

RECONSTRUCTED REBELS:
EX-CONFEDERATES IN THE REPUBLICAN PARTY

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ABSTRACT

Brian K. Fennessy: *Reconstructed Rebels: Ex-Confederates in the Republican Party*
(Under the direction of Harry L. Watson)

After Congress took control of Reconstruction in 1866, thousands of former Confederates migrated into the Republican Party. Though nowhere near a majority of former Confederates, these “reconstructed rebels” exerted an outsized influence on Congressional Reconstruction. Few have a place in popular memory other than James Longstreet, though scholars have written about a handful of others as forgotten heroes who represented a different path for the South. In contrast to that view, this dissertation argues that their impact was largely conservative and that they were complicit in the abandonment of Reconstruction.

An analysis of the roughly 4,600 former Confederates who received amnesty from Congress—that is, relief from the Fourteenth Amendment’s officeholding ban—shows that reconstructed rebels had much in common with Reconstruction’s opponents. Unlike Democratic Redeemers, however, they made a tactical decision that by joining forces with the Republicans, they could regain political power and attract northern economic investment in their states. Moreover, drawing on a long history of patron-client relationships with yeoman whites, they saw Black political participation as fully compatible with white supremacy and elite power. By joining the Republican Party, reconstructed rebels believed they could make Reconstruction more conservative and restore traditional white elites to power.

While a great many southern elites supported violence as a means to overthrow Reconstruction, others preferred political cooptation. By successfully convincing white

northerners that they were “reconstructed,” ex-Confederates in the Republican Party re-legitimized the image of white southern elites. The Democratic Redeemers benefited from their actions and later followed in their footsteps by combining Black political participation and white supremacy in the decades leading up to Black disfranchisement at the end of the nineteenth century. This history should remind readers in the twenty-first century about the mutability of white supremacy and the vulnerability of institutions to capture by elites. An accurate understanding of reconstructed rebels is particularly important in the current context of racial injustice, political violence, and struggle to balance national unity with justice.

To Donna and Kenneth

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INTRODUCTION: “GONE OVER”

Confederate Lieutenant-General James Longstreet was “the highest in rank of the Southern men who have ‘gone over’ to the Northern side since the war.” The southern novelist who made this observation did so only a few short years after white southerners had overthrown Republican government in the South, ending the period known as Reconstruction. The writer contemplated the phrase “gone over” in this context. “The evident underlying meaning in this,” he mused, “if anything can be gathered from the tone, look, and bearing of those saying it, is that the man spoken of has committed a grave offence against good morals and the well-being of society.”¹

Joining the Republican Party was not a popular move for a white southerner in the aftermath of Confederate defeat. At a time when most former Confederates opposed the Republican Congress’s plan of Reconstruction, Longstreet endorsed it. In 1868, he cast his vote for Ulysses S. Grant in the presidential election, and a year later the new president rewarded him with a plum patronage position in New Orleans. A few short years later, Longstreet was the commander of Louisiana’s biracial state militia. His troops took an oath to “accept the civil and political equality of all men.”² Twice, Longstreet led the militia against white insurgents who were trying to overthrow the state government and reverse African American societal gains.

¹ Brinsley Matthews [pseud. for William S. Pearson], *Well-Nigh Reconstructed: A Political Novel* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2010), 8.

² James K. Hogue, *Uncivil War: Five New Orleans Street Battles and the Rise and Fall of Radical Reconstruction* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006), 74.

Though Longstreet's course made him unpopular at the time, now more than a century later, he looks like a progressive hero. In the age of Trump, activists have responded to systemic racism by toppling Confederate monuments, but Longstreet is an example of an ex-Confederate who was seemingly different. An opinion piece in the *Washington Post* from 2016 exemplifies the common view: "Longstreet risked his life for the worst cause Americans ever espoused, then for the best one. In short, he epitomized this nation's saving grace, and humanity's: the capacity to learn from our mistakes, and to change." If New Orleans removed its statue to Robert E. Lee—which it did, a year later—the author suggested replacing it with one of Longstreet.³

Longstreet was an exception among former Confederates, but he was not alone. There was an influential minority of ex-rebels who aided Congress and Black southerners in their attempts to transform the South. Historians have estimated that some 20 percent of white southerners voted with the Republican Party during Reconstruction.⁴ Some of them were wartime Unionists, but others like Longstreet had fought for the Confederacy. The latter were sometimes called "reconstructed rebels" during the 1860s. They were former Confederates who joined the Republican Party, or at the very least accepted the legitimacy of Congressional Reconstruction. Longstreet was the quintessential reconstructed rebel.

