examiner’s* doors not been reopened then editors across the South would have most likely felt a significant clampdown on their content. This is indicated by Grant’s request that commanding officers in the South furnish Army headquarters regularly with all copies of papers that were habitual in their “sentiments of disloyalty and hostility to the Government in any of its branches”.<sup>97</sup>

One can argue that in this instance, Grant’s recommendations went beyond his responsibilities. Former Civil War General, prominent Radical and future architect of the Ku Klux Klan Act of 1871, Benjamin F. Butler, asked Andrew Johnson: “[w]hat concern can the General of the Army have with the ‘*question of reconstruction*’...[i]n time of *peace* what control has he over the liberty of the press in States of the Union that he should issue ‘HIS orders?’”.<sup>98</sup>

As Andrew Johnson increasingly attempted to hasten an end to Reconstruction, Ulysses S. Grant, through his evolving Southern policy was attempting to prolong the process. At the beginning of April, 1866, Johnson declared the insurrection at an end. Grant’s generals in the South, some of whom were diligently using their powers to bring order, called for clarification as to the continuation of martial law or the suspension of the writ of habeas corpus. Had Grant wished for an end to the Army’s responsibility of managing the South, he would have interpreted this official ending of hostilities as reason for the withdrawal of Union forces. When Grant advised his generals that Johnson’s proclamation did not “abrogate martial law and restore the

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<sup>97</sup> Bvt. Col. Theodore S. Bowers to commanding officers, Depts of Va., N.C., S.C., Ga., Fla., Ala., Miss., La., Tenn., Tex., and Ark, Feb 17, 1866, PUSG-XVI, p.72

<sup>98</sup> Ralph Haskins et al, eds., *The Papers of Andrew Johnson* (United States: University of Tennessee Press, 1967-2000), X, pp.197-198

writ of Habeas Corpus”, one can suggest that he supported a policy where emergency measures such as military jurisdiction were a necessity, even in times of peace.<sup>99</sup>

At the same time as Johnson was stressing the undesirability of resorting to military tribunals, Grant, by way of General Order No.26, was advising his subordinates to not assume that the President’s proclamation necessarily meant the dismantling of military prisons. As Johnson worked towards a diminished role for the Union forces in the South, Grant was suggesting that the official end of the war did not necessarily mean the end of hostilities. In fact, irrefutable evidence that sections of the South had not undergone “thorough repentance” would soon justify a continued military presence and involvement in Southern affairs.<sup>100</sup>

On May 1, 1866, in Memphis, Tennessee, tensions between both races erupted into wholesale anarchy. In the preceding months, the Irish immigrant population had increasingly come to resent the black population due to the competition for jobs and a series of robberies. Minor altercations escalated into a full-on assault by whites that was encouraged by municipal officials and supported on the ground by policemen. The attack resulted in rape, beatings, robbery and the death of 42 blacks and 2 white citizens. General George Stoneman established peace and forwarded to Grant a report “outlining the mutual antagonism at the root of the dispute”.<sup>101</sup>

Congress initiated their own investigation into the event headed by Grant’s close friend Elihu B. Washburne. Grant wrote Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton that the

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<sup>99</sup> USG to Maj. Gen. George H. Thomas, Apr 10, 1866, PUSG-XVI, p.150

<sup>100</sup> *New York Times*, May 24, 1866, cited in Simpson, *Let us have Peace, Ulysses S. Grant and the Politics of War and Reconstruction, 1861 – 1868*, p.137

<sup>101</sup> General George Stoneman to USG, May 12, 1866, PUSG-XVI, pp.235-236

events of early May stamped “lasting disgrace upon the civil authorities that permitted them”.<sup>102</sup> He emphasised the unwillingness of the Memphis authorities to impose order and to protect blacks. More importantly he stressed that the only protection offered was by Union forces, whose numbers were still “inadequate for putting down such a riot speedily”.<sup>103</sup> Grant’s final assessment was that military forces should take over judicial matters until the civil authorities gave “evidence of their ability, and willingness, to take cognizance of their cases and to give fare [sic] trial”.<sup>104</sup> Such suggestions were deemed by Attorney General James Speed as unconstitutional on grounds that what occurred in Memphis entailed “no offence against the laws and dignity of the United States of America”.<sup>105</sup> That Grant termed the events as a “massacre” and a “disgrace” signified their gravity in his eyes.

The escalation of violence seen in Memphis no doubt motivated Grant’s subsequent expansion of General Order No.3. Issued on July 6, 1866, General Order No.44 was both interventionist and aggressive in its intentions. Whereas the previous order had sought to protect Unionists and blacks from improper suits, the new order charged commanders in the South with the responsibility of pursuing and prosecuting those accused of “crimes and offences against officers, agents, citizens and inhabitants of the United States, irrespective of color, in cases where the civil authorities have failed, neglected, or are unable to arrest and bring such parties to trial”.<sup>106</sup> General Order No.44 is a defining moment in Ulysses S. Grant’s early Southern policy. Eight months after his tour of the South, Grant had taken upon himself to issue orders that went

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<sup>102</sup> USG to Edwin M. Stanton, July 7, 1866, *ibid*, pp.233-234

<sup>103</sup> *ibid*

<sup>104</sup> *ibid*

<sup>105</sup> Attorney General James Speed to Andrew Johnson, Jul 13, 1866, *ibid*, pp.234-235

<sup>106</sup> USG, General Orders No. 44, Jul 6, 1866, *ibid*, p.228

beyond maintaining civil order. General Order No.44 was an attempt to bring justice to the South through the controversial usurping of local authority and judicial power by the United States Army.

To further illustrate Grant's intentions at this time, one needs only to see his response to any challenges to his orders. When Major General George H. Thomas informed Grant that the Memphis rioters had been identified, it coincided with United States Attorney General James Speed's conclusion that military authority ended with the successful suppression of the riots. As much as events in Memphis highlighted a murderous rage within the South directed at blacks, this was a matter for the courts of Tennessee to deal with, not the military acting on the part of the Federal Government. Grant thought otherwise, writing Secretary of War Stanton: "I do not feel authorized to order the arrest of the Memphis rioters...but I think it ought to be done with a strong hand to show that where civil authorities fail to notice crime of this sort there is a power that will do so".<sup>107</sup>

As General Order No.44 came under increasing threat, Grant advised his generals in the South to act based on their own interpretation of Washington's orders and to limit requests for clarification, so as to avoid contentious issues coming to the attention of Johnson. In an example of the kind of political chicanery that he would need to employ once in the White House, Grant chose to interpret Attorney General Speed's opinion that states were charged with the duty of protecting citizens from outrage as only applying to Memphis and advised his military subordinates similarly.<sup>108</sup> Clearly there

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<sup>107</sup> USG to Edwin M. Stanton, Endorsement, Aug 16, 1866, *ibid*, p.232

<sup>108</sup> Attorney General James Speed to Andrew Johnson, Jul 13, 1866, *ibid*, pp.234-235

was a willingness to undermine Johnson indicating a Southern policy that favoured leadership by the military in affairs relating to equal protection before the law. Never was this more evident than in the events surrounding General Philip H. Sheridan's time in the South. Grant's relationship with Sheridan, and the manner in which his subordinate's actions would on more than one occasion require defence, serve as some of the clearest indications of Grant's philosophical stance on the Reconstruction of the South.

The roots of the Sheridan controversies lie in the infamous New Orleans riot of July, 1866 that resulted from state Radicals attempting to frame a new constitution protecting freedmen. Violent altercations left 34 blacks and 3 loyal whites dead. Sheridan, who had briefly been away from the city, returned to impose martial law and bring the perpetrators to justice. As he began his investigation, he wrote Grant accusing the mayor of New Orleans of acting "in a manner so unnecessary and atrocious to compel me to say that it was murder".<sup>109</sup> In his reports, Sheridan described the protests and speeches by freedmen as being "characterized by moderation" and the response of their opponents as "intemperate", owing to the mayor's hiring of "desperate men...some of them known murderers".<sup>110</sup> Sheridan advised Grant of the necessity of "military supremacy" and expressed his disgust as his investigations had revealed the "premeditated" nature of the events.<sup>111</sup> He concluded: "it was no riot, it was an absolute massacre...which the mayor and the police...perpetrated without the shadow of a necessity".<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Sheridan, P.H., *Personal Memoirs of P.H. Sheridan* (United States: Da Capo Press, 1992), p.416

<sup>110</sup> Ibid, pp.418-419

<sup>111</sup> Maj. Gen. Philip H. Sheridan to USG, Aug 1, 1866, PUSG-XVI, p.288; Maj. Gen. Philip H. Sheridan to USG, Aug 2, 1866, *ibid*, p.289

<sup>112</sup> Maj. Gen. Philip H. Sheridan to USG, Aug 2, 1866, *ibid*, p.289



Sheridan's reports and dispatches detailing the injustices that took place and the desirability of removing the mayor were quickly made common knowledge. Johnson had forwarded them to newspaper editors in what Grant described as a "mutilated or incomplete form".<sup>113</sup> What is most notable from this controversy is that Sheridan was wholeheartedly endorsed by Grant. Sheridan called for the arresting of public officials and defined the event as a "test of what shall be the status of Northern men; whether they can live here without being in constant dread, or not".<sup>114</sup> His close ally in Washington advised him: "[p]ersevere exactly in the course your own good judgment dictates. It has never led you astray as a military commander nor in your administration of the affairs of your military division".<sup>115</sup> Grant, seemingly not dissuaded by the controversy, told Sheridan that his actions were justified by the "purity" of his motives.<sup>116</sup>

The publication of Sheridan's report in its edited form and the subsequent appeal by Grant for its unaltered state to be released, foretold an adversarial relationship that was inevitably to develop between the President and the General-in-chief. Grant appeared before the American people as the hero of the Civil War and his public standing was far above Johnson's. It was precisely this that led the insecure Executive at this time to invite Grant on his ill-fated "Swing around the circle Tour" during the summer of 1866. Having recently established the National Union Movement as an independent opposition to the Republican Party, and with an eye on the 1868 presidential election,

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<sup>113</sup> USG to Edwin M. Stanton, Aug 10, 1866, *ibid*, pp.287-288

<sup>114</sup> Maj. Gen. Philip H. Sheridan to USG, Aug 6, 1866, *ibid*, pp.292-294

<sup>115</sup> USG to Maj. Gen. Philip H. Sheridan, Aug 12, 1866, *ibid*, p.292

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid*.

Johnson once again attempted to associate the popular general with his programme of Reconstruction.

This speaking tour of the North, regarded by Grant as a “national disgrace”, was instrumental not in altering the General’s policy towards the Southern states, but in illustrating the repugnant nature of Johnson’s personality.<sup>117</sup> The tour was predominantly an attack on the congressional Programme of Reconstruction, in particular the Fourteenth Amendment that made blacks equal citizens before the law (but not equals in society). The amendment also made it so that those who had been on the side of the Confederacy during the war were excluded from holding office. As a compromise between moderate and radical factions in the Party who differed on the extent to which blacks were to be equal and rebels were to be punished, the amendment actually did little to elevate the position of blacks in America.

Despite its limitations the amendment was a watershed moment as it made the Federal Government in the form of Congress responsible for ensuring civil rights in the states. It also had great political potential for the Republicans as it reduced the number of Democratic Congressmen eligible to run for office. More calculated was the adjustment in representation which denied Southern states the ability to count black citizens unless they were part of the electorate. With blacks more likely to vote Republican an increased voter base was to be an inevitable gain for the Party.

During the President’s tour, Grant observed that “the political stump speeches of Mr. Johnson” failed to find an audience.<sup>118</sup> Additionally, the manner in which he delivered

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<sup>117</sup> USG to Julia Dent Grant, Sep 9, 1866, *ibid*, p.308

<sup>118</sup> USG to Julia Dent Grant, Sep 9, 1866, *ibid*, p.308

them forever alienated Grant due to the Tennessean's lack of restraint and integrity when addressing crowds on Reconstruction. Johnson labelled the Radicals as equally traitorous as the Confederacy, likening Thaddeus Stevens to Jefferson Davis. Grant quickly began to dislike the man just as much as his policies and soon realised that the crowds were not for the President but for the hero of the Civil War. As people demonstrated their support for the General, he chastised them for their brashness. To a congregation of supporters in Cincinnati, Grant remonstrated, "I beg of you, if you have any regard for me, to march your company away...I consider this a political demonstration for a selfish and political object, and all such I disapprove of".<sup>119</sup>

The public support could not be ignored, though. Grant's political affiliation was of interest to all those concerned with the presidential election of 1868. To newspapers and politicians alike, Grant's presence on the tour was indication enough of his support for the President and his policies. In actuality, Grant's acquiescence in the venture was again born from the same sense of duty that had forbidden him from declaring his political affiliation. Whilst the general cultivated his sphinx-like image by refusing to declare publically what side of the political fence he stood on, and privately reprimanded those who attested to his allegiance, he followed an uneven course in regards to the South. It was only with the opportunity of influencing and framing policy through his involvement in the Reconstruction Acts of 1867 that Grant allowed his cards to be seen.

What then do the collected actions of these years reveal about the Southern policy of Ulysses S. Grant? During the war, Grant had demonstrated a somewhat liberal and

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<sup>119</sup> *New York Times*, Sep 13, 1866, *ibid*, pp.308-309

considerate attitude towards the plight of slaves. He had accepted the right of blacks to gain complete equality, but questioned the timing. After the war, he had favoured a government policy that sought to restore North/South relations as soon as possible and his belief that the entire South was obedient, supportive and accepting was more a naive hope than a “whitewash”. After his brief tour of the region and his subsequent rendezvous with reality, his opinion quickly shifted instigating a phase of investigations, challenges to the authority of the President and an attempt to more directly manage affairs in the South. It is important to note that at this point, Grant was not in discussion with any Radical Republicans on a regular basis and was not being briefed or directed by politicians. His General Orders were the manifestation of his own concerns and represented a controversial and aggressive attempt to bring stability to the South, protect the freedmen and loyal whites, and prosecute those guilty of racially or politically motivated crimes. These objectives illustrate a Southern policy that accepted a prolonging of the process of Reconstruction by confronting disturbing truths. Furthermore, as ineffective as the censorship of Southern newspapers was, it represented a policy of intervention.

It is important to stress that this shift in policy towards the South was not the result of a single mind-changing experience. Certainly Schurz’s report had provoked Grant to look beyond his inadequate assessment. In actuality, what influenced his Southern policy were the regular reports from newspapers, investigators and more importantly the Army on the true situation in the South. As purely a military man, Grant’s Southern policy could only tackle issues that fell within his remit. One can argue, though, that the shift from maintaining a troop presence to issuing orders that usurped local authority and even censored Southern papers, is indicative of a policy that went far

beyond his professional responsibilities. This kind of interventionism signified an intent to not only safeguard the peace but also revise certain conditions. By the time Congress wrested control of Reconstruction from the President, Grant as General-in-chief was the perfect instrument to achieve its objectives.

### **Chapter 3: “In the face of the enemy”: Southern Policy 1867-1869**

Ulysses S. Grant had initially approached the Southern issue magnanimously. As discussed, following his tour of the South there is evidence of an increasingly interventionist policy. It should be noted, though, that whilst dealing with individual cases of Southern intransigence, he had not been afforded the opportunity, or seen the necessity, to discuss Reconstruction policy as a political issue. From touring the South, Grant believed, or at least hoped, that the general Southern population was ready and willing to restore amicable and compliant relations with the national government. His initial role within Reconstruction was that of an observer. But as time would prove, he soon began to pursue a policy of his own. In taking a more active role in the management of the defeated South, Grant dealt with the issues in justiciable terms. For his Southern policy to consider the larger political and constitutional context, though, his role within the process of Reconstruction would need to expand, requiring him to be directly involved in the region’s political reshaping.

This chapter looks at the crucial years of 1867-1869 and Grant’s move from General-in-chief to Secretary of War, and then finally to presidential candidate. During this time, one sees the expansion and realisation of Radical Reconstruction, and most importantly, the politicisation and radicalisation of Ulysses S. Grant. It is these crucial years that convince him of the responsibility he had in protecting the results of war. Furthermore, it is during this time that Grant’s Southern policy is more clearly defined, providing a standard with which to analyse and assess his presidential record.

In early 1867, Grant wrote General William Tecumseh Sherman on the increasing irritation that both political parties were starting to claim him for their own. “No matter how close I keep my tongue each try to interpret from the little let drop that I am with them”, he exclaimed.<sup>1</sup> Sherman echoed this frustration complaining that every word or action by the two men was to be “construed by Politicians for their selfish purposes”.<sup>2</sup> Expressing a desire often admitted by both men, Sherman argued, “we ought to be allowed to confine ourselves to our pure military business, which will be as much as can be done, looking to the mixed questions and interests that are forced on us”.<sup>3</sup>

Inevitably for Grant, military business was increasingly becoming political business. As General-in-chief, he had moved into a quasi-political position and his soldierly duties went far beyond Sherman’s belief of what military men should concern themselves with. As mute as Grant wished to remain on his political allegiances, any abandonment of his duties contradicted an increasingly well-defined set of beliefs. If Reconstruction was the “corollary of the War” as he was to term it, any retreat from it, as small as taking a well-earned break from Washington, was like “throwing up a command in the face of the enemy”.<sup>4</sup>

If Grant had thought Reconstruction to be a continuation of the Civil War, the political picture gave a good indication that the war was still being won. Mid-term elections in 1866 had resulted in the wholesale rejection of Johnson and his followers; Republicans

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<sup>1</sup> USG to Lt. Gen William T. Sherman, Jan 13, 1867, PUSG-XVII, pp.13-14

<sup>2</sup> Lt. Gen William T. Sherman to USG, Jan 17, 1867, PUSG-XVII, p.15

<sup>3</sup> *ibid*

<sup>4</sup> Adam Badeau, *Grant in Peace* (Hartford: S.S. Scranton, 1887), p.63; USG to Lt. Gen William T. Sherman, Jan 13, 1867, PUSG-XVII, pp.13-14

had taken 128 seats in the House to the Democrats thirty-three, they maintained their three-to-one dominance of the Senate and won every governorship up for election.<sup>5</sup> Johnson did not expect to sweep away the Republican majority through his campaigning but he had hoped that some success could dash “Republican dreams of a veto-proof supermajority”.<sup>6</sup>

The intransigence the President had encouraged was self-defeating, though, with violence in the South (exemplified by events in Memphis and New Orleans) justifying the Republicans’ waving of the bloody shirt at election time. When the Southern states refused to ratify the Fourteenth Amendment, the Radicals began to formulate a more coercive plan to reform them. Key to this was universal male suffrage with Representative and member of the Joint Committee on Reconstruction Thaddeus Stevens commenting: “[t]he white Union men are in a great minority in each of those states. With them the blacks would act in a body; and it is believed that...the two united would form a majority, control the States, and protect themselves”.<sup>7</sup> In addition to the policy of black suffrage in the South, Radicals were the driving force behind the plan for military governance of the region with Stevens calling for at least ten years of military rule, something Grant agreed with in later life.

Despite the Republican success, Johnson was still able to irritate Radicals by vetoing (albeit unsuccessfully) 21 bills, including the one to enfranchise blacks within the District of Columbia and the Tenure of Office Act which was “designed to shield

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<sup>5</sup> Jean Edward Smith, *Grant*, (Simon & Schuster: New York, 2001), p.429

<sup>6</sup> Brooks D. Simpson, *The Reconstruction Presidents* (Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1998), p.102

<sup>7</sup> Michael W. Fitzgerald, *Splendid Failure: Postwar Reconstruction in the American South* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2007), p.44



Republican appointees from the president's removal power".<sup>8</sup> Still, for Radical Republicans, emboldened by their congressional victories but frustrated by the hesitation of Southern states to ratify the Fourteenth Amendment, the need to create far reaching Reconstruction legislation was greater than ever. At the same time, Grant was executing his own Southern policy and appearing more "Radical" every day.

In February 1867, Grant gave an interview to the *New York Times* in which he discussed the need for a new course in the South. The General remarked that "a Union man is not safe if beyond the limits of military protection" and that any political discussion in the South would most likely result in a shooting which would "probably be passed off as justifiable homicide, if the murderer was arrested at all".<sup>9</sup> To Grant, those in the South who behaved this way were disloyal, leading him to conclude that the war was, as yet, not fully won. With hostility so rife but the President declaring the insurrection at an end, some permanent kind of protection for Unionists and freedmen would ultimately have to come from outside of the military and Grant's own remit.

Concerned as to the future of the South and the legacy of the war, Grant was by early 1867 keen to consult with legislators, accepting that he was moving beyond his bipartisan role and into politics. In order to influence the Reconstruction of the South, the General started to open his doors to a new cadre of advisers, colleagues and consultants instrumental in the achievement of Reconstruction. His son, Jesse, recalled that at the time: "[a]lways father seemed in consultation with some one [sic], Senators and Congressmen more in evidence than army men...father had been consulted by

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<sup>8</sup> Smith, *Grant*, p.431

<sup>9</sup> USG, Interview, Feb 16, 1867, PUSG-XVII, pp.51-52

Congress upon practically all the legislation of the period, and particularly upon every reconstruction measure”.<sup>10</sup> It is an indication of the Radicals’ faith in Grant as a facilitator of their plan that he was consulted on the measures that were to become the Reconstruction Acts.

Historian Jean Edward Smith states that the First Reconstruction Act “reflected Grant’s view that more was required to protect Southern blacks”, and he worked with Senator John Sherman (brother of William Tecumseh Sherman), “to fashion a measure that would provide for black suffrage”<sup>11</sup> In Smith’s assessment there is no discussion, though, of Grant’s opposition to extending voting rights to blacks within the District of Columbia. Ignoring the issue entirely, he concludes that incidents in the South had convinced Grant that “by weaving the freedmen into the political fabric of the nation” past injustices could be corrected and loyal Unionists could be protected.<sup>12</sup> Whilst it was arguably the case that Grant sought to protect the lives of Unionists and Southern blacks, it was not his priority at this time to support universal black suffrage.

The Reconstruction Acts of early 1867 firmly established the requirements for re-admittance of former states to the Union by process of dividing the South into five military districts. District commanders would oversee the state-by-state election of delegates of both races who would adopt constitutions in perfect harmony with that of the nation. A further condition of re-admittance was that each state was required to ratify the Fourteenth Amendment. One of the key decisions to be made in this process was who would occupy the posts of the five military commanders. Surprisingly, Grant

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<sup>10</sup> Jesse R. Grant, In collaboration with Henry Francis Granger, *In the days of my father* (New York and London: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1925), p.49

<sup>11</sup> Smith, *Grant*, pp.432-433

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, p.433

requested that Johnson have final say. One could suggest that this was a necessary measure in order for the Reconstruction Bill to pass whilst also protecting Grant from criticism that he was holding a monopoly over military power in the South. At the same time, Johnson would have been more manageable had he control over which men would direct things on the ground. Aware of how difficult and time-consuming a complete reorganisation of the top level of the army in the South would be, Grant was happy to entrust the President with such decisions in the hope that there would be little change.

The end result was that in March 1867, after the passing of the First Reconstruction Act, the commanders of the South looked identical to those in August of 1866. For Grant, such a result maintained favourable men such as Philip H Sheridan and Daniel E. Sickles. Had the President introduced more conservative men, Grant was unconcerned, as evidently he was confident that once they were stationed South, they would soon change their opinions. Believing that there was a transformative quality in dealing with the region, he remarked to a friend: “all...generals at the South were radical in their opinions, though when first sent down, they were eminently conservative”.<sup>13</sup>

But it was not only events in the South that influenced Grant and directed his Southern policy. While enacting the Reconstruction Acts, Congress was also considering the Army Appropriations Bill which aimed to permanently establish Grant’s headquarters in Washington and establish that any change in his position was to be decided by

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<sup>13</sup> *New York Independent*, Feb 14, 1867 cited in Brooks D. Simpson, *Let Us Have Peace, Ulysses S. Grant and the Politics of War and Reconstruction, 1861 – 1868* (Chapel Hill & London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1991), p.171

himself or the Senate. At the same time, the chain of command was to be set in stone, thus clearing up certain apprehensions the General had long held. All military orders by the President or Secretary of War would have to go through Grant, not around him.

These securities were welcomed and congressional adoption of the Army Appropriations Bill emphasised the extent to which Republican legislators had faith in Grant and were supportive of any measures that would usurp the power of the President. A key intention of the Reconstruction Acts was to support the military in its execution of justice in the South. It did this by nullifying *Ex parte Milligan*, a ruling by the Supreme Court that martial law could not exist within a state where civil courts were open and unobstructed. That so much hinged on the successful passing of the Reconstruction Acts is evident in the attempt by Grant and Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton to convince Congress to stay in session, so as to not leave the fragile legislation in the hands of the President.<sup>14</sup>

On March 4, 1867, Grant wrote to his friend Elihu B. Washburne: “Reconstruction measures have passed both houses of Congress over one of the most ridiculous Veto messages that ever emanated from any President”.<sup>15</sup> That opposition to the Reconstruction Acts was termed ridiculous emphasises the extent to which Grant supported it. But despite embracing the legislation, Grant hoped that it was to be the last measure needed for the South, “unless the President proves an obstruction”.<sup>16</sup> What the country and Grant were to learn was that the Reconstruction Acts were only

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<sup>14</sup> DGW, Mar 29, 1867, III, p.74

<sup>15</sup> USG to Elihu B. Washburne, Mar 4, 1867, PUSG-XVII, pp.76-77

<sup>16</sup> *ibid*

as effective as the enforcement that followed, and Johnson was to prove a powerful obstructionist.

The evidence shows that in the late 1860s, Ulysses S. Grant was more proactive and provided more direction on Southern affairs than he did during the war or whilst in the White House. But as would become commonplace later in his political career, reinforcement of Southern policy, or articulation of his political or racial philosophy, was often the result of his need to defend something or someone, rather than build support for certain policy objectives. An early and significant example of this can be seen in his relationship with General Philip H. Sheridan and how it helps articulate Grant's philosophy on the South.

Immediately after passage of the first Reconstruction Act, District Commander Sheridan was "determined to see the Law's zealous execution" in Louisiana.<sup>17</sup> On March 27, 1867 in New Orleans, he removed from office: Mayor Monroe, Judge of the First District E. Abell and Attorney General Andrew S. Herron due to their opposition to Reconstruction laws and their public encouragement of insubordination to the Federal Government.<sup>18</sup> In particular, Sheridan took great issue with Judge Abell's promise that he would not charge those accused of the New Orleans Massacre. Despite challenges by U.S. Attorney General Stanberry as to the legality of District Commanders removing civil officers, Grant advised Sheridan that he was to continue exercising his right to remove any obstacles to Reconstruction on the basis of the relevant legislation.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Sheridan, P.H., *Personal Memoirs of P.H. Sheridan* (United States: Da Capo Press, 1992), p.428

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, p.429

<sup>19</sup> USG to Maj. Gen. Philip H. Sheridan, Apr 21, 1867, PUSG-XVII, pp.122-123.

When Sheridan began his own interpretation of voter eligibility in the fifth district, he again appealed to Grant for advice. Sheridan's concern was that those men who held office before and during the Civil War were inherently traitorous. Despite this, they had no objection to taking any oath of allegiance the government was willing to offer them. Sheridan felt that the oath's purpose was redundant as regardless of the intent of the individual, the oath "would be taken as a thirsty man would take a drink of lemonade".<sup>20</sup>

Nonetheless, Sheridan continued with voter registration along lines acceptable to him and in accordance with the supplementary Reconstruction Act (also known as the Second Reconstruction Act) that defined methods of voter registration. Awaiting judgement by Attorney General Stanberry as to the particulars of who would be disenfranchised by the supplementary Reconstruction Act, Sheridan, supported by Grant, proceeded to administer the polls with judicious effect, providing for quick prosecution of those registrars guilty of fraud.<sup>21</sup>

During this period Sheridan continued his support for those at threat in the South through liberal use of military commissions. Describing the situation for blacks as "lamentable" and a "natural outcome of Mr. Johnson's policy", Sheridan sought to protect them in their lives and property.<sup>22</sup> In his personal memoirs he reflected on this time stating simply that "it would have been little less than inhuman to deny them sympathy".<sup>23</sup> In his attempt to halt what he saw as the "march of terrorism inaugurated

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<sup>20</sup> Maj. Gen. Philip H. Sheridan to USG, Apr 26, 1867, *ibid*, pp.123-124

<sup>21</sup> Sheridan, *The Personal Memoirs of P.H. Sheridan*, pp.430-433

<sup>22</sup> *ibid*, p.433

<sup>23</sup> *ibid*

by the people whom Mr. Johnson had deluded”, Sheridan was quick to use military commissions in the prosecution of the numerous cases of murder and assault perpetrated by whites upon blacks.<sup>24</sup> One particular case was that of John W. Walker, who had walked free after shooting a black citizen in the parish of St. John, Louisiana. Sheridan’s investigation into numerous cases like this uncovered institutional racism and victimisation of blacks by the New Orleans police force. The General was quick to cleanse that public service, allowing for an influx of ex-Union soldiers into its ranks and thus putting a temporary stop to intimidation and injustice in New Orleans.<sup>25</sup>

It was Sheridan’s final action relating to judicial practices that sealed his fate, however. After reforming the New Orleans police force, the District Commander removed unsuitable persons from jury lists and replaced both a justice of the peace and a sheriff. This was an attempt to stem the wave of injustice perpetrated by officials who denied blacks the right to testify in court and allowed those guilty of racially motivated crimes to escape punishment. When on August 24, 1867, Sheridan applied his “revision of the jury lists as would reject from them every man not eligible for registration as a voter”, Johnson seized his chance to remove him ordering Grant to replace his close ally.<sup>26</sup> Whilst welcoming the termination of his responsibilities, Sheridan was unapologetic in his intentions to “remove from place and power all obstacles” in the way of a loyal and civil Southern society.<sup>27</sup>

Sheridan had certainly shown himself to be a zealous but effective administrator of congressional Reconstruction legislation. As a District Commander, he had exhibited

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<sup>24</sup> *ibid*, p.434

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, pp.434-435

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, p.440

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, p.441

independence and bravery in his attempt to manipulate, interpret and pre-empt official policy, all with the aim of removing rebels from office and just as importantly, protecting freedmen in the South. Through his relentless pursuit of those guilty of the New Orleans massacre to his attempt to restructure aspects of the Louisiana legal system, he worked to protect freedmen and punish the unrepentant. The significance of this episode in relation to this thesis is the manner in which Grant responded to Sheridan's actions and ultimately his removal.

At all times Grant advised Sheridan on Reconstruction law but was comfortable with his subordinate using his own judgement in how to apply the congressional acts. After learning of Sheridan's removal, he wrote to Johnson in language that seemed out of character for the usually reserved man. Exhibiting a rare sense of desperation, Grant wrote the President: "I am pleased to avail myself of this invitation to urge-earnestly urge-urge [sic] in the name of a patriotic people, who have sacrificed hundreds of thousands of loyal lives and thousands of millions of treasure to preserve the integrity and union of this country-that this order be not insisted upon".<sup>28</sup> Grant defined Sheridan's actions as a continuation of the Civil War, stating that any other stance would betray all those who sacrificed something in the struggle. He further contended that the policy executed in the Fifth Military District was "unmistakably the expressed wish of the country".<sup>29</sup> In the continual fight against the political and social ideology that gave life to the Confederacy, Grant believed Sheridan's removal would be "interpreted by the unreconstructed element in the South – those who did all they could to break up this government by arms, and now wish to be the only element consulted

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid, p.442

<sup>29</sup> Ibid



as to the method of restoring order-as a triumph.”<sup>30</sup> He wrote Sheridan that his removal was a “heavy blow to reconstruction” and honoured his friend, affirming: “I have sustained your course publically, privately & officially, not from personal feeling, or partiality, but because you were right”.<sup>31</sup>

That Grant believed Sheridan’s actions to be “right” is an indication of how, at this juncture, he believed Southern policy should be executed. His friend’s course of action, in all its extremes, can be seen to be the Southern policy of Ulysses S. Grant by proxy. Had Johnson not been there to curtail the more interventionist District Commanders, Grant would have most likely given his subordinates a mandate to remove officials, police the polls, conduct investigations, oversee or conduct trials and even censor the press. Such a rigorous application of the Reconstruction Acts had the simple goal of hounding out anti-Union feeling and protecting the lives and livelihood of blacks. At this time, men such as Grant and Sheridan were afforded the luxury of administering Reconstruction on a bipartisan basis. As a consequence, Grant’s Southern policy had a consistency and a certainty that was missing during his presidency.

In closing his letter to Sheridan, Grant gave a very clear indication of how he was now very much working in the interests of a political party: “such a welcome awaits you as will convince you that “Republicans” are not always ‘ungreatful [sic]’ ...there is still a loyalty in the Country which will save it through any trial”.<sup>32</sup> When Grant made his letter defending Sheridan public, Northern papers and Radicals rejoiced with one

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid

<sup>31</sup> USG to Maj. Gen. Philip H. Sheridan, Sep 8, 1867, PUSG-XVII, pp.316-317

<sup>32</sup> Ibid

Connecticut periodical commenting that Grant had shown himself “in his true light as the earnest and reliable adherent of the congressional policy of Reconstruction and as a determined opponent of the reactionary policy upon which Johnson has been bent”.<sup>33</sup>

Not content with just bringing attention to the injustice of Sheridan’s removal, Grant was more than willing to counteract decisions made by the District Commander’s replacement, Democrat and Johnson supporter, Winfield S. Hancock. Frustrated at his failure to sustain his friend, and by extension Sheridan’s policy of managing his district, Grant sought to delay Hancock taking up the post by exaggerating a yellow fever epidemic in New Orleans. His concerns over Hancock were warranted as on February 4, 1868, the new district commander removed Sheridan appointee New Orleans Street Commissioner William Baker on charges of corruption. Grant ordered Hancock to reinstate the ejected official. When Hancock proceeded to remove nine New Orleans city councilmen, seven of them black and all Sheridan men, Grant again ordered their reinstatement. Hancock soon requested to be reassigned away from the Fifth Military District.<sup>34</sup>

Similar to his relationship with Sheridan, Grant’s support of Commander of the 2nd Military District (comprising the Carolinas) Daniel E. Sickles further reaffirms his Southern policy. With a little more restraint than Sheridan, Sickles had governed his district in a manner that sought to re-write the state’s criminal and civil codes. When he obstructed federal courts and became a source of much discussion in the Johnson

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<sup>33</sup> *Hartford Courant*, in *New York Times*, August 31, 1867, cited in Simpson, *Let us have Peace, Ulysses S. Grant and the Politics of War and Reconstruction, 1861 – 1868*, p.199

<sup>34</sup> Simpson, *Let us have Peace, Ulysses S. Grant and the Politics of War and Reconstruction, 1861 – 1868*, pp.241-242; see PUSG-XVIII, pp.132-138, pp.185-187 & pp.200-201 for correspondence regarding the replacement of Sheridan.

cabinet, Grant wrote Sickles seeking clarification on what had occurred and on what authority the District Commander based his actions on.

In this letter, one sees the inherent faith Grant had in his district commanders that makes much of his request a formality. Grant states that his (Sickles's) actions have concerned the President and his cabinet, "all of whom, leaving the writer of this out, deny unhesitatingly your authority under the Acts of Congress to interfere in any manner with these Courts".<sup>35</sup> Grant admitted that Sickle's actions were most likely illegal under current congressional Reconstruction policy and that in theory, military authority should be subordinate to civil authority, unless those civil offices fail to uphold the acts of Congress and foster rebel sentiment and behaviour. Having said this, Grant did not order Sickles to cease his actions, he merely asked for him to see the "other side of the question" in the interests of building a defence to the President.<sup>36</sup> Ultimately this was to prove futile as Sickles was removed shortly after.

In this instance, similarly as he had done with Sheridan, Grant had attempted to maintain a district commander who in their implementation of Reconstruction legislation, would allow themselves to be guided by a sense of morality and justice. To assist the district commanders, Grant would attach to his orders copies of Reconstruction law should they feel unsure in their administration of the acts.<sup>37</sup> Sheridan and Sickles had executed Reconstruction policy with the intention of protecting blacks and loyal whites and establishing a legitimate voter base. In addition, they both used their military authority to bring order and some semblance of justice to

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<sup>35</sup> USG to Maj. Gen. Daniel E. Sickles, Aug 24, 1867, PUSG-XVII, pp.294-295

<sup>36</sup> Ibid

<sup>37</sup> Badeau, *Grant in Peace*, p.65

their districts. However carefully Grant wished to tread in the event of such controversies resulting from his subordinate's actions, his support and faith in their judgement reveals a definable set of ideals in regards to the management of the South, at least during this pivotal time.

As much as Grant sought to defend the rights of his subordinates, he was just as comfortable in affirming the righteousness of his own actions, often by inflating his power and responsibilities. Concerned over Sheridan's removal and keen to reiterate his approval of all of the District Commander's actions, Grant wrote Johnson: "[t]he Act of Congress of July 19th 1867 throws much of the responsibility of executing faithfully the reconstruction laws of Congress, on the General of the Army".<sup>38</sup> Clearly regretting his decision to allow the President overall approval on choices for district commanders, Grant discussed the matter in language far more direct than he had used before. Although acknowledging that the President was in his right to replace Sheridan, Grant wrote, "I claim that I ought to be consulted as to the Agents who are to aid me in this duty".<sup>39</sup> Having seen Johnson overrule his command of the army, Grant was now on the defensive warning the President: "I emphatically decline yielding any of the powers given the General of the Army by the laws of Congress".<sup>40</sup>

The confidence to challenge Johnson increased alongside Grant's perception of his role in Reconstruction. In a speech described by Gideon Welles as "studied and premeditated", Grant informed the Secretary of the Navy that "the law placed the execution of the Reconstruction Acts in his [Grant's]...hands".<sup>41</sup> While he wished to

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<sup>38</sup> USG to Andrew Johnson, Aug 26, 1867, PUSG-XVII, pp.301-303

<sup>39</sup> Ibid

<sup>40</sup> ibid

<sup>41</sup> DGW, Aug 27, 1867, III, p.187

not come into conflict with any one, he declared that he “must see the Reconstruction law executed”.<sup>42</sup> As legislation was passed and Grant became more confident in his authority, Secretary of the Interior Orville H. Browning wrote that the General-in-chief was “swift to deliver his crude opinions upon all subjects, and especially upon legal questions, as if they were oracles and not to be controverted”.<sup>43</sup> This posturing was part of his defence of Sheridan and Sickles and the manner in which they attempted to establish law and order and reinforce issues of equality. As Johnson continued to try and nullify much of the power and intention of Reconstruction, Grant was sure of his duty, telling close friend and adviser Elihu B. Washburne, “I feel the same obligation to stand at my post that I did whilst there were rebel armies in the field to contend with”.<sup>44</sup>

A key element of congressional Reconstruction was the drafting of new state constitutions in the South. As the responsibility fell to district commanders to organise these conventions, the vexatious nature of their proceedings often required Grant’s consideration, further politicising his Southern policy. In the Third Military District that consisted of Alabama, Florida and Georgia, Grant advised General Meade to move ahead with removing treasurers who refused to open funds for the organisation of a constitutional convention.<sup>45</sup> In Virginia, he approved of District Commander Schofield’s attempts to establish a moderate Republican regime in the state by removing Radicals from office. In both cases Grant was prioritising the aim of Reconstruction, not the outcome that many of its architects hoped for. But having

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid

<sup>43</sup> Theodore Calvin Pease and James G Randall, eds., *The Diary of Orville Hickman Browning* (Illinois State Historical Library. Springfield, Illinois, 1933), II, Aug 16, 1867, p.158

<sup>44</sup> USG to Elihu B. Washburne, Apr 5, 1867, PUSG-XVII, p.98

<sup>45</sup> Simpson, *Let us have Peace, Ulysses S. Grant and the Politics of War and Reconstruction, 1861 – 1868*, p.238

frustrated Radicals in Virginia, he did call on Schofield's successor to appoint blacks to local offices. He also advised his district commanders to appoint, when desirable, army officers in place of political office holders who were removed on account of their conduct or beliefs.<sup>46</sup>

Grant's policy to frustrate Radicals in Virginia should not be seen necessarily as contradicting his defence of Sheridan. Virginia was not experiencing comparable levels of criminality and injustice as had been evident in Louisiana. In this instance, Grant prioritised the re-admittance of a state rather than the fortunes of a political faction. In 1867, Ulysses S. Grant's Southern policy was to offer protection, establish law and order and facilitate the political reconstruction and re-admittance of the Southern states. Fractious in-fighting was a matter for local politicians and Congress. It was only in Baltimore that Grant chose an interventionist approach on a political issue, personally negotiating with the disputed parties.

Grant's intervention in Maryland politics actually predated the passing of the First Reconstruction Act, illustrating his willingness to use his influence to solve a political dispute. In late 1866, Democrat Governor Thomas Swann had made repeated requests to Johnson to supply him with federal troops. Eager to remove "illegal and revolutionary combinations" of Republicans who were engaging in private meetings, Swann sought to apply new voting qualifications so as to allow many ex-rebels to vote.<sup>47</sup> Johnson acquiesced to this request for troops but Grant resisted the President's call having been advised by General Edward Canby that Swann's actions and requests

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<sup>46</sup> USG to Bvt. Maj. Gen. Irwin McDowell, Jun 5, 1868, PUSG-XVIII, p.279

<sup>47</sup> Simpson, *Let us have Peace, Ulysses S. Grant and the Politics of War and Reconstruction, 1861 – 1868*, p.154

were “an effort to secure political power”.<sup>48</sup> Aware that Swann had already removed two police commissioners so as to supplant them with Democrats, Grant wrote the President that he thought it unjustifiable to “send troops into a state in full relations with the General Government, on the eve of an election, to preserve the peace”.<sup>49</sup> So great was his concern that on two occasions he visited the disputing parties to broker a peace and avoid federal intervention. Ultimately, Grant was to prove successful in avoiding the use of federal troops but he could not prevent victory for the Democrats within the state.