The reminder that white Americans can redeem themselves from racial prejudice is a compelling one today. It is worth asking whether the Longstreets of the South might have led the

³ Charles Lane, "The forgotten Confederate general who deserves a monument," *The Washington Post*, 27 Jan 2016, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/the-forgotten-confederate-general-who-would-make-a-better-subject-for-monuments/2016/01/27/f09bad42-c536-11e5-8965-0607e0e265ce_story.html>.

⁴ For estimates of the white Republican vote during Reconstruction, see Allen W. Trelease, "Who Were the Scalawags?" *The Journal of Southern History* 29, no. 4 (1963): 458; William C. Harris, "A Reconsideration of the Mississippi Scalawag," *Journal of Mississippi History* 32 (Feb. 1970), 38; Carl Degler, *The Other South: Southern Dissenters in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), 193; Abbott, *The Republican Party and the South, 1855-1877* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986), 137, 159; Hyman Rubin III, *South Carolina Scalawags* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2006), xxi.

region in a different direction than the one it pursued in the late nineteenth century, one that pointed to a much more genuine sectional and racial détente and away from the path to Jim Crow that made the white South more intensely sectional, racist, and violently repressive in 1900 than it had been in 1860.

The answer presented here is that they could not, or at any rate, did not. Reconstructed rebels did not free themselves from their past as much as popular interpreters of Civil War memory might wish. For example, at the same moment that Longstreet was going over to the Republicans, he wrote privately, “Since the negro has been given the privilege of voting, it is all important that we should exercise such influence over that vote, as to prevent its being injurious to us, & we can only do that as Republicans.” He reasoned that “Congress requires reconstruction upon the Republican basis,” and “if the whites won’t do this, the thing will be done by the blacks, and we shall be set aside, if not expatriated. It then seems plain to me that we should do the work ourselves, & have it white instead of black & have our best men in public office.”⁵ Republican Reconstruction could and should still be managed by whites, Longstreet believed, if they joined the party in power. In 1875, after years at the head of Louisiana’s biracial militia, he wrote to an old friend, “the difference in our politics is not so great as appear [*sic*], if sifted to the bottom. The end that we seek I know is the same.—The restoration of the Southern people to their natural and proper influence.”⁶

If celebrating Longstreet and other reconstructed rebels is an error, their stories can nevertheless teach us something important. Their stories can help historians answer a key

⁵ James Longstreet to R. H. Taliaferro, 4 Jul 1867, Boagni Collection, quoted in William Garrett Piston, *Lee’s Tarnished Lieutenant: James Longstreet and His Place in South History* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1990), 106.

⁶ Longstreet to T. J. Goree, 12 May 1875, Goree Papers LSU, quoted from Thomas R. Hay and Donald B. Sanger, *James Longstreet* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1952), 376.

question about the Reconstruction era: how did white southern elites ultimately regain power? One answer has been that white southerners actively resisted through the Democratic party, violent insurgency, and racial terrorism. Another answer by historians is that white Northerners grew apathetic about the situation in the South and withdrew their support for military intervention. These answers are not mutually exclusive, and they both provide partial answers to the question. In addition to these forces, reconstructed rebels played an essential part in restoring the legitimacy of the South's prewar slaveholding elite.

Reconstructed rebels adopted the party that had managed Confederate defeat and then provided citizenship and voting rights to African Americans. They accepted equality under the law and Black voting rights—but white elites had previously done the same for poor whites without actually accepting them as their social equals or expecting them to ever control the levers of governance. Many of their core assumptions, especially about race, had changed little. They supported Congressional Reconstruction because they saw it as a way to restore the power of white southern elites, prevent violent instability, and bring economic prosperity to their communities. Some of them abandoned the Republican Party when African Americans pressed for greater civil rights protections and a greater say in governance. Others, including Longstreet, stayed in the Republican Party, but their contributions to Reconstruction played a key role—in ending it.

Unlike Democratic “Redeemers,” Reconstructed rebels did not use or condone violence to restore “home rule” to the South, but they helped to convince white northerners that men of their class were the region's rightful leaders. When Democrats began to claim that they too were reconstructed and had accepted the results of Congressional Reconstruction, white northerners started to believe them, and Reconstruction found its end. Reconstructed rebels were not

redeemed from their racism, but they did help to usher in the period that some historians still refer to as “Redemption”—the period after Reconstruction when southern states reestablished home rule, white supremacy, and elite power.

How White Southern Elites Regained Power

Historians have offered several reasonable explanations of Reconstruction’s failure to produce a lasting biracial democracy in the South. Dan Carter’s work on the “failure of self-reconstruction in the South” explores the attempt of white southern elites to adapt during the early postwar period known as Presidential Reconstruction. Ultimately, he finds that they lacked imagination and became irrelevant when Republicans saw the South required a more thorough restructuring than Andrew Johnson and his southern supporters had intended. The lesson is that the white South could not have reconstructed itself.⁷

If white southerners could not reconstruct themselves, they could certainly use violence to overthrow the project known as Congressional Reconstruction. From Allen Trelease’s 1971 book *White Terror* to Douglas Egerton’s more recent *The Wars of Reconstruction*, scholars have thoroughly documented white southern racial terrorism and violent insurgency. Former slaveowners responded with violence wherever freedpeople sought to enjoy their freedom by relocating, working where and how they chose, and organizing politically. Especially angered by Black political organizing at the grassroots level, whites formed Ku Klux Klan units and conducted a campaign of intimidation, assault, and assassination. In the runup to the 1868 presidential election, they murdered Black and white Republicans alike. For a short time in the

⁷ Dan T. Carter, *When the War Was Over: The Failure of Self-Reconstruction in the South, 1865-1867* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1985).

early 1870s, the federal government was able to tamp down on organized racial violence in some areas, but as the North wearied of Reconstruction, the defenders of white supremacy dropped the disguises, intimidated Black voters openly, and used local militias to overthrow Reconstruction's biracial state governments.⁸

Other historians have supplemented the white counterrevolution explanation of Reconstruction's failure by looking at shifting attitudes in the North. Many scholars who study the Republican Party in this era have argued that its leaders abandoned African Americans when they found that they could carry the presidency without the South.⁹ Looking beyond party leaders, Heather Cox Richardson makes a strong case that an economic depression and labor unrest at home caused northerners to lose interest in matters down south, or even to explicitly oppose Reconstruction. Wealthy capitalists in particular feared that an empowered Black working class in the South would inspire the white proletariat in northern cities. The progressive tendencies of the North's free labor ideology were thus tempered by its assumptions that both former slaves and white workers should rise and fall on their merits without government interference.¹⁰

⁸ Allen W. Trelease, *The Ku Klux Klan Conspiracy and Southern Reconstruction* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1971). Douglas R. Egerton, *The Wars of Reconstruction: The Brief Violent History of America's Most Progressive Era* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2014). An abbreviated list of the many scholars who have added to this interpretation must also include George Rable, *But There Was No Peace: The Role of Violence in the Politics of Reconstruction* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1984); James K. Hogue, *Uncivil War: Five New Orleans Street Battles and the Rise and Fall of Radical Reconstruction* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006); Hannah Rosen, *Terror in the Heart Of Freedom : Citizenship, Sexual Violence, and the Meaning of Race in the Postemancipation South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009); Gregory P. Downs, *After Appomattox: Military Occupation and the Ends of War* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2015).

⁹ Vincent De Santis, *Republicans Face the Southern Question—The New Departure Years, 1877-1897* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1959); Stanley Hirshson, *Farewell to the Bloody Shirt: Northern Republicans and the Southern Negro, 1877-1893* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1962); Abbott, *The Republican Party and the South*; Heather Cox Richardson, *To Make Men Free: A History of the Republican Party* (New York: Basic Books, 2014). For a different view see Charles W. Calhoun, *Conceiving a New Republic: The Republican Party and the Southern Question, 1869-1900* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2006).

¹⁰ Heather Cox Richardson, *The Death of Reconstruction: Race, Labor, and Politics in the Post-Civil War North, 1865-1901* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2001).

Racism also played a role in the North's retreat from Reconstruction, as Carole Emberton makes clear in her recent work. African Americans did not deserve saving, some northerners reasoned, if they could not defend themselves from white violence. When they did resist, however, journalists associated Black violence with barbarism.¹¹ Moreover, Laura Edwards and Andrew Slap have shown how ideas about race, class, and gender combined with a "liberal" movement against the political spoils system to convince many in the North that the Southern Republican governments were corrupt and that the region should be ruled by its "best men."¹² Perhaps, as Mark Summers argues quite convincingly, white northerners had always been more concerned with stabilizing the country than bringing biracial democracy to the South.¹³

To the mix of factors that brought down Reconstruction, historians like Michael Fitzgerald have added the debilitating factionalism within the southern Republican parties. Native white Republicans vied with more progressive arrivals from the North for African American support. This dynamic gave African American more influence during the 1870s, but at the same time, Democrats used Republican factionalism to their advantage. Moreover, African American gains in the intraparty disputes—a greater share of offices, more spending on schools, more attention to civil rights—stimulated the violent white reaction that ended Reconstruction.¹⁴

¹¹ Carole Emberton, *Beyond Redemption: Race, Violence, and the American South after the Civil War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015).