One of the most consistent strands of Grant’s Southern policy throughout his career was his belief that the army was not to be used to decide political contests. Grant’s intervention in Baltimore was owed to his anxiety that a precedent might be set where federal troops would become a common solution for all those who claimed injustice at the polls. Despite his own political leanings, Grant was trying his best to keep his beloved institution from being an instrument of politicians.

At the close of the war, Grant had told his wife Julia: “[m]anagement is all that is now wanted to secure complete peace”.<sup>50</sup> With the establishment of the five military districts, Grant now headed up a management network that through its district commanders sought to establish provisional governments and just as importantly, maintain order. As part of his duties, Grant felt it necessary to advise his Generals on the desirability of an effective cleansing of public office. When confronted with state governments that proved an obstruction to justice, such as that of Georgia in 1868,

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<sup>48</sup> Bvt. Maj. Gen Edward R. S. Canby to USG, Oct, 1866, PUSG-XVI, pp.353-354

<sup>49</sup> USG to Andrew Johnson, Oct 24, 1866, *ibid*, pp.350-354

<sup>50</sup> USG to Julia Dent Grant, May 9, 1865, PUSG-XV, p.30

Grant asked, “[w]ill it not be well to remove all the civil officers in Columbus, and all other places when like outrages occur, and appoint true men in their place?”<sup>51</sup> Over time, he was inundated with questions over the legitimacy of conventions, the responsibility of registrars and the manner in which district commanders should enforce Reconstruction policy. As a precursor to his presidential style, he demonstrated a tendency at times to ignore issues by diminishing the military’s responsibility for them. Grant’s concern was that the army should not appear to be an architect of Southern constitutions or government, but should simply maintain order so that the political processes could occur, regardless of the outcome.

When the General-in-chief did authorise the removal of office holders, it was because they were obstructing the process of Reconstruction. Often those that sought to derail Reconstruction were Democrat but as can be seen in Virginia, Grant had no trouble in moving against Radicals should they prove to be an obstruction to the programme’s greater purpose. On occasion, though, military intervention was necessary at times of heightened political disagreement. This is evident when in July 1867, he advised General George H. Thomas, who feared violence in Louisville come election day, to “give orders for the most vigorous [sic] use of the military to preserve order on election day and not wait until people are killed and the mob beyond control before interfering”.<sup>52</sup>

Despite alternating between an aggressive and passive use of the army in Southern politics, there is clear evidence of a radicalisation of Ulysses S. Grant in the late 1860s. Nowhere is this illustrated better than in his conversations with Secretary of the Navy

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<sup>51</sup> USG to Maj. Gen. George G. Meade, Apr 7, 1868, PUSG-XVIII, pp.227-228

<sup>52</sup> USG to Edwin M. Stanton , May 23, 1867, PUSG-XVII, p.236



Gideon Welles who described Grant as “braced up...and committed to the unconstitutional law of Reconstruction”.<sup>53</sup> Welles had long been a supporter of Johnson and his Southern policy; he had also played a major role in establishing the President’s National Union Party. His suspicions of Grant’s “Radical” nature had existed for some time. At an earlier meeting in the midst of the Sheridan controversy, Grant had expressed to Welles his distaste as to the striking down of such loyal men.<sup>54</sup> When the two discussed the state of the Union in general, Welles was “pained to see how little he [Grant] understood of the fundamental principles and structure of...government, and of the Constitution itself”.<sup>55</sup>

In his attempt to argue against the President’s veto of Reconstruction Bills and the removal of men such as Sheridan, Grant reaffirmed to Welles the supremacy of Congress by simplifying the issue to statistical reasoning. He stated: “in Congress, fifty at least of the first lawyers of the country... had voted for the Reconstruction law” and therefore, he asked, “were not...the combined wisdom and talent of those fifty to have more weight than Mr. Johnson, who was only one to fifty?”.<sup>56</sup> He then told Welles that the laws enacted by Congress were not open to debate or repeal unless the Supreme Court deemed it necessary.

A belief in the supremacy of Congress was natural in nineteenth century American politics and sat well with Grant, especially since this view supported the Republicans. Throughout his various careers, Grant held true to the belief that the President was “a

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<sup>53</sup> DGW, Aug 13, 1867, III, p.169

<sup>54</sup> Ibid, p.176

<sup>55</sup> Ibid, p.177

<sup>56</sup> Ibid

representative of the feeling, wishes and judgement of those over whom he presides”.<sup>57</sup> To Welles, Grant was arguing that the President had little to no power when it came to law-making, specifically with regard to Reconstruction.

On the subject of district commanders and in contradiction to his earlier requests, Grant’s interpretation of constitutional law held that the power Congress had to appoint heads of departments was applicable to those who were to manage the five military districts. Welles was quick to ask Grant whether or not he could be “serious in supposing that provision of the Constitution alluded to, had reference to military districts or any other particular territory parcelled out and called Departments”.<sup>58</sup> As the conversation moved onto more tangible elements of Reconstruction, Welles was taken aback that Grant’s view of the South seemingly embodied a “virtual dissolution of the Union”, an “abandonment of our republican federal system” and an idea that would create a “central power, which could control and destroy the States, a power above and beyond the Constitution”.<sup>59</sup> Grant had seemingly provoked such outrage by his comment – echoing Thaddeus Stevens – that the former Confederate states “had rebelled, been conquered, and were to be reconstructed and admitted into the Union when we felt that we could trust them”.<sup>60</sup>

Such thinking was not surprising from a military man. More revealing, though, was Grant’s emphatic belief that Southern states had no more rights than a prisoner of war. When Welles pressed Grant on whether or not *he* would pursue such a dictatorial course, the General, confident of his position merely said that “he did not believe we

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<sup>57</sup> PMUSG, II, p.510

<sup>58</sup> DGW, Aug 22, 1867, III, p.177

<sup>59</sup> Ibid, pp.179-180

<sup>60</sup> Ibid

could either convince the other, and we had better dispose of our business”.<sup>61</sup> Nevertheless Grant reaffirmed, “[r]ebels must be put down and kept under”.<sup>62</sup> Welles, convinced of Grant’s political ambitions, concluded that he had “become severely afflicted with the Presidential disease, and it warps his judgement”.<sup>63</sup>

Grant’s conversations with Welles exemplify his Southern policy at its most extreme. The General had clearly moved from conciliation in the interests of haste, to enforcement as a necessity to establishing a more perfect Union. Such absolutism in Grant’s rhetoric is rare. Perhaps when confronted by men so diametrically opposed to the congressional programme of Reconstruction, he felt compelled to adopt an aggressive position.

Grant’s comment to Welles is not the only example of his support for a more militaristic management of the South. In January 1867, he had written to Stanton on the appalling conditions for Union men and freedmen in Texas. Frequent murders of loyal whites and blacks, and the subsequent failure or outright refusal of civil courts to try the guilty men, created in Grant’s opinion “practically a state of insurrection”.<sup>64</sup> He asserted that however deplorable martial law was, it was required in order to ensure security for all persons regardless of race, colour or affiliation. Until such states as Texas, merited being “returned to... full relations with the Union”, it was necessary to wield the big stick, and enforcement of this kind, “would be a warning to all and if necessary could be extended to others”.<sup>65</sup> Grant came to believe that by the act of

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid

<sup>62</sup> Ibid

<sup>63</sup> Ibid

<sup>64</sup> USG to Edwin M. Stanton, Jan 29, 1867, PUSG-XVII, p.38

<sup>65</sup> Ibid

secession, the Southern people had sealed their fate. Those who rebelled in such a manner, “stake their lives, their property, and every claim for protection given by citizenship – on the issue. Victory, or the conditions imposed by the conqueror – must be the result”.<sup>66</sup>

If this was to be Grant’s policy, how far then had he moved from the Lincolnian idea of Reconstruction that he supported initially? In a speech three days before his assassination, Lincoln stated that any discussion of whether or not the states were in or out of the Union was a “pernicious abstraction”.<sup>67</sup> Quite simply, he believed that the states were “out of their proper practical relation with the Union; and that the sole object of the government...is to again get them into that proper practical relation”.<sup>68</sup> When Louisiana stood as the first experiment in Reconstruction and its irregularities began to emerge, Lincoln preached patience and acceptance of the transitional phase arguing that “the new government of Louisiana is only...as the egg is to the fowl, we shall sooner have the fowl by hatching the egg than by smashing it”.<sup>69</sup> Lincoln had favoured broad amnesty and a conciliatory approach to working with Southern states, something far more restrained than what Grant espoused in the late 1860s. But as testimony to his foresight, Lincoln surmised the situation in much the same way as historians would frame their defence of Radical Reconstruction and Grant in particular. He concluded, “great peculiarities pertain to each state.., and withal, so new and unprecedented is the whole case that no...inflexible plan can safely be prescribed”.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> PMUSG, II, p219.

<sup>67</sup> Lincoln, *Collected Works*, VIII, p.270, cited in Randall & Donald, *The Civil War and Reconstruction*, p.556

<sup>68</sup> Ibid

<sup>69</sup> Ibid

<sup>70</sup> Ibid

The challenge for any historian discussing the legacy of Lincoln's Reconstruction policy is that he was only afforded the time to consider the broader constitutional and organisational issues, not actually face the deep social, racial and political challenges that would need to be confronted. Johnson's prioritisation of the re-admittance of the states over an actual Reconstruction was a continuation of sorts of the Lincolnian ideal. It is doubtful, though, that Lincoln would have accepted such a complete return to antebellum practices as typified by the Black Codes. Randall and Donald quite rightly state that "[t]o Johnson the war had two objectives, Union and freedom; he never subscribed to what C. Vann Woodward has called the 'third War aim,' the Radicals' demand for equality".<sup>71</sup> It is the contention of this study that between 1866 and 1869, Grant clearly *did* subscribe to that third war aim and his actions and political reasoning serve to illustrate that.

Grant's argument with Welles occurred shortly after he accepted the position of Secretary of War. The reasons for this decision are contentious and warrant consideration in the context of this thesis. To a close friend, the General confessed: "I accepted this position reluctantly, and would not have done so at all, were it not to protect the Treasury against unjust cotton claims. Were an unscrupulous man Secretary of War, a mere scratch of his pen could defraud the country of many millions of dollars, and it was to avoid the possible appointment of such a man that I accepted the position".<sup>72</sup> Others thought differently of Grant's motivations. Henry D. Cooke, brother of infamous financier Jay Cooke, wrote at the time: "I have no doubt that

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<sup>71</sup> Randall & Donald, *The Civil War and Reconstruction*, p.558

<sup>72</sup> Real-Admiral Daniel Ammen, *The Old Navy and the New* (Philadelphia: Lippincott Company, 1891), p.428

Grant's object was to prevent a *general sweep* of the military Reconstruction District commanders, and the substitution of *obstructionists*".<sup>73</sup> Under the Reconstruction Acts, the Secretary of War was instrumental in administering that legislation. As the only Radical in the Johnson cabinet, Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton had long been the sole dissenting voice. For Grant, it was necessary that Stanton not be replaced by an individual who would obstruct the programme of congressional Reconstruction. In correspondence with Johnson on the issue of removing the Radical Secretary of War, Grant sought to remind the President of the purpose of the Tenure of Office Act and stated that the removal of Stanton would be looked on disapprovingly by the "mass of loyal people".<sup>74</sup>

In this letter, Grant also discussed in the same context as Stanton the removal of Philip H. Sheridan. Being more explicit than he had when discussing the Secretary of War's dismissal, Grant asserted that Sheridan was "universally, and deservedly, beloved by the people" for his service during the Civil War, and that his actions as district commander had "given equal satisfaction".<sup>75</sup> Furthermore, Johnson's plan to remove him had emboldened the enemies of Reconstruction and by their action, further intervention by Congress was required. In closing, he defended his challenge of the President's actions on the basis of his sense of duty and the belief that he was "right in this matter".<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Henry D. Cooke to John Sherman, August 19, 1867, *John Sherman Papers*, LOC, cited in Smith, *Grant*, p.440

<sup>74</sup> USG to Andrew Johnson, August 1, 1867, PUSG-XVII, pp.250-252

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid*

But despite Grant's clear opposition to the President's course of action, Johnson once again hoped to strengthen his position by way of association with the increasingly popular General-in-chief. Jean Edward Smith describes Grant's appointment to Secretary of War as Johnson's attempt to shield himself from the Radicals but also split the General from their ranks, thus eroding support for Grant in the imminent election. Smith repeats a common historical argument that Johnson assumed he could control Grant. This is somewhat surprising considering Grant's stubbornness and regular opposition to the President's views and orders. When the President asked the General-in-chief if they had any quarrel, Grant replied that they differed on the Reconstruction Acts and the Fourteenth Amendment but there was "Nothing Personal".<sup>77</sup> Despite this, Johnson still proceeded with appointing Grant as Secretary of War *ad interim*.

When he accepted the position of Secretary of War, Ulysses S. Grant stepped outside of his professional comfort zone. Perhaps mindful of Johnson's desire to remove him, Grant accepted a position inside the administration rather than being forced into one too far out of it. A year earlier, he had successfully avoided the President's manoeuvres to send him to Mexico on a diplomatic mission. At the close of the War, Grant had been preoccupied with France's attempts to establish a presence on the borders of America. As events in the South took up the bulk of the General's time, he was pleased then when Sherman, out of courtesy to his friend, took the Mexico mission upon himself. What these events imply is that Grant believed he had an instrumental role in the process of reconstructing the South. By accepting the position of Secretary of War, whilst still maintaining his rank as General-in-chief, he was able to wield even more

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<sup>77</sup> Hans L. Trefousse, *Andrew Johnson: A Biography* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1989), p.295

power over the programme's management. The record shows, though, that this brief sojourn was far more significant for Grant professionally than for Reconstruction.

The public split between President Johnson and Grant in 1867-68 is a key component of Reconstruction history and a decisive factor in the development of Grant's political career. His time in the Johnson cabinet did not change his political philosophy, rather it was instrumental in persuading him to seek the presidency. The well-documented split with Johnson requires little analysis in the context of this thesis. In simple terms, it centred on whether or not Grant had promised the President that he would hold on to his position as Secretary of War in the event of Congress seeking to reinstate the ousted Stanton (who under the Tenure of Office Act had been illegally removed). According to Grant, he informed the President in no uncertain terms that he would vacate the office of Secretary of War if Congress reinstated Stanton, something Johnson disputed. When Congress finally reinstated Stanton, the President harangued Grant for not maintaining his office, while the General affirmed that he had already informed the President that his tenure as Secretary of War would end immediately upon Stanton's reinstatement.<sup>78</sup>

More than the actual disagreement, it was the manner in which the President publically criticised and misrepresented Grant's motivations and actions that ended cordial relations. Grant had earlier told Johnson that there was nothing personal in their quarrels. Events within the Johnson cabinet had certainly changed that with the impact being a public split with the President and, by circumstance, an association with the Radicals. When the split was made known, Thaddeus Stevens remarked, "[h]e is a

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<sup>78</sup> Smith, *Grant*, pp.446-449



bolder man than I thought him...[n]ow we will let him into the Church".<sup>79</sup> When Republicans attempted to impeach Johnson after he fired the reinstated Stanton, the President remarked that Grant "was standing behind the seven managers of impeachment...urging them on to impeachment and declaring conviction and despotism indispensable to save the country".<sup>80</sup> That the attempt at impeachment failed had little effect on Grant in the long run. By 1868 his course was set, and was soon to take him towards the very position he was currently battling.

Just four months after he fell out with Johnson, Grant accepted nomination as Republican presidential candidate. The motivation for Grant's pursuit of the presidency is fundamental to this thesis as it both defines his Southern policy and establishes a context in which to analyse and assess it, once he is in the White House. Rejecting William S. McFeely's argument of careerism, it is incontrovertible that Grant's acceptance of the nomination owes itself exclusively to the issue of Reconstruction. The previous four years had convinced him of the necessity of the congressional programme in its Radical form and his responsibility - and by extension that of the army - in ensuring its satisfactory execution. Grant's pursuit of the presidency is singularly the most revealing factor in his Southern policy. His experiences of dealing with politicians both during and after the war and his recent troubles within the Johnson cabinet did not endear him to a life of politics. Like Sherman, Grant had regularly rejected claims that he sought political office. The former had told his brother John in 1866 that both he and Grant desired to "keep plainly

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<sup>79</sup> Oberholtzer, *History of the United States*, I, p.489, cited in William B. Hesseltine, *Ulysses S. Grant, Politician* (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1957), p.111

<sup>80</sup> Andrew Johnson to Edmund Cooper, Jul 8, 1868. *Andrew Johnson Papers*, LOC.

and strictly to our duty in the Army, and not be construed as partisans”.<sup>81</sup> However abhorrent the world of politics seemed to the straight-talking and uncomplicated generals, circumstances dictated that *Grant’s* duty would take him to the White House.

Grant’s aide-de-camp, Adam Badeau, wrote that as a presidential candidate, “[p]robably no man has ever been mentioned for the place who was more unwilling to accept the honor”.<sup>82</sup> Similarly, Sometime after leaving political office, Grant confessed, “I did not want the Presidency, and never have quite forgiven myself for resigning the command of the army to accept it”.<sup>83</sup> In defence of that regretful decision, he stated, “I owed my honors and opportunity to the Republican party [sic], and if my name could aid it I was bound to accept”.<sup>84</sup> After eight years in office, Grant still believed of the necessity of keeping a Democrat out of the White House as otherwise, “behind the President thus elected...the first element would be the solid South, a South only solid through the disenfranchisement of the Negroes”.<sup>85</sup> Evidently at the time, he held similar beliefs; writing only two months before Grant’s official acceptance, Sherman informed his brother that his friend “thinks that the Democrats ought not to succeed to power, and that he would be willing to stand a sacrifice rather than see that result”.<sup>86</sup> The idea of his election as a sacrifice was certainly confirmed when upon hearing news of his election he said, “I am afraid I am elected”.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Rachel Sherman Thorndike, ed., *Correspondence between General and Senator Sherman from 1837 to 1891* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1894), p.280

<sup>82</sup> Badeau, *Grant in Peace*, p.141

<sup>83</sup> John R. Young, *Around the World with General Grant* (New York: American News Co., 1879), II, p.452

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid*, pp.269-270

<sup>86</sup> William T. Sherman to John Sherman, Mar 14, 1868, Thorndike, *The Sherman Letters*, pp.314-315

<sup>87</sup> Isabel Ross, *The General’s Wife: The life of Mrs Ulysses S. Grant*, cited in Simpson, *Let us have Peace, Ulysses S. Grant and the Politics of War and Reconstruction, 1861 – 1868*, p.57

Even though Grant was by 1868 associated with Radical Reconstruction, his appearance of being outside of politics was necessary for the Republican's political success. The fall elections in 1867 revealed limited popular support for extensive Reconstruction. As Southern states began the momentous process of drafting and ratifying their state constitutions, the Northern voter turned away from much of what the Republican Party represented. Kansas rejected black suffrage as did Ohio and the Democrats took New York and Pennsylvania. The only consolation for the Republicans was Rutherford B. Hayes' election as Governor of Ohio, some counterbalance to a newly elected Democratic state legislature.<sup>88</sup>

GOP Success in the 1866 mid-term elections had relied in large part on exploitation of Southern violence. But whilst the protection of blacks and Unionists may have met with support, to force racial equality on the entire country, was far less popular. David Donald in *Charles Sumner and The Rights of Man* offers a concise explanation of the impact of these disappointments on the Republican strategy for the 1868 presidential election and how Grant quickly became the right man at the right time. Whereas men such as Senator Charles Sumner had supported Chief Justice Salmon P. Chase for the nomination, the Democrat gains in the 1867 election had led the party to latch on to Grant as a popular vote-getter. This was much to the disappointment of the Massachusetts Senator who considered Grant "a good soldier and nothing more".<sup>89</sup> As the General's name was increasingly bounded about, Sumner asked, "[w]ho can say

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<sup>88</sup> Simpson, *Let us have Peace, Ulysses S. Grant and the Politics of War and Reconstruction, 1861 – 1868*, p.218-219

<sup>89</sup> New York *Herald*, Dec. 15, 1867, cited in David Donald, *Charles Sumner and the Rights of Man* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1970), p.339

that, as President, he would give to the freedmen...that kindly and sympathetic support which they need?"<sup>90</sup>

With Party fortunes far better served by "waving the bloody shirt and reviving wartime concerns and associations than by pressing for justice to blacks", it was natural that Grant would be identified by the American voter as the embodiment of that feeling.<sup>91</sup> Michael W. Fitzgerald's assessment that Grant's candidacy gave "a solid impression of nonideological leadership" implies a detachment from a political faction.<sup>92</sup> Some did expect certain things from a Grant presidency, though. One Republican believed that the patriotism evident in Grant's every action provided for a "good foundation on which to build a pretty confident faith in him as the friend of equal rights".<sup>93</sup> Those who looked upon Grant's election with disfavour anticipated that his presidency would be a complete reversal of Johnson's policy. In the opinion of Secretary of the Interior Orville H. Browning, it would be "a condemnation of the entire course of the administration and an endorsement of all the measures of Congress".<sup>94</sup>

Indicative of the extent to which some believed that a Grant presidency would be a Radical presidency was Browning's belief that the voter faced a choice between "despotism and Constitutional government".<sup>95</sup> He feared that the General would inevitably be the "representative of the worst principles of the Radical party".<sup>96</sup> It should be noted, however, that such concern reflected a belief that Grant would be the

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<sup>90</sup> *Boston Advertiser*, Supplement, Sept. 4, 1867, cited in *ibid*, p.339

<sup>91</sup> Simpson, *The Reconstruction Presidents*, p119

<sup>92</sup> Fitzgerald, *Splendid Failure: Postwar Reconstruction in the American South*, p.94

<sup>93</sup> Gerrit Smith to Salmon P. Chase, Oct 4, 1868, John Niven, ed., *The Salmon P. Chase Papers* ((Kent, Ohio and London, England: Kent State University Press, 1998), V, pp.280-281

<sup>94</sup> Pease & Randall, *The Diary of Orville Hickman Browning*, Aug 3, 1868, II, pp.210-211

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid*, Aug 4, 1868, p.212

tool of Radicals in Congress, not a policy maker himself. Many still regarded Grant as uninformed, unskilled and as a popular figurehead for Radical Republicans. No one believed this more than Gideon Welles who had observed the General-in-chief closely, fearing not his ability or intention, but his burgeoning power. As rumours of Grant's association with Radicals became common knowledge, Welles wrote in his diary: "[u]nless he can be extricated...he will because of his war record, be made an instrument of evil".<sup>97</sup> Even those close to Grant belittled his political ambition. Still doubtful of his desire for the presidency, Sherman remarked, "I don't think he has clearly defined political opinions, but would let Congress and the departments work out the problem of the future, which is probably better than to form a theory and force matters to conform to it".<sup>98</sup>

In his letter of acceptance, Grant wrote that his nomination expressed "the feelings of the great mass of those who sustained the Country through its recent trials."<sup>99</sup> As much as he talked of "[n]ew political issues, not foreseen", his reference to those who had sustained the country identified the choice in the upcoming political contest as being one between union and disunion.<sup>100</sup> His description of the presidency as a "purely administrative officer" revealed not only his intention to act with restraint but also served to further emphasise the limits of Johnson's power.<sup>101</sup> What was significant about Grant's letter is that it said nothing of his reasoning for accepting the nomination. In a draft, he had ventured to lay out some policy going into the White House. His concern was Reconstruction and even though he wanted to see the process

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<sup>97</sup> DGW, Aug 26, 1867, III, p.185

<sup>98</sup> William Sherman to John Sherman, Aug 3, 1867, Thorndike, *The Sherman Letters*, p.292

<sup>99</sup> USG to Joseph R. Hawley, May 29, 1868, PUSG-XVIII, pp.263-264

<sup>100</sup> Ibid

<sup>101</sup> Ibid

completed in a timely fashion, it was for those who had “the wright [sic] and power to dictate the terms” to determine when the programme was completed to satisfaction.<sup>102</sup> But in both versions and with a sense of hope he closed his acceptance with, “Let us have peace”.<sup>103</sup> Grant’s famous request was open to interpretation; was it to be a peace achieved through an acceptance of Reconstruction by the rebellious South, or an abandonment of it by the North? Some feared his call as, “[w]e will have peace and you, the opposition, must submit to our terms of peace even if we be compelled to have peace at the point of bayonet”.<sup>104</sup>

However undefined and vague Grant’s political opinions could seem, he still had an overall purpose to guide him, at least initially. He sought the presidency to safeguard those things he felt were larger than him and his desire for a life outside of politics. Amidst suggestions that he was to be nothing more than a vote-getter or a despotic tyrant, he had a deep-felt personal commitment that he was reluctant to put into words. To Sherman, though, he was unreserved, admitting that by going into politics, he would be entering a world “in which there is to be a new strife to which I am not trained”.<sup>105</sup>

In 1864 Grant told close friend Daniel Ammen, “I know of no circumstances likely to arise which could induce me to accept of any political office whatever. My only desire will be, as it always has been, to whip out the rebellion in the shortest way possible”.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Draft, May 29, 1868, *ibid*, pp.264-265

<sup>103</sup> USG to Joseph R. Hawley, May 29, 1868, *ibid*, pp.263-264

<sup>104</sup> Andrew J. Wilcox to Andrew Johnson, Sep 18, 1868, Ralph Haskins et al, eds., *The Papers of Andrew Johnson*, (United States: University of Tennessee Press, 1967-2000), XV, p.64

<sup>105</sup> Lewis Catton Research Notes, cited in Simpson, *Let us have Peace, Ulysses S. Grant and the Politics of War and Reconstruction, 1861 – 1868*, p.245

<sup>106</sup> USG to Read-Admiral Daniel Ammen, Feb 16, 1864, Ammen, *The Old Navy and the New*, p.531

Four tumultuous years later he was to write to Sherman telling him that he could not turn down political office otherwise the country would lose “the results of the costly war”.<sup>107</sup> Historians have referred to the letter as an indication of Grant’s intentions as President but have not used it as a standard to assess him by. The presidency of Ulysses S. Grant is judged to be one of contradictions and one that oscillates between extremes. His record before entering the White House is mostly consistent and reflects a desire to provide protection for blacks and loyal Unionists, reconstruct the seceded states in accordance with Radical policies and counteract a resurgence of Confederate policies. Paul H. Buck in *Road to Reunion* (1937) identified the three consequences of the war: the end of secession, the destruction of slavery and that the “Southern slavocrat in national politics was permanently to be replaced in favour of Northern direction”.<sup>108</sup> Whilst these three war aims had by and large been achieved, post-war developments placed their durability in constant danger. Secession was renounced but intransigence endured. Slavery was destroyed but racially motivated violence flourished. Finally the slavocrat, or the South’s “thinking men” as Grant once saw them were still a force that refused to accept political exile and the new political and constitutional order.

Grant’s own understanding of the results of war are identifiable in his post-war endeavours to secure: the end to insurrectionary behaviour, the move towards racial equality and the removal of the old Southern political order. His concern with violence and order in the South motivated his support for military jurisdiction over the unreconstructed states, the use of the military to track down criminals and try them, and Sheridan’s handling of the New Orleans massacre. As a supporter of the move

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<sup>107</sup> USG to Lt. Gen. William T. Sherman, Jun 21, 1868, PUSG-XVIII, pp.292-293

<sup>108</sup> Paul H. Buck, *The Road to Reunion*, 1865-1900 (Boston & Toronto: Little, Brown and Company, 1937), p.9

towards racial equality, Grant had instructed his subordinates through his general orders to protect black lives just as much as Unionist ones and despite misgivings about their readiness, he had accepted general equality as the ultimate goal for African Americans. On the endurance of the old Southern leadership class, Grant saw a Democratic victory as the death of Reconstruction and a direct threat to the results of war. Throughout his presidency he would regularly refer to the Democrat Party as being determined to nullify the results of war. But these concerns did not lie solely with that Party. In justifying his decision to Sherman, he believed that to not accept the nomination would place the fate of Reconstruction, and more importantly the legacy of the Civil War, in the hands of “mere trading politicians”, be they Republican or Democrat.<sup>109</sup>

Reflecting on this pivotal moment in Grant’s life, aide-de-camp Adam Badeau wrote, “[w]hat he did with the Republicans at the time was not for them as a political party but because he believed that the acts of the President had made their course the only one practicable”.<sup>110</sup> Grant repeatedly expressed his disdain for politics; on becoming Secretary of War, he confessed, “[a]ll the romance of feeling” that public servants acted out of patriotism, consideration and “for the general good of the public has been destroyed”.<sup>111</sup> Even after accepting the nomination he looked for some fortuitous turn of events that would relieve him of his duty. The General hoped that the Democrats might run a somewhat moderate candidate against him who would “disappoint the Copperhead element of their party” if he was victorious.<sup>112</sup> Unfortunately for Grant, the Democrats’ nomination of Horatio Seymour and Frank Blair gave Republicans

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<sup>109</sup> USG to Lt. Gen. William T. Sherman, Jun 21, 1868, PUSG-XVIII, pp.292-293

<sup>110</sup> Badeau, *Grant in Peace*, p.73

<sup>111</sup> USG to William T. Sherman, Sep 18, 1867, PUSG-XVII, pp.434-344

<sup>112</sup> USG to Lt. Gen. William T. Sherman, Jun 21, 1868, *ibid*, pp.292-293



reason enough to wave the bloody shirt at election time (see chapter four). Democratic confidence to run on a platform dominated by anti-reconstruction rhetoric was undoubtedly influenced by their successes in the elections of 1867. For the Republicans, this resurgence necessitated a more moderate approach to Reconstruction and black suffrage, whilst still playing on Civil War rhetoric.

In his anxiety about becoming President, Grant appeared to be somewhat distant from the Party he was soon to represent. His letter to Sherman revealed his disappointment in the behaviour of politicians on both sides of the political spectrum and a belief that Reconstruction, at times, was simply a mechanism for electing Republicans in the South. From this point on, though, and throughout the rest of his life, Grant was proud to say: “I am a Republican because I am an American”.<sup>113</sup> Hesitant though he was, he entered into politics accepting a duty articulated by Sherman: “[t]he War, no matter what its cause, or conduct was an epoch in our National history, that must be sanctified, and made to stand justified to future Ages [sic]”.<sup>114</sup> Evidently the majority of Republicans had faith that Grant was the right man for their purpose.

It is clear from the collected correspondence that Grant and Sherman shared many of the same ideals, specifically on the sanctity of the Civil War and key aspects of Reconstruction. For Sherman, though, the results of war were largely guaranteed by the defeat of the South and the passing of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Amendments. Rarely preoccupied with concerns for civil rights, he had been more closely associated with the policy of Andrew Johnson.<sup>115</sup> Having held intimate conversations with both

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<sup>113</sup> Young, *Around the World with General Grant*, II, p.270

<sup>114</sup> William T. Sherman to USG, Jun 28, 1868, PUSG-XVIII, p.294

<sup>115</sup> Pease & Randall, *The Diary of Orville Hickman Browning*, Oct 9, 1867, II, p.161-162

men, Secretary of the Interior Orville Hickman Browning concluded: “Sherman is fully conservative and utterly opposed to the unconstitutional and revolutionary measure of the radicals. Grant is a radical of strong passions and prejudices”.<sup>116</sup> According to Gideon Welles, Grant would “forgive much to the rebels, [but] he is unsparing towards those whom he denounces as Copperheads”.<sup>117</sup> Those within the Party had a similar faith in Grant’s political convictions, but with far more an optimistic forecast. Carl Schurz, someone instrumental in Grant’s radicalisation but ironically by this stage a moderate, concluded, “I believe we shall have in him a good, wise president, true to Republican principles”.<sup>118</sup>

If, as Browning believed, Grant was a Radical, what could have been inferred about his opinion on race and the freedmen by 1868? Certainly by the end of the conflict, Grant was a fierce opponent of slavery. In likening its unnaturalness to the practice of polygamy, he wrote, “[w]e forgive them for entertaining such notions, but forbid their practice”.<sup>119</sup> Once slavery was abolished, he reported, condemned and acted upon instances of violence towards Southern blacks. When opportunity presented itself, he highlighted concerns over the issue by gathering evidence through his district commanders and forwarded reports to Johnson on the rise of Ku Klux Klan activity.<sup>120</sup>

The racial dimension of Grant’s early Southern policy was not only evident in his dealing with state issues. When key legislation such as the Civil Rights Act of 1866 was challenged, Grant lent his support providing a dossier on Southern violence thus

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid, Oct 9, 1867, II, p.163

<sup>117</sup> DGW, Sep 17, 1866, II, p.591

<sup>118</sup> Joseph Schafer, ed., *Intimate Letters of Carl Schurz, 1841-1869* (Madison: State Historical society of Wisconsin, 1928), Dec 20, 1868, p.357

<sup>119</sup> PMUSG, I, pp.217-218

<sup>120</sup> See PUSG-XVIII, pp.196-197

reinforcing the act's necessity. Gideon Welles described the General's attachment as an "omnium-gatherum of newspaper gossip, rumours of negro murders, neighbourhood strifes and troubles, amounting to 440 in number".<sup>121</sup> The Secretary of the Navy often remarked on Grant's concern for the freedmen. One diary entry in late 1867 shows the Johnson Cabinet discussing relief efforts for impoverished blacks in the South. When Welles's expressed his opinion that "the talk of relief by feeding the lazy and destitute negro for a few weeks was an absurdity", he noted that "Grant once or twice interrupted me, and I could see did not like my remarks".<sup>122</sup>

Despite such evidence it is understandably frustrating to historians sympathetic to Grant that he was opposed to enfranchising blacks within the District of Columbia. When the enabling legislation came before the cabinet, Grant welcomed its intention to disenfranchise rebels but opposed measures to extend the vote to blacks simply because "he thought it very contemptible business for members of Congress whose States excluded the negroes, to give them suffrage in this district".<sup>123</sup> One can argue that had Grant truly supported black equality, his concerns about hypocrisy would have been merely a matter of discourse not an excuse to challenge the change in law. That Grant eventually agreed to the enfranchisement of Southern blacks was owed more to necessity than belief. Congress chose, as he put it, to "enfranchise the negro, in all his ignorance" as a defensive measure rather than a progressive one.<sup>124</sup> Keen to stress Grant's conservatism, Adam Badeau believed that whilst he "saw the unfitness of the freedmen at the time for the ballot" and "recognized the danger of admitting them to suffrage", he accepted that the "danger was less than that of allowing those

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<sup>121</sup> DGW, Jan 15, 1867, III, p.42

<sup>122</sup> Ibid, Dec 24, 1867, p.246

<sup>123</sup> Ibid, Jan 4, 1867, p.5

<sup>124</sup> PMUSG, II, p.512

who had been the nation's enemies to return untrammelled to their former position".<sup>125</sup>

When black suffrage was widely defeated at the polls in 1867, Grant was earnest in his hope that such rejection would "compel moderation on the part of extremists".<sup>126</sup>

Referring back to Browning's judgement that Grant was at this time a most fervent Radical, the issue of the black suffrage case contradicts such claims. Placed within a large body of evidence, Grant's attitude towards race, as construed by his actions and comments indicates a belief in racial equality but with a stipulation that it must be a carefully staged process. His caution in supporting voting equality in the North was born not out of racial prejudice but a concern with how the move towards equality would be managed. As President, he would more clearly outline his racial viewpoint and would only criticise measures such as the Fifteenth Amendment on the grounds of their lack of accomplishment.

Race aside, if Grant did believe that Reconstruction policy was being driven by extremists within the Republican Party, this concern was secondary to his belief that the safeguarding of the results of war was entirely dependent upon the existence of a Republican government. Grant's Southern policy by 1868 was largely an attempt to facilitate Reconstruction, and by extension the Republicans' success over their enemies. When offered the position of Secretary of War, all concerns over where it would lead him were subordinate to the fear that another appointment could obstruct the Reconstruction process. The presidential election of 1868 was a greater threat to the legacy of the Civil War should the victor prove to be too conservative or even too

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<sup>125</sup> Badeau, *Grant in Peace*, p.58

<sup>126</sup> N.R Thayer to Elihu B. Washburne, Oct 10, 1867, *Washburne Papers*, cited in Simpson, *Let us have Peace, Ulysses S. Grant and the Politics of War and Reconstruction, 1861 – 1868*, p.219

radical. When the nomination was given, Grant's fears of an obstructionist president, one that would strike down the Reconstruction Acts, disregard the Fourteenth Amendment and leave blacks and loyal whites unprotected, were reason enough to accept. He felt that his moderation could enable Reconstruction within a few years to be completed successfully and therefore his intention as President was not to expand its provision but rather remove the office as a hurdle. But as much as Grant wished to achieve this, there were times during his presidency where he made efforts to prolong aspects of the process.

The Southern policy of Ulysses S. Grant from 1865 to 1868 can best be described as one shaped by experience. At the end of the war few were more anxious that the process of Reconstruction be conciliatory and swift. His tour of the South had misled him into believing that the citizens of the region were reconciled to their defeat. As Johnson's quick establishment of provisional governments maintained the Confederacy in all but name, this policy, as Grant surmised, "seemed to regard the South not only as an oppressed people, but as the people best entitled to consideration of any of our citizens".<sup>127</sup> When he read Schurz's report and those of newspapers and his own men, his was enlightened as to the realities of the Southern situation, causing him to adjust his opinions. As Johnson tried to curtail an increasingly interventionist military and Federal Government, Grant tried when possible to argue for the legality of his orders and justify the presence of the military in the South. Through Sheridan, one sees a Southern policy comfortable with the practice of a civil and political cleansing of opponents of Reconstruction policy, and the pursuit of criminals responsible for the murders of blacks and loyal whites. In conversation, as reserved

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<sup>127</sup> PMUSG, II, p.511

and guarded as Grant could be, there are instances where he described the ex-Confederate South as being at the mercy of a victorious North that was justified in making demands for change. Republicans could have faith in Grant as a defender and executor of Reconstruction policy. That faith was clearly evident in his involvement in the Reconstruction Acts and his nomination for President. Adam Badeau wrote that by 1868, station and circumstance, “charged Grant with the supreme duty of supervising the Reconstruction of the Union”.<sup>128</sup> As one who observed him closer than any other at this time, Badeau wrote of this moment:

He seemed to have a keener personal interest, an unwillingness to lose what had been secured at so much cost. Perhaps he did not want to see his own work undone...Of course no such word was uttered to or by him, but he certainly never in his career appeared more anxious or ardent in any task than in his efforts now to induce the South to accept the terms which he believed the easiest the North would ever offer.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> Badeau, *Grant in Peace*, p.72

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid*, p.44

## **Chapter 4: Closing the work of Reconstruction: Grant's First Years in Office**

As presented in chapters two and three, Ulysses S. Grant's Southern policy had been shaped by circumstance. Despite being an early supporter of conciliation, through his management of the five military districts, Grant had come to support a more interventionist, centrally managed and protracted process of Reconstruction. Drawn into the political game by Johnson and the Radicals, the General-in-chief had accepted the nomination for President due to a sincere concern as to how the results of the Civil War were to be safeguarded. Grant's manifesto was to see an end to insurrectionary behaviour, to facilitate the move towards racial equality and to counteract the old political order of the South. From 1865 to 1868, his military and political career had been defined by these three issues. The possibility that a new president might work against these objectives induced Grant to seek the White House himself in 1868.

Maintaining a chronological approach, this chapter looks at how Grant's philosophy on the South, as illustrated by his Southern policy between 1866 to 1868, guided the early years of his presidency. It addresses whether his policy choices as President represented his commitment to protect the results of war or other priorities in managing the South. By associating specific policy choices with enduring political goals, this study is an attempt to counteract the conclusion that incongruity was the defining characteristic of Grant's policy. It is important, though, to stress that an evaluation of the Grant presidency is not necessary for this analysis. It is Grant's intention that is of relevance, not necessarily the effectiveness of his actions although

they will be commented on. The focus of this study is policy aims, not achievement, therefore keeping Grant's political and racial philosophy as the central factor.

In order to convincingly outline and argue for a specific policy or set of goals, one must consider the political and professional environment in which Grant was operating. To what extent did his election provide a mandate for a presidency defined by the results of war? How did Southern Policy influence his cabinet choices? Finally, by 1869, what work still remained in reconstructing the American South?

At the time of his dear friend's election, General William Tecumseh Sherman wrote, "[w]hat we want in national politics is quiet, harmony, and stability, and these are more likely with Grant than any politician I know of".<sup>1</sup> The General looked optimistically upon Grant's ascendancy to the White House as the means by which America could move on from the Civil War. For Grant, his acceptance of the nomination was a duty, not an ambition. It went beyond partisan politics and sought to safeguard the nation's future against issues that very much represented the past.