¹² Laura Edwards, *Gendered Strife and Confusion: The Political Culture of Reconstruction* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997); Andrew L. Slap, *The Doom of Reconstruction: The Liberal Republicans and the Civil War Era* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006).

¹³ Mark W. Summers, *The Ordeal of the Reunion: A New History of Reconstruction* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014).

¹⁴ The best works in this vein are by Michael Fitzgerald, particularly his *Urban Emancipation: Popular Politics in Reconstruction Mobile, 1860-1890* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2002) and *Splendid Failure: Postwar Reconstruction in the American South* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2008). Another important synthesis that analyzes party factionalism is Michael Perman, *Road to Redemption, Southern Politics, 1869-1879* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984). Also see Jeffrey J. Crow, "Fusion, confusion, and Negroism: Schisms Among Negro Republicans in the North Carolina Election of 1896," *North Carolina Historical Review* 53, no. 4 (1976).

Reconstructed rebels hold the key to a new explanation of Reconstruction's failures and how the South's prewar elites regained power. This interpretation does not contradict the usual explanations, all of which build on the historiographical consensus in Eric Foner's masterful synthesis, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution*.¹⁵ The interpretation presented here is essential nonetheless because it helps further explain, to quote a recent title, "how the South won the Civil War."¹⁶ It shows how defeated groups coopted the victors' institutions and turned defeat into non-defeat. Finally, it demonstrates that reconstructed rebels, far from being forgotten prophets of racial justice, were in fact complicit in the nation's great national failure.

Motivations and Consequences

Historians have spilled considerable ink analyzing the background and motivations of Southern Republicans. A lively debate once existed over whether the "scalawags" were persistent Whigs or hill-country Democrats. In the former view, they were elite men who wanted government support for business interests and hoped to strike back against the Democrats who had dominated southern politics in the 1850s. In the latter interpretation, they were poor whites and wartime Unionists who harbored longstanding resentment against the slaveholding elite.¹⁷ A closer focus on those who served the Confederacy will show that reconstructed rebels were often

¹⁵ Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988).

¹⁶ Heather Cox Richardson, *How the South Won the Civil War: Oligarchy, Democracy, and the Continuing Fight for the Soul of America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020).

¹⁷ For attempts at quantitative analysis of partisan origins, see David H. Donald, "The Scalawag in Mississippi Reconstruction," *The Journal of Southern History* 10, no. 4 (1944): 447-460, Thomas B. Alexander, "Persistent Whiggery in the Confederate South, 1860-1877," *The Journal of Southern History* 27, no.3 (1961): 305-329. Allen W. Trelease, "Who Were the Scalawags?" *The Journal of Southern History* 29, no. 4 (1963): 445-468; Warren A. Ellem, "Who Were the Mississippi Scalawags?" *The Journal of Southern History* 38, no. 2 (1972): 217-240. For an analysis focused more on ideology, see Mitchell Snay, "Freedom and Progress: The Dilemma of Southern Republican Thought During Radical Reconstruction," *American Nineteenth Century History* 5, no. 1 (2004): 100-114.

persistent Whigs. Nevertheless, in some in places like North Carolina, where former Whigs had governed during the war, former Democrats could be found perpetuating old rivalries from within the Republican Party. Regardless of their prewar party affiliation, the quantitative analysis in chapter one shows that reconstructed rebels were more likely to come from the slave-owning classes than their Unionist counterparts in the Republican Party. Moreover, their letters and speeches suggest that reconstructed rebels often joined the party for conservative reasons. By accepting political change, they hoped to stabilize southern society, revive the regional economy, and most of all, restore the elites like themselves to power.

The impact of reconstructed rebels on southern politics was even more important than their motivations. Reconstructed rebels successfully convinced white northerners that prewar elites were fully reconstructed and able to rule at home. Some did so for their white Democratic counterparts even when they themselves did not abandon the Republican Party at the end of Reconstruction, though many did.

Before anyone defected, reconstructed rebels first had to argue that they deserved political favor. The Fourteenth Amendment and Reconstruction Acts banned many of them from holding office. That penalty could be lifted from select individuals, but to receive that reward, they had to convince northerners that they accepted legal and political equality for African Americans. Few who successfully demonstrated this new faith were being outright deceptive; recipients of congressional amnesty had in fact joined the Republican Party and their fortunes became linked to those of Black constituents.