Such selflessness naturally came with a sense of regretful obligation. Five months after accepting the nomination and in the lead up to the election, Grant still evinced reluctance to immerse himself fully in the world of politics. To Secretary of War John M. Schofield, he wrote of "so much pulling and hauling" as to make him delay his return to Washington.<sup>2</sup> Grant was not comfortable with the attention he was now to receive nor with the expectation that he should speak openly and decisively on political matters. He was a deeply conservative man in both manner and tone. Secretary of the

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<sup>1</sup> Louis A. Coolidge, *Ulysses S. Grant* (Cambridge: Riverside Press, 1922), p.279

<sup>2</sup> USG to Sec of War John M. Schofield, PUSG-XIX, Sep 25, 1868 p.43



Treasury George S. Boutwell commented, “Grant's feelings were not intense, and in the expression of his opinion his tone was mild and his manner gentle”.<sup>3</sup> As a consequence he often failed to make clear his opposition to something and such silence would often lead people to misinterpret his views or to assume that he had none.

Grant had maintained silence throughout his campaign despite being besieged by reporters, politicians, army men and even 5000 tanners who had visited him in person.<sup>4</sup> Jean Edward Smith, attributing too much political ambition to the General, describes this tactic as a “calculated noncampaign as deliberate as any military action he ever commanded”.<sup>5</sup> William S. McFeely suggests that like Lincoln, Grant was a candidate of middle-of-the-road America, someone who “could appear un beholden both to the war-creating abolitionist easterners and the war-shunning Democrats”.<sup>6</sup> The *Springfield Republican* outlined its belief as to why Grant had been nominated, identifying a “general sentiment that precisely this man was needed to secure the full and final reconstruction of the South, to inaugurate a thorough and searching retrenchment in the expenses of the government, to introduce into the civil service the same high standard with which his military selections have ever been made”.<sup>7</sup>

For the mass of the Republican Party, the General was the logical choice following its war with his predecessor, Andrew Johnson. Conservatives who had supported Johnson during the impeachment had a hard choice between the seemingly Radical Grant and

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<sup>3</sup> George S. Boutwell, *Reminiscences of Sixty Years in Public Affairs* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1968), II, p.255

<sup>4</sup> William S. McFeely, *Grant, A Biography* (New York & London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1981), p.280

<sup>5</sup> Jean Edward Smith, *Grant* (Simon & Schuster: New York, 2001), p.459

<sup>6</sup> Mcfeely, *Grant, A Biography*, pp.280-281

<sup>7</sup> *Springfield Republican*, May 22, 1868 cited in Andrew L. Slap, *The Doom of Reconstruction, The Liberal Republicans in the Civil War Era* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006), p.109

Democrat Seymour (who now publically had Johnson's support). Roseboom and Eckles argue that had these old Union Party men been faced with a choice between Seymour and another Radical, they may have supported the Democratic nomination. It was the appeal of Grant, though, and the belief that he was a moderate who sought political harmony that "induced most of them to take him on faith".<sup>8</sup> As discussed, Grant's only serious rival for the nomination had been Chief Justice Salmon P. Chase. But whereas Grant had been an ally in the Radical's fight with Johnson, Chase's impartial stance during the impeachment hearings had done him little good. The only real contest within the Party was for vice-president which went to House Speaker Schuyler Colfax of New York.

Upon nomination, the Republican delegates endorsed a campaign "denouncing the corruption of the Johnson Administration, promising encouragement of immigration, and a strong attitude toward Great Britain".<sup>9</sup> Grant's greatest educator on Southern affairs, but soon to be chief antagonist, Carl Schurz, led a "ringing appeal for justice to the soldiers, to the Union men and Negroes of the South".<sup>10</sup> Encouraged by the progressive constitutional amendments and legislation that had characterised the late 1860s and Grant's appeal to the voter, the Republican Party continued to campaign on the notion of a continuing civil war, endorsing congressional Reconstruction including black suffrage in the South. Even Sumner, at odds with the nomination, described the election as a test for "whether loyalty or rebellion shall prevail".<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Eugene H. Roseboom and Alfred E. Eckles, jr, *A History of Presidential Elections: From George Washington to Jimmy Carter* (New York, Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc, 1979) p.85

<sup>9</sup> William B. Hesseltine, *Ulysses S. Grant, Politician* (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1957), p.119

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, p.119

<sup>11</sup> Charles W. Calhoun, *Conceiving a New Republic: The Republican Party and the Southern Question, 1869-1900* (Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2006) p.8

The Democratic Party's standard bearers, former Governor of New York Horatio Seymour and his running mate Frank Blair, typically focussed their campaign on Southern issues, in particular promising to nullify the Reconstruction Acts. The Democrats' platform was predominantly about turning back the clock, not presenting sound policies for the future of the country. This was illustrated by the involvement of former Confederate Generals Wade Hampton and Nathan Bedford Forrest in the campaign.<sup>12</sup> With Seymour and Blair such fierce opponents of Reconstruction, the potential for four more years of Johnson-like obstructionism was not lost on the voter. Blair, who had parted ways with the Republican Party due to congressional Reconstruction, delivered numerous speeches during the campaign, calling Congress and Grant dictators and declaring that Seymour would restore Johnson's conservative governments.<sup>13</sup> Central to the Democratic campaign was the issue of black suffrage with Blair declaring that "the white race is the only race in the world that has shown itself capable of maintaining free institutions of a free government".<sup>14</sup>

In addition to attacking Republican policies, the Democrats portrayed Grant as a drunk, an abolitionist and a black sympathiser. Chief Justice Chase observed that the Democrats seemed to be counteracting Grant's "Let us have peace" with "Let us have war".<sup>15</sup> The Republicans responded with slogans such as "[s]cratch a Democrat and you will find a Rebel under his skin".<sup>16</sup> Primarily, the GOP platform focussed on two

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<sup>12</sup> Smith, *Grant*, p.458

<sup>13</sup> William Gillette, *Retreat From Reconstruction, 1869 -1879* (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1979), p.14

<sup>14</sup> John Hope Franklin, "The Election of 1868" included in Arthur M. Schlesinger jr, *History of American Presidential Elections 1789-1968* (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1971), p.1259

<sup>15</sup> Simpson, *Let us have Peace, Ulysses S. Grant and the Politics of War and Reconstruction, 1861 – 1868*, p.248

<sup>16</sup> Hesseltine, *Ulysses S. Grant, Politician*, p.127

issues: finance and Reconstruction. For the latter they emphasised justice and equality for black citizens but not without caveats. The cautious and overtly political approach to black suffrage can be seen in the Republican policy to impose it in the South, but leave it as a state issue in the North; a policy best described by Republican House member James G. Blaine of Maine as “evasive and discreditable”.<sup>17</sup>

In his last days as head of the army, Grant withdrew from Southern affairs so that his actions would not to be “interpreted as an attempt to manipulate the election results and thus confirm Blair's predictions of military dictatorship”.<sup>18</sup> He observed the politicking of each party from a distance. In Galena, Illinois he followed the results in each state through a newly installed telegraph line at the home of close friend Elihu B. Washburne. The inevitable victory was to come with Grant carrying twenty-six of thirty-four states. But despite overwhelming success in the Electoral College (214-80), Grant only narrowly won the popular vote relying on 400,000 black ballots to give him the edge. In Congress, Republicans maintained their two-thirds majority in the Senate whilst seeing their dominance of the House increase to four fifths.<sup>19</sup>

But what did victory signify? Smith argues that Republicans and Democrats alike celebrated the victory as “a triumph for conservative principles: sound money, government economy, and the restoration of the South under Reconstruction”.<sup>20</sup> In truth, there was very little known about the policies Grant was to support or perhaps

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<sup>17</sup> James G. Blaine, *Twenty Years of Congress: From Lincoln to Garfield* (Norwich, Conn.: The Henry Bill Publishing Company, 1886), II p.412

<sup>18</sup> Brooks D. Simpson, *Let Us Have Peace, Ulysses S. Grant and the Politics of War and Reconstruction, 1861 – 1868* (Chapel Hill & London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1991), p.249

<sup>19</sup> Smith, *Grant*, p.458

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, p.461

initiate himself. Hesseltine concludes: “when the country took stock after the election, there was wide diversity of views as to what had been gained”.<sup>21</sup> Whilst certain policy areas were an unknown quantity, Southern policy was more easily ascertainable simply through Grant’s role in Reconstruction and the military management of the South. Certainly his behaviour in war and peacetime revealed certain opinions regarding race, the South and the American political system. To Sherman, he had argued that the executive of the nation was to decide the legacy of the Civil War and that its results needed protecting. But regardless of what Grant might have thought his mandate to be, to what extent did the election of 1868 confirm that the politics of Reconstruction should continue?

At the outset, Grant was nominated on a platform that sought justice and protection for freedmen and Unionists. Senator John Sherman told him: “your nomination was not made by our party but by the people, and in the obedience to the universal demand that our candidate should be so independent of party politics as to be a guarantee of peace and quiet”.<sup>22</sup> Grant’s mandate therefore came from an expectation that he would be the facilitator of the end to the turbulent process of Reconstruction, something “Let us have peace” easily played in to. Clearly the Republican platform of Reconstruction still had support, as evidenced by the election results. But in order for *Grant* to have had a mandate, he would have needed policies on which *he* had been elected. There were no policies, though, outside of facilitating the Party, and there had not been any political speeches to appeal to the voter. If the President did have a mandate, something the popular vote argues against, it was as John Sherman said: to bring peace and quiet.

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<sup>21</sup> Hesseltine, *Ulysses S. Grant, Politician*, p.132

<sup>22</sup> John Sherman to USG, Jun 27, 1868, PUSG-XVIII, pp.294-295

In order for Grant to pursue a Southern policy that actively sought to safeguard the results of war and congressional Reconstruction, the election results needed to support such a focus. An acceptance of Radical Reconstruction, but not necessarily broad support for the Republican Party in the South, had been evident in the quick adoption of revised state constitutions. However, as military forces turned state affairs over to civilian control, intransigence in the form of Ku Klux Klan activity went unchallenged. The quick and widely reported return to violence in the South provided a reminder of the necessity of a robust Reconstruction on the part of the national government. Reports of murder and nightly patrols of recently formed White Supremacist group Knights of the White Camelia gave credence to the Republican presidential campaign's rhetoric. Concurrently, and to the benefit of the Republican campaigners, Democratic attempts in the South to wrest control from carpetbaggers and scalawags through violence and intimidation reminded Northern voters of the still unreconstructed and unrepentant South.<sup>23</sup> The 1868 results confirmed that at least for the meantime, the country desired the Republican Party to continue managing the peace.

Grant's inaugural address, written solely by him, was delivered on an overcast March 4 in 1869.<sup>24</sup> His ride to the capitol building had seen a break in tradition as neither the outgoing or incoming presidents could stand to be near each other. Whilst the address concerned itself largely with repayment of the public debt, the new President acknowledged the challenges facing the country and his presidency. He began his

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<sup>23</sup> Michael W. Fitzgerald, *Splendid Failure: Postwar Reconstruction in the American South* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2007), p.94

<sup>24</sup> Coolidge, *Ulysses S. Grant*, p.274

speech with the same sentiment he had expressed in private: “[t]he responsibilities of the position I feel, but accept them without fear”.<sup>25</sup> This was humility laced with trepidation. To assuage concerns that he might lapse into dictatorship, Grant declared that his role was to advise and support Congress; promising, “all laws will be faithfully executed whether they meet my approval or not. I shall, on all subjects, have a policy to recommend, but none to enforce against the will of the people”.<sup>26</sup> Had Grant not proceeded to warn that he would, when necessary, exercise his constitutional right of veto, his image as purely a puppet of the Republican Party would have been quickly confirmed.

For the South and for blacks in particular, Grant declared the Fifteenth Amendment as the hope for the final settlement of issues of inequality. Like its predecessor, the amendment did not strive for social equality, rather it sought to establish political parity by giving all black males the vote. Republicans had debated the merit of granting universal male suffrage with assurances from those in favour of the amendment that there need be no concern that “placing the ballot in the colored man’s hand will be his passport to all ranks and conditions of society”.<sup>27</sup> Additionally, there had been considerable debate over whether or not the black race could intelligently cast a ballot and whether or not that inability was due to their station in life or genetic inferiority.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> USG, Inaugural Address, March 4, 1869, PUSG-XIX, pp.139-143

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, pp.139-143

<sup>27</sup> *Congressional Globe*, cited in Calhoun, *Conceiving a New Republic: The Republican Party and the Southern Question, 1869-1900* , p.13

<sup>28</sup> Calhoun, *Conceiving a New Republic: The Republican Party and the Southern Question, 1869-1900*, pp.12-15

The amendment in its final form was a product of the haste in which it was to be ratified. Aware that their two-thirds majority in both houses was finite, many Republicans accepted a narrower wording with the removal of references to property and education as factors not to be discriminated against. This, as history would prove, allowed states to easily circumvent the amendment through the use of poll tax or literacy tests as a means of determining voter eligibility. Gillette argues that the real purpose of the amendment was the enfranchisement of blacks in the North and border-states where their support could be more easily guaranteed.<sup>29</sup> For those that supported the amendment for its egalitarian qualities, the political benefits were emphasised as a means of getting support. Illustrative of this is Charles Sumner's remark to the Senate: "if you are not moved by considerations of justice under the Constitution, then I appeal to that humbler motive which is found in the desire for success".<sup>30</sup>

Grant's support for a measure that sought to ensure that no citizen's right to vote was "denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude", sits uncomfortably next to his belief in 1867 that any such provision was extreme. If one is to review Grant's earlier comments regarding black voting rights in the District of Columbia, his opposition was apparently based on notions of political hypocrisy, specifically on the part of Northern Republicans. The blanket approach of the Fifteenth Amendment addressed that issue. Given that there is no recorded opposition from Grant to the amendment on racial lines, it is reasonable to assume that he accepted the measure. Less than a year later he was comfortable with being closely associated with the same cause, asking for "patience forbearance towards another throughout the land, and a determined effort on the part

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<sup>29</sup> Gillette, *Retreat from Reconstruction, 1869-1879*, p.19

<sup>30</sup> *Congressional Globe*, cited in *ibid*, p.11



of every citizen to do his share towards cementing a happy union".<sup>31</sup> If one is to consider all of Grant's comments on race, throughout his lifetime, the evidence implies that he saw African Americans as ignorant, but with what South Carolina Senator Frederick Sawyer called the "powers of development".<sup>32</sup>

With the election of 1868, Radicals looked forward to a more cordial relationship with the President and many Northern voters believed that Grant would bring about a satisfactory end to Reconstruction. "Let us have peace" was a call for a truce, an end to hostilities with no clear victor just a relief from the social, racial and economic battle that had been waging since 1861. With Grant in office, and perhaps more importantly Johnson out of it, Reconstruction seemingly had better a prospect of ending with a sense of accomplishment rather than defeat. Despite a belief that he was involved in a continuing Civil War, Grant evidently saw the end in sight. Following his victory in 1868, he wrote close friend Captain Daniel Ammen: "[n]ow there seems to be a general acquiescence, North and South, in the result. Appearances now are about what they were in 65".<sup>33</sup> It is curious that Grant was to make such a hasty conclusion. In 1865 he had perceived a similar state of affairs, only to admit later that he was gravely wrong.

Before the election Grant had warned Sherman that the future of the nation was in the hands of "mere trading politicians". If the war and its accomplishments were to stand the test of time, men such as themselves were required to take politics away from the politicians and place it in the hands of someone whose allegiance was owed to the

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<sup>31</sup> USG, Inaugural Address, March 4, 1869, PUSG-XIX, pp.139-143

<sup>32</sup> *Congressional Globe* cited in Calhoun, *Conceiving a New Republic: The Republican Party and the Southern Question, 1869-1900*, p.14

<sup>33</sup> USG to Capt. Daniel Ammen, Nov 23, 1868, PUSG-XIX, pp.70-71

nation, not a party. In February 1869, Grant spoke of his approach to selecting his cabinet: “it will be my endeavour to call around me as assistants such men only as I think will carry out the principles which you have said the country desires to be successful – economy, retrenchment, faithful collection of the revenue, and payment of the public debt”.<sup>34</sup>

In discussing his cabinet, Grant said nothing of Reconstruction or the South, the guiding principles behind his motivation for the White House. Brooks D. Simpson argues that Grant’s initial cabinet “veered toward moderate assumptions about reconstruction”.<sup>35</sup> This is true in that he tended to select men on chemistry rather than political savvy. His initial selections included friends Elihu B. Washburne for Secretary of State and retailer Alexander Stewart for Secretary of the Treasury. Stewart was to fall foul of an 1789 statute that barred any person involved in trade or commerce from holding the position of Secretary of the Treasury. Although Grant requested that his friend be made exempt, the Senate, in a display of pique at the lack of consultation on the nominations, refused to make an exception. Soon after, Washburne resigned as Secretary of State, a job for which neither his enthusiasm nor health were strong enough for. Grant replaced Washburne with New Yorker Hamilton Fish and Stewart with Congressman George S. Boutwell. Outside of the cabinet, a minor role brought just as much controversy when Grant appointed former Confederate general James Longstreet as surveyor of customs of the port of New Orleans, an early indication of the President’s desire for reconciliation.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> USG, Speech, Feb 13, 1869, PUSG-XIX , pp.129-130

<sup>35</sup> Brooks D. Simpson, *The Reconstruction Presidents* (Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1998) p.140

<sup>36</sup> Smith, *Grant*, pp.468-472

In the end, Grant's cabinet was certainly not representative of the Southern policy as indicated by his actions leading up to the presidency. There was to be no firebrand like General Phil Sheridan, perhaps because such a personality could not operate within the American political system. As a whole, Reconstruction and the South played little part in the appointment of the President's cadre of advisors. In fact, Secretary of the Interior Jacob D. Cox "had announced himself boldly as opposed to negro suffrage" and the appointment of Fish as Secretary of State and General Ebenezer R. Hoar as Attorney General were based more on ability than ideology.<sup>37</sup> Fish did note, however, that Grant tended to judge people on their war record. In discussion of the Circuit Judgeship for the 2nd District, he recorded in his diary, "President wants judges whose views of questions growing out of the war, & its incidents, are sound".<sup>38</sup>

When addressing the National Convention of the Colored Men of America, the president-elect told the optimistic crowd, "I hope sincerely that the Colored people of the nation may receive every protection which the laws give them. They shall have my efforts to secure such protection".<sup>39</sup> These efforts, however, were to be tempered by Grant's hesitation in taking a partisan position, despite now being a Republican president. This is evident in his response to when black members of the Georgia state legislature had been illegally unseated and replaced by men ineligible to hold office under the Fourteenth Amendment. The record shows that even before his inauguration, Grant was already concerned over the impact of his actions. Discussing the Georgia issue with District Commander Major General George G. Meade, he stated, "[i]t is impossible for me to answer a civil question without being misunderstood either as to

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<sup>37</sup> Coolidge, *Ulysses S. Grant*, p.278

<sup>38</sup> DHF, Nov 20, 1869

<sup>39</sup> USG, Speech, Jan 19, 1869, PUSG-XIX, p.107

what I say or as to the motive for saying it".<sup>40</sup> At this juncture, Grant chose inaction as his policy towards Georgia. The frequency with which the threat of unfair criticism would paralyse the President is a key element of Grant's Southern policy. It is important to note, though, where that fear of criticism was justified, or where it was a means to avoiding an issue.

Grant's sidestepping of the Georgia case took place before he entered office but after he was elected. That such a blatant disregard for the Reconstruction Acts was to be ignored indicates the extent to which Grant was anxious not to meddle in local politics. As General-in-chief, he had been decisive in addressing issues of violence but had largely steered clear of overtly political issues. Even though he had requested the removal of office holders, this was usually for justifiable reasons, notably refusal to follow the Reconstruction Acts. He had promised blacks that they would have his efforts in their protection. When men in white hoods began to terrorise the Southern countryside, Grant would show himself at times to be a man of his word. As stated, though, he was comfortable in ignoring these kinds of issues despite the direct threat to what he believed to be the most important results of war. An early indicator of how the results could be overlooked can be seen in the process of bringing the last unreconstructed states, Virginia, Mississippi and Texas, back in to the Union. Dealing with Virginia almost immediately upon inauguration, his policy towards the Old Dominion, on face value, indicated not a concern for the results of war, but a prioritisation to finalise the process of Reconstruction through considerable conciliation.

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<sup>40</sup> USG to Maj. Gen. George G. Meade, Jan 25, 1869, PUSG-XIX, pp.114-115

The President's policy towards Virginia was largely dictated by the ease in which it could be implemented. As Jack P. Maddex, Jr in *Reconstruction and Redemption in the South* highlights, Virginia stands out from the other seceded states as it avoided the political turmoil and violence that other states had experienced. Under Johnson's plan for Reconstruction, moderates collectively known as the Baldwin Group came to dominate the state legislature. Despite an initial stance against the war during the secession crisis, their policies immediately after it were decidedly Confederate in nature with the legislature enacting its own form of black codes and requesting that Robert E. Lee be made provisional governor. Following the passing of the Reconstruction Acts, Republican proponents of the legislation set about organising a state government that would support black suffrage and proscription of former Confederates.<sup>41</sup> But despite the congressional programme and 42 percent of the population being black, Republicans in Virginia failed to establish a governing party, remaining splintered and divided on black suffrage.<sup>42</sup>

Once in office, Grant initially made efforts to support state Republicans by removing Democrat and opponent of Radical Reconstruction, District Commander General George Stoneman.<sup>43</sup> At the same time, the President was visited by a delegation of moderates from Virginia expressing frustration with the test oath, the disenfranchisement clause and the county election provision of the proposed new state constitution. All of these measures were designed to keep former Confederates out of Southern politics whether as voters or office holders. Grant told the delegation that

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<sup>41</sup> Jack P. Maddex, Jr, "Virginia The Persistence of Centrist Hegemony" in Otto H. Olsen, ed., *Reconstruction and Redemption in the South* (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1980), pp.113-126

<sup>42</sup> Ibid

<sup>43</sup> U.S. Rep Benjamin F. Butler to Sec of War John A. Rawlins, Mar 29, 1869, PUSG-XIX, p.159

“the subject of the restoration of the State of the Union was one of deep interest to him”.<sup>44</sup> To solve the problem he recommended that Congress order an election permitting the people of Virginia to vote on separate clauses of the state constitution so that this issue would not delay ratification. The result inevitably would be that “such features as were most objectionable could be defeated”.<sup>45</sup>

It was not surprising that Grant favoured this tactic in ensuring readmission of Virginia back into the Union. In the years preceding his presidency, despite a sincere concern for the lives of loyal whites and blacks in the South, he had increasingly moved away from proscription and favoured a gradual process of amnesty, seeing it as inevitable. As Congress reached the end of its session in April 1869, Grant delayed its adjournment with a subject that he declared “concerns so deeply the welfare of the country that I deem it my duty to bring it before you”.<sup>46</sup> He urged Congress to admit all states back into the Union “at as early a period as the people of those States shall be found willing to become peaceful and orderly communities, and to adopt and maintain such constitutions and laws as will effectively secure the civil and political rights of all persons within their borders”.<sup>47</sup>

In his request to Congress, Grant emphasised peace and order as the essential elements to reconstructing a state. Leading up this, state conservatives had repeatedly met with Grant to discuss the Virginia constitution and had assured him of their support for black suffrage should the exclusion clauses be removed.<sup>48</sup> With that acceptable

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<sup>44</sup> *New York Herald*, Apr 4, 1869, PUSG-XIX pp.171-172

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> USG to Congress, Apr 7, 1869, PUSG-XIX p.163-164

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> Fitzgerald, *Splendid Failure: Postwar Reconstruction in the American South*, p.123

bargain, Grant appealed to Congress that separate clauses should be established in the Virginia constitution. Extolling the pacifying effect of conciliation, he stated “whenever the people of a rebellious State are ready to enter in good faith upon the accomplishment of this object, in entire conformity with the constitutional authority of Congress, it is certainly desirable that all causes of irritation should be removed as promptly as possible.”<sup>49</sup> When Virginians went to the polls in July to vote on the constitution and state election, the Radicals suffered a dual defeat in both the voting down of the objectionable clauses and the state legislature being turned over to conservative Republicans and Democrats.

Brooks D. Simpson argues that Grant would not have been pleased with the results of his first political exercise. He suggests that in pursuing this middle ground, Grant was attempting to appeal to centrist whites and support moderate Republicans in an effort to stave off Democrat resurgence. There is no evidence, however, to suggest that Grant was overly disappointed with the end result in Virginia. Within the first six months of his presidency he had facilitated the peaceful and largely agreeable re-admission of Virginia back into the Union. As Northern Republicans in Congress protested at the results, Grant wrote to Attorney General Ebenezer R. Hoar that although it was for Congress to make and amend Reconstruction laws, he favoured acceptance of the results. He also would have had some idea of where the state was heading under its new regime. In an earlier report on the Fifth Military District he wrote that the jury systems had broken down in Virginia in part because of “the prejudice between white

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

and black” and the “strong prejudice of class and of caste” made unanimous verdicts almost impossible.<sup>50</sup>

Further evidence of the President’s comfort with separating the objectionable from the agreeable when forming new state constitutions was his recommendation that the policy followed in Virginia be extended to Mississippi and Texas. In March 1869 Grant assured a delegation that “Mississippi should be reconstructed as soon as this could be done on a loyal basis, and in such a manner as to give peace and quiet to the people”.<sup>51</sup> That peace and quiet was to be established, as it was to be in Virginia, through a separate vote on certain clauses. On July 13, seven days after voting took place in Virginia, Grant issued a proclamation declaring Tuesday November 30, 1869 as the day for submission of the Mississippi Constitution with Articles VII of both Section 3 and 5 to be put before a separate vote. These clauses were again those relating to disenfranchisement and the ineligibility of former Confederates.

To suggest that Grant would not have been happy with the results in Virginia is to ignore his policy for Mississippi and how Republican fortunes within these states were evidently not Grant’s primary concern. In fact, he had been directly warned of the precarious nature of Mississippi politics leading up to the November elections. In April, the chairman of the Republican State Executive Committee, Hiram T. Fisher, had advised the President to postpone the election until after December. With blacks at the mercy of plantation owners who were quick to dismiss them on account of their ballot choices, Fisher suggested that the election should be held after the crop had been

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<sup>50</sup> George Sinkler, *The Racial Attitudes of American Presidents: From Abraham Lincoln to Theodore Roosevelt* (New York: Doubleday, 1971) p.128

<sup>51</sup> *Washington Weekly Chronicle*, Mar 27, 1869, PUSG-XIX, p.172



harvested. He warned Grant that to not do so would “greatly jeopardize the interests of the colored people, and be dangerous to loyal reconstruction.”<sup>52</sup> For the new President, however, it was the completion of that jigsaw of states that was clearly his highest priority. Local Party fortunes were of far less importance to him than the symbol of national unity. If Grant was to be the peacemaker that the election had clearly presented him as, he would need to prioritise the completion of the Reconstruction programme therefore settling any unanswered questions emanating from the Civil War. To hastily readmit Virginia, Mississippi and Texas was to provide closure to the most identifiable goal of Reconstruction: the reformation of the Union.

Fortunately for Grant, Republican chances in Mississippi were significantly stronger than they were in Virginia. Confident in their victory, he had publicly thrown his weight behind state Radicals following the attempts of his brother-in-law, Lewis Dent, to bring him on side with conservative Republicans in the state. Rejecting Dent’s appeals, he answered, “I am so thoroughly satisfied in my own mind that the success of the so-called Conservative Republican party in Mississippi would result in the defeat of what I believe to be for the best interest of the State and country.”<sup>53</sup>

Mississippi revealed that when comfortable with the situation, Grant would show a preference for the Radical over the conservative. But despite this political proclivity, the policy he pursued in Virginia, Mississippi and Texas and his conciliation to conservative interests very much invited the old Southern political order back into local government. In those states, however, the threat to the results of war, if quantified by state violence, was minimal. Grant’s determination to re-admit these states was

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<sup>52</sup> Hiram T. Fisher to USG, Apr 16, 1869, *ibid*, p.207

<sup>53</sup> USG to Lewis Dent, Aug 1, 1869, *ibid*, p.221-222

born from a necessity to bring about closure to Reconstruction, and by extension, the Civil War. In his annual message of 1869, he spoke of the need to accept the results in Virginia, Mississippi and Texas and “thus close the work of reconstruction”.<sup>54</sup> With these states still unreconstructed, the war and its corollaries endured. Those states still lacked proper relations with the rest of the country and that undecided fate arguably fostered defiance. To close the work of Reconstruction was to provide some kind of absolution. Riding roughshod over issues of loyalty and the opinions of many who had sponsored him for the White House, the President could be pleased with his achievement. For the first time since 1861, the nation was a whole. Grant's policy at this time, and arguably for most of his political career, was country over party. This form of conciliation - which might appear as an abandonment of the results of war - in essence sought to achieve a peace that was essential to the Civil War's legacy.

To readmit a state did not mean that the President would turn a blind eye to events in it. Grant initially had been hesitant in interfering in Georgia on the issue of black representatives being unseated in the state legislature. Simpson accounts for this as being necessary in pursuing a moderate policy in Virginia, Texas, and Mississippi.<sup>55</sup> Arguably, though, to have supported blacks in Georgia whilst appealing to centrists in Virginia would have not necessarily placed either plan in danger. In both states Grant would have been appealing to a majority and therefore could have effectively and legitimately dealt with both.

By concentrating his efforts on the unreconstructed states, was Grant therefore prioritising Reconstruction as a national issue over its effectiveness at a local level in

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<sup>54</sup> USG, Annual Message, Dec 6, 1869, PUSG-XX, pp.18-44

<sup>55</sup> Simpson, *The Reconstruction Presidents*, p.142

dealing with issues of racial inequality? To declare Reconstruction over at the soonest opportunity available was of benefit as any policy towards the South could be seen as an individual response to an individual issue, not part of a highly politicised programme exclusively directed by the Republican Party. The more Grant moved away from having to publically term every action towards the South as part of Reconstruction, the more his policy could be legitimised as day-to-day governance. To move on from Reconstruction was not necessarily to abandon it; it was an attempt to depoliticise events in the South and base decisions on morality and constitutional legality not as part of a North/South divide or Republican versus Democrat contest. With Virginia, Mississippi and Texas readmitted, the Union was complete and as Grant had observed in 1865, management was all that was needed.

In the first eight months of his presidency Grant's Southern policy had focussed on bringing Reconstruction to an administrative and symbolic end. With that in mind, it is essential, then, to distinguish Reconstruction from Southern policy. Reconstruction was the process of rebuilding and reforming the governments of the South, politically, economically, legally and socially. It was a natural outcome for the war and was highly politicised by its design and potential outcome. Southern policy was any goal or action that either directly affected local Southern issues, or related to the South, even if part of a broader national or Northern agenda. The issues to test Grant's Southern policy were a direct result of Reconstruction but their roots and their effect went far beyond that temporary state of affairs for the South. Southern policy had to deal with traditional issues characteristic of the South, regardless of the congressional programme of Reconstruction. Whilst escalated or enflamed by that process, the

majority of the challenges that Grant faced in the South were deeply rooted in the politics, society and culture of the South.

Whilst it should be recognised that Northern blacks experienced similar levels of inequality, it was the legacy of slavery and the greater black population that made the issue of race far more acute in the South. In his effort to close the work of Reconstruction, a key aim of Grant's Southern policy was to support legislation and constitutional amendments that would address issues of inequality. But whilst the President's aim was to address the issue of race on a constitutional and national level, it is questionable if that policy extended to ensuring compliance within individual states.

Ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment had gone hand-in-hand with Grant's efforts to secure the readmission of Virginia, Mississippi and Texas. Both initiatives were instrumental in formally ending Reconstruction and ratifying equality, at least on paper, for blacks. Grant's effort to secure ratification was not limited to the South. As General-in-chief he had observed the hypocrisy of the North's demands for equality whilst its own black citizens enjoyed nothing approaching the rights of whites. To that end, Grant wrote to Governor David Butler of Nebraska urging an earlier convening of the legislature so as to ratify the Fifteenth Amendment. He accounted for his urgency due to the "earnest desire...to see a question of such great importance brought to an early settlement, in order that it may no longer remain an open issue, and a subject of agitation before the people."<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> USG to David Butler, Nov 23, 1869, PUSG-XX, pp.15-16

To describe the issue of inequality as an agitation to the American people does not necessarily imply that Grant saw the debate as bothersome. Anxiety over the patience of the American people for Southern issues would have undoubtedly influenced the direction of his policy. In his inaugural address he stated, “[o]n all leading questions agitating the public mind I will always express my views to Congress and urge them according to my own judgment.”<sup>57</sup> With an ear to the people he still reserved the right to decide on behalf of them the best course of action.

The President celebrated the significance of the Fifteenth Amendment in American history in a special session of Congress on March 30, 1870. He described ratification in a manner “flaming with fervid rhetoric to a degree unusual for Grant” and deemed it “a measure of grander importance than any other one act of the kind from the foundation of free government to the present day.”<sup>58</sup> He asked blacks to earn the newly given right in their actions and behaviour and urged whites to “withhold no legal privilege of advancement to the new citizen.”<sup>59</sup> The emotional significance for Grant is clearly evident; in a message to Congress he declared that “the adoption of the 15th Amendment to the Constitution completes the greatest civil change, and constitutes the most important event that has occurred, since the nation came to life.”<sup>60</sup> In a speech to Republicans from the First Ward, Washington D.C., he admitted, “there has been no event since the close of the war in which I have felt so deep an interest as that of the ratification of the fifteenth amendment...It looked to me as the realization of the Declaration of Independence.”<sup>61</sup> Grant was uncomfortable in displaying such emotion

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<sup>57</sup> USG, Inaugural Address, March 4, 1869, PUSG-XIX, pp.139-143

<sup>58</sup> Coolidge, *Ulysses S. Grant*, p.368; USG to Congress, Mar 30, 1870, PUSG-XX, pp.130-131

<sup>59</sup> USG to Congress, Mar 30, 1870, PUSG-XX, pp.130-131

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> USG Speech, Apr 1, 1870, *ibid*, pp.137-138

publically but genuinely seemed overwhelmed at the achievement when he told Republicans: “I can not say near so much on this subject as I would like to, not being accustomed to public speaking.”<sup>62</sup>

In attempting to reconcile these comments with his earlier opposition to black suffrage, those initial concerns appear even more contradictory when compared to the passion so clearly felt at this moment. It should be stressed, however, that it was arguably more the effect that ratification would have on the country as a whole rather than the rights it conferred on blacks that excited Grant. Upon ratification, he told Elihu B. Washburne: “[y]ou will see by the papers that the ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment is assured! With this question out of politics, and reconstruction completed, I hope to see such good feeling in Congress as to secure rapid legislation and an early adjournment”.<sup>63</sup> With the Fifteenth Amendment being potentially the final achievement the reconstruction of the South required, the Republican Party could move on, satisfied that it had successfully written equality into the Constitution, even if it had not yet guaranteed it. For Grant, his enthusiasm was perhaps even more selfishly motivated. With the amendment ratified and Congress soon to adjourn he told Washburne, “[m]y peace is when Congress is not in session.”<sup>64</sup>

By January 1870 Grant had been in office ten months and in that time his Southern policy had been one that clearly sought to achieve two things: the readmission of all states to the Union and some settlement regarding the political and legal position of blacks. In pursuing both of these, the President had demonstrated a Southern policy

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> USG to Elihu B. Washburne, Jan 28, 1870, *ibid*, p.91

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

that primarily sought to “close the work of reconstruction”.<sup>65</sup> In readmitting Virginia, Texas and Mississippi, Grant accepted that the more punishing aspects of Reconstruction policy needed to be removed and conciliation was available to those in the South who entered into some form of negotiation. With regard to those whose actions defied the constitutional amendments, such as the men who had removed black legislators from the Georgia House of Representatives, Grant had eventually supported Congress in its refusal to seat them. To support blacks further in the South, he had been outspoken in his support for ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment.

It can be argued, therefore, that in his first year in office, the President had carefully balanced white and black interests in the process of Reconstruction. He had legitimised the place of blacks in post bellum America and had made clear efforts at conciliation. This balance had seen no favouritism or victimisation of either camp. Rather it had been a policy of appeasement to both sides’ needs, and Georgia aside, had successfully avoided measures that would have prolonged the process of Reconstruction. In an effort to end insurrectionary behaviour, the first step was to provide closure to the Civil War therefore ending the debate as to what form the new South was to take. With fundamental changes to the Constitution no longer deemed necessary, Southern policy would be for the remainder of Grant’s presidency an attempt to manage the South, not reshape it. The peace that had been in the hands of “mere trading politicians” had been effectively managed under his presidency and therefore he could consider that specific threat to the results of war gone. In truth, and as history would prove, the results of war were far more endangered by the behaviour of citizens in the South than politicians in Washington. Through violence, intimidation and fraud, white

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<sup>65</sup> USG, Annual Message, Dec 6, 1869, PUSG-XX, pp.18-44

Southerners engaged in insurrectionary behaviour designed to negate the results of war and re-establish local and traditional rule.

If Grant had accepted the presidency in an effort to safeguard the legacy of the Civil War, his Southern policy would need to ensure that rebellious behaviour and racial persecution was effectively dealt with. If not, a broader and justifiable goal would need to be evident. After the readmission of the last of the Reconstruction states and the passage of the Fifteenth Amendment, Southern policy was defined largely by Grant's dealing with individual political, racial and legal issues. It is the intention of this thesis to identify the extent to which Grant's personal political and racial philosophy (which evolved with the times) was evident in the policy choices he pursued in the South. In doing so, policy can be considered in the context of protecting the results of war or prioritising the close to the work of Reconstruction.

Virginia serves as an initial example where Southern policy was largely dictated by a desire to finalise Reconstruction rather than address issues of inequality, the legitimacy of office holders and effectiveness of state judicial systems. But whilst that state enjoyed a relatively cordial relationship with the President, others offered far greater a challenge and required a different approach. In March, 1870, Governor William H. Holden of North Carolina informed the President that he had declared the county of Almage as being in a state of insurrection. Holden, a former Democrat and defender of states' rights and secession, had deserted the cause in 1863 once failure looked inevitable. His split from the Confederacy led him to be associated with Unionist groups who were supporting the Northern army and represented a peace movement within the state. After being appointed as provisional governor by Andrew



Johnson, Holden and his Union Party were to face a Confederate-conservative coalition that accepted the end of the war and slavery, but nothing else. After losing the gubernatorial election in 1865, Holden quickly aligned with congressional Republicans and their programme of Reconstruction slowly turning the Union Party into the state Republican Party. Despite the typical divisions on issues such as black suffrage, solid support from black voters enabled the Party to take the fall elections of 1867, dominate the state constitutional convention and convincingly elect Holden as Governor.<sup>66</sup>

Despite these successes, by 1870, North Carolina's Republicans were being attacked politically and physically following the collapse of railroad plans that had left the state in serious debt. Holden declared, "[t]here exists in this State a secret oath-bound armed organization, which is hostile to the State government and to the government of the United States".<sup>67</sup> That hostility manifested itself in a secret organisation that was "whipping and maltreating peaceable citizens, hanging some, burning churches and breaking up schools which have been established for the colored people."<sup>68</sup> To support his clamp down on what was to soon be identified as Ku Klux Klan activity, Holden requested that Congress suspend the writ of habeas corpus, establish military tribunals and sanction the shooting of those found guilty. Such a remedy would be "a sharp and a bloody one...as indispensable as was the suppression of the rebellion."<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Otto H. Olsen, "North Carolina: An Incongruous Presence in Reconstruction and Redemption in the South", included in Olsen, *Reconstruction and Redemption in the South* (Louisiana State University Press, Baton Rouge and London, 1980), pp.157-166

<sup>67</sup> William W. Holden to USG, Mar 10, 1870, PUSG-XX , pp.211-212

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

Four months after this initial request Holden decreed another county, Caswell, in a similar state of insurrection. His next action was to use the militia to arrest those he considered to be involved in politically or racially motivated crimes. Holden also told Grant that although he had men organised, and that another three hundred and fifty men were to be dispatched from the county of Yanceyville, the Klan's forces outnumbered his own. Seeking to capture the President's ear, the Governor mentioned that there was evidence pointing towards former President Andrew Johnson being the head of the Klan.<sup>70</sup> Grant was to finally respond with a promise that troops would be used to suppress violence. Shortly after, six companies were sent to support the Governor. These soldiers, however, were largely confined to their barracks and when sent specifically to counties under threat from Klan activity, their orders were to support state forces, not to lead. Congress' only direct support for Holden came through the provision of ammunition and equipment for the state militia.

Grant's hesitation in supporting Holden outright was motivated by the manner in which the Governor was managing state affairs. William Gillette describes the Governor's policy as the answering of illegal violence with "extralegal justice."<sup>71</sup> Holden countered Klan violence by arresting and imprisoning men without trial. Such tactics played badly in a state already teetering on the edge of Democratic resurgence. In early August, Democrats were successful in capturing the North Carolina legislature due, in Gillette's summation, to "the combination of Holden's foolishness and Grant's indifference."<sup>72</sup> Grant's decision to not give teeth to his orders significantly impacted on the Governor's strength. What had more of a lasting impact, however, were the

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<sup>70</sup> William W. Holden to USG, Jul 20, 1870, PUSG-XX, pp.210-211

<sup>71</sup> Gillette, *Retreat from Reconstruction*, 1869-1879, p.91

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid*, p.92

actions of Holden following the election disappointments. During this time, the Governor had entered into a battle with District Judge George W. Brooks, who had challenged the legitimacy of Holden detaining prisoners captured by the militia. Refusing the judge's request to present the detained men, the Governor told Grant that Brooks was emboldening the state's enemies.<sup>73</sup> Attorney General Amos T. Akerman, in agreement with the President, advised Holden to meet the federal judge's requests. Following that, the Governor was successfully impeached and the state fully redeemed for the Democratic Party.