Once in office, however, reconstructed rebels placed the economic interests of white southerners over those of Black freedpeople. They took steps to end racial terrorism, but believed that governance should be in their hands, not in those of the African Americans whose votes they

expected. These positions did not suggest to Republican leaders in the North that white southerners were unreconstructed. In fact, the Republican Party was quickly becoming the party of big business, and party leaders still believed that political virtue resided in men of their own race and class. Once southern elites in the Republican Party could convince northerners that they were reconstructed, it became easier for southern Democrats to do so as well with the argument that white elites could be trusted to govern their own states.

Part of the argument here is that ex-Confederates in the Republican Party paved the road to Redemption, and any interpretation of Redemption must confront not only the historiography of Reconstruction, but also the legacy of C. Vann Woodward. In his classic 1951 volume, *Origins of the New South*, Woodward challenged the traditional view that the Redeemers were backward-looking “Bourbons” who, like the French monarchists after the Revolution, had “learned nothing and forgotten nothing.” For Woodward, Redemption “was not a return to an old system nor the restoration of an old ruling class.” The basis for this claim was Woodward’s observation that the southerners who came to power after 1877 were mostly “of middle-class, industrial, capitalistic outlook, with little but a nominal connection with the old planter regime.”¹⁸ *Origins* continues to cast a long shadow, though its arguments have not gone without challenge. Other scholars have revealed within the post-Reconstruction Democratic Party a vital agrarian wing, which consistently aligned with western agrarians and exerted equal, if not more, pull than the industrial types who allied with northeastern capital.¹⁹

¹⁸ C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877-1913* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951), 19-21.

¹⁹ Carl V. Harris, "Right Fork or Left Fork? The Section-Party Alignments of Southern Democrats in Congress, 1873-1897," *The Journal of Southern History* 42, no. 4 (1976): 471-506; James Tice Moore, "Redeemers Reconsidered: Change and Continuity in the Democratic South, 1870-1900," *The Journal of Southern History* 44, no. 3 (1978): 357-78 and "The Historical Context for 'Redeemers Reconsidered,'" in *Origins of the New South Fifty Years Later*, ed. By John B. Boles and Bethany L. Johnson (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2003);

The interpretation here both supports and departs from Woodward's argument about Redeemers. On the one hand, ex-Confederates who joined the Republican Party did look to move the South beyond its agrarian roots and one of their major goals was to attract northern and European investment. However, their connections to the antebellum slaveocracy were more than superficial. Even as they warmed to the "New South" gospel of industrial development, they were still determined to maintain a cheap, Black labor force. As much as they had in fact changed in response to Confederate defeat and Reconstruction, the accession of some former Confederates to the Republican Party did represent a restoration of prewar elites to power. Even when the Republican Party later lost the South, Redeemers benefited from reconstructed rebels' "redemption" of southern elites into the political world, whether they were industrial or agrarian in outlook. The impact of reconstructed rebels on southern capitalism and race relations would be felt long after they left the stage.

Reconstructed Rebels

The following chapters draw heavily on the political writings, speeches, and private correspondence of ex-Confederates whose postwar activity made them "reconstructed rebels." This is a more appropriate term than the conventional "scalawags" for several reasons. Along with the term "carpetbagger," scalawag was a derogatory term created by Reconstruction's opponents. "Scalawags" also refers to all white southern Republicans, including those who were former Unionists. Certainly, the views of some southern Unionists on politics and race were "reconstructed" during the 1860s and 1870s, and northern policy makers, including Abraham

Terry L. Seip, *The South Returns to Congress: Men, Economic Measures, and Intersectional Relationships, 1868-1879* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1983).

Lincoln, expected them to form a nucleus for southern Republican parties. Many excellent studies have been written about their role in Reconstruction.²⁰ Historians can gain new insights, however, by examining those southern Republicans who had once supported the Confederacy and had the unique experience of embracing defeat. Unlike white Unionists, whom the Northern press came to characterize as poor, illiterate, and excessively driven by class and wartime resentment, reconstructed rebels helped to reestablish the legitimacy of white southern elites.

Most of the reconstructed states are represented here, though North Carolina gets more attention. Not only did 73 percent of its white Republican leaders hold Confederate military or civilian office according to James Baggett, more reconstructed rebels from North Carolina received congressional amnesty—29 percent—than those from any other state. Perhaps the fact that certain states like North Carolina, Georgia, and Mississippi did not experience Reconstruction until 1865 accounts for why there were more former Confederates in the Republican Party. In states like Louisiana and Arkansas, where Reconstruction began during the war, a protective government allowed for the early rise to power of white Unionists.

The major characters presented here did not always correspond with each other unless they were in the same state. They behaved in similar ways, however, and they exerted a like influence over Reconstruction's direction. Outsiders also tended to view them as a group with symbolic weight. By looking at them, northerners could measure their success in transforming the South.

²⁰ See especially William C. Harris, *With Charity for All: Lincoln and the Restoration of the Union* (Louisville: University of Kentucky Press, 1999); Margaret M. Storey, *Loyalty and Loss: Alabama's Unionists in the Civil War and Reconstruction* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2004); and Victoria E. Bynum, *The Long Shadow of the Civil War: Southern Dissent and Its Legacies* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010).

In order to understand the larger national conversation on who was reconstructed, it is also necessary to analyze the words and actions of the other groups who had a stake in answering that question. Northern congressmen debated under what circumstances former rebels should be allowed to hold office. Northern settlers, southern Unionists, and African Americans frequently challenged the authority of reconstructed rebels, but less consistently than we might expect looking back from the twenty-first century. Often, they saw the value of wealthy, high-profile allies, only to be disappointed later. White Democrats charged white southern Republicans with betraying the South, the white race, their social class, and even their duty as men.

The first chapter begins by considering the background of the reconstructed rebels before they joined the Republican Party. The list of former rebels who received congressional amnesty offers an opportunity for quantitative analysis. The Fourteenth Amendment and the federal test oath circumvented President Johnson's early amnesty and banned certain ex-Confederates from holding political office. Nevertheless, Congress provided amnesty to 4,616 ex-Confederates between 1868 and the Amnesty Act of 1872, based on individual merit—that is, for supporting Reconstruction. After analyzing the census and military data on these men, chapter one continues with a more qualitative analysis based on manuscript collections and newspapers. Several recurring players make their first appearance as they navigate the war, Presidential Reconstruction, and the beginning of Congressional Reconstruction.

Chapter two draws on a source base that few historians have touched. Congressional amnesty produced not only a list of names, but also thousands of documents related to how the reconstructed rebels saw themselves. Previous historians have used parts of the Records of the House Select Committee on Reconstruction, but none have combed through the largest section of it: over 70 boxes of letters by and about reconstructed rebels who were seeking relief from the

officeholding ban.²¹ Unlike the earlier letters to Andrew Johnson where rebels exaggerated their wartime Unionism, these applications grounded their loyalty on postwar acts of open, public support for Congressional Reconstruction. Through congressional amnesty and political patronage, reconstructed rebels were restored to power.

The third chapter begins to consider the impact of reconstructed rebels on southern politics and society. Their highest priorities included attracting outside investment and preventing racial violence. These concerns were connected, since a thriving economy might make more whites willing to accept the Republican Party, and racial violence tended to scare away potential northern investors. Reconstructed rebels' policy priorities foreshadowed the boosterism of "New South" industrialists in the 1880s, and though they failed to create a stable environment for investment, Democratic Redeemers would be more successful.

Chapter four turns the focus on the unstable "friendship" between reconstructed rebels and African Americans in the South. Reconstructed rebels were able to simultaneously advocate legal equality and white supremacy because equal rights even among white people had never meant true political or social equality. Just as antebellum elites had cultivated patron-client relationships with poor whites, reconstructed rebels were willing to include Black freedpeople in a political system that was ostensibly democratic, but nonetheless warped by elite power. Reconstructed rebels spoke of racial equality, defended their Black "friends" on occasion, and solicited Black votes. Even having a few African Americans in office was acceptable, but ultimately, reconstructed rebels expected to set the agenda and run their states. When Black

²¹ William C. Harris used these applications to profile white Mississippi Republicans, but no one else seems to have used them as a source base. See Harris, "A Reconsideration of the Mississippi Scalawag," 3-42. Curiously, the only two studies of congressional amnesty do not use these sources. See William Adam Russ, Jr., "Congressional Disfranchisement, 1866-1898" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1933) and Jonathan Truman Dorris's *Pardon and Amnesty Under Lincoln and Johnson: The Restoration of Confederates to Their Rights and Privileges, 1861-1898* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1953).

southerners insisted on more than their white allies were willing to give, reconstructed rebels accused African Americans of making an unnecessary race issue.