Events in North Carolina exemplified the violence that would accompany attempts to resist Republican rule in the South. The Klan's outrages were made fully known to Grant through the flood of letters he received and would continue to throughout his presidency. The problem for the President was that Holden's actions questioned the legitimacy of the Party in the state of North Carolina. If state Republicans could only be maintained by martial law, their support was clearly at a minority. Whilst Gillette argues that Grant was directly responsible for Republican fortunes in the state, Simpson identifies that his decision not to support Holden in his fight with Brooks actually occurred after the elections. It should be noted, however, that in the August elections, Republicans had only been able to hold on to two counties, both under jurisdiction of the state militia; an indication that where there was law and order, the election returned a more favourable vote. At this time, though, Grant was not equipped with the tools that would give greater authority to intervene in state affairs and ensure that all counties in a state were effectively policed.

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<sup>73</sup> William W. Holden to USG, Dec 15, 1870, PUSG-XX , pp.212-213

What events in North Carolina illustrate is the importance of a key variable that would often determine Grant's Southern Policy – the behaviour and image of state Republicans. North Carolina suggests how Grant had been unwilling in 1870 to hastily offer support to the state, even in the event of terrorism and the assassination of innocent people. Regardless of his political affiliation, Holden's brash behaviour had offended the President who did not want to support any official's claims, simply because they were a Republican. It was the President's own failing that he was unwilling to look beyond Holden's reputation and deal with the real issue in the state of North Carolina, namely the Ku Klux Klan. This is not to say that Grant had little concern for Party fortunes. The President was acutely aware of the consequence of Republican failure. In Missouri, a group of Republicans that included Carl Schurz had begun forming an alliance with Democrats to carry the state. Party lines were crossed due to what historian Charles W. Calhoun terms the “revolution in the federal relationship” between state and the central government.<sup>74</sup> Fearing an increasingly interventionist and unconstitutional federal handling of state affairs, the Liberal Republican challenge that culminated with the 1872 election “exposed deep disparities in Republicans’ imagining of the new Republic”.<sup>75</sup>

In reference to these burgeoning fusion movements, the President declared, “they intend nothing more nor less than the overthrow of the party which saved the country from disruption, and the transfer of control to the men who strove for disruption.”<sup>76</sup> It is noteworthy that Grant chose to define opposition to the Republican Party as the continuation of the secessionist impulse. He recognised that a resurgence of the

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<sup>74</sup> Calhoun, *Conceiving a New Republic: The Republican Party and the Southern Question, 1869-1900*, p.30

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid*, p.33

<sup>76</sup> USG to Charles W. Ford, Oct 20, 1870, PUSG-XX, pp.313-314

Democrat Party at a state and national level would directly threaten the accomplishments of the Civil War and Reconstruction, and believed in the necessity of the Republican Party holding on to power. Democrat resurgence in Missouri was representative of the survival of the political forces that had led the country into war.

In October 1870, Grant wrote to Indiana Senator Oliver P. Morton on the necessity of Republicanism. "I do believe" he stated, "that it is of the utmost importance that the Republican Party should control so long as national issues remain as they now are. Without such control I believe we would lose, largely the results of our victories in the field...The 13th 14th & 15th amendments to the constitution would be dead letters".<sup>77</sup> Upon nomination Grant had told Sherman that to refuse to run would be to doom the results of the war. Eighteen months into his presidency he was reiterating the same sentiment to Morton, only with more specificity now that the constitutional amendments had been ratified. In light of his limited support for Holden in North Carolina, these comments might appear hollow unless Grant sincerely felt that there was no legitimacy on the part of the Federal Government in acquiescing to the Governor's requests.

Similar events were playing out in South Carolina where the situation was one of such lawlessness that black citizens were routinely dragged from their houses and savagely beaten. Governor Robert K. Scott wrote Grant of the torturing of four innocent citizens who were "lashed on their bare backs until the flayed flesh hung dripping in shreds, and seams were gaping in their mangled bodies large enough to lay my finger in".<sup>78</sup> The threat of violence was intensified due to the state militia being poorly trained and

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<sup>77</sup> USG to Oliver P. Morton, Oct 20, 1870, PUSG-XX, pp.312-313

<sup>78</sup> Governor Robert K. Scott of S.C. to USG, Oct 22, 1870, PUSG-XX, pp.249-251

part-time whilst their opponents were ex-Confederates, drilled and experienced in battle. Scott told the President, “[i]f the state is powerless to secure these people their natural rights the duty clearly devolves upon the National Government to throw around them its arms of protection and the shield of its authority.”<sup>79</sup> His words identified the core moralistic struggle at the heart of Southern policy. Grant now stood at the centre of the national government, placed there by his desire to not see the results of war lost. In his earlier letter to Oliver Morton, he clearly associated current issues with an on-going struggle to protect those results. Despite such threatening times, the record shows that Grant attempted to pursue a Southern policy that dealt with issues based largely on a consideration of what was legally permissible, rather than morally or politically justifiable.

By 1871 Governor Scott informed the President of the worsening situation in South Carolina: “[s]uch a reign of terror exists that but few Republicans dare sleep in their houses at night. A number of people have been whipped and murdered, and I see no remedy, other than the stationing of U.S. Troops in those Counties”.<sup>80</sup> In February, the South Carolina legislature declared that a state of insurrection existed and passed a resolution asking for protection by the Federal Government.<sup>81</sup> It appealed by way of Article 4, Section 4 of the Constitution, that the “United States shall guarantee to every State in the Union a Republican Form of Government”. Transmitting the Legislature’s resolution to the President, Governor Scott reported, “[t]he condition of things in the Counties alluded to is of the most fearful and alarming character, and earnestly demand the interposition of the Federal Government for the protection of the lives and

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Gov. Robert K. Scott to Brig. Gen. Alfred H. Terry, Jan 17, 1871, copy sent to USG, PUSG-XXI, p.259

<sup>81</sup> PUSG-XXI, pp.259-260

persons of our people.”<sup>82</sup> A week later, Grant discussed this issue with his cabinet declaring his intention to send cavalry and perhaps a regiment of infantry to the state.<sup>83</sup> By March, conditions had deteriorated further with an assault on a jailhouse by over 500 Ku Klux Klan members and the subsequent threat by Governor Scott that he would impose martial law. On March 10, Grant told Scott that he would send troops.<sup>84</sup>

Such a deplorable state of affairs required that the President be authorised to use effective, timely and justifiable methods when dealing with insurrectionary behaviour. Grant had discussed these matters in private but chose to make his opinions official by writing to the Speaker of the House of Representatives, James G. Blaine, “to express exactly what I do think.”<sup>85</sup> In acknowledging the severity of the situation, the President recommended that Congress stay in session with the sole intention of legislating on this matter. Grant was accused at this time of delaying Congress in an attempt to push through his San Domingo annexation. In response, he answered, “I did not want a March term of Congress for any other purpose whatever than to provide better means of protection for life and property in disturbed Sections of the Country.”<sup>86</sup> Calhoun refers to an “unusual meeting of Grant, cabinet members, and congressional leaders at the Capitol” where the President asked for a clarification of federal authority. At this gathering he prepared, on the spot, a special message to Congress to deal with the crises in the Southern states.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Gov. Robert K. Scott to Brig. Gen. Alfred H. Terry, Feb 14, 1871, PUSG-XXI, p.260

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> USG to Gov. Robert K. Scott, Mar 10, 1871, PUSG-XXI, p.263

<sup>85</sup> USG to James G. Blaine, Mar 9, 1871, PUSG-XXI, pp.218-219

<sup>86</sup> USG to Alexander G. Cattell, Mar 21[3?], 1871, PUSG-XXI, pp.237-241

<sup>87</sup> Calhoun, *Conceiving a New Republic: The Republican Party and the Southern Question*, 1869-1900, p.26

On March 23, 1871, for the second time in his first term, Grant delayed Congress's adjournment due to a Southern issue. The concerned President told the legislators: "[a] condition of affairs now exists in some States of the Union, rendering life and property insecure, and the carrying of mails, and the collection of revenue dangerous...[t]hat the Power to correct these evils, is beyond the control of the State authorities, I do not doubt. That the power of the Executive of the United States, acting within limits of existing laws, is sufficient for present emergencies, is not clear."<sup>88</sup> To that end, Grant requested that Congress provide some form of enforcement legislation but with the proviso "that such law as shall be passed in pursuance of this recommendation shall expire at the end of the next session of Congress."<sup>89</sup>

To the actual form of the bill Grant preferred to leave its content to Congress. It is clear that in the pursuance of his Southern policy, the President wished to expand the power of the Federal government but avoid the controversy of appearing as if he was trying to increase his own. He would have been well aware of concerns regarding legislation that had the image of empowering Congress and the President to send the Army, uninvited, to any state to control its affairs.<sup>90</sup> It was precisely these fears that led Grant to request that Congress should devise a solution. Satisfied enough in his efforts, he quickly vacated Washington to his summer residence in Long Branch, New Jersey.

Before departing on vacation, Grant offered Southerners an opportunity to lay down their arms and avoid a government act that would have far reaching consequences. To

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<sup>88</sup> USG to Congress, Mar 23, 1871, PUSG-XXI, p.246

<sup>89</sup> Ibid

<sup>90</sup> U.S. Rep James A. Garfield to Jacob D. Cox, Mar 23, 1871, PUSG-XXI, pp.247-248



those perpetrators of murder and assault in South Carolina, he proclaimed, “I, Ulysses S. Grant, President of the United States, do hereby command the persons composing unlawful combinations...to disperse and retire peaceably...within twenty days from this date”.<sup>91</sup> This offer was a last-ditch attempt to make the impending legislation unnecessary. The proposed bill and the President had been the subject of heavy criticism and accusations that they would ring in an era of despotism in America. New York Democrat Fernando Wood declared, “in no free Government anywhere in the world has any such power been delegated by the people. Nor is there any despot for the past century who would attempt to exercise it.”<sup>92</sup> With Grant having recently spoken of his admiration for Bismark, this former Copperhead avowed, “[h]e did not appreciate the difference between despotism and republicanism; and this, doubtless, accounted for his admiration of Germanic imperialism, which subordinated political opinion to the edicts of the State.”<sup>93</sup> Offering a more balanced assessment, Carl Schurz, while supporting the spirit of the law, expressed concern at its “undue centralization” of power.<sup>94</sup>

As much as Grant was to be portrayed as a dictator in waiting, there were just as many calls for an increase in federal power. Republican Representative Samuel Shellabarger of Ohio exclaimed, “[t]he measure is one...which does affect the foundations of the Government itself, which goes to every part of it, and touches the liberties and the rights of all the people, and doubtless the destinies of the Union.”<sup>95</sup> In support of it he told colleagues, “I demand that you give the President power to strike the conspiracy

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<sup>91</sup> USG Proclamation, Mar 24, 1871, PUSG-XXI, pp.257-258

<sup>92</sup> U.S. Representative Fernando Wood, *Congressional Globe*, PUSG-XXI, pp.249-250

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>94</sup> *Congressional Globe*, cited in Calhoun, *Conceiving a New Republic: The Republican Party and the Southern Question, 1869-1900*, p.21

<sup>95</sup> Rep. Samuel Shellabarger, *Congressional Globe*, Mar 28, 1871, PUSG-XXI, p.249

instantly – dead.”<sup>96</sup> Others reminded those fearful of Grant as some kind of Caesar that he once “stood at the head of an army composed of a million veteran soldiers, and yet at the behest of the civil power this great army melted away like dew before morning sun.”<sup>97</sup>

In truth, the President wanted nothing less than to have additional powers that he would be obliged to use in an increasingly common fashion. Execution of the Enforcement Acts went to the very limits of Federal power. As Calhoun observes, “[w]here the proper constitutional boundary lay formed the central question for many Republicans as they struggled to balance the needs of the hour with the dictates of American Federalism”.<sup>98</sup> The main philosophical issue was “how far the national government could go in regulating the conduct of elections, a matter historically the province of the states”.<sup>99</sup> Testifying to the uncertainties, James A Garfield declared that at the time, Republicans were working “on the very verge of the Constitution”<sup>100</sup>.

Despite reservations, it was hard for Grant to ignore the letters that reached him on a daily basis detailing violent acts in the South. Persecuted and assaulted individuals begged the President to provide relief from offences perpetrated against them. One woman from Chesterfield, South Carolina, informed him: “we are in terror from Ku Klux threats & outrages - there is neither law or justice in our midst, - our nearest neighbour - a prominent Repub'can now lies dead - murdered, by a disguised Ruffian

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<sup>96</sup> Rep. Samuel Shellabarger, *Congressional Globe*, Apr 6, 1871, *ibid*, pp.250-251

<sup>97</sup> U.S. Rep. John B. Hawley, *Congressional Globe*, Apr 1, 1871, *ibid*, p.250

<sup>98</sup> Calhoun, *Conceiving a New Republic: The Republican Party and the Southern Question, 1869-1900*, p.27

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid*, p.20

<sup>100</sup> James A. Garfield to Burke Hinsdale, March 30, 1871, James A. Garfield Papers, cited in Calhoun, *Conceiving a New Republic: The Republican Party and the Southern Question, 1869-1900*, p.30

Band...Ought this to be? - it seems almost impossible to believe that we are in our land, - thus to be left without protection or redress...[h]elp us if you can. I have just come from the scene of blood and death. We are marked as the next.”<sup>101</sup>

Such desperate pleas became increasingly frequent throughout the spring of 1871 and to the relief of those who inundated the President with cries for help, Grant on April 20, signed the first Enforcement Act, commonly known as the Ku Klux Klan Act. He also saw fit to delay a trip to California as leaving so soon after the bill was passed would not be proper.<sup>102</sup> With the controversial legislation now through Congress, the President issued a national proclamation on May 3, describing the law as one of “extraordinary importance” and warning that it would be enforced “to the extent of the powers vested in the executive”, if citizens did not work towards civil obedience and peace.<sup>103</sup> For someone who had been reluctant to dictate the terms of the bill, Grant’s tone was surprisingly threatening, stating that he would “not hesitate to exhaust the powers thus vested in the Executive, whenever and wherever it shall become necessary to do so.”<sup>104</sup> To argue for its necessity and reactionary nature, Grant stated, “[t]he failure of local communities to furnish such means for the attainment of results so earnestly desired, imposes upon the National Government the duty of putting forth all its energies for the protection of its citizens of every race and color, and for the restoration of peace and order throughout the entire country.”<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Mrs S. E. Lane to USG, Apr 19, 1871, PUSG-XXI, p.263

<sup>102</sup> DHF, April 13th, 1871

<sup>103</sup> USG, Proclamation, May 3, 1871, PUSG-XXI, pp.336-337

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid

With the necessary tools in place, the Federal Government, on the direction of the President, could strike at the heart of Southern terrorism. Curiously, Grant appeared to not see this as immediately necessary. During a cabinet meeting only six days after the law was passed, he concluded, “it was the opinion of the members present that the existing state of affairs in the Southern States do not warrant any hasty action.”<sup>106</sup> To his satisfaction, such was the effect of the mere existence of the legislation that actual use of it was not yet warranted. Embattled Governor Scott of South Carolina told the President “there was no necessity for putting the State under martial law, and that there was a good state of feeling among the better classes of citizens to put down KuKlux organizations.”<sup>107</sup>

Even if Grant was slow to dispatch troops in the event of racially motivated violence, he was regularly found to be extoling the virtues of equality. On being appointed Minister to Haiti, African American Alexander Tate told the President, “[t]o make choice of a man of that race to represent the great and powerful Republic of the United States at the Republic of Hayti, have [sic] awakened in the hearts of all Haytiens - jealous of the progress and of the ultimate elevation of their race - a just feeling of admiration and of gratitude.”<sup>108</sup> Grant responded, “[i]f any proof were wanting of the unfounded character of the prejudice which, until recently, pervaded at least parts of this country against the race from which you are sprung, it might be found in the high tone and polished style of the remarks which you have just uttered”.<sup>109</sup> When congratulated on this gesture by the Black National Convention of North Carolina, the President remarked, “I have done all I could to advance the best interests of the citizens

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<sup>106</sup> *Philadelphia Public Ledger*, May 10, 1871, *ibid*, p.337

<sup>107</sup> *New York Times*, May 27, 1871, *ibid*, p.266

<sup>108</sup> Alexander Tate address to USG, Nov 22, 1869, PUSG-XX, pp.9-10

<sup>109</sup> USG Speech, Nov 22, 1869, *ibid*, pp.8-9

of our country, without regard to color, and I shall endeavour to do in the future what I have done in the past.”<sup>110</sup> Early efforts to address racial issues were not solely confined to congratulatory messages. Although delayed in his response, Grant did act decisively in Georgia placing the state under military supervision.

If legal and political equality for African Americans was a core component of Reconstruction, it is fundamental to this thesis that there is a continuing discussion of Grant’s own racial attitudes. Often progressive in his thoughts on race during and after the war, two notable instances during his early presidency both confirm and challenge that image. The annexation of San Domingo and Grant’s handling of his son’s behaviour at West Point provide contradictory evidence. Their importance in relation to this thesis is how they portray the racial attitude of the President and subsequently, how that might have influenced Southern policy.

In the case of San Domingo, the evidence shows the President willing to look beyond the United States in addressing the issue of race. In his effort to annex the small Caribbean island, Grant bullied his party and cabinet and in the process made enemies of men that were the very life blood of Reconstruction, most notably Charles Sumner. The impact of San Domingo on Grant's cabinet and by further extension Reconstruction will be explored later. What requires discussion in this instance is the racial dimension of the President’s attempt to annex the island.

When discussing his reasoning for pursuing annexation, Grant emphasised that San Domingo was capable of accommodating the entire black population of the United

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<sup>110</sup> USG Speech, Dec 11, 1869, *ibid*, p.50

States. Whilst Lincoln may have seen colonisation as a permanent solution to the black issue, Grant's intention was to use it as a bargaining chip. In a memorandum, he wrote, "[t]he present difficulty, in bringing all parts of the United States to a happy unity and love of country grows out of the prejudice of color. The prejudice is a senseless [sic] one, but it exists. The colored man cannot be spared until his place is supplied. But with a refuge like San Domingo his worth here would soon be discovered, and he would soon receive such recognition as to induce him to stay".<sup>111</sup> Furthermore, this effect would not be confined to the United States. In Grant's estimation, the produce that would come from San Domingo would diminish exports from countries still using slave labour such as Brazil and Cuba. Since America was the main importer from these countries, Grant anticipated, "[u]pon every pound we receive from them an export duty is charged to support slavery and Monarchy...Get San Domingo and this will all be changed."<sup>112</sup>

Convolved as this plan was, it demonstrated Grant's belief that blacks had a future in America. To relieve the condition of blacks in the South and avoid the need for greater legislative and constitutional change, the President hoped to emphasise their worth to Southern Whites. He believed that by offering the island to blacks, "the mere knowledge of that fact on the part not only of the freedmen but of their former masters, would serve to prevent anything like widespread injustice."<sup>113</sup> This vision, however naïve, is essential in understanding Grant's view of race in America. As a bargaining chip, San Domingo could have reinforced the value of black labour in the South and arguably would have motivated greater acceptance of their rights. The Civil War had

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<sup>111</sup> USG, Memorandum, 1869-1870, *ibid*, pp.74-76

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>113</sup> Simpson, *The Reconstruction Presidents*, pp.145-146

achieved emancipation but not equality. Grant's policy sought to facilitate this not by imposing the will of the national government but by trying to instigate a cultural shift in the relationship between blacks and whites in the South

Whereas the case of San Domingo signifies Grant's inclusive attitude on race, an incident at West Point involving his eldest son presents a contrary image. In 1870, Fred Grant was implicated in the abuse of the academy's first black cadet, James Webster Smith. The Hon. David Clark, a close friend and sponsor of Smith, wrote to Grant on the issue: "[s]uch treatment of this noble boy is disgraceful to the country, and its correction would not be beneath the dignity of your Exalted Station".<sup>114</sup> Grant's response to this incident has produced conflicting reports. Smith had been on the receiving end of abuse at West Point by a number of students, not just the President's son, and in his altercations with them he had been found guilty of two infractions. Smith had been court-martialled for fighting with another cadet and for having been found guilty of falsehood when his claims of abuse were not upheld. In a letter in 1874 to the first paper for black Americans, *The New National Era*, Smith affirmed that Grant approved of both himself and his combatant being punished for their physical altercation. Nevertheless, the President "disapproved in my case, on the ground that the punishment was not severe enough."<sup>115</sup> This contradicts Secretary of State Hamilton Fish's recollection that following Smith's second court martial over charges of falsehood, his punishment was reduced from dismissal to a "reduction in his academic standing one year", through mitigation by Grant.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> David Clark to USG, Jul 8, 1870, PUSG-XXI, pp.29-30

<sup>115</sup> James Smith to the editor of *The New National Era*, Aug 7, 1874, PUSG-XXI, p.30

<sup>116</sup> DHF, June 13th, 1870

In subsequent letters to the *The New National Era*, Smith portrayed President Grant as a most contradictory figure. Apparently, the President had assured Smith's sponsor, David Clark, that he would support the cadet in his rights even though his son, who was present at this meeting, commented that "the time had not come to send colored boys to West Point" and that "no D-----d nigger will ever graduate from West Point."<sup>117</sup> Clark wrote of the same meeting and that the President had said about Smith: "let him remain there (WestPoint), and I will do all that I can to protect him in his rights, and so shall the officers of the Academy."<sup>118</sup> He also recommended that the officer who provoked Smith to make his complaint of abusive language be expelled. To his great disappointment, Clark learnt of Grant's apparent request to the Secretary of War to make up the court in Smith's trial so "as to cause his removal."<sup>119</sup> Clark confessed that he was "astonished at this announcement, remembering what President Grant had promised".<sup>120</sup> He concluded: "[t]his son Fred, had all along assumed to be a sort of Governor of West Point, and has made himself obnoxious to the professors by advising them of what 'his father' desired or did not desire."<sup>121</sup>

Disgusted with the President's duplicity, Clark, in correspondence with a friend, asked if the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments guaranteed black men a place in the Senate, then it should likewise be in effect in the nation's most prestigious military institution. Disillusioned, he reflected, "[f]rom that moment up to the present time I have never believed that Gen. Grant has been in sympathy with the colored people.

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<sup>117</sup> James Smith to the editor of the *New National Era*, Jul 30, 1874, PUSG-XXI, p.29

<sup>118</sup> David Clark to Sayles J. Bowen, Jul 22, 1872, *ibid.*, pp.31-33

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*



But I am convinced that all his professions of friendship for them have been for the sake of his own personal or political advancement.”<sup>122</sup>

As the only Grant historian to study this incident in great detail, William S. McFeely implicates Grant through the reported conversations with David Clark, Smith and Secretary of War William W. Belknap, in a conspiracy of racial persecution. The legitimacy of these sources is questionable as the President’s actions contradict each other so much that the truth is difficult to ascertain. Grant did not have a duplicitous nature. He either spoke his mind or remained silent. To have promised support and then to have underhandedly sought further punishment and expulsion for Cadet Smith is improbable and unsubstantiated outside of Clark’s comments. Additionally, there is contradictory evidence from meticulous documenter of the Grant presidency, Hamilton Fish, who most likely would have supported the President’s persecution of a black cadet. Grant revisionists Brooks D. Simpson, Jean Edward Smith and John Scaturro ignore this incident entirely most likely considering it either unsubstantiated or inconvenient to their argument.

The study of this incident is of relevance to this thesis as it warrants consideration in the larger sense of how Grant’s views on race influenced Southern policy. If the President displayed such unfairness, to what extent then was this racially motivated? It can be argued that Grant would have victimised a white soldier in conflict with his own son. If Grant had wanted to remove Smith from West Point, it was most likely the defensive nature of a protective father, not a racist. Having seen blacks fight during the Civil War and supported and facilitated their right to vote and hold office, it would

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

have been somewhat contradictory for the President to have not supported their admission to the country's greatest military institution.

Even if the West Point incident is accurate, his overall record shows Grant to have been someone who sought protection and legal and political equality for blacks. San Domingo is a key component of Grant's Southern policy as it was an attempt to enhance the value of freedmen in the eyes of Southern whites. By emphasising their necessity, he hoped that the white population would be more accepting of their role within Southern society and its economy. In the end, the President's efforts were to prove futile. Despite repeated attempts, annexation was to fail leaving only the power of the Federal Government as the means by which blacks in the South could protect their rights and lives.

By the middle of 1871, Ulysses S. Grant had been in the office of the presidency for two years. He accepted the nomination of the Republican Party as he had not wanted the results of the war to be lost to "mere trading politicians". As leader of the Union forces he had seen the defeat of a rebellious South, an end to secession and the complete destruction of the system of slavery. As President, it was his personal duty to ensure that Southern intransigence and the freedom and protection of blacks endured. What then do his first two years in office indicate about his commitment to that duty?

As a chapter in the Southern policy of Ulysses S. Grant, the early part of his presidency represented a moment where the task was clear and the achievements were often historic. The readmission of the states represented closure for the Civil War and

Reconstruction. The Fifteenth Amendment had bestowed a new state of political equality for blacks, and the Enforcement Act signalled the Federal Government's commitment to supporting those achievements. As evidenced in his correspondence and public addresses, the President wanted to close the work of Reconstruction; a statement that defines Grant's Southern policy in the early years of his presidency. To close the work of Reconstruction was to close the most visible wounds of the Civil War. Grant wished to shift the national agenda from the past onto the future. Reconstruction would become simply Southern policy and any action by himself or the Federal Government could be termed as regular governance, not the persecution or subjugation of the Southern people by the Republican Party.

To facilitate this timely and agreeable closure, Grant's Southern policy was largely one of appeasement to both white and black interests. Equality and enforcement was balanced by conciliation in Virginia and a general move towards removing restrictions in voting and office holding in the Reconstruction states. With management all that was needed, Southern policy was to become predominantly about enforcement of laws both old and new, not instigating continual and radical change. But despite these achievements, the results of war would prove to be just as fragile as they had been in the late 1860s, thus prolonging the Reconstruction era.

## **Chapter 5: Amnesty, Enforcement and the Grant Administration's Attempts to Occupy the Middle Ground**

This chapter focusses on the latter part of Grant's first term as President and the administration's management of Southern issues in the context of the desire to protect the result of war but also close the work of Reconstruction. With grand legislative and constitutional change achieved, the necessity for Southern policy to be transformative lessened. Reconstruction was a corollary of the Civil War and something that would determine its legacy. With the programme's political and racial goals superficially achieved, Southern policy was to be more reactionary and no longer charged with creating new mechanisms of social order and equality.

As to be expected, much of Grant's Southern policy was determined by the political landscape of the early 1870s. The Republican dominance of Congress had progressively diminished since the triumphant congressional elections of 1866. The fall of 1870 had seen the Republicans lose their two-thirds control of the House (first time since 1864) going from a majority of 99 to 25. Abandoning their self-defeating platform of anti-Reconstruction rhetoric, the Democratic Party had embarked on "The New Departure" that sought to work within the new South's political landscape rather than return it to antebellum times. 1870 also saw the emergence of the Liberal Republican movement. First organised in Missouri through a coalition led by Republican Senator Carl Schurz, this anti-Grant faction was to campaign primarily on the corruption and "anti intellectual style of Washington".<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Michael W. Fitzgerald, *Splendid Failure: Postwar Reconstruction in the American South* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2007), p. 133

As significant as a resurgent Democratic Party and a new challenge in that of the Liberals was, the Republican Party's own identity crisis was to prove just as damaging to its ability to maintain a cohesive political party able to withstand these challenges. Slavery, war and Reconstruction had been its defining issues for over a decade. With the war won, Reconstruction largely complete and the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments ratified, the Party no longer had a common purpose. The new generation of leaders would increasingly have less and less investment in Civil War-era ideals and what Grant saw as its precious results.

Opposition to the President and the disparaging image of "Grantism" had gained strength throughout the early 1870s. Black Friday and the corruption that became associated with Grant's administration strengthened his critics and also had a considerable effect on Southern policy.<sup>2</sup> Importantly, though, whilst being attacked by both Democrats and Liberals, Radicals, who by and large had supported the President, could be just as hostile. Charles Sumner, who was once described by Grant as "unreasonable, cowardly, slanderous, unblushingly false", had seen his relationship with the President turn into public contempt.<sup>3</sup> The Massachusetts Senator and Head of the Committee of Foreign Affairs had viewed Grant's annexation of San Domingo with suspicion due to the lack of preparation. To judge the desirability of the island,

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<sup>2</sup> Black Friday refers to the collapse of the U.S. gold market on September 1869 after financiers Jay Gould and Jim Fisk attempted to corner the market. The President, who had met with Gould and Fisk on a number of occasions, eventually discovered the plot and ordered the sale of \$4,000,000 in government gold. The resulting panic caused the price of gold to crash, thus devastating the U.S. economy. Gould and Fisk escaped punishment whilst American agriculture saw a steep decline in the price of wheat, corn and other crops. Grant's association with Gould and Fisk, especially their connection (and evidently bribing) of the President's brother-in-law, contributed to accusations of corruption that characterized much of the Grant presidency. See Jean Edward Smith, *Grant* (Simon & Schuster: New York, 2001), pp.482-490.

<sup>3</sup> Fitzgerald, *Splendid Failure: Postwar Reconstruction in the American South*, p.133

the President had despatched his Private Secretary Orville E. Babcock who quickly returned with a draft treaty.

The inadequacies of Babcock's treaty and Grant's haste in annexing the island evidently concerned Sumner, leading him to accuse the President of seeking to gain financially from the annexation. Congress saw fit to send a committee to San Domingo to conduct an independent evaluation. Grant successfully staffed the committee with allies and men that had been "openly identified with the welfare of American blacks", most notably Frederick Douglass.<sup>4</sup> Despite a more favourable report from Congress, annexation ultimately failed and Grant and Sumner's relationship was beyond repair, driving apart two men who Brooks D. Simpson argues "believed more than most in black equality and opportunity".<sup>5</sup>

The annexation of San Domingo was Grant's attempt to legitimise the place of blacks in the South. He had hoped that the threat of their emigration would have resulted in better treatment by Southern whites. With annexation a failure, the rights of blacks in the South would have to be protected by the ballot or bayonet. South Carolina exemplified this dilemma where after a brief respite brought on by the threat of the Enforcement Act, conditions in the state resumed their bloody course. In May 1871, Governor Scott told Grant that there was no reason to place the state under martial law. Despite this, Congress had dispatched a subcommittee to "inquire into the condition of the late insurrectionary States".<sup>6</sup> In September, Grant received evidence from the subcommittee consisting of testimonies that painted a picture of intimidation,

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<sup>4</sup> Brooks D. Simpson, *The Reconstruction Presidents* (Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1998), p.148

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, p.146

<sup>6</sup> U.S. Sen John Scott to USG, Sep 1, 1871, PUSG-XXII, pp.163-165

assault and murder committed by “bands of armed men in disguise.”<sup>7</sup> The situation was exacerbated by claims that marshals in South Carolina were either indifferent or in sympathy with these types of groups.<sup>8</sup> One citizen wrote Grant that in their county of Barnwell, murder was taking place weekly and that “no damned Radical will be tolerated.”<sup>9</sup> When this situation was investigated, however, not a single person could corroborate this story. The claims were attributed to the fact that the writer of the letter was to “shortly be an applicant for an appointment in the Post Office Department and seeks to appear in the character of an ardent but much abused Republican.”<sup>10</sup>

Despite the occasional illegitimate claim, the situation in South Carolina was one that required intervention on the part of the government. In early October, Grant met with Attorney General Akerman who suggested suspending the writ of habeas corpus in the state.<sup>11</sup> On October 12, the President issued his second proclamation to South Carolina in 6 months demanding that unlawful groups disperse and return to their homes within 5 days. In many ways this was merely a courtesy as on October 17, Grant took the controversial step of suspending the writ in certain counties in South Carolina thus implementing the Enforcement Act for the first time. This executive action met with predictable concern, especially from those that felt the President’s action to be unwarranted. Former candidate for vice-president Francis P. Blair challenged Grant declaring: “[t]he President states in his message that the testimony taken before the committee on southern affairs amply sustains him in his proclamation of martial law...Nobody was authorized by the committee to make any such report to the

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid

<sup>8</sup> U.S. Rep Alexander S. Wallace to U.S. Sen John Scott, Aug 27, 1871, PUSG-XXII, p.165

<sup>9</sup> Warren Driver to USG, Sep 1, 1871, PUSG-XXII, p.166

<sup>10</sup> Capt. Birney B. Keeler to post adjt, Sep 22, 1871, PUSG-XXII, pp.166-167

<sup>11</sup> Att. Gen. Amos T. Akerman to Benjamin H. Bristow, Oct 7, 1871, PUSG-XXII, pp.162-163

President.”<sup>12</sup> Blair, who had been a member of the subcommittee that had investigated affairs in South Carolina, argued that “the facts elicited by that examination did not justify the proclamation of martial law, and I suspect that I know more about the facts elicited before the committee than the President himself.”<sup>13</sup>

Blair’s criticism suggests that Grant based his policy on his own assessment of the situation – one that was arguably influenced by the flood of letters from victims of Klan violence – and not Congress’ own findings. This action was one of President Grant’s most controversial, independent and bold decisions in managing Southern affairs during his presidency. But much of the historiography considers Attorney General Akerman to be the directing mind in this instance. This consensus necessitates a consideration within this study of the importance of Akerman in the context of Grant’s Southern policy.

Amos T. Akerman had assumed the position of Attorney General following the resignation of Ebenezer R. Hoar in November of 1870. In an episode that would foretell Akerman's fate, Hoar had left Grant's cabinet under dubious circumstances. He confessed that his resignation had been the result of him leaking sensitive information. Secretary of State Hamilton Fish recorded in his diary that the President seemed less concerned with the leak and more that “all the Members of the Cabinet should sustain his San Domingo treaty.”<sup>14</sup> Secretary of the Interior Jacob D. Cox wrote that during the San Domingo affair, Hoar “received a note from the Prest [sic] intimating that the time had come when a concession to the Southern States seemed

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<sup>12</sup> U.S. Sen Francis P. Blair message to House of Representatives, Dec 5, 1871, PUSG-XXII, P.181

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> DHF, Jun 17, 1870



necessary & that for that purpose the judge would have to make way for a Southern man.”<sup>15</sup> Akerman was to be that concession but in time, it was to prove costly to those in the South mindful of an Attorney General committed to order and equality.

Whilst not in favour of the institution of slavery, Akerman nevertheless followed his native Georgia when it seceded from the Union. At the close of the War, he accepted defeat and began serving as a member of Georgia's constitutional convention. As both a supporter of Reconstruction and a native Southerner, Akerman sought not to victimise his home state but to assist it in its transition. When black legislators were forced out of their seats in March of 1869, he was quick to push for their re-admittance. William S. McFeely describes Akerman as void of “high flown rhetoric” and similarly to Grant (although the author would not seek to admit it) he thought that blacks had a legitimate place in America's future, believing that “if ignorance did not disqualify white men it should not disqualify black men.”<sup>16</sup> In his assessment of his appointment, McFeely argues that Akerman was appointed not only as a Southerner but also as a zealous lawyer favoured by Radicals. Hoar had recommended Akerman and for those senators who wished to see a more vigorous Southern policy, his appointment was fair trade for their support of the President's foreign policy. Most likely Grant saw Akerman as a perfect balance; his background, practical outlook and Reconstruction credentials made him an ideal candidate.

At the start of his tenure, Akerman was mostly involved in railroad business. But as lawlessness increasingly become commonplace in certain Southern states, he worked

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<sup>15</sup> Sec of the Interior Jacob D. Cox to Aaron F. Perry, Jul 29, 1870, PUSG-XX, p.171-172

<sup>16</sup> William S. McFeely, “Amos T Akerman: The Lawyer and Racial Justice”, included in J. Morgan Kousser and James M. Mcpherson, eds., *Region, Race, and Reconstruction: Essays in honor of C. Vann Woodward* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982) p.403

closely with local judges to prosecute members of terrorist organisations. In his time as Attorney General, his lawyers won approximately half of the cases brought before them between 1870 and 1872. McFeely concludes that no Attorney General "has been more vigorous in the prosecution of cases designed to protect the lives and rights of black Americans" and that his resignation "diminished the federal government's commitment to an aggressive enforcement of civil-rights legislation."<sup>17</sup> One must consider whether such praise is warranted and more importantly what Grant's relationship with Akerman reveals about the President's Southern policy.

Akerman certainly had the support of Grant when new to the job. Whilst touring parts of North and South Carolina, Grant quickly instructed his Southern commanders to assist and comply with all of the Attorney General's requests.<sup>18</sup> He evidently had the President's ear on Southern issues (exemplified by the President's policy towards South Carolina) but his determination seemed to irritate others. In describing one cabinet meeting, Hamilton Fish wrote: "Akerman introduces Ku Klux - he has it 'on the brain' - he tells a number of stories - one of a fellow being castrated - with terribly minute & tedious details of each case - it has got to be a bore, to listen twice a week to this same thing."<sup>19</sup>

In the end, though, Akerman was to suffer the same fate as his predecessor when he was ushered out of office in the interest of other priorities. On December 11, 1871, Grant informed Fish that Akerman was to be replaced by George H. Williams of Oregon. Shortly before, Akerman had written of a conspiracy to remove him due to

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid, p.395

<sup>18</sup> Adjutant General Edward D. Townsend to Brig. Gen. Alfred H. Terry, Sep 11, 1871, PUSG-XXII, p.180

<sup>19</sup> DHF, Oct 31 & Nov 24, 1871

an adversarial relationship with railroad men. In breaking the news to him, Grant informed Akerman, “[c]ircumstances convince me that a change in the office which you now hold is advisable, consulting the best interests of the government, and I therefore ask your resignation.”<sup>20</sup>

What then were those circumstances? What did Grant prioritise over an effective proponent of enforcement who sought justice in the South? Seemingly it was the cost of justice that concerned the President. Grant entered into the presidency with a set of objectives that in practical terms sat uneasily next to each other. He sought to protect the results of war but also finalise Reconstruction, therefore returning the country to some state of normality. A continual concentration on Klan activity threatened that. McFeely is right when he suggests that “Grant knew that under the Constitution habeas corpus could be suspended only in cases of invasion and rebellion, and he did not want to conceive of the Klan’s activities as a reopening of the Civil War.”<sup>21</sup> In his first term, the President evidently saw more worth in the appearance of closure rather than in implementing real change. Despite losing Virginia to a resurgent Democracy, he was grateful for its quick re-admittance to the Union. Additionally the amendments to the Constitution and the Enforcement Act codified the position and security offered to former slaves. This codification was reason enough to celebrate.

At the time of Akerman’s removal, *The Philadelphia Inquirer* reported that Grant had been “semi-officially informed by members of the Supreme Court that Attorney-General Akerman was hardly competent for his high position, and that, in

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<sup>20</sup> USG to Amos T. Akerman, Dec 12, 1871, PUSG-XXII, p.288

<sup>21</sup> William S. McFeely, *Grant, A Biography* (New York & London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1981), p.373

consequence, many most important interests of the government were being continually sacrificed.”<sup>22</sup> The paper then stated that the President “replied that he would have to bring about a remedy as soon as possible.”<sup>23</sup> Despite such an inglorious exit, communication between Grant and Akerman at this time shows little animosity. The President acknowledged the Attorney General’s significance, telling him, “I wish to express my approbation of the zeal, integrity and industry which you have shown in the performance of all your duties.”<sup>24</sup> In return, Akerman wrote, “permit me to express my grateful sense of the kindness which I have uniformly received from you during my service in the office.”<sup>25</sup> Akerman’s fondness for the President did not extend to those he evidently considered more responsible for his ousting. Although unspecific and never accusatory of Grant, he believed that it was those enemies that he had made through his dealing with the railroads that had forced him out, specifically Collis P. Huntington and Jay Gould.<sup>26</sup>

There is no existing evidence to suggest that the President sought to get rid of Akerman simply because of railroad development. But even if he had, it is doubtful that he would have seen Akerman’s exit as causing a fundamental shift in Southern policy. Akerman’s systems were in place to allow his work to continue. His successor, George H. Williams, did not bring about a change in policy for the office of Attorney General. Under Williams the Federal Government achieved “456 convictions in 1872, 469 in 1873, and 102 in 1874, while Akerman had accomplished only 32 in 1870 and 128 in 1871.”<sup>27</sup> Statistically the removal of Akerman did little to slow down prosecutions in

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<sup>22</sup> *Philadelphia Inquirer*, Dec 13, 1871, PUSG-XXII, p.289

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> USG to Amos T. Akerman, Dec 12, 1871, *ibid.*, p.288

<sup>25</sup> Amos T. Akerman to USG, Dec 13, 1871, *ibid.*, p.296

<sup>26</sup> McFeely, *Grant A Biography*, p.373

<sup>27</sup> McFeely, *Amos T Akerman: The Lawyer and Racial Justice*, p.410

the South and had Akerman stayed, it is unlikely that he alone would have saved Southern blacks from their inevitable slide back into inequality. McFeely concludes that in the end, America lost “the finest champion of human rights in the Grant administration”.<sup>28</sup> Simpson considers the Attorney General to be more of a player in Grant’s Southern policy, rather than its chief architect. Both agree, though, that he stands as the Grant administration’s fiercest proponent of Reconstruction. Akerman clearly saw his role in the same way. After learning of his fate, he wrote “[e]ven such atrocities as Ku-Kluxery do not hold their attention...the Northern mind being active and full of what is called progress runs away from the past.”<sup>29</sup>

In conclusion, the rise and fall of Amos T. Akerman reflects the Republican Party’s uncomfortable relationship with enforcement. He was a predictable casualty of changing political preoccupations and the nature of the world in which he worked. Grant’s removal of him certainly indicates that the President did not feel the need to support or retain proponents of Radical Reconstruction. This, however, was already apparent in his initial cabinet choices. As discussed in chapter four, the professional and ideological profiles of Grant’s cabinet were not congruous to the political philosophy he had demonstrated since the close of the Civil War. Akerman aside, the numerous replacements Grant would make did little to better that image. Evidently Grant placed little importance on the politics of his cabinet members. When compared with his defence of Sheridan and Sickles, his comfort in trading cabinet members is all the more striking. This contempt for political office is not surprising, though. His lack of concern as to the suitability of his political appointments in achieving his goals indicates that it was not policy makers that were important but the man on the ground,

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<sup>28</sup> Mcfeely, *Grant, A Biography*, p.373

<sup>29</sup> Ibid

that man usually being a military one. This is supported by his comment after leaving the White House that it would have been best for the South to have been under military jurisdiction for at least ten years.

Despite evidence to suggest that Grant's taste for reforming the South was lessening, he still spoke in the same manner as he had during Radical Reconstruction. In June 1871, Grant sat down with *The New York Herald* and reiterated his reasons for accepting the presidency. Still waving the bloody shirt, he stated, "I consented to give up a life office for a temporary, though higher one, for good reasons. I believed that if a democratic [sic] president was elected there would be little chance for those who fought in the Union."<sup>30</sup> When questioned on his friend Sherman's political ambition, Grant's response further reinforced that belief: "[h]e is no democrat...[h]e probably knows very well that if the democracy succeeded, the Southern Leaders, who are still hostile to the Union of the States, and, in that view, enemies of the republic, would gain possession of the government and before long annul, so far as they could, the acts of the republican party."<sup>31</sup>

With the political contest simplified in such terms, Grant identified the primary political issue as still being the safeguarding of the results of war. The end to secession, the Reconstruction Acts, and the Thirteenth, Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments had all been Republican in design and their survival was tied to that of the Party. It should be asked, though, what the purpose of these histrionics was? The waving of the bloody shirt or a preoccupation with Reconstruction and Southern intransigence was of lessening concern for the average Northern voter and the new generation of

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<sup>30</sup> *New York Herald*, Jun 6, 1871, PUSG-XXII, p.31

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

Republican leaders, at least in the North. Arguably then, these outbursts were very much Grant's own beliefs, not an attempt at populism. But the more Grant spoke in terms such as this, the more he would require of himself when implementing policy in the South and the more hollow his words would appear.

By the summer of 1871, Ulysses S. Grant could be satisfied that in his first two years of office he had balanced black and white interests. He had petitioned for the readmission of Virginia, Texas and Mississippi in an expedient manner so as to consolidate the country and seal the most visible wounds of the Civil War. In doing so he had let proscription slide allowing men of questionable loyalty to redeem Virginia for the Democrats. In somewhat of a balancing act, enforcement legislation had shown that the olive branch had thorns. Despite this attempt to settle all remaining questions, the antagonists remained, whether they were enemies of the republic or of the Republicans. Modern study of Reconstruction largely concludes that no President could have established equality in the South without waging what would have amounted to a continual Civil War. Grant's Southern policy could have only acted as a flood barrier, not a solution to the flood itself.

As stated, South Carolina had served as the pretext for enforcement legislation which ultimately saw Grant suspend the writ of habeas corpus. This method of addressing state issues was certainly not the preferred one for the Grant administration as it was to expose the Party and his presidency to criticisms of excessive power and unnecessary interference. Circumstances in South Carolina had justified such a response but in other states, internal politics and the timeliness of each crisis would require a different tact. Grant's pragmatic and at times opportunistic approach resulted

in a Southern policy that lacked consistency. Whilst South Carolina, and as will be discussed later Louisiana, gave the President most cause for concern, events in a variety of states, be they Ku Klux outrages or Republican factionalism, required action.

A test case for Grant's commitment to protecting the results of war can be seen in Georgia. Events in the state had required immediate attention upon Grant's inauguration but he delayed dealing with them until after his successes with Virginia, Mississippi and Texas. In December 1869 the President finally decided to confront the issue signing "An Act to promote the reconstruction of the State of Georgia" which not only laid down strict rules regarding membership of the legislature but also stipulated that Georgia ratify the Fifteenth Amendment. He went further placing the state back under military supervision arguing that the circumstances demanded it.<sup>32</sup> Following these actions, twenty-four Democrats were excluded and replaced with Republicans. Grant proceeded to advise his generals on how to respond to cases where eligibility was in question: "[e]xercise your own discretion. If a flagrant case arises, when a disqualified person proposes to take the oath, investigate the question of Eligibility [sic], and determine for the time being his Right."<sup>33</sup>

The President's support energised GOP fortunes in the state initially but his backing was soon withdrawn once Republicans sought to protract their power by postponing state elections from 1870 to 1872. The Democratic Party responded by attempting to impeach Republican Governor Rufus Bullock who ultimately avoided such a fate by resigning. The success of this tactic was short lived, though, as the Democrats

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<sup>32</sup> Simpson, *The Reconstruction Presidents*, p.143

<sup>33</sup> William T. Sherman to BT Maj. Gen A. H. Terry, PUSG-XX, Jan 12, 1870, p.104



successfully passed legislation calling for an earlier election to oust Bullock's successor, Benjamin Conley. As the political squabble escalated, Attorney General Akerman, in something of an abandonment of his own state, advised the President that Georgia's Republicans should "learn to stand on their own feet. They must not depend always on propping from Washington, and might as well learn the lesson now."<sup>34</sup> Grant followed this advice with the inevitable result of Democratic triumph.

Georgia offers an interesting test case for presidential Southern policy. Firstly, Grant's delay in dealing with the state indicates his priorities. Clearly readmission of the states required his focus rather than the violation of the Reconstruction Acts, signifying a concern as to how the controversy of intervention might derail the process. Despite such a delay, it was Grant who called on Congress to empower Governor Bullock to re-admit the black representatives and it was his decision to place the state under military supervision.<sup>35</sup> Gillette asserts that the delay "encouraged the unrepentant southern reactionaries in their boldness" but admits that this was a mistake on the parts of both Congress and the President, as neither could forge a solution.<sup>36</sup> Gillette considers policy in Georgia as a counterweight to Radical dissatisfaction over the handling of Virginia but still focusses on its shortcomings. Simpson, with a greater appreciation of the practicalities of the day, argues that presidential intervention could only go so far. He concludes: "[i]f Republicanism was to survive in Georgia, it would have to demonstrate that it could do so without the protection of federal bayonets"<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Simpson, *The Reconstruction Presidents*, p.157

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, pp.142-143

<sup>36</sup> William Gillette, *Retreat From Reconstruction, 1869 -1879* (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1979),p.86.

<sup>37</sup> Simpson, *The Reconstruction Presidents*, p.143

In many ways, Georgia in 1869 was the quintessential case of a Southern state crisis. It included the traditional antagonists and the tried and tested methods of political battle. Most importantly, it was representative of an unfortunate tendency on the part of the Grant administration as Georgia is just one example of where the President either delayed or struggled to form policy. It is difficult, however, to see how a quicker resolution would have in the long term improved Republican chances. Grant had requested that Georgia be placed under military supervision and by 1870 had returned the state legislature to the Republicans, including the black representatives that had been unseated. Gillette argues that the withdrawing of that initial support is representative of an inherent distaste for the Southern wing of the Party. He cites Akerman's comments that generally Northern Republicans showed little interest in helping the party in the South even "in a matter that is directly political".<sup>38</sup> The author concludes that it was "a sad end to such a bold beginning".<sup>39</sup>

Gillette's issue is that Grant was not consistent in his policy towards Georgia's Republicans. He refers to: the initial order to place the state under military supervision, then the push for elections to the legislature at a time least beneficial to Republicans, and finally his lack of support when state Republicans attempted to hold onto the Governorship.<sup>40</sup> Grant's policy was inconsistent as it was purely reactionary. In total, though, it attempted to tread a careful middle ground, one where Grant had tried to present an image of a president committed to a fair result in Georgia rather than the right result for his party. If one is to relate policy in Georgia to that notion of the results of war, whilst Democratic resurgence was representative of the old Southern order,

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<sup>38</sup> Akerman to J.R. Parrott, December 6, 1871, Akerman Letterbooks, cited in Gillette, *Retreat from Reconstruction, 1869-1879*, p.90.

<sup>39</sup> Gillette, *Retreat from Reconstruction, 1869-1879*, p.90

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid*, pp.88-90

the unseating of black delegates, which was the most unacceptable element, had been dealt with effectively.

Whilst the Southern policy of Ulysses S. Grant was primarily reactionary, it must be noted that on occasion it appeared proactive. With violence being addressed by enforcement legislation, it is understandable, then, that by 1871 Grant was attempting to counterbalance those new powers through conciliation. By providing amnesty and welcoming former rebels back into the body politic, he could foster a new era of good feeling as men who had seen their fathers disqualified from voting, now saw their enfranchisement by Grant's hand. Such a policy was also unlikely to fail as despite there being no general amnesty, Congress had, on request, removed the disabilities of nearly 5,000 ex-Confederates since 1868.<sup>41</sup> When the Amnesty Bill was presented to Congress, Sumner sought to attach to it his own design on civil rights. The *Washington Evening Star* reported that the President “considered that appending the supplementary civil rights bill to the amnesty measure would jeopardize the passage of the latter, and in that respect it would be unfortunate.”<sup>42</sup> One could criticise Grant for placing the interests of his former enemies over the rights of those he was more closely associated with.

The Amnesty Bill was initially defeated in the Senate due to Sumner's unpopular legislation being attached to it. A revised bill that excluded civil rights successfully passed through both Houses but only after the Massachusetts Senator had voiced his opposition. "Sir, the time has not come for amnesty" he declared; “[y]ou must be just

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<sup>41</sup> Charles W. Calhoun, *Conceiving a New Republic: The Republican Party and the Southern Question, 1869-1900* (Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2006), p.35

<sup>42</sup> Gillette, *Retreat from Reconstruction 1869-1879*, pp.88-90

to the colored race before you are generous to former rebels.”<sup>43</sup> In truth, Grant and Sumner did not sound that dissimilar. A year earlier Secretary of State Fish wrote in his diary:

[Grant] had thought seriously of it [general amnesty], but while several states are requesting aid of the Military power of the Gov. to repress lawlessness & opposition to the Government & the laws, he does not think it wise to move in the direction of a general Amnesty, which would make 'Aleck Stephens, Jeff. Davis, & Robert Lee' & other eligible to seats in the Senate, or House of Representatives. He had hoped for the early & full readmission of all the rebel states, & their entire pacification, had that been accomplished & quiet fully restored, he would have been glad to recommend a general Amnesty.<sup>44</sup>

Clearly at this stage Grant had seen a general amnesty as rewarding the most unforgivable figures of the Confederacy. Fish's recollection also shows how the President would only consider a general amnesty upon pacification of the South. By 1872 pacification was far from a reality yet the President wished to pursue amnesty. His only request was that “great criminals, distinguished above all others for the part they took in opposition to the Government” still be excluded from holding office.<sup>45</sup> As a Southern policy goal, amnesty certainly appealed to Grant's desire to close the work of Reconstruction. This effort at reconciliation would remove a constantly antagonistic legacy of the Civil War. Calhoun presents a convincing argument that the disabilities

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<sup>43</sup> Louis A. Coolidge, *Ulysses S. Grant* (Cambridge: Riverside Press, 1922), p.378

<sup>44</sup> DHF, April 15, 1870

<sup>45</sup> James D. Richardson, *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 1789-1897* (Washington D.C. : Bureau of National Literature and Art, 1903), VII, p.153

imposed by the Fourteenth Amendment had actually achieved little in reconstructing the South. The issue of political ostracism had been a beacon for opponents of the Republican Party to rally behind. By barring ex-Confederates from holding office, little had been achieved in protecting loyal blacks and whites as these persons could still join the South's most dangerous institution, the Klan.<sup>46</sup>

Grant signed the Amnesty bill on May 22, 1872, thus removing all disabilities of former Confederates. However, those Senators and Representatives of the Thirty-sixth and Thirty-seventh Congresses, and those in the military who abandoned their positions in 1861 still found themselves excluded. Clearly he reserved a special place in political exile for those he deemed beyond redemption.

The support for amnesty was a core component of Grant's policy to close the work of Reconstruction. In an effort to settle Southern issues and return the country to some semblance of normality, many Southerners saw their rights reinstated and their leaders returning to the corridors of power. Despite his rhetoric, Grant had been complicit in an effort to conciliate traditionally anti-Republican and anti-Union Southerners. With the offer of amnesty accompanied by the threat of federal intervention, the President's Southern policy was either a contradiction or a well-balanced attempt to appease and support both sides.

As established in chapter one, much of the historiography argues that Grant supposedly had no policy at all, merely a set of pragmatic, inconsistent and self-defeating responses that lacked a common purpose. If one is to account for this

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<sup>46</sup> Calhoun, *Conceiving a New Republic: The Republican Party and the Southern Question, 1869-1900*, p.36

oscillation by rejecting this common argument, there must be some explanation for the schizoid approach to Southern policy.

In his clearest statements on the subject, Grant appeared to have two overriding intentions when dealing with the South. Firstly there was the need to close the work of Reconstruction by legislating and amending the Constitution where necessary. Underpinning that was the eternal responsibility of protecting the results of the Civil War, identifiable as an end to insurrectionary behaviour, the move towards racial equality and the removal of the old Southern political order. The desire to both close the work of Reconstruction but do so in a manner that protected the results of war created a conflict of interests. Whereas one prioritised political realities and a popular desire to move on from Civil War era politics, the other clung to issues of honour, justice and reverence for what had been won on the battlefield. These two diametrically opposed objectives account for the incongruity of Grant's Southern policy. To work towards a clearer understanding of this, one must analyse and evaluate Grant's record on the South in relation to those two broadly defined objectives. Nowhere is this question more significant and challenging in its answer than in the state of Louisiana.

Republican Governor of Louisiana, Henry Clay Warmouth, had taken office in large part due to the freedmen's vote. Despite this support, once in office he took a number of steps intended to gain favour amongst the state's native white population, notably vetoing a civil rights bill and appointing Democrats to office. In addition to this, efforts had been made to appeal to whites through employment opportunities in the building

of the state's canals, railroads and levees.<sup>47</sup> In opposition to Warmouth, a rival group of Republicans consisting of Collector of Customs William P. Kellogg, U.S. Marshall Stephen Packard, and Grant's brother-in-law, James F. Casey, emerged. As the complexity and pettiness of the in-fighting developed, Grant confessed: "[t]he muddle down there is almost beyond my fathoming."<sup>48</sup> Such bemusement was evidently commonplace; a visitor to the President in March of 1870 wrote that he was "struck with the pathos of his face; a puzzled pathos, as of a man with a problem before him of which he does not understand the terms."<sup>49</sup> No problem was to prove more puzzling than Louisiana and the chain of events that followed the contest for its senatorial seat.

In January of 1871, Republican James F. Casey, who had been denied the senatorship through Republican Governor Warmouth's influence over the Louisiana legislature, went about trying to remove the Governor by gaining control of the Party. With the Republican state convention to be held in August, each faction scrambled to assemble ward and county clubs to select their own delegates. Dubious tactics were employed by both sides with each accusing the other of fraud. In addition, there was a dispute over where the convention would be held with each side favouring a location they considered secure. The Warmouth faction wanted the protection of their own police by holding the convention in the statehouse whilst Casey's group demanded it be held in the customhouse which at that time was protected by federal troops.<sup>50</sup>

Seeking legitimacy, Casey's group petitioned Grant for relief from abuse and intimidation by organised gangs. On August 3, the President instructed Attorney

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<sup>47</sup> Fitzgerald, *Splendid Failure: Postwar Reconstruction in the American South*, pp.126-127

<sup>48</sup> Simpson, *The Reconstruction Presidents*, p.158

<sup>49</sup> Coolidge, *Ulysses S. Grant*, p.284

<sup>50</sup> Gillette, *Retreat from Reconstruction, 1869-1879* p.106-107

General Akerman to “give the Marshall of La. (Packard) such orders, by telegraph, as may be legally authorized to secure the protection to free speech and free action.”<sup>51</sup> Akerman was to tell the President that current conditions in Louisiana provided no legal grounds for intervention but did support the use of additional deputies at the expense of the Federal Government.<sup>52</sup> Gillette states that by doing so, Grant gave “carte blanche” to the Packard faction. Furthermore, it was an example of a predictable cronyism on Grant's part owing to his relationship to Casey. This is debatable as firstly Grant's initial endorsement offered only what was legally authorized. It made no assurances of federal intervention and it avoided specifics, placing the responsibility on Akerman to decide what was legal and warranted. Additionally, family ties were no guarantee of presidential patronage, as was evident in Mississippi.

Of greater concern to the President than the fortunes of his relations was that Warmouth was seeking to align with state Democrats, something already witnessed in Tennessee and Texas. In the latter, the President had publically thrown his support behind state Radicals in response. Fusion parties of conservative Republicans and Democrats were by their very nature an enemy of Grant's Republican Party and a Southern policy that intended to support centrist and Radical regimes.

On August 9, 1871, a Republican meeting was held by the Casey faction in the customhouse which was being defended by 150 federal soldiers. Deputy marshals refused entry to Casey's opponents resulting in the Warmouth faction assembling their own convention. Both sides proceeded to elect rival state Republican committees making the split official. In testimonies gathered by the Committee to Investigate the

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<sup>51</sup> USG, Endorsement, Aug 3, 1871, PUSG-XXII, p.101

<sup>52</sup> Gillette, *Retreat from Reconstruction*, 1869-1879, p.107



Condition of Affairs in the State of Louisiana, it was stated that during this crisis, Casey had abused the use of federal officers. In the committee's hearings, Judge of the 8th District court of New Orleans, Henry C. Dibble, spoke of his dealings with the President. He had requested that Grant look into Casey's use of federal officials to which the President proscribed himself. Grant's investigation however did not result in any removals. When Dibble was asked "[d]id the President justify the conduct of the custom-house officials in bringing armed soldiers into the building?", he told the committee that the President "wanted to know what objections we had to troops if we did not intend to do any harm?"<sup>53</sup> The Judge concluded that Grant's personal dislike of Warmouth had influenced his opinion and that by supporting Casey and turning a blind eye to his tactics, "[h]e must have known that it was in violation of republican institutions, and I think he must have been of the opinion that almost anything was justifiable in overthrowing Governor Warmouth."<sup>54</sup>

Those writers who attribute much of Grant's behaviour to nepotism or cronyism are quick to label Louisiana as one of the most dubious episodes in his administration's history. Much of the criticism is due to the belief that the President's decision to not investigate Casey owed almost exclusively to his personal relationship with him. One could argue, though, that there were far greater reasons for intervening on the side of Casey. Firstly, blacks made up 50.1 percent of the population in Louisiana and held a majority in 62 percent of the state's counties and parishes.<sup>55</sup> With the black voter more influential than in any other gulf state, it was therefore desirable to maintain a Republican party more appealing to blacks in Louisiana. Secondly, as the crisis was

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<sup>53</sup> Henry C. Dibble testifying before the Select Committee to Investigate the Condition of Affairs in the State of Louisiana, Feb 3, 1872 PUSG-XXII, pp.105-106

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Gillette, *Retreat from Reconstruction, 1869-1879*, pp.104-105

between rival Republican factions, the President could act in a way that would be less controversial as the dispute existed largely within his own party, not between Republican and Democrat. Lastly, if Grant still saw the Democrat Party as the enemy of the republic then his support for Republican regulars – and not Warmouth who had actively courted Democrats – met that need to protect the results of war.

Despite some initial guidance from the President, the troubles would continue to escalate therefore demanding more decisive action. In January 1872, the “Customhouse clique” consisting of Casey, Kellogg and Packard went about defeating their enemies by any means including arresting many of the opposition. Once again both parties attempted to usurp power from each other and so two legislatures were organised. Warmouth’s was protected by state militia and Casey’s guarded by federal officers. Acts of political defiance soon turned into physical altercations as legislature members on both sides were attacked. Both groups also sought to take territory away from each side by seizing their rival’s buildings. By January 24, however, Warmouth admitted defeat and re-joined the original legislature consoled by the election to lieutenant governor of one of his allies.

What then was Grant's reaction to the situation? During the fighting the President told Casey, “[t]roops cannot be used [e]xcept under provisions of law.”<sup>56</sup> Grant told his Secretary of War William W. Belknap that to act in favour of either side would immediately bestow presidential recognition, something he was uncomfortable with.<sup>57</sup> Attorney General George H. Williams informed Warmouth that “the President does not feel that he would be justified in deciding these questions at this time and under

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<sup>56</sup> USG to James F. Casey, Jan 10, 1872, PUSG-XXII, p.327

<sup>57</sup> USG to William W. Belknap, Jan 15, 1872, *ibid*, pp.343-344

existing circumstances is unwilling to interfere in State matters with the military power of the Government, except in a clear case of legal right and overruling necessity.”<sup>58</sup> Grant chose to disregard reports from both sides of impending bloodshed and denied requests for martial law to be declared. Such a decision was justified as this was not like South Carolina where a wave of violence had spread across counties with the sole intention of terrorizing communities.

What occurred in Louisiana was neither a betrayal of the freedmen nor a cynical usurpation of power due to presidential favouritism. Even though Grant favoured Casey’s group over Warmouth’s, he wished to avoid embarrassing entanglements so therefore played very little active role in settling the dispute. He moved in favour of Casey initially, most likely due to Warmouth’s political opportunism in 1869-70. Following Casey’s brief victory, Grant essentially maintained a position of non-interference, enabling Republicanism in Louisiana to find its own way. His only order was for troops to be ready to defend the State House from a planned seizure by the Casey group.<sup>59</sup> This was not necessarily evidence of the President’s sudden support for Warmouth; rather it was a minimal effort to keep order. In truth, Grant would have had little affection for either side as both groups sought to bolster their ranks by aligning, when it suited them, with Democrats.<sup>60</sup> Such ambivalence to the result allowed the President to place responsibility for the muddle on the shoulders of Congress with the recommendation that a committee should visit the state.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Att. Gen. George H. Williams to Gov. Henry C. Warmouth, Jan 15, 1872, *ibid*, p.345

<sup>59</sup> Orville E. Babcock to William W. Belknap, Jan 22, 1872, *ibid*, p.347

<sup>60</sup> Henry C. Warmoth to USG, Jan 4, 1872, *ibid*, p.322

<sup>61</sup> USG to Henry L. Dawes, Jan 12, 1872, *ibid*, pp.336-337

Louisiana would prove to be the longest struggle in the South for the Grant administration. In his first term the President had been confronted by two rival Republican regimes, both opportunistic in their attempts to enlist Democrats. Intervention from the Federal Government was not justified as its effect would have been to support one side, most likely Casey's, which was already enjoying federal assistance. When Grant stated that "he thought he would be initiating a bad policy to meddle with the politics of any State; that it would be setting a questionable precedent for the future", he outlined a clear policy when dealing with the South.<sup>62</sup> In maintaining neutrality he sent a message to all other regimes in the region that the Enforcement Acts did not guarantee intervention for political means.

Importantly, if one is to argue against Grant's supposed support for Casey simply due to family ties, there must be reasons outside of that to account for the President's actions. As stated, both factions attempted to bolster their ranks through an alignment with Democrats. On the issue of race, however, Warmouth's support for racial integration was notably lacking. Republican policy towards blacks in Louisiana had been progressive. Historian Michael W. Fitzgerald describes the time as one where "[a]dvanced ideas were much in evidence" referring specifically to attempts to outlaw segregation throughout the state and the requirement that half of all party nominees were black.<sup>63</sup> Once in office, Warmouth worked against these measures whereas Kellogg had actively sought the involvement of blacks in the legislative process. Fitzgerald points out that both sides were guilty of dirty tactics such as Kellogg's use of the brothel as a canvassing tool. Despite their common tendencies, it is not surprising that the Grant administration would out of necessity support Kellogg,

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<sup>62</sup> Washington Chronicle, March 29, 1872, *ibid*, pp.331-332

<sup>63</sup> Fitzgerald, *Splendid Failure: Postwar Reconstruction in the American South*, p.126

Packard and Casey. If Republicanism was to survive in Louisiana where it had a significant chance, the President would have to support the lesser of two evils.

The complexities of Southern politics make assessing Grant's policy all the more difficult. To define it purely by its accomplishments would be misrepresentative as even the staunchest proponent of Reconstruction and civil rights would have faltered. It is therefore essential to consider the words of Grant as being just as illustrative of his policy as his actions were. To repeatedly castigate Grant for the failure of Southern policy is to assume that there was real opportunity to effect the kind of change required at the time. Therefore judging or interpreting Grant's political and racial beliefs purely by his record in office paints a narrow picture.

In addition to his private correspondence and interviews are Grant's public communications. His annual addresses outline policy but also seek to defend action that had been taken, and shame those guilty of crimes. His criticisms, celebrations and accusations all need considering when defining his political and racial philosophy. As public and as self-serving as his addresses might be, they offer some insight into the opinion and thought process of a President not prone to publically expressing his views on a political subject. The attention paid and the terminology used when discussing the South shows evidence of an evolution of thought. Fundamental to this thesis is whether or not those public statements were at variance with his implementation of policy in the South.

In his first annual address, Grant recognised that in order to bring peace and prosperity to the South, the "union of all the States, with equal rights, indestructible by any

constitutional means” was a requirement.<sup>64</sup> To that end, he requested that Congress readmit Virginia, Mississippi and Texas but also place Georgia under temporary conditions. A year later he spoke in the same terms but recognised a deteriorating state of affairs. The President admitted that “a free exercise of the elective franchise has by violence and intimidation been denied to citizens” and that “the verdict of the people has...been reversed”.<sup>65</sup> But as much as he chose to highlight these wrongs, he believed that Reconstruction was nearing completion with only Georgia's delayed representation stalling the process. He summed up his administration's policy as a “thorough enforcement of every law...in securing a pure, untrammelled ballot, where every man entitled to cast a vote may do so, just once at each election, without fear of molestation or proscription on account of his political faith, nativity, of color.”<sup>66</sup>

When Grant addressed the country in December of 1871, he was doing so having just supported the Enforcement Act. In an attempt to deflect concerns over his increased power, he declared that the new laws had been imposed upon him by Congress. In truth, this imposition had followed *his* recommendation. Despite this need to counter the image of the Enforcement Act, the focus of Grant's third annual message was the defence of *his* policy towards the South and in turn a justification for enforcement. He supported his actions by referring to the findings of the Committee to Investigate Southern Outrages. As a record of the law's effectiveness, the President remarked, “[a]t the last account the number of persons thus arrested was 168. Several hundred, whose criminality was ascertained to be of an inferior degree, were released for the

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<sup>64</sup> USG, First Annual Address, Dec 6, 1869, Richardson, *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents*, VII, pp.27-42

<sup>65</sup> USG, Second Annual Address, Dec 5, 1870, *ibid*, pp.96-112

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid*.

present. These have generally made confessions of their guilt.”<sup>67</sup> He added, “[g]reat caution has been exercised in making these arrests, and, notwithstanding the large number, it is believed that no innocent person is now in custody.”<sup>68</sup> It was also in this annual address that the President chose to discuss amnesty. Grant told Congress that by removing the proscriptive measures of the Fourteenth Amendment, “majorities are sure to elect officers reflecting the views of the majority.”<sup>69</sup> By allowing the majority of Southerners back into the body politic, the President could counteract claims that enforcement legislation was a way to ensure Republicanism in the South by any means.

A defence of enforcement and a request for amnesty was an effective way of presenting an equitable Southern policy. Grant did not, however, choose to ignore the realities. He admitted that the situation in the South was “unhappily, not such as all true patriotic citizens would like to see.”<sup>70</sup> In an attempt to develop the South in the interests of the Southern people, the President sought to encourage a mutually beneficial relationship between the intransigent Southerner and the North. He stated that “[s]ocial ostracism for opinion's sake, personal violence or threats toward persons entertaining political views opposed to those entertained by the majority of the old citizens, prevents immigration and the flow of much-needed capital into the States lately in rebellion.”<sup>71</sup> He concluded his assessment with another call for peace: “It will be a happy condition of the country when the old citizens of these States will take an interest in public affairs, promulgate ideas honestly entertained, vote for men

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<sup>67</sup> USG, Third Annual Address, Dec 4th, 1871, *ibid*, pp.142-155

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid*.

representing their views, and tolerate the same freedom of expression and ballot in those entertaining different political convictions.”<sup>72</sup>

In his final annual address before the 1872 presidential election campaign, Grant continued to defend enforcement and encourage reconciliation. Reiterating the necessity of federal intervention, he again tried to encourage the Southern people to enter into a working relationship so as to encourage a free and lawful exercise of opinion. He admitted, though, that despite the work of the Justice Department, lawless men still “associated themselves together in some localities to deprive other citizens of those rights guaranteed to them by the Constitution of the United States, and to that end have committed deeds of blood and violence.”<sup>73</sup> With an optimistic outlook, the President spoke of a time “not far distant, when the obvious advantages of good order and peace will induce an abandonment of all combinations prohibited by the acts referred to, and when it will be unnecessary to carry on prosecutions or inflict punishment to protect citizens from the lawless doings of such combinations.”<sup>74</sup>

The annual addresses of Grant's first term in office indicate much about his Southern policy. Publically he was in support of the Enforcement Act but recognised, as did Congress, the temporary nature of it. He did not see the process of Reconstruction as ending with the defeat of the intransigent South. He spoke more of a peace being achieved through the realisation of the mutual benefits that would follow their acquiescence. In addition to a concentration on the rule of law, the annual addresses also reveal Grant's concern for the rights of citizens regardless of race or political

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> USG, Fourth Annual Address, Dec 2nd, 1872, *ibid*, pp.184-205

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.



affiliation. The rights of those who supported the Union were a key result of war. In his last message before seeking re-election Grant emphasised the accomplishments under his administration but admitted that there was still much to be done. A second term could facilitate a stern but developmental policy towards the South.

Despite the stakes being so high, Grant seemingly cared little for his own political fortunes. To close friend Adam Badeau he confessed, “[i]t will be a happy day for me when I am out of political life.”<sup>75</sup> In spite of this dislike for the office of president, Grant in 1871 still described the situation in the same way as he had done to Sherman three years earlier: “I do feel a deep interest in the republican party keeping control of affairs until the results of the war are acquiesced in by all political parties.”<sup>76</sup> Further evidence of this concern can be seen by his closing comment: “[w]hen that is accomplished we can afford to quarrel about minor matters.”<sup>77</sup> Years later Grant would admit, “[t]he second nomination was almost due to me - if I may use the phrase - because of the bitterness of political and personal opponents. My re-election was a great gratification, because it showed me how the country felt.”<sup>78</sup>

On June 10, 1872, Grant accepted the nomination for a second term with a desire to “see a speedy healing of all bitterness of feeling between Sections, parties or races of Citizens, and the time when the title of *Citizen* carries with it all the protection and privileges to the humblest, that it does to the most exalted.”<sup>79</sup> Much of that bitterness had dissipated according to the Republican National Committee when it declared that

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<sup>75</sup> USG to Adam Badeau, Nov 19, 1871, PUSG-XXII, pp.238-239

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> John R. Young, *Around the World with General Grant* (New York: American News Co., 1879), II p.452

<sup>79</sup> USG to Thomas Settle et al, Jun 10, 1872, PUSG-XXIII, p.161

all the promises of the 1868 campaign had been fulfilled. All Southern states were now restored and newly enacted laws provided protection and ensured an honest exercise of the franchise.<sup>80</sup> Although the President had seen division in Party ranks owing to San Domingo, the tariff, civil service reform and Reconstruction policy, once again the national convention produced overwhelming support for him. Anti-Grant feeling manifested itself in the form of the Liberal Republican Party led by Carl Schurz. The Party had its roots in Missouri where Republicans had aligned with state Democrats in opposition to the President's policies on Reconstruction, the tariff, San Domingo and civil service reform. They saw the Thirteenth, Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments as the end of Reconstruction and campaigned for "a return to the methods of peace and the constitutional limitations of power".<sup>81</sup>

Grant's other enemies were closer to his own heart. As a result of the President's tactics in attempting to bully through his San Domingo treaty, he had made a very public enemy in Senator Charles Sumner. On May 31, 1872, Sumner had taken to the Senate floor to remind his colleagues of the President's record of nepotism and his greed for power. With "an almost pathological hatred of Grant", Sumner attempted to thwart his re-nomination by attacking him on issues of corruption, nepotism and his ability in office.<sup>82</sup> On the subject of race, he described the President's relationship with Frederick Douglass as disrespectful and called his support for the Civil Rights Bill Sumner had attached to the Amnesty bill a "meaningless juggle of words, entirely

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<sup>80</sup> William B. Hesseltine, *Ulysses S. Grant, Politician* (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1957), p.269

<sup>81</sup> Calhoun, *Conceiving a New Republic: The Republican Party and the Southern Question, 1869-1900*, p.40

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid*, p.45

worthy of the days of slavery”.<sup>83</sup> This rant did little to erode support for Grant. Few still listened to Sumner who was to eventually throw his lot in with the Liberal Republicans in pursuit of what he saw as “reconciliation, not only between the North and South, but between the two races, so that...instead of *irritating antagonism* without end, there shall be *sympathetic cooperation*”.<sup>84</sup> Calhoun argues that henceforth Sumner “relinquished much of his claim to the captaincy of the movement for black rights”.<sup>85</sup> At the time Frederick Douglass spoke of the “insidious and dangerous advice and counsel of Mr. Sumner” whilst stating that “[w]ith Grant, our security is unquestionable”.<sup>86</sup> It should be noted that Sumner may have been somewhat placated in the nomination of fellow Radical Henry Wilson for Vice-President. An act historian William B. Hesseltine considers an attempt by the Grant camp to maintain favour with the "old anti-slavery guard."<sup>87</sup>

The President certainly enjoyed support from this group with veteran abolitionist Gerrit Smith demanding a second term for the warrior-president as the only means of defeating the Klan and protecting the results of war. In opposition, and adopting the policy of anything but Grant, the Democrats endorsed Liberal Republican candidate Horace Greeley admitting that as the next president was likely to be a Republican, they might as well have had some say in which one it was.<sup>88</sup> The Democrats had been unable to mount a unified offensive due to continual divisions resulting from an uncomfortable mix of ultra conservatives, moderates and former Republicans.

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<sup>83</sup> Republicanism vs. Grantism. Speech of Hon. Charles Sumner, of Massachusetts, delivered in the Senate of the United States, May 31, 1872 (New York; The Tribune Associations, 1872)

<sup>84</sup> Charles Sumner, Letter to Colored Citizens by Hon. Charles Sumner, July 29, 1872 (Washington, D.C.: F. & J. Rives and Geo. A. Bailey, 1872) cited in Calhoun, *Conceiving a New Republic*, p.45

<sup>85</sup> Calhoun, *Conceiving a New Republic: The Republican Party and the Southern Question, 1869-1900*, p.45

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid*, p.45

<sup>87</sup> Hesseltine, *Ulysses S. Grant, Politician*, p.277

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid*, p.279

Additionally, there was great division between the Northern and Southern wings of the Party with the former increasingly frustrated with those who refused to accept Reconstruction. Evidence to the fact can be seen in the Democratic National Convention in 1872 endorsing equal rights only to have them denounced at a state level.<sup>89</sup>

Democrat support for Greeley was to come to naught, though, as he scuppered his chances through a series of disastrous speeches where he alienated veterans, blacks and Unionists alike. The issue for the Liberal Republican and Democrat coalition was that through Greeley they offered reconciliation only on the terms of a general amnesty. This in turn made Northern voters apprehensive about a party that would inevitably seek to tear down Reconstruction. As had been the case in 1868, the weakness of the opposition enabled Grant to be victorious. James A. Garfield wrote at the time that Greeley made “the candidacy of Grant tolerable and respectable”.<sup>90</sup> Like Seymour in 1868, Greeley had led many to settle with Grant, not least Frederick Douglass who wrote at the time: “[w]hatsoever may be the fault of the Republican Party, it has within it the only element of friendship for the colored man’s rights.”<sup>91</sup> Calhoun summarises the contest as one where Liberals sought a future “with northerners and southerners accepting a common destiny borne of fellow feeling rather than coercion” whilst regular Republicans saw one where “the national government would play a more activist role in charting the nation’s destiny and protecting the

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<sup>89</sup> Gillette, *Retreat from Reconstruction, 1869-1879*, 1869-1879 p.59

<sup>90</sup> James A. Garfield to William C. Howells, July 11, 1872, *Garfield Papers*, cited in Gillette, *Retreat from Reconstruction, 1869-1879*, p.69

<sup>91</sup> James M. McPherson, “Grant or Greeley? The Abolition Dilemma in the Election of 1872”, *American Historical Review* 71 (October 1965), p.46, cited in Joan Waugh, *U.S. Grant: American Hero, American Myth* (North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009), p.144

individual's rights".<sup>92</sup> As illustrated by his policy and statements, Grant embraced both of those ideals.

Statistically, Grant fared better in 1872 than he had in 1868 achieving a greater number in the Electoral College (286 to Greeley's 66). Furthermore, he gained more of the popular vote than in the previous election increasing his number by 600,000, ultimately seeing a 56 to 44 percent split overall. Congress also saw Republicans attain a two-thirds majority in both houses.<sup>93</sup> According to Hesseltine, "[i]t was the efficient organization of the national Republican campaign, the lavish use of money, and the constant contact with every locality, rather than the direct appeal to the intelligence or prejudices of the voters, that brought success to the Republican cause."<sup>94</sup> Unsurprisingly Grant was as silent in success as he was in the contest which, according to Gillette, was "in deference to custom as well as for fear of blundering".<sup>95</sup> In relation to his silence in such situations, Hesseltine offers an assessment that is all too true of the sphinx-like President: "[i]n the future as in the past, men must watch his actions to learn what he thought."<sup>96</sup> The question, therefore, is what can one infer about Grant's Southern policy from the record of his first term? Furthermore, does the record accurately represent the President's philosophy on the South?

Southern policy during Grant's first administration predominantly reflected an intention to complete Reconstruction. The haste with which that was pursued and the manner in which legislative achievements were celebrated all served to provide

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<sup>92</sup> Calhoun, *Conceiving a New Republic: The Republican Party and the Southern Question, 1869-1900*, p.40

<sup>93</sup> Waugh, *U.S. Grant: American Hero, American Myth*, p.145

<sup>94</sup> Hesseltine, *Ulysses S. Grant, Politician*, p.286

<sup>95</sup> Gillette, *Retreat from Reconstruction, 1869-1879*, p.65

<sup>96</sup> Hesseltine, *Ulysses S. Grant, Politician*, p.290

closure to the programme and in a larger sense, the Civil War. Readmitting the remaining states had achieved Reconstruction's primary goal; the ratification of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendment had established political and legal equality and amnesty had addressed the issue of political ostracism. In addition, the tools available to the government in maintaining order and intervening in states had been expanded through the Enforcement Acts. Whilst Grant had not been the architect of these landmark achievements he had been instrumental in their development and adoption. Despite the threats that faced each one of these achievements, in the context of what was to follow, these were halcyon days for Reconstruction.

Grant expressed a desire to close the work of Reconstruction but also honour his duty to protect the results of war. The former was relatively straightforward as much could be forgiven just as long as the image of union was achieved. The readmission of Virginia, Mississippi and Texas exemplifies an effort on the part of Grant to hasten readmission, regardless of its sacrifices. Providing closure to the Civil War and finalising Reconstruction was reliant on addressing the larger political questions the President had inherited. But despite the achievements of the first Grant administration in bringing about a close to the programme of Reconstruction, a threat to the results of war still existed with events in Georgia and South Carolina counteracting the image of peaceful union. Politically and racially motivated violence in the South challenged the notion of Reconstruction being complete and on a more personal level, Grant's ability to protect the legacy of the Civil War. In what would become more acute in his second term, Grant was required to deal with state crises often faced with a very public request for him to take a side. In his first term he had been required to intervene in the affairs of three states, each offering their own issues and options.

In Georgia, Grant had delayed intervention in a racially motivated issue most likely to safeguard his policy for readmission of Virginia, Mississippi and Texas. Despite the eventual outcome being a complete disaster for state Republicans in Georgia, Grant's intermittent support was not tantamount to a retreat from Reconstruction or a betrayal of the results of war. Democrat success was inevitable; to force a Republican regime on the state in the wake of the Enforcement Act would have legitimised all accusations of bayonet rule. What was most at threat in the state was the legal right of blacks to hold office. This very public denial by the Georgia legislature was dealt with through the largely acceptable use of the army, therefore forewarning other states.

Whereas Georgia offered a somewhat simple case of Republican against Democrat, Louisiana was a matter of intra-party squabbling. Both sides represented the same opportunistic politicking that the President mostly rejected. Whilst the Louisiana saga is explored to its conclusion in chapters six and seven, a balanced analysis of the facts show that initially the Grant administration chose to keep both sides from destroying each other. The problem in associating Louisiana with either of Grant's broad policy goals in the South is that the state's problems were not based on race, such as in Georgia, or violence, like in South Carolina. It is, however, representative of one of the major areas of Southern policy: the extent to which the Grant administration would intervene in a Southern state in order to settle a political contest.

Initial policy in Louisiana saw the Grant administration tread a fine line in curtailing the extreme efforts of both sides, never wholeheartedly supporting one so as to ensure the defeat of the other. The defining factor in the President's initial reaction to the

Louisiana controversy is that there was no great danger that demanded a federal response. Where favouritism can be found, it was out of an aversion to the racial politics of the Warmouth faction.