The final chapter completes the story of reconstructed rebels by analyzing how they grappled with Republican defeat and assessing their impact on Democratic Redemption. Many left the Republican Party and blamed either African Americans, “carpetbaggers,” or northern leaders on the way out the door. Others stayed in the party, even though they expressed similar views to those who left. In the end, many of them were able to make their peace with Democratic rule. At the same time, men like L.Q.C. Lamar and David Key successfully convinced white northerners that they were reconstructed too, despite never having joined the Republican Party. The chapter concludes by looking at the reconstruction rebels’ attitudes toward legal disfranchisement at the dawn of a new century.

After America’s Civil War, democratic tradition and ideas about white racial superiority mandated against a prolonged period of military rule. The war had become one to destroy slavery, but white northerners were hardly certain about African Americans’ capacity to govern. Such considerations meant that there would have to be some role for former elites. Northern Republicans wisely required that elite participation be limited to those who were “reconstructed.” To what extent, however, did reconstructed rebels truly free themselves from their own past?

CHAPTER 1
EMBRACING DEFEAT:
SELF-RECONSTRUCTION IN THE SOUTH

In the summer of 1865, Edward Gantt was vigorously working for Arkansas’s restoration to the Union under President Johnson’s plan of Reconstruction. Arkansas, like other southern states, was organizing its government according to Johnson’s lenient terms, and Gantt wrote in June that soon not even Johnson’s “radical” opponents would “have the nerve to say that *Arkansas is not a state.*” Gantt disclaimed any desire for office. He promised Johnson, “I shall quietly but energetically endeavor to see that we get good sound men for congress—those who will strengthen the hands of the administration in the great work before it.” Like most southern elites who later joined the Republican Party, Gantt started out as a supporter of Presidential Reconstruction.¹

Presidential Reconstruction, as historian Dan Carter suggests, was the South’s failed attempt at “self-reconstruction.” Before Congress later insisted on a more thorough reworking of southern institutions, President Johnson allowed white southerners to take the lead in reconfiguring their own governments. Gantt’s readiness to participate in this project is not surprising. The people Carter studied generally repudiated secession, at the very least admitting that it was a mistake, and at most arguing that it was a crime. They also recognized the death of slavery and worked to lay the foundation for an economic order without it. However, as Carter argues, their imagination was limited by conservative racial ideology. They still imagined

¹ Edward W. Gantt to Andrew Johnson, 29 Jun 1865, *The Papers of Andrew Johnson*, ed. Paul H. Bergeron (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1989), Vol. 8, 313. Emphasis in the original.

African Americans as a menial labor force that needed to be strictly controlled with “black codes.” To white northerners, southern leaders increasingly looked unrepentant and unreconstructed. They clung to Johnson’s lenient terms and became intransigent when Congress demanded more. Self-reconstruction was a failure.²

Gantt started out a supporter of Johnson’s policy, but his efforts to “self-reconstruct” did not end there. Even before his letter to Johnson, Gantt had told Pennsylvania Republican William D. Kelley that “the end of the Rebellion is not the mere breaking up of the physical forces that sustained it, but *the extirpating of the ideas that made it!*” He naively believed that loyal white southerners would grant Black southerners “*the principle of suffrage and equality before the law,*” and he wanted to help establish free labor institutions in the South.³ From September 1865 to October 1866, he served as Freedmen’s Bureau superintendent of the southwestern district of Arkansas. In the summer of 1865, Gantt had been able to speak of “radicals” who opposed Johnson’s plan, but the conflict between the president and congress was still inchoate. Unlike the typical Johnsonian southerner, however, Gantt did not oppose Congress when it took control of Reconstruction in 1867, nor did he rejoin the Democratic Party, which had been his political home before the war. Instead he recruited for Republican clubs and campaigned for the Republican presidential nominee, Ulysses S. Grant, in 1868.⁴ As Gantt put it much earlier, “Revolutions shake up men’s thoughts and put them in different channels.”⁵

² Dan T. Carter, *When the War Was Over: The Failure of Self-Reconstruction in the South, 1865-1867* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1985). See also Michael Perman, *Reunion without Compromise: The South and Reconstruction: 1865-1868* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1973).

³ E. W. Gantt to William D. Kelley, 5 May 1865, published in *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 11 May 1865

⁴ Randy Finley, “‘This Dreadful Whirlpool’ of Civil War: Edward W. Gantt and the Quest for Distinction,” in *The Southern Elite and Social Change: Essays in Honor of Williard B. Gatewood, Jr.*, ed. Randy Finley and Thomas A. Deblack, (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2002), 71.

⁵ *The New York Times*, 14 Nov 1863.