Finally, much like the President sought to balance interests in enacting Southern policy, his public discussion of the South sought to appease both sides. As violence and disorder prevailed, rather than chastise the South, the President sought to negotiate with it, emphasising the benefits of a cordial and dutiful relationship.



## Chapter 6: Ballots and Banditti

Historian Charles W. Calhoun contends that during the first three years of his presidency, Grant and Republicans in Congress “worked together to create a structure of law and executive power to preserve the results of war”<sup>1</sup>. As Reconstruction history would prove, though, these achievements were to prove short-lived. In Grant’s second term Southern issues were to be far more complex, controversial, bloody and vexing than they had been previously. Ensuring peace, harmony and good governance in the South was far more challenging by the mid-1870s due to the Reconstruction programme being largely completed. The mandate for military governance, intervention and the reshaping of Southern institutions lessened with the Grant administration having no more right to dictate local issues than it did in the North. Henceforth, Grant’s Southern policy was almost exclusively reactive with attempts to protect the results of war limited by circumstance and his ability to foresee the consequence of inaction. The majority of the Grant historiography depicts an incongruous path due to the lack of a road-map for completion. Whilst Grant might have lacked policy aims that had a definite end-game, he nevertheless approached Southern issues with the ultimate goal of protecting the results of war.

This chapter focusses primarily on events in Louisiana and Arkansas. Both serve as case studies with which to analyse and in part evaluate Grant’s adherence to protecting the results of war. Each state required action on the part of the President whether it was to be settling disputed election results, bestowing recognition on one warring

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<sup>1</sup> Charles W. Calhoun, *Conceiving a New Republic: The Republican Party and the Southern Question, 1869-1900* (Kansas, University Press of Kansas, 2006), p.31

party, or dispatching federal troops to quell violence. In each case the fundamental question is what did Grant's policy choices seek to accomplish? As the controversy of federal intervention grew, did he seek to maintain the Republican Party on a national level or safeguard loyal regimes in the South? Furthermore, was he more concerned with the image of himself as a despot or the rights and lives of loyal citizens both black and white?

In his first term, the President had maintained a relatively neutral position when dealing with Republican in-fighting in Louisiana. By 1872, party lines were more clearly defined when Republican regulars William Pitt Kellogg and Grant's brother-in-law James F. Casey were supported by a federal judge in a claim of electoral fraud against Democrats, following the 1872 elections. With the stage set for another showdown, one Louisianan asked the President, "[i]f fraud shall carry our state against us and a legal majority of voters; We [sic] will look to the strong arm of Republicanism as exemplified in you for our protection and right".<sup>2</sup> Grant proceeded to order Attorney General Williams to support the decision of the federal judge and assist those he believed to be the legitimately elected legislature in their occupation of the State House.<sup>3</sup> When Republican acting Governor P.B.S. Pinchback pressured Grant for additional support, Casey added to the urgency telling the President that the delay "is disheartening our friends and cheering our enemies".<sup>4</sup> Grant sent word to Governor Pinchback that he was recognised as the lawful governor and that protection would be given in the event of violence.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> J.E. Trimble to USG, Nov 10, 1872, PUSG-XXIV, P.4

<sup>3</sup> William Gillette, *Retreat From Reconstruction, 1869 -1879* (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1979), p.113

<sup>4</sup> P.B.S. Pinchback to USG, Dec 9, 1872, PUSG-XXIV, p.5; James F. Casey to USG, Dec 11, 1872, *ibid*, p.5

<sup>5</sup> George H. Williams to Pinchback, Dec 12, 1872, *ibid*, p.5

Shortly after this, rival legislatures were once again established, with Grant choosing to allow the Democrats to organise but not attempt to legislate until it had been established who the rightful majority was in the state legislature.<sup>6</sup> The unseated Democratic Governor John McEnery, who had also been accused of fraud, told the President that the Republicans were “seizing under the shadow and name of your Excellency all the powers and attributes of our State Government and...terrorizing its Officers and especially the Courts”.<sup>7</sup> Gillette is highly critical of the President’s policy at this time, suggesting that in allowing the McEnery legislature to organise, “its very existence perpetuated a semblance of legality and served as a rallying point for the enemies of the Kellogg government”.<sup>8</sup> This can be challenged as with the election results of 1872 still to be verified, the McEnery legislature, whilst not having the necessary legality to occupy the State House, did have a semblance of legitimacy and a right to exist until the contest was settled.

On February 25, 1873, Grant wrote to Congress claiming that investigations into the 1872 election in Louisiana had uncovered so many fraudulent activities that the true victor was hard to ascertain. With no solution to the problem, he requested that Congress provide an answer otherwise he would continue to recognise Governor Pinchback and the Republican legislature as “if not a *de jure*, at least, a *de facto*, government”.<sup>9</sup> It should be noted that even though Grant chose to maintain state Republicans in their claim to office, this policy was once again one where he chose to support the lesser of two evils. Simpson writes, “Grant got his way, although the

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<sup>6</sup> USG to William B. Belknap, Jan 5, 1873, *ibid*, p.3

<sup>7</sup> John McEnery to USG, Jan 20, 1873, *ibid*, p.53

<sup>8</sup> Gillette, *Retreat from Reconstruction*, 1869-1879, p.113

<sup>9</sup> USG to Congress, Feb 25, 1873, PUSG-XXIV, pp.51-53S

President was not exactly enthused about the kind of people he had endorsed”.<sup>10</sup> Whilst not enamoured with the Kellogg regime, the President was familiar enough with Louisiana’s Democrats to not regret his decision to publically support Republican Governor Pinchback. The initial controversy had been largely peaceful but as both rival regimes sort to manage the courts and collect taxes, the downtrodden McEnery faction resorted to encouraging violence resulting in the massacre at Colfax in April 1873 where 71 blacks and 2 whites were killed.<sup>11</sup> Grant issued a proclamation ordering the dispersing of “turbulent and disorderedly persons” with its effect being fifteen months respite from Louisiana’s troubles.<sup>12</sup>

The peace that followed the Colfax massacre was interrupted in August 1874 when Governor Kellogg updated the President on the “exceptional circumstances” the state was now in.<sup>13</sup> In truth, the circumstances were not exceptional but rather predictable as Kellogg informed the President that the enemies of the Republican Party had “returned to the policy of murder, violence and intimidation”.<sup>14</sup> Placing some of the blame on Grant’s shoulders, the Governor charged that the President’s policy in Arkansas and Texas to “let the South alone” had encouraged Louisiana’s agitators.<sup>15</sup> Kellogg believed that his regime could maintain peace in the river parishes but federal assistance was essential on the borders. Justifying his request, he claimed that in the six districts of the state, five of them had an undoubted Republican majority and would elect Republican candidates should the polls be peaceful and true. As a concession, he

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<sup>10</sup> Brooks D. Simpson, *The Reconstruction Presidents* (Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1998), p.166

<sup>11</sup> Gillette, *Retreat from Reconstruction*, 1869-1879, pp.114-115

<sup>12</sup> USG, Proclamation, 22 May, 1873, PUSG-XXIV, p.122

<sup>13</sup> Governor William Pitt Kellogg to USG, Aug 18, 1874, PUSG-XXV, p.215-216

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*

promised to place clerks and commissioners of the opposition at the polls. Kellogg was appealing to the President for pre-emptive action, something that Grant was reluctant to undertake. He closed his letter requesting that troops return to their posts (some had been removed due to an earlier outbreak of yellow fever) as “such a course would have a most salutary [sic] effect and would prevent much bloodshed and probably a formal call upon the President and a renewed agitation of the Louisiana question which otherwise a quiet fair election next November would for ever set at rest and fully vindicate your just policy towards us”.<sup>16</sup>

Corruption and careerism defined the GOP in Louisiana but that did not excuse the violence that was just as prevalent. Grant continued to receive reports of bloodshed and persecution in the state. One letter from a black minister detailed the desperate situation: “if we go to law for our rights we are either shot or hung or runned off of the place, or out of the Parish or county...[g]ive us peace or give a Territory to ourselves”<sup>17</sup>. The increase in violence was largely due to the fusion of Democrats and White Leagues under the leadership of a former Confederate Colonel David B. Penn. As another election approached, it was not only Republicans who petitioned the President for support. Grant received a request from the “conservative people of Louisiana” stating that they had “after two years of struggle against the Power of what they Consider an odious usurpation been remitted by your action & by the non action of Congress to the ballot as the only means of relief from their difficulties”.<sup>18</sup> It didn’t help that the “machinery of Election is in the hands of the acting Govr a machinery carefully arranged by himself & his C[o]adjutors for the express purpose of defeating

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid

<sup>17</sup> Rev. John Boyd and many others to USG, Sept 5, 1874, PUSG-XXV, p.218-220

<sup>18</sup> Robert H. Marr to USG, Sept 9, 1874, PUSG-XXV, pp.220-221

the popular will”<sup>19</sup> Grant was under no illusions as to the dubious activities of both sides; his choice was somewhat simplified, though, in that it was only those of Democratic persuasion that organised themselves into armed gangs and committed murder.

The political situation in Louisiana deteriorated further when on September 14, 1874, 8000 supporters of the Democrats, McEnery and Penn seized City Hall, the State House and the police stations, and successfully ousted the Kellogg government.<sup>20</sup> Kellogg told the President that the state was unable to control the insurrection and formally requested “measures to put down the domestic violence & insurrection now prevailing”.<sup>21</sup> Kellogg chose to appeal under Article 4, Section 4 of the Constitution, that being that the United States shall guarantee to every State in the Union a republican form of government and shall protect them against invasion and domestic violence.

The invocation of Article 4 and the situation in Louisiana allowed Grant to threaten intervention without concern as to its legitimacy. Grant delivered another proclamation, hoping that it would have the same pacifying affect as it had in 1873, stating that “turbulent and disorderly persons... combined with force and arms to overthrow the State government of Louisiana, and to resist the laws and constituted authorities of said State”.<sup>22</sup> Referring to Article 4, he gave a five day timeframe for the insurrectionary forces to disperse.<sup>23</sup> To add to the sense of urgency, Grant

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid

<sup>20</sup> Gillette, *Retreat from Reconstruction*, 1869-1879, p.118

<sup>21</sup> Kellogg to USG, Sept 14, 1874, PUSG-XXV, p.221

<sup>22</sup> USG, Proclamation, Sept 15, 1874, *ibid*, p.213-214

<sup>23</sup> Ibid

considered an earlier convening of Congress only to be told that with congressional elections fast approaching, Congressmen needed to be in their districts. But as much as Grant feared the violence escalating, he grew no fonder of Louisiana's Republicans. Fish recalled that in a cabinet meeting, "Kelloggs [sic] weakness & imbecility were denounced by the Prsdt & others" and that it was generally agreed that "there were great frauds on both sides, & no legal return of votes honestly given".<sup>24</sup> This general denouncement contradicts Gillette's argument that Grant's policy in Louisiana was dictated by cronyism. But despite concerns over Kellogg's principles, all in the cabinet were agreed that "under no circumstances could the Insurgent Govt be recognized".<sup>25</sup>

As stated in earlier chapters, perhaps the most revealing documenter of the Grant administration was Secretary of State Hamilton Fish. In one of his first meetings with new cabinet members Secretary of the Treasury Benjamin Bristow and Postmaster General Marshall Jewell, he revealed the manner in which the President managed Southern affairs. Noting Bristow and Jewell's surprise as to how quickly Grant's proclamation on affairs in Louisiana was issued, Fish wrote, "[t]hey are new members - otherwise they wd (sic) not be surprised".<sup>26</sup> Fish's comment on Grant's style does not appear to have been discussed by historians but it says much. Firstly it indicates that the President was able to rule on Southern issues independently and with a speed that suggests confidence. On the other hand the haste and lack of consultation perhaps indicates a thoughtless response to events. This is somewhat supported when Fish notes that Grant had to be persuaded at this very moment not to go on another short vacation to Long Branch, New Jersey.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> DHF, Sept 16, 1874; Gillette, *Retreat from Reconstruction*, 1869-1879, p.105

<sup>25</sup> DHF, Sept 16, 1874

<sup>26</sup> DHF, Sept 15, 1874

<sup>27</sup> Ibid

With lawlessness now the prevailing factor, Grant considered resorting to a proven method of governing Louisiana: sending General Phil Sheridan to take charge. His willingness to pursue an inevitably more aggressive policy in the state was further reflected in his statement to Fish that “he would much more willingly declare Martial Law, if there had not been, & were not doubts of the legality of Kellogg’s claims to the Governorship”.<sup>28</sup> Had Republicans in Louisiana been more innocent a victim, Grant would have approached policy much in the way that congressional Reconstruction did in the late 1860s. Reports of peace and quiet soon came in, though, once the President had ordered two naval vessels and eight companies of infantry to New Orleans.<sup>29</sup> He also advised Generals in the state that they were to “summon a surrender of the insurgents” should there be pockets of resistance remaining<sup>30</sup>.

Peace was restored in Louisiana once again through presidential proclamation and backed up by little more than the threat of federal intervention. The Democratic insurgency seemed to quickly collapse once Grant’s movement of military forces became known. Certainly he would have proceeded with greater degrees of enforcement had things not been settled quickly. Postmaster General Marshall Jewell told Elihu B. Washburne, “Grant means business in this thing. He is not mad about it, nor does he use any hard language, and he doesn’t smoke or say much, but his eyes are *set in his head*”.<sup>31</sup> As much as Grant might have meant business in Louisiana, he did so only in the context of bringing order, not guaranteeing a Republican state

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<sup>28</sup> DHF, Sept 16, 1874

<sup>29</sup> James F. Casey to USG, Sept 16, 1874, PUSG-XXV, p.24; Moses Greenwood and William M. Burwell to USG, Sept 17, 1874, *ibid*, p.224

<sup>30</sup> Orville E. Babcock to William W. Belknap, Sept 17, 1874, *ibid*, pp.224-225, Edward D. Townsend to William H. Emory, Sept 18, 1874, *ibid*, pp.225-226

<sup>31</sup> Gen. Marshall Jewell to Elihu B. Washburne, Sept 19, 1874, *ibid*, p.226



government. He advised the Marshall and District Attorney of Louisiana that on no account should they be part of any negotiations between the warring factions. Even though the President accepted the lesser of two evils in supporting Kellogg, he believed that his administration “must not be committed directly or indirectly by civil or Military officers in any recogniti[on] of any of the parties to the late insurrection as having claim to official position”.<sup>32</sup>

In cases like Louisiana, Grant was willing to use the Federal Government to police the South but not determine its politics, at least not directly. He made use of the military as peacekeepers but not as active participants in any disputes believing that Southern politics should take their natural (or unnatural) course.<sup>33</sup> Intimidation and murder was not natural though and warranted intervention under the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments. Delay and restraint in the pursuit of this purpose was often the product of the controversial nature of the enforcement legislation that buttressed the constitutional amendments. Grant was sensitive to accusations of despotism so in spite of his own beliefs, he was limited in his response.

In November 1874, Louisiana unsurprisingly produced another set of disputed election results. The returning board under Kellogg’s influence successfully threw out returns that showed a conservative victory until there was a balance of 53 conservatives and 53 Republicans legitimately elected.<sup>34</sup> In the midst of the latest controversy, Grant delivered his annual message which addressed Louisiana’s continuing troubles.

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<sup>32</sup> USG to “The Marshal & Dist Atty of La”, undated, *ibid*, p.234

<sup>33</sup> USG, Endorsement, Sept 23, 1874, *ibid*, p.234

<sup>34</sup> Louis A. Coolidge, *Ulysses S. Grant* (Cambridge: Riverside Press, 1922)p.469

Defending his limited use of troops, the President argued:

Considering that the present State administration of Louisiana has been the only government in that State for nearly two years; that it has been tacitly acknowledged and acquiesced in as such by Congress, and more than once expressly recognized by me, I regarded it as my clear duty, when legally called upon for that purpose, to prevent its overthrow by an armed mob under pretense of fraud and irregularity in the election of 1872.<sup>35</sup>

He admitted that the election results of 1872 were questionable but stated, “from the best sources of information at my command I have always believed that the present State officers received a majority of the legal votes actually cast at that election”.<sup>36</sup> He declared that should Congress continue to procrastinate in finding more permanent a solution for the state, he would carry on directing things himself. Then, after detailing the outrages committed by bands of masked men in the South, he reaffirmed that the purpose of the Fifteenth Amendment and Enforcement Acts was “to guarantee to all citizens the right to vote and to protect them in the free enjoyment of that right”.<sup>37</sup> Therefore, the stationing of troops in the South was due to “undoubted evidence that violations of said act had been committed and that a widespread and flagrant disregard of it was contemplated”.<sup>38</sup> Finally, in a damning critique, the President argued that if

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<sup>35</sup> USG, Sixth Annual Address, Dec 7, 1874, James D. Richardson, *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 1789-1897* (Washington D.C. : Bureau of National Literature and Art, 1903), VII, pp.284-303

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

such action was to be questioned, “the whole scheme of colored enfranchisement is worse than mockery and little better than a crime“.<sup>39</sup>

It is surprising, then, that even after issuing such a defence of intervention on principle, Grant told Kellogg, “[i]t is exceedingly unpalatable to use troops in anticipation of danger. Let the State authorities be right and then proceed with their duties”.<sup>40</sup> Kellogg had once again requested troops in anticipation of more violence. The President wished to exhaust state forces before considering the use of federal ones. Most likely he thought federal intervention highly probable as he requested that the commanding General in Louisiana, William H. Emory, be ready to suppress any outbreak of violence and that “to have it understood that he will do it”.<sup>41</sup> Curiously this message was sent at the same time as he informed Kellogg that he wished to see state authorities settle their own affairs.

Even though Grant wished to avoid being the adjudicator of Southern squabbles, he nevertheless accepted responsibility for ensuring peace, deciding at this juncture to dispatch Sheridan to Louisiana. In the late 1860s, Sheridan had been an instrumental part of Grant’s journey to the White House as his controversial management of affairs in Louisiana had forced the latter to define and defend a specific approach to managing the South. With the circumstances in Louisiana once again requiring attention, Sheridan was sent word that “[w]hat the President desires is to ascertain the true conditions of affairs and to receive such suggestions from you as you may deem

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> USG to Kellogg, Dec 9, 1874, PUSG-XXV, p.295

<sup>41</sup> William W. Belknap to Edward D. Townsend, Dec 16, 1874, *ibid*, p.295-296

advisable and judicious”.<sup>42</sup> The General’s suggestions were to be characteristically provocative.

Once on the scene, Sheridan reported that peace could easily be re-established in Louisiana by declaring white supremacist groups as “banditti” and having them rounded up and put on trial. Sheridan emphasised the efficiency of using such terminology as it would negate the “necessity of any special legislation for the preservation of peace & equality of rights in the State of Louisiana”.<sup>43</sup> With the gloves off, Sheridan believed that “no further action need be taken, Except [sic] that which would devolve upon me”.<sup>44</sup> Grant was evidently in agreement with the path Sheridan was pursuing as a week earlier he had discussed with his cabinet the possibility of placing Louisiana under Marshall Guard. It appears that this idea was not taken further due to Attorney General Williams’s opinion that the President lacked the authority.<sup>45</sup>

Sheridan’s arrival in New Orleans had coincided with the organisation of the contested state legislature. Democrats proceeded to disrupt its convening and secured a majority for themselves and a quorum. Kellogg’s men returned with Colonel Phillipe R. de Trobiand who under orders from Sheridan to “not hesitate a moment”, removed five unrecognised Democrat legislators, thus returning the political body to its earlier form.<sup>46</sup> The ensuing controversy of the situation laid in the fact that Trobiand, and by extension the Federal Government and Grant, had intervened to determine a local

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<sup>42</sup> William W. Belknap to Philip H. Sheridan, Dec 24, 1874, PUSG-XXVI, p.16

<sup>43</sup> Philip H. Sheridan to William W. Belknap, Jan 5, 1875, *ibid*, pp.18-19

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>45</sup> DHF, Dec 29, 1874

<sup>46</sup> Gillette, *Retreat from Reconstruction, 1869-1879*, p.123

political dispute. This fuelled an increasingly common accusation that presidential Southern policy translated to Republicanism by any means.

When Trobriand, Sheridan, Kellogg and by affiliation Grant were all accused of exercising bayonet rule, Sheridan told Secretary of War Belknap, “[g]ive yourself no uneasiness. I see my way clear enough if you will only have confidence”.<sup>47</sup> Belknap replied, assuring the General, “[t]he President & all of us have full confidence & thoroughly approve your course...Be assured that the President and Cabinet confide in your wisdom and rest in the belief that all acts of yours have been and will be judicious”<sup>48</sup>. Simpson attests that to many people at the time, Grant had “thrown off even the flimsy pretense of being the chief Civil Magistrate of the country” and was aspiring to “play the role of Caesar”<sup>49</sup>. Many praised this course of action, notably Abolitionist Wendell Phillips who told Belknap, “I wish to express to him [Grant] my gratitude, as a citizen, for this decision & sagacity in dealing with the White League”.<sup>50</sup> Grant was of similar opinion telling his cabinet that he would not denounce or censure Sheridan.<sup>51</sup>

Hamilton Fish noted that at the time of the Trobriand controversy, despite arguments to the contrary, the President “was determined under no circumstances to apologise for anything done”.<sup>52</sup> When the Secretary of State questioned the President on the constitutionality of Trobriand and Sheridan’s actions, Grant said nothing other than

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<sup>47</sup> Sheridan to Belknap, Jan 6, 1875, PUSG-XXVI, p.18-19

<sup>48</sup> Belknap to Sheridan, Jan 6, 1875, *ibid*, p.19

<sup>49</sup> Brooks D. Simpson, *The Reconstruction Presidents* (Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1998), p.176

<sup>50</sup> Wendell Phillips to Belknap, Jan 9, 1875, PUSG-XXVI, p.21

<sup>51</sup> DHF, Jan 9, 1875

<sup>52</sup> DHF, Jan 9, 1875

that a message to Congress would clarify his view.<sup>53</sup> Despite such belligerence, Grant's self-preservation is discernible in his decision to have his cabinet build evidence showing that Sheridan and Trobriand acted alone.<sup>54</sup>

On January 13, 1875, Grant issued a special message to the Senate on affairs in Louisiana that aimed to defend his administration's policy. He stated that "lawlessness, turbulence, and bloodshed" characterised the state, as it had done since 1868 when "the Republican vote...through fraud and violence, was reduced to a few thousands".<sup>55</sup> Contesting the accusation that his administration had been responsible for an escalation in violence, he stated that "disorders there are not due to any recent causes or to any late action of the Federal authorities".<sup>56</sup> Referring to the disputed election of 1872, the President reminded the Senate of the manner in which Democrats disenfranchised thousands of blacks in Louisiana. His support of the federal judge in upholding the Republican's claim of fraud was explained as one based on constitutional authority. Reiterating the purpose of the Fifteenth Amendment and the Enforcement Act, Grant argued that the actions of the Kellogg government and his own were "too clear for controversy".<sup>57</sup> The defensiveness of his message is unsurprising considering that it was a response to a Senate resolution requesting information on intervention in the state.

Discussing further the legality of supporting Kellogg, Grant suggested that in the event of electoral fraud, the right of the United States courts to interfere with state elections

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<sup>53</sup> DHF, Jan 9, 1875

<sup>54</sup> Ibid

<sup>55</sup> Grant to the Senate, Jan 13, 1875, Richardson, *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 1789-1897*, VII, pp.305-314

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

was as much of an obligation under the Fifteenth Amendment as the prohibition of slavery was under the Thirteenth. There is no record of Grant expressing similar opinions in his private correspondence. In truth the record shows that he was far more supportive of states settling their own electoral disputes. Whatever his reasoning, his defence had legitimacy. The administration's choice in Louisiana was, as he saw it, between a "governor who was cheated out of 20,000 votes, against another whose title to the office is undoubtedly based on fraud and in defiance of the wishes and intentions of the voters of the State".<sup>58</sup>

It is clear from the Grant papers and the diary of Hamilton Fish that the President had little actual sympathy for the Kellogg regime. Whilst he might have had concern for the citizens of Louisiana, he had little affection for state Republicans whose standards were only marginally better than those of the Democrats. It is understandable, then, that much of his defence of federal intervention in Louisiana was based on the plight of its citizens. The President painted a picture of lawlessness and outrage so as to justify what little intervention had taken place. In Colfax and Coushatta, citizens in Louisiana had acted with a "bloodthirstiness and barbarity...hardly surpassed by any acts of savage warfare".<sup>59</sup> As much as he wished to avoid condemning the entire state, he believed that a greater sin was that "insuperable obstructions were thrown in the way of punishing these murders".<sup>60</sup> He then gave what is commonly seen as his most passionate public statement on Southern affairs:

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

Fierce denunciations ring through the country about office holding and election matters in Louisiana, while every one of the Colfax miscreants goes unwhipped of justice and no way can be found in this boasted land of civilisation and Christianity to punish the perpetrators of this bloody and monstrous crime.<sup>61</sup>

To emphasise the resistance to the Federal Government, Grant referred to merchants signing declarations of resistance and the inflammatory role of the press. With the streets of Louisiana “stained in blood”, Grant argued that when faced with such “portentous circumstances”, he was legally bound by the Enforcement Acts upon the request of the state governor to render assistance and commit troops to Louisiana.<sup>62</sup>

Importantly, Grant did not avoid addressing the controversy surrounding Trobriand and Sheridan’s intervention with the Democrat legislature. Admitting that interference by the military in a state legislature was only acceptable during rebellion, he chose therefore to portray the situation in Louisiana as just that. These dire circumstances were to “exempt the military from any intentional wrong” and that they “may well have supposed that it was their duty to act”.<sup>63</sup> To present intervention as not serving partisan interests, Grant stated that with the army, “both parties appear to have relied upon them as conservators of the public peace” and that “[n]obody was disturbed by the military who had a legal right at that time to occupy a seat in the legislature”.<sup>64</sup> In an attempt to absolve Sheridan of any “party motives”, he agreed that the General’s ideas may have been illegal but if they were adopted they would “soon put an end to

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.



the troubles and disorders in that State”.<sup>65</sup> This is another indication of Grant’s opinion that the South was perhaps best placed in the hands of the military as without such measures, the crimes in Louisiana would “reproach upon the State and country long after the present generation had passed away”.<sup>66</sup> To conclude, he stated that if the army was to be criticised for doing wrong, then the blame was with “the turbulent element surrounding them”.<sup>67</sup>

In this special message, Grant had attempted to account for the actions of his administration and the Federal Government as legally sanctioned and morally justified. Even with these strong opinions, though, Grant still failed to provide leadership placing the fate of Louisiana in the hands of what was to become by 1875 an increasingly obstructionist Democratic majority in the House of Representatives.<sup>68</sup> Shirking the responsibility he had referred to throughout his entire discussion, he asserted that it was more appropriate for Congress to take action despite admitting that “its inaction has produced great evil”.<sup>69</sup>

Simpson describes this message as a “forthright statement of conditions in the South, in some of the most impassioned language used by any president”.<sup>70</sup> Gillette concludes: “in substance, rather than a stubborn defense, it almost amounted to an

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> The 44<sup>th</sup> Congress (1875-1877) had seen the Republican numbers in the House slip from 199 to 103 whilst the Democrats increased from 88 to 182 giving them a 62.8 voting share. See United States House of Representatives: History, Art & Archives. Congress Profiles, 43rd Congress (1873-1875) [Internet] [Accessed 29 July 2014]; Available from <http://history.house.gov/Congressional-Overview/Profiles/43rd/>; *ibid* Congress Profiles, 44th Congress (1875-1877) [Internet] [Accessed 29 July 2014]; Available from <http://history.house.gov/Congressional-Overview/Profiles/44th/>

<sup>69</sup> USG to the Senate, Jan 13, 1875, Richardson, *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents 1789-1897*, VII, pp.305-314

<sup>70</sup> Simpson, *The Reconstruction Presidents*, p.179

apology".<sup>71</sup> It is reasonable to consider Simpson's interpretation to be more convincing. The message contained far too much detail and reasoning to be considered an apology. The disappointment is that the impassioned language is made redundant by Grant's desire that a Democratic Congress take control, thus alleviating him of the responsibility. Clearly his idea of the President as purely an administrative officer endured. In his defence of Sheridan, however, he revealed that extreme measures could achieve what he considered to be the best result for all.

Had Grant sought to shore up support for an interventionist Southern policy, he would have taken comfort in the response to his special message. Representative Ebenezer R. Hoar of Massachusetts described the President's thoughts as "manly, frank, and vigorous" whilst Speaker James G. Blaine declared that it would "exercise an immense influence on the public mind and bring People face to face with the real question".<sup>72</sup> The real issue still remained, though, as Sheridan reported that Radical supporters were being driven from the state, blacks were being refused work and thousands of people ostracised from their communities were without home or food.<sup>73</sup> In something of a vindication, the President's message was soon to receive official validation. Both the legislatures of Nebraska and Kansas adopted official resolutions of support for Grant's Southern policy and the House of Representatives officially recognised the Kellogg government in early March of 1875.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Gillette, *Retreat from Reconstruction, 1869-1879*, p.129

<sup>72</sup> Ebenezer R. Hoar of Massachusetts to USG, Jan 14<sup>th</sup>, 1875, PUSG-XXVI, p.25; James G. Blaine to USG, Jan 14<sup>th</sup>, 1875, *ibid*, p.25

<sup>73</sup> Philip H. Sheridan to William W. Belknap, Jan 16<sup>th</sup>, 1875, *ibid*, p.28

<sup>74</sup> James G. Blaine to USG, Mar 1, 1875, *ibid*, P.32

Around the same time that Grant was defending his actions in Louisiana, he had to do the same in reference to policy in Arkansas, justifying his efforts against “violence, intimidation and revolutionary proceedings”.<sup>75</sup> Arkansas was similar to Louisiana in that it was another contest for presidential recognition. In 1872, gubernatorial candidate for a Liberal Republican and Democrat coalition, Joseph Brooks, had lost to Republican regular Elisha Baxter. The latter had entered office amidst claims of electoral fraud and proceeded to alienate his Republican supporters by pursuing policies more favourable to the Democrats. Brooks, a former editor of an antislavery newspaper, was by 1874 now enjoying Republican support. After a court decision upheld his 1872 claim to office, he quickly seized the State House in April. Much like Louisiana, Grant received appeals from both sides for presidential recognition. But whereas in Louisiana party lines were eventually to be clearly drawn, Arkansas saw both sides continually claiming to represent the Republican Party.

Defending his courtship of the Democrats, Baxter told Grant, “I have given position to no democrats who are not now in accord with the republican party [sic], and who will not maintain its principles and policies”.<sup>76</sup> In a clear attempt to align his strategy to that of the President’s, he commented: “Virginia is progressing rapidly in this direction and Arkansas cannot too soon follow her most commendable example”.<sup>77</sup> Baxter was suggesting to Grant that the only way for the Republican Party to survive in the South was for it to align with moderate Democrats. What the President had attempted in Virginia was not an amalgamation of the parties but a simple offer of conciliation towards an opposing group. Baxter’s course bore little resemblance to any

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<sup>75</sup> USG to Congress, Feb 8, 1875, *ibid*, p.52-53

<sup>76</sup> Elisha Baxter to USG, Sept 4<sup>th</sup>, 1873, PUSG-XXV, p.62

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid*

followed by Grant as the President was loathed to encourage or support hybrid or fusion parties.

When Brooks took control of the State House in 1874, the President was quick to instruct his commanding officer in Arkansas to take no sides and to only maintain peace.<sup>78</sup> Grant was justified in this response as events in Arkansas implied no threat to public order. When a group of Senators urged the President to bring order to the escalating war between Brooks and Baxter, Grant is recorded as saying that “all necessary measures had been taken, within the proper limits of the power of the Government”.<sup>79</sup> By May the squabble had turned into preparations for war with Baxter rallying the support of whites and Brooks gathering an army of black citizens.<sup>80</sup>

All of it was to come to nothing, though, as both sides sat entrenched waiting for presidential recognition. Those that believed a vote for Baxter was a vote for the Confederacy petitioned Grant stating that should Brooks be denied office, “the greatest possible injustice will be done to the entire union [sic] element of this state and a triumph achieved by the unreconstructed element over the loyal”.<sup>81</sup> One citizen informed the President that “any recognition of Baxter at present would result in general assassination of many citizens especially colored”.<sup>82</sup> Gillette argues that even though Grant did little, his order for troops to maintain peace benefitted Brooks as it was this faction that held the State House. He also states that those representing Brooks were permitted to meet with the President whilst Baxter’s representatives were

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<sup>78</sup> Orville E. Babcock to Belknap, April 16<sup>th</sup>, 1874, *ibid*, p.63

<sup>79</sup> DHF, April 21, 1874

<sup>80</sup> J.A. Conrad to USG, May 8<sup>th</sup>, 1874, *ibid*, p.96

<sup>81</sup> J.M. Murphy & 32 others to USG, Petition, May 12<sup>th</sup>, 1874, *ibid*, p.102

<sup>82</sup> Dr. L. W. Wilcox to USG, *ibid*, p.102

excluded. Similar to his assessment of Louisiana, Gillette concludes that “cronyism combined with Republicanism was thus far characteristic of Grant’s support”.<sup>83</sup> The President’s actions following this reported meeting contradicts Gillette assertion as it was Baxter who benefitted once Grant saw fit to intervene. Despite a state court decision recognising Brooks as the legitimate winner of the 1872 gubernatorial contest, Grant issued a proclamation on May 15, 1874 recognising Baxter, who represented a collusion between Republicans and Democrats, as the legitimate governor of Arkansas.<sup>84</sup>

Grant’s surprising move in Arkansas is best accounted for by looking at the advice given by Attorney General George H. Williams. The President was told that in the beginning, “[a]ccording to the Constitution and laws of the State, the votes for Governor were counted and Baxter was declared elected, and at once was duly inaugurated”.<sup>85</sup> Upon investigation, the General Assembly had found Baxter to be elected whilst the Circuit Court of Pulaski County has decided in favour of Brooks.<sup>86</sup> Williams argued that the only body with the power to deal with the disagreement over a contest such as that in Arkansas was the General Assembly. Looking at the state constitution, Williams was able to argue that the General Assembly/Legislature was the only body that could reopen an election. This made redundant the judgement in the Circuit Court that was favourable to Brooks. The Attorney General acknowledged that Brooks could have received more votes but the President had no way to verify it. Importantly, he recognised that “[f]rauds may have been committed to the prejudice of Brooks: but; [sic] unhappily, there are few elections where partisan zeal runs high,

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<sup>83</sup> Gillette, *Retreat from Reconstruction, 1869-1879*, p.139

<sup>84</sup> USG, Proclamation, May 15<sup>th</sup>, 1874, PUSG-XXV, p.106-108

<sup>85</sup> George H. Williams to USG, May 15<sup>th</sup>, 1874, *ibid*, p.108

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid*

in which the victorious party with more or less of truth is not charged with acts of fraud”.<sup>87</sup>

In addition to justifying the recognition of Baxter on legal grounds, the Attorney General told the President that there needed to be an end to the controversy and that either Brooks or Baxter “with law and order is better than the other with discord and violence”.<sup>88</sup> His frustration on the matter and the President’s willingness to accept his decision was arguably influenced by their exhaustion from the Louisiana quandary. The situation in that state was in many ways similar to Arkansas, but with the key difference being that Arkansas had not developed into murder and massacre and did not therefore require a forceful response. In dealing with the issue, the Attorney General also feared the example that would be set should the President recognise Brooks and the manner in which he was attempting to gain power. For a decision like this to be applied elsewhere in the South, Williams believed: “[t]here is not a State in the Union in which they would not produce conflict and, probably, bloodshed”.<sup>89</sup> Unfortunately, Grant soon learnt that by enabling Baxter to regain office, a more dangerous precedent was to be set through the dismantling of the state constitution.

When Baxter finally received recognition he told the President that he would “administer the State Government as to make the Republican party the party of the really good people [sic] of the State”.<sup>90</sup> In October 1874, Grant received a letter from the wife of an Arkansas Sheriff: “I do most humbly hope and pray that you will assist in some way to relieve us of our danger as we have no protection as matters now stand.

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid

<sup>88</sup> Ibid

<sup>89</sup> ibid

<sup>90</sup> Joseph Brooks to USG, May 25<sup>th</sup>, 1874, *ibid*, pp.109-110

It is useless to call on Gov Baxter for protection for he has betrayed the Republicans into the hands of their worst enemies who are determined to run them all out of the country”.<sup>91</sup> Following the defeat of Brooks, state Democrats began removing judges and officeholders and reduced the governor’s term to two years, triggering an election that saw Baxter step down altogether and Democrat Augustas Garland inaugurated as Governor.<sup>92</sup>

The cleansing of the state enabled Arkansas Democrats to nullify congressional Reconstruction through an abrogation of the state constitution. When this was discussed in Washington, the President suggested that there be a statement issued that no decision on affairs in Arkansas would be taken until a congressional committee’s findings were given. Hamilton Fish argued “that such answer wd [sic] commit him too strongly to the conclusions of the Committee”.<sup>93</sup> The decision was therefore made that the statement would simply say: “with the information now before the Government no action will be taken”<sup>94</sup>. The decision was perhaps fortuitous for Grant as after two months of waiting, the congressional Committee on May 6, 1875 sustained the Democratic government of Augustus Garland and the newly revised constitution.<sup>95</sup>

Having previously excused himself from supporting Brooks, Grant, in November 1875, suddenly found reason to support him in his claim to power. When providing Congress with all correspondence and orders relating to events in Arkansas, the President gave his treatise on the matter declaring that Brooks had in fact been lawfully

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<sup>91</sup> Loucinda Grayson to USG, forwarded by U.S. Senator Stephen W. Dorsey, Oct 29<sup>th</sup>, 1874, *ibid*, p.111

<sup>92</sup> Simpson, *The Reconstruction Presidents*, P.171

<sup>93</sup> DHF, Nov 17, 1874

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>95</sup> Gillette, *Retreat from Reconstruction, 1869-1879*, p.146

elected in 1872 and had been unlawfully deprived of that office since. He then argued that the state constitution and government in Arkansas was overthrown and replaced through “violence, intimidation and revolutionary proceedings”.<sup>96</sup> Furthermore, the President warned that these wrongs, “if permitted to stand, practically ignores [sic] all rights of Minorities in all of the States”.<sup>97</sup> His change of policy was brought about by the manner in which Arkansas had revised its state constitution negating much of congressional Reconstruction. On this matter, he asked: “[w]hat is there to prevent each of the states, recently re-admitted to federal relations of certain conditions, changing their constitutions and violating their pledges if this action in Ark is acquiesced in”.<sup>98</sup>

It had only been a month since the President had addressed issues in Louisiana and therefore the similarities in tone are understandable. Just as with Louisiana, Grant requested that Congress “take definitive action in this matter to relieve the Executive from acting upon questions which should be decided by the Legislative branch of the Govt”.<sup>99</sup> Gillette believes that whilst his report on Louisiana’s affairs had the aim of forcing Congress’s hand, with Arkansas, “the wording implied that Grant intended to interfere in any case, and only wanted Congress to give him an excuse for doing so”.<sup>100</sup>

Whereas his comments on Louisiana had received praise and support, the reaction to Grant’s demands for action in Arkansas brought condemnation and fear. The *New York Herald*, *Springfield Republican* and *Independent* all accused the President of

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<sup>96</sup> USG to Congress, Feb 8th, 1875, PUSG-XXVI, pp.52-53

<sup>97</sup> Ibid

<sup>98</sup> Ibid

<sup>99</sup> Ibid

<sup>100</sup> Gillette, *Retreat from Reconstruction, 1869-1879*, p.147



attempting to exercise a dangerous amount of power by trampling over local jurisdiction.<sup>101</sup> There was also criticism within his cabinet with Hamilton Fish considering the President's message "dangerous in its tendencies, and inconclusive in its arguments".<sup>102</sup> The Secretary of State, alongside Attorney General Williams, was concerned with what would follow should Grant try to intervene on the side of the ousted Brooks. He believed that with many states now changing their constitutions in a similar manner to Arkansas, to question their legitimacy was a risky thing. The Secretary believed that Grant's message had been influenced by Arkansas Senators Stephen W. Dorsey and Powell Clayton and that their support of Brooks was due to Baxter's opposition to their railroad plans. Fish wrote: "I believe that there is a large steal in the Arkansas matter and fear that the President has been led into a grievous error".<sup>103</sup> Gillette refers to this, stating that prior to giving this message to Congress, the President, unbeknownst to his cabinet, had met with Clayton and Dorsey. He offers no evidence to support this claim however.<sup>104</sup>

On March 2, 1875, Grant's motion to recognise Brooks as the legitimate governor of Arkansas was defeated by a Republican controlled Congress with only two days left in its life. Henceforth the President would have to deal with a Democratic dominated House of Representatives.

Louisiana and Arkansas are both stories of indecision, flip-flopping and eventually, conviction. What differentiates them are the conditions that existed in each state. Intervention in Louisiana was warranted due to the widespread violence that was both

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<sup>101</sup> *ibid*

<sup>102</sup> DHF, Feb 11 & Feb 21, 1875

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>104</sup> Gillette, *Retreat from Reconstruction, 1869-1879*, p.147

politically and racially motivated. In Arkansas, the fighting that occurred was between two political factions and was not a murderous campaign perpetrated along racial lines. Whilst similar in many respects, both of these case studies offer their own unique dimension of the Southern policy of Ulysses S. Grant. As complicated and exhausting as events in Louisiana were, the question in regards to that state was simple: was Grant's Southern policy to be one that either protected the rights and lives of citizens in the South or abandoned them? In Arkansas the case evolved from trying to avoid entanglement to attempting to ward off a constitutional redemption of the South and protect one of the pillars of Reconstruction. The Democrat resurgence in that state was a watershed moment in Reconstruction history and presidential Southern policy. Was a Southern state able to overturn a constitution that had been a prerequisite for its re-admittance to the Union? If that was possible then the work of the Reconstruction Acts and the results of war stood in a very precarious position. To his detriment it took the President far too long to realise this.

## **Chapter 7: Republicanism by any Means**

The focus of this chapter is to assess policy choices made during the final years of the Grant presidency in the context of closing the work of Reconstruction, Republican fortunes and most importantly, the results of war. The case studies of Mississippi, Louisiana and South Carolina are revisited and an analysis of the significance of the 1876 presidential election on Southern policy is presented.

In order for Grant to protect the results of the Civil War, he would need to maintain the tools and conditions that were essential to their survival. However, a disinterest – tantamount to an abandonment of Reconstruction ideals – was increasingly commonplace in mid-1870s politics. The Enforcement Acts increasingly came under judicial scrutiny through court challenges to their constitutionality. In 1873, a federal court in Kentucky challenged the legality of certain clauses contained within the first act and in January 1875, as Grant was beseeching Congress to take decisive action in Louisiana, the case reached the Supreme Court.

The safeguarding of the President's enforcement powers was not helped by his bumbling approach to appointing Supreme Court Judges. Brooks D. Simpson chastises Grant for his lack of vision on court appointments at such a pivotal time. Despite Reconstruction and its ancillary statutes increasingly coming under attack, Grant never seemed to consider the Southern or racial policy of his court nominations. Eventually he was to find his man in Ohio politician and attorney Morrison R. Waite, someone whose views on the South were unknown and was confirmed by the Senate largely

due to their impatience. With no voice in the Supreme Court and with enforcement under scrutiny, Grant's occasional desperate pleas for justice were to fall on the deaf ears of the men he had appointed.<sup>1</sup>

The constitutional legality of the Enforcement Acts was initially challenged in two decisive decisions by the Supreme Court: *United States v. Reese* (1876) and *United States v. Cruikshank* (1876). The former referred to the aforementioned challenge by the Kentucky federal Court. The origins of the case were in the barring of black voters through methods such as poll tax. Officials involved in the political chicanery were indicted under the Enforcement Act but no judicial decision could be agreed on by the Kentucky Court. With that state body unable to deal with the issue, it fell to the Supreme Court to reach a decision; one that ultimately was to severely limit the applicability of the Enforcement Acts. Declaring that the Fifteenth Amendment only assured that the right to vote could not be denied on account of colour, tactics such as poll tax were not in violation of the amendment and did not warrant prosecution.<sup>2</sup> In *United States v. Cruikshank*, a similar decision had been made in an appeal by those indicted for the Colfax massacre. The dismantling of Reconstruction and the redemption of the South was now being achieved not only through violence and fraud, but also by way of successful legal challenges.

With the Supreme Court decisions arriving in 1876, the impact on Grant's Southern policy was limited. These decisions were far more significant for the Hayes presidency and would be the first steps in deconstructing the Enforcement Acts until their almost

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<sup>1</sup> Brooks D. Simpson, *The Reconstruction Presidents* (Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1998), p.183

<sup>2</sup> William Gillette, *Retreat From Reconstruction 1869 -1879* (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1979), pp. 295-296

complete removal in the early 1880s. However, these challenges were to contribute to a growing distaste for intervention and the kind of big government that the Grant administration had come to represent. Whilst never stripped of his enforcement powers, Grant was hesitant to use them as their constitutionality was increasingly questioned. One indication of this can be seen in Attorney General William's decision to delay certain prosecutions in the South once enforcement came under greater scrutiny.<sup>3</sup>

At the same time as enforcement was being successfully eroded, futile attempts were made to bestow additional civil rights on blacks. The product of these efforts requires consideration so as to appreciate the dead letter that Reconstruction was by 1875. It also reflects Grant's wavering support for legislation that would demand further intervention on the part of the Federal Government.

Notable for its limitations, the 1875 Civil Rights Act sought to eliminate racial discrimination in public areas such as transportation but made no effort to address it in schools. Simpson regards it as "an empty declaration of virtue, and not much of one at that".<sup>4</sup> With the congressional elections of 1874 acting as a referendum on the Republican Party, the Civil Rights Act was as weak as the lame ducks that had passed it. Despite its limitations, though, one should not discount the pejorative effect it had simply on principle. Gillette deems it "a catalyst that greatly hastened the reaction against reconstruction".<sup>5</sup> For Grant, who had delayed signing it until it was somewhat diluted, its effect was to erode some of the support he enjoyed from border state

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<sup>3</sup> Simpson, *The Reconstruction Presidents*, pp.182-183

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, p.181

<sup>5</sup> Gillette, *Retreat from Reconstruction, 1869-1879*, p.258

Republicans.<sup>6</sup> In total, as notable as the Civil Rights Act of 1875 might have been in hastening a reversal of Reconstruction, it played little on Grant's mind. When he signed it into effect on March 1, 1875, the President issued no statement or grand celebration of its achievements. Despite it being what Gillette argues as "superficially the most progressive federal law enacted during reconstruction", the lack of interest and the act's lack of teeth was a comment on the state of affairs and the support afforded to any racially focussed social or legal reform.<sup>7</sup> In comparison to Grant's championing and celebration of the Fifteenth Amendment, the Civil Rights Act of 1875 was not only ignored but actually derailed at times by the President. Was this because its potential was to be too specific and too precise as to what the Federal Government would have to enforce? Whilst the Fifteenth Amendment had made grand sweeping change, its broadness suited a President who would at times take comfort in the limitations of his power.

The Civil Rights Act (but not necessarily civil rights) was evidently of secondary importance to Grant's policy in the South. More pressing matters existed in the form of Democratic attempts to redeem Southern states. Whilst Louisiana occupied much of the President's time in this matter, its neighbour state, Mississippi, was also embroiled in its own series of vexing crises. Radicals within the state had seen their legitimate hold erode as economic issues exposed the party's inefficiency. Now fully recovered from the defeats of 1871 and 1872, the Democrats went about their usual method of violence to regain power and swept the polls in municipal elections in Vicksburg. In December 1874, Grant sent troops to Vicksburg to restore peace but

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<sup>6</sup> William B. Hesseltine, *Ulysses S. Grant, Politician* (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1957), p.357

<sup>7</sup> Gillette, *Retreat from Reconstruction, 1869-1879*, p.273

characteristically this has been no quick decision. The President had received numerous letters throughout the summer requesting or opposing federal intervention. Governor Adelbert Ames attributed Grant's refusal to send troops to his suspected desire for a third term.<sup>8</sup> Arguably, Grant's reluctance to intervene initially was warranted as at that time, only fraud was taking place, not violent outbreaks to which federal forces could be the only remedy.

But as history had already proven on a number of occasions, that inevitable outbreak of violence was to occur. On December 7, 1874, rioting took place resulting in the death of three hundred blacks and two whites.<sup>9</sup> Having had his previous requests denied, Governor Ames sent a new appeal to the President who, now in agreement, declared that Mississippi's authorities lacked the force to govern.<sup>10</sup> By January 1875 a temporary calm had been restored through the much delayed arrival of federal troops and a forced settlement on the Republicans side of the Vicksburg municipal election.

Grant's delay in dispatching troops resulted in the deaths in December and certainly had he been bolder in the summer, that tragedy would have been avoided. But like so many states, Ames' requests were a regular occurrence and if the President's policy had been to try and dispatch troops upon every claim of fraud, a dangerous precedent would have been set. To have supported Ames in his initial claims would have been to draw more criticism of his powers of enforcement, thus hastening an attack on all facets of federal intervention and the protection of civil rights in the South.

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid, p.150; Belknap to Henry T. Crosby, July 31, 1874, PUSG-XXV, p.159

<sup>9</sup> Gillette, *Retreat from Reconstruction, 1869-1879*, p. 151

<sup>10</sup> USG, Proclamation, Dec 21, 1874, PUSG-XXV, p.306 -307,

By September 1875, a situation of unrest still existed in Mississippi with the Democrat opposition even more determined by the President's earlier proclamation and use of federal troops.<sup>11</sup> Adopting the "Mississippi Plan", they sought to regain control of the state by any means just as long as it didn't invite federal intervention.<sup>12</sup> When their enthusiasm boiled over into a riot on September 4, Governor Ames again appealed to the President. It was at this moment that Grant chose to manage Southern affairs in a way that can be best described as an abandonment of his duty as president and his responsibility to protect the results of war. In referring the matter to newly appointed Attorney General Edwards Pierrepont, Grant was delegating Southern policy to his subordinate. In the case of Amos T. Akerman, this was not an issue for Reconstruction or the results of war owing to Akerman's own position on managing the South. With Pierrepont, though, his direction in the matter of Mississippi produced a far more conservative response.

History shows that at this time there was a battle for Grant's ear between Mississippi Governor Adelbert Ames and Attorney General Edwards Pierrepont, with the situation exacerbated by Grant vacationing in New Jersey during this crucial time. On September 8, Ames told the President: "[d]omestic violence prevails in various parts of the State beyond the power of the State authorities to suppress".<sup>13</sup> Pierrepont, by contrast, insisted that there was enough force in the state for peace to be restored.<sup>14</sup> The Governor continued to write to Pierrepont on the perilous situation for blacks in Mississippi and that he could not "escape the conscious discharge of...duty toward a

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<sup>11</sup> Simpson, *The Reconstruction Presidents*, p.185

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ames to USG, Sept 8, 1875, PUSG-XXVI, p.296

<sup>14</sup> Pierrepont to USG, Sept 12<sup>th</sup>, 1875, *ibid*, p.313-314



class of American citizens whose only offense consists of their color”.<sup>15</sup> It is unclear whether or not Grant was aware of these letters between Pierrepont and Ames. In one letter, the Attorney General presented a united front on the part of himself and the President frustratingly telling Ames, “[w]e cannot understand why you do not strengthen yourself in the way the President suggests...P strongly suggests that forces and the will of the Miss people defeat the rebellious element of the state”.<sup>16</sup> Whilst the policy of exhausting state forces before contemplating intervention was a common one for the President, it is doubtful if he would have worded his response in the way Pierrepont presented it.

As Ames and Pierrepont argued over the necessity of federal intervention, Grant was expressing his own frustration on the subject. On September 15, he wrote to Pierrepont on the problems of Mississippi – and intervention in the South in general – admitting that he was “somewhat perplexed” on the issue.<sup>17</sup> In Grant’s opinion, the great problem in executing an effective and just Southern policy appeared to be one of perception. He described the public as “being tired out with...annual, autumnal outbreaks in the South” but attributed the apathy to a distortion of the facts.<sup>18</sup> The President believed that “there is so much unwholesome lying done by the press and people in regard to the cause & extent of these breaches of the peace that the great majority are ready now to condemn any interference on the part of the government”.<sup>19</sup> From this statement one can infer that it was sensitivity to public opinion rather than his own conservatism that stood as the obstacle to an interventionist Southern policy.

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<sup>15</sup> Ames to Pierrepont, Sept 13<sup>th</sup>, 1875 *ibid*, p. 297

<sup>16</sup> Pierrepont to Ames, Sept 14<sup>th</sup>, 1875, *ibid*, p.314

<sup>17</sup> USG to Pierrepont, Sept 15<sup>th</sup>, 1875, *ibid*, p.313

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*

Historians have argued that this reference to the public's waning support reflected Grant's own tiring attitude. It is curious, then, that the subsequent comments on his frustration with the hypocrisy of the press are not as commonly cited. Grant admitted that he hoped for peace without use of proclamation but if it was to be, he would instruct his Commanders "to have no child's [sic] play" on the issue.<sup>20</sup> As a point of policy, the President told Pierrepont, "If there is a necessity for Military interference there is justice in such interference as to deter evil doers".<sup>21</sup> By stressing apathy on the part of the public but necessity of action on the part of the government, Grant's summation of the Southern issue was arguably that justice based on notions of morality and equality was being stifled.

Ironically, events show that some semblance of justice or order was actually to come in part from the timid but shrewd tactics of Pierrepont. The Attorney General had requested from Grant that their correspondence on the Mississippi dilemma be made public knowledge through publication in the press.<sup>22</sup> The pacifying result of this is evident in Ames's letter of September 30, reporting that the White Liners "[w]hose only policy is intimidation, are themselves somewhat intimidated"<sup>23</sup>. It should be noted that whilst Pierrepont sought a solution to the problem that would see no troop movement or dispatching of personnel, Grant was still open to some form of federal assistance. On September 27, the President ordered his Attorney General to find the

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid

<sup>21</sup> Ibid

<sup>22</sup> Pierrepont to USG, Sept 16, 1875, *ibid*, 1875,

<sup>23</sup> Ames to USG, Sept 30, 1875, *ibid*, p.314

funds to support a request from Ames for detectives to “penetrate the schemes and plots of the white-liners”.<sup>24</sup>

Despite some difference in policy between the President and his Attorney General, there was an underlying agreement between the two that federal intervention during election time was to be avoided. Despite this uniformity, the Attorney General still felt the need to misrepresent the President by selectively reiterating his instructions. Specifically, when informing Ames of Grant’s demand that things be settled without need for troops, he removed the President’s assurances of no child’s play if troops were required. Gillette suggests that that the Attorney General was able to edit Grant’s words and even publish these altered letters in the press without consequence because he was simply “taking advantage of Grant’s fatal ambiguity, which could be selectively used to support quite different courses of action”.<sup>25</sup> Most likely the President would have read these reports in the press. That there is no evidence of any repercussion for Pierrepont strongly implies an apathetic attitude on Grant’s part. As Gillette quite rightly states, “President Grant, apparently willing for his attorney general to make the decision, shunned further responsibility and acquiesced”<sup>26</sup>

With the President on vacation, Pierrepont continued to direct things, writing to Ames that to bring about a peaceful solution to the problem would “redound greatly to your credit throughout the entire North”.<sup>27</sup> With the Attorney General steering the Grant Administration’s Southern policy, the Democrat’s “Mississippi Plan” continued unchallenged with the result being the almost complete redemption of the state with

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<sup>24</sup> Ames to USG, Sept 25, 1875, *ibid*, p.335; USG to Pierrepont, Sept 27, 1875, *ibid*, p.335

<sup>25</sup> Gillette, *Retreat from Reconstruction, 1869-1879*, p.157

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>27</sup> Pierrepont to Ames, Oct 23, 1875, PUSG-XXVI, p.336

all but ten of the seventy-two counties in Mississippi going to them. The election was criticised by most Republicans, specifically African-American Senator from Mississippi, Blanche K. Bruce, who wrote that when national support was sought, the President, “from perhaps a scrupulous desire to avoid the appearance of interference...declined to accede to the request made for Federal troops”.<sup>28</sup> Following the redemption of Mississippi, Blanche concluded that “the colored citizens must no longer expect special legislation for their benefit, nor exceptional interference by the National Government for their protection”.<sup>29</sup>

Whereas Bruce was attributing Republican failure to the Mississippi Plan of the Democrats, his colleague Hiram R. Revels presented to Grant his own treatise on events. The Senator stated that the Ames government was defeated by its own supporters: “the dishonest course which has been pursued has forced into silence and retirement nearly all of the leading republicans who organized and have heretofore led the party to victory”.<sup>30</sup> Let down by carpetbagger politicians, Blacks in Mississippi had “determined, by casting their ballots against these unprincipled adventurers, to overthrow them”.<sup>31</sup> Revels’ assumption was that Republican voters of both races abstained from supporting the incumbent state government so as to almost cleanse the Republican Party in preparation for the 1876 presidential election.

Whilst arguments over Grant’s ambition at this stage for a third term are largely baseless, a preoccupation with the presidency did heavily influence policy in Mississippi. Much of his hesitation to intervene was determined by the likely impact

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<sup>28</sup> Blanch K. Bruce, March 31, 1876, *ibid*, pp.319-320

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>30</sup> Hiram R. Revels to USG, Nov 6, 1875, PUSG-XXVI, p.319-320

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*

it would have on Republican electoral chances in Ohio. With Republicans fearing that the loss of the Buckeye state would mean the loss of the White House the following year, the tremors felt by federal intervention in the South had to be lessened, if not avoided entirely. Earlier in the year and in similar circumstances, Grant had taken action in Louisiana. During the height of Mississippi's crisis and as Ohioans went to the polls, the President took no similar steps.

Ohio was to be a crucial state in the 1876 contest, something Governor Ames knew too well, writing his wife: "I was sacrificed last fall that Mr. Hayes might be made Gov[ernor] of Ohio".<sup>32</sup> On reflection, Grant admitted to a mistake at this pivotal time, stating, "I believed at the time that I was making a grave mistake. But as presented, it was duty on one side and party obligation on the other".<sup>33</sup> From this comment one can infer that Grant saw his duty as being at odds with his party. But what duty was he specifically referring to? If the Republican Party's interests had been to sacrifice Mississippi for Ohio, Grant's "duty" must have referred to the other option available at the time: intervention, the protection of state Republicans and the upholding of civil rights. The latter is consistent with much of Grant's rhetoric further confirming that Southern policy, at least as a philosophy, was largely consistent. Grant seems to have not wavered from his belief that the Democrat Party was still a threat to the Union and the results of war needed safeguarding.

Despite his comments after the fact and his regret as to how he kowtowed to Party interests, there is no evidence, at the time, of a crisis of conscience or even much of a

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<sup>32</sup> Adelbert Ames to Blanche K. Bruce, Sep 19, 1876, cited in Gillette, *Retreat from Reconstruction, 1869-1879*, p.400

<sup>33</sup> Simpson, *The Reconstruction Presidents*, p.188

debate on the issue. It appears that Grant was comfortable to advise Pierrepont and then let him manage affairs entirely, even allowing him to misrepresent his words. He was able, though, to admit fault some years later. In a comment that again refers to his personal sense of duty being at odds with his professional responsibility, he admitted, “[i]f a mistake was made, it was one of the head and not of the heart”.<sup>34</sup> If he could have saved Mississippi, “convinced that it would have resulted in the loss of Ohio to the Republicans” he would have.<sup>35</sup> During the crisis the President evidently was convinced that Mississippi was a lost cause despite having effected change in somewhat similar circumstances in South Carolina. In referring to Ames’ regular requests for troops and his failure to clearly exhaust his own powers, Simpson concludes that by this late stage, Grant had “lost interest in helping southern Republicans who did not help themselves, especially when to do so might cost the party votes in the North”.<sup>36</sup>

An evaluation of presidential Southern policy in Mississippi should not discount the draining effect of Louisiana. The politics in that state had become increasingly perplexing with Grant unable to form a solution or at the least extradite himself from the troubles. With circumstances in Mississippi increasingly paralleling those of Louisiana, it is no surprise, then, that the President wished to avoid further entanglements.

If by the mid-1870s Grant wanted to relieve himself of the responsibility of being the determinant of local politics, further supporting evidence can be found in his policy

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<sup>34</sup> Simpson, *The Reconstruction Presidents*, p.188

<sup>35</sup> Ibid

<sup>36</sup> Ibid

towards the South's most violent state, South Carolina. State Republicans had long enjoyed a hands-on relationship with the Grant administration though the work of former Attorney General Amos T. Akerman and most notably the suspension of the writ of habeas corpus in October 1871. But whilst the administration had dealt decisively with intimidation and violence, the President disdained state Republicans, describing them as "that corrupt crew" and demanding during the 1874 elections that they "stop the robbery".<sup>37</sup> With such contempt, Grant would have welcomed the success of reform candidate Daniel H. Chamberlain in the gubernatorial contest of that year.<sup>38</sup> Unfortunately the moderate Governor did not solve the Party's factionalism or adequately challenge a resurgent Democrat Party defined by colour-line politics and violence.

On July 12, 1876, Governor Chamberlain reported to Secretary of War James Donald Cameron of the murder in Hamburg of one white and eight blacks after the militia asked a gang of white men to turn over their arms.<sup>39</sup> Chamberlain attributed the incident to the fact that the militia was comprised of black Republicans; "[t]he lines of race and political party were the lines which marked the respective parties to the affair" he wrote.<sup>40</sup> He went further, informing the President that whilst blacks and Republicans were running scared, amongst the Democrats there was a "feeling of triumph and political elation".<sup>41</sup> Fearing another season of villainy, Chamberlain asked Grant: "will the general government exert itself vigorously to repress violence in this State during the present campaign...whenever that violence shall be beyond the

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid, p.170

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, p.170

<sup>39</sup> Daniel H. Chamberlain to Sec of War James D. Cameron, July 12, 1876, PUSG-XXVII, pp.202-203

<sup>40</sup> Chamberlain to USG, July 22, 1876, *ibid*, p.200-202

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid*

control of the State Authorities?”<sup>42</sup> Labelling the incident “cruel, bloodthirsty, wanton, unprovoked”, the President took time in his correspondence with Chamberlain to vent his frustration on Southern affairs. He described South Carolina as “governed to day by officials chosen through fraud and violence, such as would scarcely be accredited to savages”.<sup>43</sup> Referring again to the misrepresentation of affairs, Grant reminded Chamberlain, “[t]here has never been a desire on the part of the North to humiliate the South – nothing is claimed for one State that is not freely accorded to all the others, unless it may be the right to kill negroes and republicans without the fear of punishment, and without loss of caste or reputation”.<sup>44</sup> Referring to the massacre that occurred in Hamburg, the President believed that only the “Great Ruler of the Universe” knew when such atrocities would end. To the Governor’s request for help, the President wrote simply “I subscribe myself”, concerned that “[t]oo long denial of guaranteed rights is sure to lead to revolution, bloody revolution”.<sup>45</sup>

Grant submitted to Congress all communication regarding the Hamburg massacre describing it as “the late disgraceful and brutal slaughter of unoffending men” but choosing not to elaborate on events, rather simply stating: “[m]y letter to Governor Chamberlain contains all the comments I wish to make on the subject”.<sup>46</sup> The President’s short discussion of this matter was either indicative of a confidence in the evidence or a sense of futility on the issue. He did, though, choose at this moment to make a statement regarding Southern atrocities: “murders & massacres of innocent men, for opinions sake, or on account of color, have been of too recent date and of too

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid

<sup>43</sup> USG to Chamberlain , July 26, 1876, *ibid*, pp.199-200

<sup>44</sup> Ibid

<sup>45</sup> Ibid

<sup>46</sup> USG to the Senate of the United States, July 31, 1876, *ibid*, pp.230-232



frequent occurrence to require recapitulation or testimony here. All are familiar with their horrible details, the [only] wonder being that so many justify them or apologize [for] them”.<sup>47</sup> What Grant was essentially saying was that knowledge of violence was as widespread as the apathy that greeted it.<sup>48</sup>

Despite his denunciatory tone, the President seems to have only moved on South Carolina when he felt completely comfortable, most likely hoping that Congress would take lead on the issue. On October 17, Grant issued the tried and tested proclamation threatening federal intervention under the guarantee clause in the Constitution if the insurrectionary groups did not disperse within 3 days.<sup>49</sup> The effect was notable with one South Carolinian commenting that Republicans in the state were now able to hold meetings without being disturbed.<sup>50</sup>

The proclamation of October 1876 was to be one of Grant’s last acts towards the South before being entangled in the presidential election controversy. Throughout his presidency, Southern policy was predominantly dictated by how it would affect the Republican Party on a national level. With the South once again the deciding factor in the presidential election of 1876, Grant’s Southern policy was to play a key part in determining the future of the country. He assisted the Republican Party in a tactic that would prioritise success on a national level over the support for friendly regimes in the South. Grant had spoken of being torn between duty and party obligation. Whilst the compromise of 1876 might be the eighteenth century’s most notable example of

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid

<sup>48</sup> Ibid

<sup>49</sup> USG, Proclamation, Oct 17, 1876, *ibid*, pp.329-330; Simpson, *The Reconstruction Presidents*, p.191

<sup>50</sup> S.C. Attorney General William Stone to Attorney General Taft, Oct 21, 1876, PUSG-XXVII, p.334

playing party politics, in actuality, for Grant, its consequence reflected greatly on his responsibility for protecting the results of war.

In September 1876, General Sheridan discussed the forthcoming presidential election with Grant, telling him that with Congress now dominated by Democrats, the possibility of a fair return from Louisiana was all but non-existent.<sup>51</sup> The issue of reliability was not confined to that state, though, with the election returns being questioned across the South. Once the votes had been counted for the presidency, Democrat hopeful Samuel J. Tilden held the popular vote over Republican Rutherford B. Hayes, but the electoral vote of South Carolina, Florida, Oregon and Louisiana were disputed. As lawyers from both parties headed South to fight over the results, Grant hoped that “fair men” of both sides would help settle the dispute.<sup>52</sup>

As recounts took place, the President wrote to Sherman on the need to maintain order and reliability. “No man”, he wrote, would be worthy of the office of President should he be “placed there by any fraud”.<sup>53</sup> Evidently Grant was willing to see his party lose the White House, telling Sherman, “[e]ither party can afford to be disappointed on the result but the Country cannot afford to have the result tainted by the suspicion of illegal or false returns”.<sup>54</sup> As fair and balanced as he wished to be, Grant still dispatched those he trusted to Louisiana to assist in the recount, including Senator John Sherman.<sup>55</sup> It should be noted also that Grant’s inherent distrust of Democrats still endured. A week before he sent men South, the President had opposed the endorsement of a political

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<sup>51</sup> Sheridan to USG, Sept 15, 1876, *ibid*, p.298

<sup>52</sup> USG to Sherman, Nov 10, 1876, *ibid*, p.17

<sup>53</sup> USG to Sherman, Nov 10, 1876, *ibid*, p.19-20

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>55</sup> USG to James A. Garfield, USG to John A. Logan, USG to John Sherman, *ibid*, pp.30-38

appointment purely on the basis that the gentleman in question was a Democrat; “[t]his at least can not [sic] be allowed”, he stated.<sup>56</sup>

During the electoral crisis, Grant concentrated his attention on the two disputed states that he was most familiar with: Louisiana and South Carolina. Both states saw electoral fraud and voter intimidation. In Louisiana, Republican Stephen B Packard (part of the Kellogg faction) had claimed victory over Democrat Francis T. Nicholls in the gubernatorial election. In South Carolina, Chamberlain was claiming similar success against Democrat Wade Hampton. Grant dealt with South Carolina by maintaining strict neutrality so as to not invite accusations of imposing a result. Grant had spent eight years dealing with questionable governments in the South whose lack of legitimacy eroded their image and that of the Republican Party at large. Grant’s last point of policy on the South was essentially to try and facilitate the most accurate and honest set of election results the region had seen since before the war. He believed Chamberlain to be the legally elected Governor of South Carolina but wanted a clinical use of the army so as to not lean towards either side.

On November 30, Grant discussed the electoral controversy with Secretary of War Cameron who called it “war and Revolution”.<sup>57</sup> Wishing to avoid the kinds of provocative language he was certainly guilty of at times, the President responded: “no! no! it is no such thing”.<sup>58</sup> The two had been discussing Chamberlain’s request that illegitimate members of the state legislature be removed. Just as he had in Mississippi,

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<sup>56</sup> USG, Endorsement, *ibid*, p.6

<sup>57</sup> DHF, Nov 30, 1876

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid*

Grant reinforced the rule that “United States troops can only be used for the suppression of domestic violence”.<sup>59</sup>

Grant has been criticised in his handling of South Carolina with claims that he shamefully abandoned Chamberlain. His decision to leave the Governor and state forces to manage affairs, and his instruction to his General stationed there that it was not his “duty to purge the Legislature”, allowed South Carolina to take its natural but albeit unfortunate course.<sup>60</sup> He suggested that a statement be issued saying: “the President does not think that the exigency of the case is such as to call for any affirmative action on his part”.<sup>61</sup>

This excuse merely highlighted Grant’s culpability, though, as his previous lack of “affirmative action” had in large part led to the great dispute of 1876. Despite proclamations, and the occasional dispatching of troops, there had been no great success in addressing the regular autumnal outbreaks and supporting Republican governments in the South. As much as this failure was Grant’s own, often the limitations of office and the behaviour of the disputed parties themselves were to blame. That Grant lacked faith in either party in South Carolina is evident when he ordered that the army was to not support either “pretended house”.<sup>62</sup> The President’s neutral stance was perhaps helped by the fact that both sides called for assistance. Just as Chamberlain had sought help in removing Democrats from the State Legislature,

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<sup>59</sup> DHF, Dec 1, 1876

<sup>60</sup> USG to Col. Thomas H. Ruger, *ibid*, p.58

<sup>61</sup> DHF, Dec 1, 1876

<sup>62</sup> DHF, Dec 4, 1876

his rival Wade Hampton was making his own request for protection from Chamberlain's out of state "roughs".<sup>63</sup>

Grant's Southern policy had a tendency to change course usually due to a realisation of the impact of his action or inaction. During the electoral crisis, however, it became immovable. When dealing with Louisiana and South Carolina, the President neither deterred nor supported either side choosing to put aside his own beliefs. In private, however, the evidence shows that he watched the results closely with a clear interest in the result. To Colonel Thomas Ruger in South Carolina he asked, "[i]s an effort being made to deprive the electors holding certificates of election from casting their votes?"<sup>64</sup> Two days later the President issued a memorandum stating that the (quoted verbatim) "democratic plan proposes a compromise which recognizes no chance for the republican Party to remain in control no matter what the result. The republican plan proposes to determine the actual result of the election and to give the victors the benefit of success".<sup>65</sup> Rhetoric like this was common in Grant's correspondence but it did have some substance this time as he instructed Ruger to "not recognize in any manner any person as Governor of South Carolina other than D.H. Chamberlain until you hear from me".<sup>66</sup>

As the electoral crisis continued well in to the new year, South Carolina's Republicans heard nothing from Grant as the President evidently believed by this juncture that "the whole army of the United States would be inadequate to enforce the authority of

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid

<sup>64</sup> USG to Colonel Ruger, Dec 4, 1876, *ibid*, p.60

<sup>65</sup> USG, Memorandum, Dec 6<sup>th</sup>, 1876, *ibid*, p.82-84

<sup>66</sup> USG to Colonel Ruger, Dec 7<sup>th</sup>, 1876, *ibid*, p.84

Governor Chamberlain”.<sup>67</sup> Concerned that any act on his part to buttress the authority of South Carolina’s Republicans would merely delay the resolution of the presidential dispute, Grant settled to do nothing. A similar tactic followed in Louisiana where both sides resorted to the state tradition of organising rival legislatures. With Republicans and Democrats awaiting the President’s decision, Grant’s policy was to give no order or recommendation, just as he had with South Carolina. In both of these cases, inaction on the part of the Executive meant no fuel for the flames being stoked by Democrats in Congress who were filibustering so as to delay an unfavourable result for the presidency.

During the four long months of controversy, Grant’s disappointment not only in the affairs of Southerners, but more importantly in his own handling of things, was increasingly evident. In conversation with Hamilton Fish on January 17, 1877, Grant spoke of being “disturbed by the Louisiana difficulty and the importunities, of what he called, ‘some of the rabid Republicans’ to induce him to take extreme measures”.<sup>68</sup> Grant specifically named Senator John Sherman as one of those “rabid” men who were trying to convince him to take extreme actions. He stated that the men in Louisiana that Sherman and his like were supporting were only there for power. More significant was that Grant declared himself now opposed to the Fifteenth Amendment, frustrated that “it had done the negro no good, and had been a hindrance to the South, and by no means a political advantage to the North”.<sup>69</sup> It seems that after eight long years, Grant had concluded that the enfranchisement of blacks had given the Republican Party no actual political advantage in the South. The destructive consequences of trying to

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<sup>67</sup> New York Tribune, Feb 19, 1877, *ibid*, p.88

<sup>68</sup> DHF, Jan 17, 1877

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid*

impose Republicanism on the South were all too evident in the congressional elections of 1874 and the presidential contest of 1876. It was also during this conversation that Grant informed Fish of a bargain being offered by the Nicholls government in Louisiana to recognise Hayes as President at the cost of the Packard regime. Fish noted that the President “expressed great anxiety for the solution of this question, and for relief from the pressure brought to bear on him”<sup>70</sup>

The disappointment Grant expressed to Fish was not kept within the cabinet. In his final annual message, the President spoke of his misfortune at becoming President, the mistakes he made, and the inappropriateness of his appointments. Like the historians that would seek to defend his shortcomings, Grant emphasised the “most critical and difficult time” of his election, taking office so shortly after the Civil War and at a time when the country was still so divided.<sup>71</sup> On Reconstruction, he wrote of the embarrassment of the delay caused by the struggle between Congress and Johnson and his wholehearted support for the programme once in office. Like often before, he offered a simple summation of the issue:

The intervening time to my first inauguration was filled up with wranglings [sic] between Congress and the new Executive as to the best mode of "reconstruction," or, to speak plainly, as to whether the control of the Government should be thrown immediately into the hands of those who had so recently and persistently tried to destroy it, or whether the victors should continue to have an equal voice with them in this control.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> DHF, Jan 17, 1877

<sup>71</sup> The American Presidency Project. Ulysses S. Grant Eight Annual Message [Internet]. 1999-2014. [Accessed 29 July 2014]; Available from <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=29517>

<sup>72</sup> Ibid

On January 22, 1877, Grant provided all communication regarding the disputed states of South Carolina, Louisiana and Florida to the House of Representatives. As usual, he chose this moment to set the record straight on certain aspects of Southern affairs. He described the use of federal troops as limited and in “no case so as to interfere with the free exercise of the right of suffrage”.<sup>73</sup> No troops were present at voting places; only in areas where violence was to be expected. Grant defended this limited action by arguing that “[s]uch a disposition of the troops seemed to me reasonable and justified by law and precedent, while its omission would have been inconsistent with the constitutional duty of the President of the United States”.<sup>74</sup>

In this defence, Grant also suggested that, if anything, he had lent on the side of restraint and that had there been *more* military force, the confusion over the presidency would not exist. With a greater military presence across the South, he believed: “it would have been my duty to have disposed of it in several States with a view to the prevention of the violence and intimidation which have undoubtedly contributed to the defeat of the election law in ...South Carolina, Louisiana, and Florida”.<sup>75</sup> It would seem that regardless of his faith in Southern politics, Grant was still in support of military intervention. This soldierly approach could guarantee safety for citizens and in theory allow for a free exercise of the ballot. His failing, though, was that to have been truly effective, soldiers needed to have been stationed at the polls continually. But as Grant knew, this would have implied a Union Army policing the polls purely in Republican interests.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> UGS to House of Representatives, Jan 22, 1877, PUSG-XXVIII, pp.123-128

<sup>74</sup> Ibid

<sup>75</sup> Ibid

<sup>76</sup> Ibid



Seeking to further justify to the House what limited action had taken place, Grant referred to Article 4, Section 4 of the Constitution and asserted that to deny assistance to Southern governments when under attack, would be tantamount to an abandonment of his duty as President. He reminded the House of earlier instances of government federal intervention, tellingly referring to seizures of runaway slaves and the John Brown suppression as his examples.<sup>77</sup> The choice of these examples undoubtedly intended to highlight the hypocrisy of the situation; if the government had used force for those ends how then could the House criticise his use of troops to protect lives? From these statements Grant once again appeared to favour a policy where federal intervention was warranted in all cases of severe public disorder. His great failing, though, was that he was only too quick to deny troops should their use have the faintest partisan purpose.

In his comments to the House of Representatives in January of 1877, Grant had provided a philosophical and factual defence of a Southern policy that argued for the necessity of federal intervention. Nevertheless, by this late stage he was becoming increasingly uncomfortable with supporting Republican regimes in the South. Hamilton Fish describes the President's distaste at the "importunity with which they were pressing him to recognize the Packard Government".<sup>78</sup> Fish provides a revealing insight at this time into Grant's moral dilemma in engineering a Hayes victory. Despite believing that the returning board in Louisiana "had in its whole history been tainted with suspicion, if not with actual fraud", he felt obliged to recognise Packard as

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid

<sup>78</sup> DHF, Jan 27, 1877

governor as the recount had returned to him a majority.<sup>79</sup> Also, if it had not been “injurious to the Republican Party, and to the ultimate success of Gov Hayes”, he would have felt safe in recognising either the Packard Republicans or the Nichol’s Democrats so as to settle the latest state contest.<sup>80</sup> A free hand therefore would not have necessarily meant support for local Republicans with Grant of the opinion that perhaps what was best for the state was for the Nichols Government to be in power.<sup>81</sup>

These vacillating conversations with Fish are evidence of both Grant’s crisis of conscience and tiring commitment. He ranted that he had “been importuned, in season, and out of season, to an extent which was indelicate if not indecent”.<sup>82</sup> His discussions with Fish also illustrate how after two terms as President, Grant had come to represent those “trading politicians” he had found umbrage with in 1868. The trade however was for some semblance of Republicanism in Government and ultimately the best chance for the results of war. Had Congress, the South and the presidency gone to the Democrats, there was no doubt in Grant’s mind that every single achievement of the Civil War and Reconstruction would have been largely lost.

In the final months of his presidency, Grant’s Southern policy was entirely dictated by the national agenda. He continued to stall on recognising Packard in Louisiana, being advised to defer that matter to his successor, “otherwise he might be imposing on Gov Hayes a policy adverse to his own views, and thus embarrass and jeopard [sic] the success of the Administration for the next 4 years”.<sup>83</sup> To enable him to be excused

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid

<sup>80</sup> Ibid

<sup>81</sup> Ibid

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> DHF, Feb 19, 1877

from that responsibility, on January 29, 1877, Grant approved the act to create the electoral commission that would decide the presidency.<sup>84</sup> This would address his concerns that without some kind of validity, Hayes would be “crippled in power”.<sup>85</sup> In conversation with Hamilton Fish, Grant considered the possibility of the election going in favour of the Democrats: “if Tilden were elected he would be unable to satisfy the expectations of the South” being unable and unwilling to commit troops to ensure the collection of internal revenue.<sup>86</sup> Already concerned with this issue, Grant stated, “the Whiskey Distillers are running their Stills, paying no tax, and that the running down of receipts, has been very great”.<sup>87</sup> He did suggest a silver lining in this eventuality, however. With Tilden unable to collect taxes and reduce the debt, “four years of his administration will satisfy the country with the Democrats and make a better chance for the Republicans coming into power”.<sup>88</sup>

If Grant had decided to impose a settlement in Louisiana for Hayes to inherit, it would have been one that recognised the Packard regime as the legitimate state government. He had resisted pressure to recognise them at the time and thought them underserving in their claim to victory. But once out of office, he admitted to his son Jesse, “[i]f I had been in Mr Hayes’s place, I would have insisted upon the Republican Governor being seated, or I would have refused to accept the electoral vote of Louisiana”.<sup>89</sup> There is some evidence to support this. On January 14, 1877, Grant told Brigadier General Ruger that “[s]hould there be a necessity for the recognition of either it must

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<sup>84</sup> USG to the Senate of the United States, Jan 29, 1877, PUSG-XXVIII, p.143-145

<sup>85</sup> DHF, Jan 17, 1877

<sup>86</sup> Ibid

<sup>87</sup> Ibid

<sup>88</sup> Ibid

<sup>89</sup> Jesse R. Grant, in collaboration with Henry Francis Granger, *In the days of my father* (New York and London: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1925), p.205,

be Packard”.<sup>90</sup> Grant clearly had an opinion but no desire to let it dictate his response to the political turmoil.

With the Electoral Commission going about its work and with three weeks left in the White House, Grant wrote his Attorney General: “[a]lthough so short a time it appears to me interminable, my anxiety to be free from care is so great”.<sup>91</sup> That freedom was to come on March 2, 1877 when the Electoral Commission ruled in favour of Rutherford B. Hayes. The deadlock was broken with the Republicans in Washington promising to withdraw troops from the South if the Democrats recognised Hayes as the victor in the presidency. Grant’s role in this compromise had been merely to enable the conditions for it to happen. The Electoral commission had provided the neutral body with which to settle the controversy and the President avoided obstructing its work by essentially ignoring the pleas from Louisiana and South Carolina. To support these Republican regimes was to hand the presidency to Hayes with the stench of corruption surrounding it.

In the end, Ulysses S. Grant’s very last act towards the South was to help usher in the return to small government by ordering the withdrawal of troops from the troubled state of Louisiana. On March 3, 1877, he wrote to Secretary of War Cameron telling him to “let the two Governors work out their own precedence for Executive recognition in the same manner as any Northern state would have to do under like circumstances”.<sup>92</sup> With the election of Hayes would come a new approach and Grant seemed to be initiating that policy by removing any special consideration to a state,

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<sup>90</sup> USG to Brig. Gen. Christopher C. Ruger, Jan 14, 1877, PUSG-XVIII, p.114

<sup>91</sup> USG to Edwards Pierrepont, Feb 11, 1877, *ibid*, pp.158-159

<sup>92</sup> USG to James D. Cameron, March 3, 1877, *ibid*, pp.164-165

simply because it was from the South. He considered Reconstruction at an end as there was no need for a difference in policy when dealing with Southern states. It mattered not that many of those involved in the disputes in Louisiana and South Carolina were the same men who instigated and perpetrated violence. At the beginning of his presidency Ulysses S. Grant wanted to close the most visible wounds of the civil war. By 1877 he chose simply to ignore them in what Michael W. Fitzgerald quite rightly states as “a revealing decision for a leader so identified with civil rights enforcement”.<sup>93</sup>

Brooks D. Simpson offers a more favourable assessment to the end of Grant’s presidency, stating that he “could leave office satisfied that at least he made sure that the determination of the election of 1876 had not followed the course of events over the past years in several southern states”.<sup>94</sup> Offering a broader conclusion, Gillette considers the crisis and its solution “insignificant and, in many ways, expected – perhaps even inevitable”.<sup>95</sup> The history of Reconstruction had foretold these events and the manner in which they were to be settled. The compromise both parties and the President had been complicit in where publically sought and “were but another symptom of the dislocation of American politics brought about by rebellion and reconstruction”.<sup>96</sup> Calhoun looks to the lessons that Grant would have learnt, concluding: “[t]he hero of Appomattox, who had begun his administration with

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<sup>93</sup> Michael W. Fitzgerald, *Splendid Failure: Postwar Reconstruction in the American South* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2007), p.207

<sup>94</sup> Simpson, *The Reconstruction Presidents*, p.196

<sup>95</sup> Gillette, *Retreat from Reconstruction, 1869-1879*, p.334

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid*

perhaps an inflated perception of what lay within a president's power, now fully recognized the political limits of the possible in the American republic".<sup>97</sup>

A month after leaving the White House, Grant was interviewed by the *St. Louis Globe-Democrat* where he discussed his memoirs, civil service reform and the South. Speaking candidly on the Southern question, Grant acknowledged the illegitimacy of some Republican regimes in the South. Asked by the reporter whether or not Hayes would completely withdraw troops, Grant thought it a certainty. He believed, though, that if *he* was still in office, he would have ordered a reduction in federal force, not a complete withdrawal. Despite this willingness to use troops, he concluded: "in this free country, and so long after quiet has been restored everywhere else, the exercise of military authority in civil matters is repugnant to the people, and so, when the troops are gone, the Nicholls [Louisiana] and Hampton [South Carolina] Governments will rule as matter of acquiescence on the part of the people of those two states".<sup>98</sup>

In the same interview, when questioned on why Louisiana and South Carolina still remained troublesome after so much time, Grant did not speak of the Klan, White Leaguers or of the political inadequacies of the parties. He believed that peace now existed in states like Georgia because they were productive and labouring: "Northern skilled labor and capital are invited in...Labor is respected, and all goes right. Make labor respected in Louisiana and South Carolina, and the political field will soon be clear of trouble".<sup>99</sup> This statement reprises much of the argument for the annexation of San Domingo as he still believed that the long-term solution to inequality in the

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<sup>97</sup> Charles W. Calhoun, *Conceiving a New Republic: The Republican Party and the Southern Question, 1869-1900* (Kansas, University Press of Kansas, 2006), p.136.

<sup>98</sup> USG, Interview in *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, April 2, 1877, PUSG-XXVIII, pp.183-184

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid*

South was for the white population to recognise the economic worth of their free black co-inhabitants.

From this interview, Grant evidently supported President Hayes' policy to remove the "color line" from American politics.<sup>100</sup> He had attempted that himself, notably in his effort to see the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments ratified and the questions over equality removed from the national agenda. Commenting on the future of the Republican Party, Grant thought it best to "[b]reak up the distinction of color, so that a party is not composed of all whites or all colored people".<sup>101</sup> It is unknown as to what Grant thought of Hayes' Southern policy when it did not yield results for the Republican Party. By 1880, Hayes' plan to create a healthy Republican Party in the South through compromise, conciliation and realignment had failed. Grant's attempt at a third term did not put him directly at odds with Hayes but it did generate support for a return to what was Calhoun considers a "more aggressive southern policy".<sup>102</sup>

Further reflection on the South can be found in the letters between Grant and Commodore Daniel Ammen sent during the retired President's tour of the world. In one notable exchange, Grant discussed the great railroad strike of 1877 and the necessity that such industrious action be put down immediately. He referred back to his own experience of applying federal power to settle insurrectionary behaviour but wondered why "when they [federal troops] were called upon to protect the lives of negroes – as much citizens under the Constitution as if their skins were white – the country was scarcely large enough to hold the sound of indignation belched forth by

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<sup>100</sup> See conclusion for outline of Hayes policy

<sup>101</sup> USG, Interview in *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, April 2, 1877, PUSG-XXVIII, pp.183-184

<sup>102</sup> Calhoun, *Conceiving a New Republic The Republican Party and the Southern Question, 1869-1900*, p.169.

them for some years”.<sup>103</sup> His comments echoed those he made to the House of Representatives comparing his intervention to protect lives with previous efforts to capture runaway slaves. Disappointed in the hypocrisy of public reaction he concluded: “[i]t does seem the rule should work both ways”<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> USG to Commodore Daniel Ammen, Aug 26, 1877, PUSG-XXVIII, pp.251-252

<sup>104</sup> Ibid



## Conclusion

In retirement, Grant felt frustrated as to how his actions as President had been disapproved of and attacked his critics on the basis that he was acting in defence of the natural rights of American citizens. Throughout his presidency he thought it necessary to remind Congressmen, the press and the American public of the injustices down South, often to expose what he felt was a double standard. The question, therefore, is if Grant had a political and racial philosophy on how the South should be managed, one needs to consider whether or not his actions and the outcomes they produced were at variance with it. In the conclusion of this thesis, an attempt to define Grant's Southern policy will be achieved through a reflection on those key policy choices relating to the South, race, Reconstruction and the legacy of the Civil War. A great conflict exists between the words and actions of Ulysses S. Grant. In total, how do the collected comments, policy choices, and tangible achievements of the Grant presidency help define his Southern Policy?

To answer this question, one must consider it in the context of what followed Grant after his exit from the White House. Brooks D. Simpson presents the Hayes presidency as not the end of Reconstruction but rather "an opportunity to implement a new southern policy".<sup>105</sup> Whereas Grant seemingly had never settled on a policy, Hayes "committed himself to conciliating white southerners to entice them to join the Republican Party".<sup>106</sup> Grant's Southern policy was in many ways one that only sought to manage the South, not actually work towards some long term goal. Charles W.

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<sup>105</sup> Brooks D. Simpson, *The Reconstruction Presidents* (Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1998), p.199

<sup>106</sup> Ibid

Calhoun's asserts that "whereas Grant had witnessed the erosion of Republican power in the South under circumstances over which he had little control, Hayes sought to take hold of circumstances and direct them to his own ends, for the good of his party and of the country".<sup>107</sup> In the end, this political stratagem proved costly as any attempt at removing the colour line in Southern politics and conciliate local white interests would result in political and social segregation for blacks. Michael W. Fitzgerald excuses Hayes arguing that he "did not consciously betray black rights; he instead indulged in an optimistic scenario to ease retreat from an impossible situation".<sup>108</sup> Regardless of Hayes' policy, few scholars would disagree with Charles W. Calhoun's statement that the presidential election of 1876 "marked the effective abandonment of Reconstruction".<sup>109</sup>

Despite the difference in approach, Hayes and Grant were not so far removed; both accepted that blacks were equal, but not immediately qualified to vote. Despite these conservative ideals, Simpson argues that Hayes' vision for black Americans was "far broader...than that possessed by many of his fellow white Americans".<sup>110</sup> As Governor of Ohio in the late 1860s, Hayes attempted to enfranchise black males and when time came to ratify the Fifteenth Amendment, he was a diligent campaigner for it. Calhoun suggests that his commitment to Reconstruction actually ran deeper than his predecessor's, referring specifically to Grant's comments of January 1877 that the Fifteenth Amendment had brought no benefit to blacks in the South or the Republican

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<sup>107</sup> Charles W. Calhoun, *Conceiving a New Republic: The Republican Party and the Southern Question, 1869-1900* (Kansas, University Press of Kansas, 2006), p.148

<sup>108</sup> Michael W. Fitzgerald, *Splendid Failure: Postwar Reconstruction in the American South* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2007), p.207

<sup>109</sup> Calhoun, *Conceiving a New Republic: The Republican Party and the Southern Question, 1869-1900*, p.137

<sup>110</sup> Simpson, *The Reconstruction Presidents*, p.200

Party.<sup>111</sup> Calhoun's argument is somewhat overly simplified as taken as a whole statement, Grant's regret is more about the failure of the measure rather than opposition to what it sought to accomplish. Following ratification of the amendment, Hayes spoke of "[a]n era of good feeling" and a need to move on from Reconstruction.<sup>112</sup> On intervention in the South, he supported a "let-alone policy" in the face of the "ultra measures" employed by President Grant.<sup>113</sup> Simpson notes that Hayes' success in retaining the governorship of Ohio in 1875 owed itself to Grant's restraint in dealing with Mississippi.<sup>114</sup> This was a lesson learnt in how "support for black ballots cost Republicans more support than they stood to gain".<sup>115</sup>

As a candidate for the presidency, Hayes spoke of peace and conciliation to the interests of white Southerners but his attempts at slogan-writing mimicked Grant's rhetoric. In his diary he drafted such vote-getters as, "[a]re you for the Nation, or are you for the Rebels?...Should we give the Government to the men who tried to destroy it?".<sup>116</sup> Simpson notes that such tactics were for the benefit of Northern votes, not in the interest of securing the South. As a reflection of an actual concern for blacks in the South, though, when Tilden looked certain to take the White House, Hayes wrote: "the colored man's fate will be worse than when he was in slavery".<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Calhoun, *Conceiving a New Republic The Republican Party and the Southern Question, 1869-1900*, p.137

<sup>112</sup> Rutherford B. Hayes to Guy M. Bryan, December 24, 1871, cited in Simpson, *The Reconstruction Presidents*, p.200

<sup>113</sup> Hayes to Bryan January 2 and July 27, 1875, *ibid*, p.201; T. Harry Williams ed., *Hayes: The Diary of a President, 1875-1881* (New York, 1964), March 28, 1875, cited in Simpson, *The Reconstruction Presidents*, p.201

<sup>114</sup> Simpson, *The Reconstruction Presidents*, p.201

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>116</sup> Williams, *Hayes: The Diary of a President, 1875-1881*, September 18, 1876, cited in Simpson, *The Reconstruction Presidents*, p.202

<sup>117</sup> Simpson, *The Reconstruction Presidents*, p.203

When comparing the Southern policy of Ulysses S. Grant with that of Rutherford B. Hayes, it is important to recognise the extent to which the Grant presidency had been defined by intervention. The electoral crises required Hayes to “decouple his administration from the legacy of intervention under Grant”.<sup>118</sup> Grant stands historically as a President who faltered in securing rights and protection for blacks and loyal whites. It should be acknowledged, though, that during his time in office his image was not solely one of corruption; it was also as an interventionist President who sought to impose Republican governments on the South. Hayes evidently saw a more long-lasting method of securing Southern states, albeit with far less concern for the freedmen. During the electoral crisis, he settled on a policy of realignment in the South, seeking a fusion of conservative Republicans with “prewar Whigs and Douglas Democrats”.<sup>119</sup> He saw peace as coming from what Simpson refers to as a “union of hearts”, rather than the result of a “force that compels obedience”.<sup>120</sup> One Southern Democrat described the new President as “full of the idea of being the great Pacificator, and this makes his policy more favourable to us than Grant’s”.<sup>121</sup>

Upon inauguration, Hayes arguably sounded very much like his predecessor when he spoke of the “permanent pacification of the country” and that “only a local government which recognizes and maintains inviolate the rights of all is a true government”.<sup>122</sup> The difference, Simpson argues, is that whilst “Grant had grown to distrust the sincerity of most southern whites; Hayes still took them at their word, hoping to

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid, p.204

<sup>119</sup> William Gillette, *Retreat From Reconstruction 1869 -1879* (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1979), p.336

<sup>120</sup> Simpson, *The Reconstruction Presidents*, p.206

<sup>121</sup> Lucius Q. C. Lamar to E. D. Clark, March 30, 1877 in Clark Papers, cited in Gillette, *Retreat From Reconstruction, 1869 -1879*, p.336

<sup>122</sup> Hayes Inaugural Address, March 5, 1877, James D. Richardson, ed, *Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 1789-1897*, (Washington D. C., 1912), 6:4394-99, cited in Simpson, *The Reconstruction Presidents*, p.207

cultivate reconciliation by abandoning coercion".<sup>123</sup> This somewhat blinkered approach to settling the South might have had the potential to create a legitimate voter-base. What was certain, though, was that friendly regimes such as that of Packard in Louisiana and Chamberlain in South Carolina were destined to fall should the President withdraw troops and pursue a new policy.

An indicator of Hayes' rejection of the Grant administration's apparent proclivity for intervention was the make-up of his cabinet. Once in the White House, a very notable cleansing took place. Despite retaining "rabid Republican" John Sherman as Treasury Secretary, the new President's cabinet included allies of Andrew Johnson, Southern Democrats and most symbolically Carl Schurz as Secretary of the Interior. Perhaps even more striking was Hayes' attempt at appointing former Confederate general Joseph E. Johnston to the War Department. Gillette describes the cabinet as one that "smacked of treason to staunch Republicans, for they considered most members of this new cabinet their traditional enemies".<sup>124</sup> This is not to say that Grant's cabinet included an abundance of Reconstructionists. As conservative or non-committal as they were, though, they were certainly not as representative of the old South as Hayes' were. The new President counteracted concerns about the conservatism of the new cabinet by following one of Grant's examples. By appointing Frederick Douglass as Marshal of the District of Columbia, he was able to alleviate some of the concerns of blacks and a great many white Republicans.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Simpson, *The Reconstruction Presidents*, p.208

<sup>124</sup> Gillette, *Retreat From Reconstruction, 1869 -1879*, p.337

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid*, p.338

Having to deal with South Carolina and Louisiana once in office, Hayes only ever contemplated a solution based on Democrat victory, even though other options were available. In both states he quickly moved to withdraw federal troops based on flimsy promises that no violence would follow. Simpson concludes that “Hayes had dropped the bloody shirt in his rush to clasp hands across the bloody chasm; the foes of the Grant regime, led by Schurz...were now in control of administration policy”.<sup>126</sup> Gillette stresses the necessity of a new approach as with “the southern wing ...reduced to a powerless minority”, there was everything to gain from conciliation to general Southern interests.<sup>127</sup> It should be appreciated, though, that despite a change in government, the principles of the former one endured with the Hayes cabinet agreeing that it was not a “wise policy” to “decide contested elections in the States, by the use of the National army”.<sup>128</sup>

Even if the abandonment of the last Grant-era Republican regimes was inevitable, Hayes appears to have honestly believed in the long-term effectiveness of his Southern policy. By abandoning the freedmen to the mercy of the state, Simpson presents the new President’s intentions as being one where “[n]o longer the targets of political controversy...blacks would now be allowed to assume their rightful place in southern society as equal under law”.<sup>129</sup> Grant certainly had pursued such a policy, most notably when championing the finality of the Fifteenth Amendment. The differentiating factor in this comparison is that Grant accepted the necessity of intervention in order to support this and other amendments of similar nature. It is likely that had Grant pursued, and been successful in gaining a third term in 1876, he would have not

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<sup>126</sup> Simpson, *The Reconstruction Presidents*, p.210

<sup>127</sup> Gillette, *Retreat From Reconstruction, 1869 -1879*, p.341

<sup>128</sup> *ibid*, p.341

<sup>129</sup> Simpson, *The Reconstruction Presidents*, p.210

fundamentally amended his policy towards Southern states. As discussed, his comments after leaving the White House indicate the extent to which he believed intervention and military governance to be acceptable.

In emphasising the watershed moment that the withdrawal of troops from the South was, Gillette concludes: “[t]rue, public discord would be brought to an end: there would no longer be any political controversies, because the southern Republican party would soon cease to be anything to contend with”.<sup>130</sup> The change in policy is further illustrated in the manner in which Hayes responded to the inevitable resumption of violence in the South following the exodus of troops. Referring to a massacre of white Republicans in Mississippi in 1877, Gillette suggests that “Hayes’ silence was as complete as Tilden’s had been after the Hamburg massacre of the previous summer”.<sup>131</sup>

It should be noted that despite an attempt at pacification through conciliation, Hayes was not willing to see the powers of enforcement entirely stripped away. When a Democrat Congress attempted to limit the powers of the Federal Government by denying it the right to send troops to a state unless requested by state officials, Hayes challenged the bill. “What a preposterous idea”, he claimed, “that the United States cannot enforce its own laws, can’t protect its own citizens in their rights; or control for good in the interests of peace or in the election of its own citizens”.<sup>132</sup> After vetoing numerous bills attempting to limit the power of the Federal Government and the President in intervening in state elections, Hayes accepted one that sought to outlaw

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<sup>130</sup> Gillette, *Retreat From Reconstruction, 1869 -1879*, p.346

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid*, p.347

<sup>132</sup> Simpson, *The Reconstruction Presidents*, p.222

the use of the United States Army to police the polls. This is something that Grant most likely would have acquiesced in, even if it had concerned him. Simpson refers to another similarity in the manner in which Hayes responded to the prospect of blacks migrating west. Much like Grant's intentions with San Domingo, Hayes reacted positively to it, stating: "Its effect is altogether favourable. The tendency will be to force the better class of Southern people to suppress the violence of the ruffian class, and to protect colored people in their rights".<sup>133</sup> On their shared use of patronage, Gillette refers to the mutually detrimental effect both Presidents had. Whereas Grant had appointed unscrupulous and unqualified men, Hayes chose to fill the Federal Government - particularly in the South - with Democrats or native Southerners which rather than just causing damage, "totally disabled it".<sup>134</sup>

Despite many similarities, the stark contrast between the Southern policy of Ulysses S. Grant and Rutherford B. Hayes was that the latter sought a fundamental realignment of the parties. To achieve this goal, the defining characteristics of the Reconstruction era would have to be largely ignored. Unfortunately for Hayes, as early as 1878, it was clear that this union of conservatives had failed to emerge, undermining the President and making enemies of those Republicans who still sought to hold on to some Southern states. Grant's former Attorney General, Amos T. Akerman, observed: "[t]hey accept his [Hayes'] favors, deny his title, revile all the principles that he has professed in the past and the men who have cooperated with him in maintaining them, and laugh at him for being so easily taken".<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> Williams, *Hayes: The Diary of a President, 1875-1881, May 24, 1879*, cited in Simpson, *The Reconstruction Presidents*, p.225

<sup>134</sup> Gillette, *Retreat From Reconstruction, 1869 -1879*, p.348

<sup>135</sup> Amos T. Akerman to George W. Smith, November 9, 1877, *Akerman Letterbooks*, cited in Gillette, *Retreat From Reconstruction, 1869 -1879*, p.349



The measurable success of the Hayes' administration is not of importance to this thesis' ultimate goal. The intention of this study is not to re-evaluate the achievements of the Grant presidency; the focus is to provide clarity as to what the Southern policy of Ulysses S. Grant was in its aims and objectives. Through a comparison with what followed, the characteristics of Grant's policy are more identifiable. Both Presidents sought peace through the removal of the Southern question from politics. The key difference was that Grant never considered the fundamental reshaping of Southern Republicanism as an option. Conciliation was pursued but only as a means of restoring rights, not offering shared power. As mismanaged, contradictory and vacillating as Grant's Southern policy was, it dealt far more in absolutes than Hayes' did. Peace could only come by way of the defeat of the "enemies of the Republic" or their acceptance of the results of war. For Hayes, peace was achievable if enough was compromised or ignored. To remove the colour-line meant quite simply to remove the freedmen from consideration.

Gillette compares the two Reconstruction presidents, considering Grant the more adaptable of the two. Whereas Hayes "consistently followed his preconceived, deductive plan", Grant, the more "erratic" of the two, could improvise, but not necessarily successfully.<sup>136</sup> In the end, both Presidents failed in pacifying the South and building a legitimate Republican Party there. Both shared many ideals on the role of the Federal Government and the future of the freedmen, but the rigidity of the Hayes policy sits in contrast to the inductive path followed by Grant.

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<sup>136</sup> Ibid, p.362

When Grant pursued a third term in 1880, the Southern question still dominated national politics, especially for the Republicans who had seen their support erode even further since Grant had left office. Enthusiasm for his return seemed to come from a desire to abandon Hayes' weak policy. Many scoffed at the image of Grant as the opposite, particularly former colleague turned opponent for the nomination, Senator John Sherman. Criticising Grant's record in pacifying the South, Sherman wrote, "during his administration thousands of people were killed and bulldozed and deprived of their right to vote without any aid or assistance or redress from him".<sup>137</sup> Despite considerable support for the "strong man" to return to the White House, Grant did not play to that image, emphasising sectional healing and the South's "returning love of the flag".<sup>138</sup> Ultimately, any possibility of a return to intervention was dashed when the nomination was given to Ohio Republican Congressman James A. Garfield.

During his presidency, Hayes wrote of his predecessor's policies in the South. Whilst Johnson apparently had been ahead of his time, on Grant, he stated simply that after two terms of using intervention as a means of governing, he was "finally compelled to let go".<sup>139</sup> If, as Hayes implies, the Grant presidency was defined by intervention, is that image realistic? The record shows that intervention was a key element of Grant's Southern policy, either as a tool or an inconvenience to avoid. In truth, it was just one part of a policy of extremes which both confirmed and contradicted the President's own beliefs. The Southern policy of Ulysses S. Grant was caught between a desire to move the country beyond the politics of the Civil War but not lose what

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<sup>137</sup> Calhoun, *Conceiving a New Republic: The Republican Party and the Southern Question, 1869-1900*, p.170

<sup>138</sup> New York Times, 1880, cited in *ibid*, p.173

<sup>139</sup> Walt P. Marchman, ed., "The 'Memoirs' of Thomas Donaldson", *Hayes Historical Journal* 2 (1979), 167-168 (October 17, 1877), cited in Simpson, *The Reconstruction Presidents*, p.214

had been achieved on the battlefield. To understand how those two tenets dictated policy, one must consider the evolution of Grant's Southern policy.

If one was to account for the Southern Policy of Ulysses S. Grant by quantifying his desire to either protect the results of war or hasten a close to the Reconstruction era, the years between the war and the presidency present a largely one sided argument. To describe Grant's early Southern policy as altruistic in its intentions and pivotal in Reconstruction history is not unwarranted. As General-in-chief, Grant was afforded the power and independence to pursue a Southern policy that intended to protect the results of war and reconstruct the South. A clear understanding of the motivations and actions of Ulysses S. Grant during this time is essential in not only presenting an argument for what his policy was, but also as a means of assessing what followed.

The naivety and optimism that Grant exhibited post Appomattox was short lived. His belief that everywhere in the South, "submission was perfect" was borne from a lack of knowledge and an eagerness to take Southerners at their word.<sup>140</sup> Furthermore, a conciliatory assessment served Grant's intention of challenging President Johnson's prosecution of Robert E. Lee. This blind faith in the South's acquiescence to the results of war peaked with his tour of the South and those redundant meetings with "the mass of thinking men".<sup>141</sup> Following this "whitewashing", the Southern policy of Ulysses S. Grant took shape in the form of a judicial application of military forces.<sup>142</sup> In 1865, Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles believed Grant to be in agreement with the policy of President Johnson only to reverse his opinion a few years later believing him

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<sup>140</sup> USG to Edwin M. Stanton, Oct 20, 1865, PUSG-XV, pp.357-359

<sup>141</sup> *Grant and Schurz on the South*, LOC, p.1

<sup>142</sup> James G. Blaine, *Twenty Years of Congress: From Lincoln to Garfield* (Norwich, Connecticut: The Henry Bill Publishing Company, 1886), I, p.149

to be a dangerous proponent of congressional Reconstruction. The Secretary's summation was accurate as the evolution of Ulysses S. Grant's Southern policy had by 1868 brought him firmly into the Radical camp.

The radicalisation that inevitably led to the presidency was first evident in his orders to his Southern commanders to forward him reports on racially motivated crime and for them to protect blacks from unequal treatment before the law. In addition, there was his controversial attempt to censure those Southern papers that fostered anti-Union feeling. Alongside these attempts to highlight and challenge outrages in the South's legal system and press, Ulysses S. Grant adopted a policy of counteracting attempts by the President to limit the powers of Reconstruction. As Johnson and his Attorney General challenged the use of the military in state affairs, Grant instructed his subordinates that any decree by the President concerned only the state he was referring to.

The aforementioned examples highlight the extent to which the Southern policy of Ulysses S. Grant in the late 1860s sought to achieve the "submission" he had assumed existed immediately after the war. Where violence was prevalent, such as in Memphis in 1866, Grant sought to stamp it out. Examples such as General Order No.44 where he instructed his Commanders to pursue and prosecute those accused of crimes against citizens "irrespective of color, in cases where the civil authorities have failed" is indicative of an increasingly investigatory policy.<sup>143</sup> This desire to whip out the rebellion is perhaps best illustrated through the efforts of General Philip H. Sheridan in Louisiana. Grant wholeheartedly supported the General's relentless pursuit of those

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<sup>143</sup> USG, General Orders No. 44, Jul 6, 1866, PUSG-XVI, p.228

responsible for the New Orleans massacre of 1866. When the situation reached its high point with Johnson's removal of the troublesome Sheridan, Grant's impassioned defence was representative of a Southern policy that was committed to not letting violence go unpunished. Grant's policy was to stop what Sheridan saw as the "march of terrorism" in the South.<sup>144</sup> The removal of a proponent of such a policy was in the eyes of Grant a disgrace to the results of war. As would be seen in 1875, it seemed it was only Sheridan, or the predicaments he found himself in, that could rile Grant up to express his honest feelings on the issue of Reconstruction and the South.

Grant's work to mitigate Sheridan's removal and delay the appointment of his successor revealed his awareness of the necessity of having the right man in the right place during the process of congressional Reconstruction. This was repeated when he charged his district commanders to remove opponents of the programme and replace them with "true men".<sup>145</sup> Grant clearly saw himself as embodying that archetype when he took charge of the office of Secretary of War. Most historians conclude that Grant took this role so as to avoid a more obstructionist and anti-Radical appointment replacing Stanton. Such a stratagem was to be poorly employed, or ignored, though, once Grant was in the White House.

The core issue at the centre of the Reconstruction era was race and the future of the freedmen. Before and during the war Grant had shown that he was no friend of slavery and certainly someone who believed in eventual equality for blacks. If, as C. Vann Woodward states, equality had been the third war aim, Grant certainly subscribed to

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<sup>144</sup> P. H. Sheridan, *Personal Memoirs of P.H. Sheridan* (United States: Da Capo Press, 1992), pp.430-433

<sup>145</sup> USG to Maj. Gen. George G. Meade, Apr 7, 1868, PUSG-XVIII, pp.227-228

it. Whilst mindful of the freedmen's readiness for equality, he nevertheless sought to facilitate their progress. With such clear intentions in regards to how the South should be managed post-war, an affiliation with the Radicals was naturally to follow. In addition to being consulted on and emboldened by the Reconstruction Acts, Grant spoke at the time of the natural and almost welcomed radicalisation of Generals in the South. In addition, he described any abandonment of his duties under Reconstruction as "throwing up a command in the face of the enemy".<sup>146</sup>

With such a concern for the legacy of the Civil War, Grant's acceptance of the nomination for President can be seen as being exclusively motivated by his Southern Policy. By identifying to Sherman the precarious nature of the results of the war and the danger of trading politicians bargaining them away, he charged himself with a very specific responsibility. In general terms, the Southern policy of Ulysses S. Grant, 1865-1868, was one that sought to protect rights, pursue and prosecute the guilty, and manage the South and Reconstruction through the work of "true men". Such a clear agenda, and the manner in which that agenda informed his decision to enter public office, establishes a philosophy towards the South that serves as a standard by which to assess his presidency. The record shows a policy, or policies that both consolidated and undermined the efforts and achievements of the years 1865-1868.

Whereas Southern Policy pre-presidency can be defined by the pursuit of justice, in his first term as President, Grant prioritised an orderly close to the process of Reconstruction and in turn traded away many of the things he had previously sought to safeguard. In many ways, "Let us have peace" perfectly outlined the President's

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<sup>146</sup> USG to Lt. Gen William T. Sherman, Jan 13, 1867, PUSG-XVII, pp.13-14

Southern policy. The desire to achieve a settlement, or some kind of closure to the Civil War era, was the defining characteristic of Grant's first term in office. This was indicated by his inaugural promise to "have a policy to recommend, but none to enforce against the will of the people", and that his cabinet choices brought no threat to such cordiality.<sup>147</sup> As General-in-chief, Grant had been driven by a desire to protect citizens in the South by almost waging a continual Civil War against its unruly elements. As President, he quickly prioritised the finalisation of Reconstruction through the settlement of all remaining tasks.

The state of Virginia and Grant's sponsorship of the separate vote on disenfranchising former Confederates best illustrates this new direction. At the same time as Georgia saw legitimately elected black legislators forcibly removed from their seats, Grant prioritised a generous move towards conciliation in another state. This desire to see a timely re-admittance of not only Virginia but also Mississippi and Texas, served the new President's public commitment to "close the work of Reconstruction".<sup>148</sup> This key statement and the resulting policy choices define Grant's first term. The Fifteenth Amendment went hand in hand with conciliation as both white and black interests were considered. Both measures were pursued by the President as part of what appears to have been a policy to remove what Grant saw as subjects of agitation. As President, he appeared to be moving in entirely a different direction as he had been when instructing his Southern commanders to circumvent presidential orders. Once elected, Grant commented that "[n]ow there seems to be a general acquiescence, North and

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<sup>147</sup> USG, Inaugural Address, March 4, 1869, PUSG-XIX, pp.139-143

<sup>148</sup> USG, Annual Message, Dec 6, 1869, PUSG-XX, pp.18-44

South, in the result. Appearances now are about what they were in 65".<sup>149</sup> If Grant had truly believed this then a change from his pre-presidential policy is not surprising.

This change is further illustrated by the manner in which violence in North Carolina was dealt with. Grant's delayed response to Governor Holden's request for troops and his general lack of support certainly contributed to the Republican's downfall. One must appreciate, though, that this policy choice was not solely dictated by an overriding desire to move away from continual Southern controversies. Holden contributed to his own downfall and offered little legitimacy for Grant and the Federal Government to take a directing hand. When compared with Grant's response to South Carolina and the sponsoring of Enforcement legislation, clearly the determining factor was the circumstances in each state, not a fixed overarching Southern policy goal. In South Carolina, Grant eventually dispatched troops and through sponsorship of the first Enforcement Act enabled the Federal Government to strike back at growing terrorism in the South. Similarly, whilst policy towards Virginia had resulted in Democrat success, in Mississippi, where the separate clause of disenfranchisement had been used, Grant wholeheartedly supported Radicals within the state because they held a legitimate voter base. Whilst closure was the overriding policy for the Grant Administration, it was not dogmatic enough to ignore opportunities or outrages.

Despite indications of a personal policy shift for Grant when dealing with the South, it must be recognised that closing the work of Reconstruction and protecting the results of war were not always mutually exclusive. In an effort to remove all irritations, Grant was also supporting measures that sought to confirm the results of war, namely the

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<sup>149</sup> USG to Capt. Daniel Ammen, Nov 23, 1868, PUSG-XIX, pp.70-71



Fifteenth Amendment. In addition to this constitutional change, through foreign policy he was attempting to bring about some societal shift in the fortunes of blacks in the South. The racial dimension of Grant's attempt to annex the Island of Sam Domingo should therefore be associated with that long term war aim to bring about equality. Additionally, whilst efforts were made at settling Southern issues, Grant's support of the Enforcement Acts reveal a willingness to disturb the image of peace, when justified. A key example of this is the administration's suspension of the writ in South Carolina in 1871 and Grant's consideration of such emergency measures in Georgia. Despite a policy to close the work of Reconstruction, the President accepted the necessity to prolong the process. In addition to this, Grant still spoke with wartime rhetoric labelling Democrats as inherently the "enemies of the republic".<sup>150</sup> At times he reaffirmed his duty justifying his place in politics as necessary "until the results of war are acquiesced in by all political parties".<sup>151</sup>

But as much as Grant's presidential policy might have maintained a certain philosophical perspective on Reconstruction and the legacy of the Civil War, too often his actions contradicted his statements. The lack of consideration for key appointments such as Attorney General or Justice of the Supreme Court either illustrates political ineptitude or a lack of concern for the Reconstruction programme.

Alongside these individual indicators of Southern policy, there are certain key case studies, primarily in the form of individual states, which assist in defining Southern policy. Most show predictable and understandable reactions to issues in the South,

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<sup>150</sup> *New York Herald*, Jun 6, 1871, PSUG-XXII, p.31

<sup>151</sup> USG to Adam Badeau, Nov 19, 1871, PUSG-XXII, pp.238-239

tempered by political justifications but with an undercurrent of moral and ethical concern.

In Louisiana, Grant's policy had been to support the lesser of two evils when faced with a fusion of Republicans and Democrats, or solely the Democrat Party. Federal intervention was used sparingly, largely because the squabbles were political in nature. When Democrats encouraged and committed violence, a more confident policy was enacted through the threat of intervention and the use of Sheridan's predictable method of dealing with violence. If one is to consider Grant's entire course in Louisiana, the President largely maintained support for state Republicans who more than any other group, best represented his own Southern policy. Dirty tactics were used by both sides, but it was only the Democrats who used murder as a tool of social and political control. William P. Kellogg, James F. Casey and Stephen B. Packard were the epitome of carpetbaggers and scalawags. Compared with their rivals, however, it was understandable that the President sought to maintain them as some kind of protector of the results of war.

In the end, despite its pettiness, frustrations and controversy, policy in Louisiana was about maintaining a Republican form of government, purely out of a need to deny a Democrat one. The abandonment of Louisiana's Republicans in 1877 was an understandable casualty of the presidential compromise and the greater issue at stake. Compared with other states, policy in Louisiana had been mostly consistent. The merits of Grant's support for Kellogg and Casey can be endlessly debated. One can argue, though, that given the choices, the President largely came out in favour of a party that offered loyal whites and blacks the greatest chance of survival.

Similarly in Arkansas, Grant, albeit somewhat blunderingly, sought to maintain state Republicans in the face of a Democrat resurgence. An earlier mistake of erring on the side of caution and not supporting Joseph Brooks in his claim of electoral fraud had been made. This was admitted to and the President became fully aware of what it would mean for “minorities in all the states” should governments in the South go about overturning their constitutions.<sup>152</sup> Policy in Arkansas had not been one where the President made a proactive decision to actively support one group or deny another. His delay in coming out in favour of Brooks was due to a desire to avoid federal entanglement in a state judicial controversy. The realisation of the significant threat that the precedent in Arkansas posed was too late. The “let the South alone” policy in Arkansas was a negligent mistake, not a well thought out plan like the separate clause in Virginia.<sup>153</sup> The shift in policy was motivated by a realisation of the threat Arkansas posed to the results of war. Grant was willing to see Republican regimes fall in the South if their defeat was legitimate. Intervention, be it politically or militarily, occurred when the threat was significant enough. This was a disappointing policy, but a policy nonetheless.

Whereas Arkansas had seen mismanagement, policy in Mississippi had been a calculated move by many in the Republican Party, including Grant, to sacrifice a Southern state in favour of a Northern one. Grant’s admission of his mistake in letting Mississippi go in favour of Ohio was both an admission of guilt and a statement of his personal policy towards the South. He spoke of being caught between party obligation and what *he* thought was right. To support Mississippi’s Republicans, especially in the

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<sup>152</sup> USG to Congress, Feb 8th, 1875, PUSG-XXVI, pp.52-53

<sup>153</sup> Governor William Pitt Kellogg to USG, Aug 18, 1874, PUSG-XXV, p.215-216

face of increasing violence, was his “duty”.<sup>154</sup> Apparently convinced that there was no hope for the state, the President allowed his Attorney General to starve Governor Ames of support until his defeat. Mississippi is a shameful episode in the presidency of Ulysses S. Grant but not one without political justification. On a local level, the Grant administration had left loyal blacks and whites to the mercy of a hostile Democratic Party. On the national stage, this sacrifice sought to safeguard at least one branch of government that could give the results of war their best chance of survival: the presidency.

Ohio and Mississippi foretold the fate of South Carolina and Louisiana once the election controversy erupted. Grant, in no way an architect of the infamous compromise, nevertheless facilitated it. His actual role in the compromise, whether as a conspirator in the steal or the protector of Reconstruction, has been largely overstated. Jean Edward Smith’s assertion that “Grant’s evenhanded mediation of the crisis preserved the peace and paved the way for a successful presidential transition” is overly complimentary.<sup>155</sup> Grant naturally allowed the Electoral Commission to complete its work and supported Republican claims to legitimacy by ignoring events in Louisiana and South Carolina during the dispute. He didn’t mediate or even advise. Hamilton Fish’s diary shows that he struggled to find a solution he was comfortable with. He chose at this pivotal time to abandon what little resolve he had shown in protecting the results of war in the South, all for what he clearly identified as a greater, national cause.

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<sup>154</sup> Simpson, *The Reconstruction Presidents*, p.188

<sup>155</sup> Jean Edward Smith, *Grant* (Simon & Schuster: New York, 2001), p.18

Despite mistakes and actions to the contrary, the Southern policy of Ulysses S. Grant was managed primarily in the interests of protecting the results of war. The desire to stamp out insurrectionary behaviour, facilitate the move towards racial equality and forever remove the Southern slavocrat from local and national politics endured throughout his public life. But this duty, and its inherent conflict with the need to provide closure to the Civil War and bring about normal governance, created an image of incongruity. Time and shifting political priorities influenced Southern policy but the issues were consistent. Murder, electoral fraud and equal rights were the day-to-day issues in the Southern states, each a threat to the results of war. As President, Grant sought to facilitate reunion of the states, offer redemption through amnesty, and legislate and amend equality into the American system of government. He sought to bring an end to the “corollary” of the Civil War but it was the overriding duty to protect the results that disturbed that process.

Clearly, Grant did not implement this policy with focus or consistency. A clinical assessment of his administration’s record in the South provides a strong counter argument to Joan Waugh’s assertion that “Grant remained steadfast in the belief that the goals of the war should be preserved even as the country’s enthusiasm for Reconstruction of the South in the North’s image faded away”.<sup>156</sup> Resolve and steadfastness, certainly characteristics he had exhibited in war, were almost entirely missing from his presidency. On a state level he struggled to formulate policy delaying his reaction often at the cost of innocent lives. He understood on a national level the importance of the Republican Party maintaining at least the White House but struggled to meet the needs of state Republicans at the right time. Lacking the strength, skill or

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<sup>156</sup> Joan Waugh, *U.S. Grant: American Hero, American Myth* (North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009), p.111

will to maintain a resilient agenda, the moral high points, be they the dispatching of troops or impassioned messages to Congress, were examples of that desire to protect the results of war bubbling to the surface. Grant regularly portrayed himself as the moral compass in government challenging Congress' delay in investigating incidents of violence. When questioned on his limited intervention in Southern states, he sought to expose the hypocrisy of using the Federal Government to capture a slave, but not to protect a voter at the polls. With a preponderance to see the contest between Republicans and Democrats as one of unionist and rebel, one would expect policy within individual states to reflect this. As discussed, the record is mixed. Whether that was due to the limits of his office, the legitimacy of the claims, or his own failings, Grant's management of the South tended to err on the side of caution.

As detailed throughout this thesis, there is consistency in his philosophy and his ruminations on Southern affairs. In practice, though, his ideals are not always represented in the way he sought to direct policy in the South. But despite there often being a contradiction between Grant's words and actions, from the end of hostilities in 1865 to the compromise of 1877, he maintained a concern for what had been won on the battlefield. Post-war and through congressional Reconstruction, he had fought for justice and the protection for the freedmen. As president he championed the Fifteenth Amendment, wielded untold federal power and, at times, rallied against the nation's apathy towards violence. His desire to close the work of Reconstruction sought to provide closure and enable the government to move beyond a state of crisis management. Certainly guilty of prioritising the meaning over the substance, and weakened by political inadequacies, Southern policy was still primarily guided by a need to protect the results of war. However much he tried to facilitate the closure of

Reconstruction, he could not move entirely away from the past, creating a conflict of interests and a record that lacks consistency.

History shows, though, that this personal agenda or political and racial philosophy, was reluctant to manifest itself at the appropriate time. The realisation of what was in danger, as seen with Arkansas, often came too late, and those grand statements that Grant made were often after the fact and in defence of his own actions. He was not a “true hero” as some modern writers might consider him.<sup>157</sup> He was a disappointment to himself, and those that maintained him at the polls, both North and South. Notwithstanding, when compared with Lincoln, Johnson and Hayes, he was arguably one of the era’s most notable egalitarians recognising the inherent equality of blacks and their right to political and legal equality. Whilst he played politics poorly, he did so regularly with the conscience of honouring the Civil War’s dead and the results of their sacrifice.

In 1870, Grant wrote: “it is of the utmost importance that the Republican Party should control so long as national issues remain as they now are. Without such control I believe we would lose, largely the results of our victories in the field...The 13th 14th & 15th amendments to the constitution would be dead letters”.<sup>158</sup> In the end, Grant’s final policy towards the South reflected that concern with the abandonment of the Party at state level so as to keep a Republican in the White House. As argued throughout this thesis, the inconsistency of Grant’s Southern policy was born from the incompatibility of protecting the results of war and ushering in a new peace. But despite acting, at times, in a way that dishonoured the Civil War dead and abandoned

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<sup>157</sup> Ibid, p.1

<sup>158</sup> USG to Oliver P. Morton, Oct 20, 1870, PUSG-XX, pp.312-313

loyal whites and blacks, by 1877, Grant held true to his belief that a Republican form of government must survive, in order to protect the results of the Civil War.



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