Since the historiographical contributions of Michael Perman and Dan Carter, the consensus on Presidential Reconstruction has been that Andrew Johnson's conservative policies emboldened white southerners to resist additional change.⁶ There is plenty of evidence to justify this interpretation. Most of the leaders of the South's failed self-reconstruction went on to oppose Congressional intervention. Gantt's support for Congressional Reconstruction was uncommon among white southern elites. However, Presidential Reconstruction is essential to understanding the making of "reconstructed rebels." Their decision to embrace Confederate defeat when Johnson's terms were the only ones on the table became a prelude to their support for Congressional Reconstruction.

In 1865, it would have been difficult to predict who out of the prewar elite would ultimately join the Republican Party. Members of the old ruling class would eventually be found in both postwar parties, and far more often among the Democrats. By analyzing the background of those who received Congressional amnesty, we can conclude that they had a similar background to those who opposed Reconstruction. Nevertheless, among those who did join the Republican Party, there were common patterns during the first couple years after the war. First, as they narrated their wartime experience, they frequently repudiated secession and described a Confederacy that had been riven by dissent and internal conflict. This constructed memory distanced them from the past and made it easier to accept new commitments. Not all reconstructed rebels, however, had been half-hearted Confederates; many were loyal to the end, like James Longstreet. Even more than anti-Confederate memory, the failure of Johnson's plan convinced many to cast their lot with the rising power of Congress. Johnson had failed to convince northerners that the South was subdued, and as a result, Republicans would not admit

⁶ Perman, *Reunion without Compromise*; Carter, *When the War Was Over*.

southern representatives to Congress. A pragmatic assessment suggested that white southern home rule could not be had under Johnson. Finally, reconstructed rebels justified embracing defeat by articulating a version of masculinity based on restraint and pragmatic decision-making, which they juxtaposed with the unrestrained violence and emotional rhetoric of their critics. Embracing defeat became a point of pride connected to their sense of self as former soldiers and well-bred pragmatic men. When Congress took the reins, their self-reconstruction did not end, but instead entered a new phase.

A Quantitative Profile

The prewar antecedents of the reconstructed rebels gave little indication of the course they would pursue in 1867 and 1868 when Republican parties began to form in the South. Other studies of Southern Republicans have found that the leading men among them were less wealthy in 1860 than their opponents, but that they were still a respectable bunch. Perhaps their followers, the ordinary voters who are more anonymous because they never served in party leadership, had more lowly origins. However, the Democratic Party in the South clearly drew from poor and middling whites as well, many of whom associated Black political inclusion with the higher taxes imposed by Republican state governments. Rather than trying to distinguish party allegiance based on background, historians can learn more if they begin by admitting that the supporters and opponents of Reconstruction shared similar prewar origins.

A fresh way of looking at Southern Republicans is to analyze those who received congressional amnesty. The Fourteenth Amendment's third section barred prewar officeholders who later served the Confederacy from holding any postwar office—local, state, or federal. The federal test oath also disqualified everyone who supported the Confederacy from holding federal

office. Since some of those former rebels had actually become supporters of Reconstruction, Congress provided amnesty to 4,616 of these new allies. Among those relieved by the 40th Congress, only one was a known Democrat. The 41st Congress relieved Republicans as well as some Democrats who vocally supported the 14th and 15th Amendments as the legitimate law of the land. All their names were recorded in the congressional statutes, and often printed in newspapers as well.

Matching a sample of these names with census and military records yields a quantitative profile for former elites who supported Reconstruction. The following analysis is based on a random, statistical sample of 355 persons who received congressional amnesty from either the 40th or 41st Congress. Compared to the average white southerner, they were clearly a privileged group. While the average soldier in the Army of Northern Virginia owned roughly \$1000 of property in 1860, the median household wealth for those who benefited from congressional amnesty was \$9,200. According to the 1860 census, only a quarter of white southern households owned slaves, but 63 percent of the elite group that needed and received congressional amnesty held slave property.⁷

The comparison here should not be too surprising. All of those who were subject to Fourteenth Amendment disqualifications were prewar officeholders, and those affected by the test oath had ambitions to hold a federal office. By definition they were a political elite, and their economic background reflected that status. One would expect these men who served in the Confederate military to be commissioned as officers, and indeed, 41 percent held commissions. More can be learned by comparing this group with other studies of the southern elite. Historian James Baggett collected data on 732 Southern Republicans and 666 of their Democratic

⁷ Joseph T. Glatthaar, *General Lee's Army: From Victory to Collapse* (New York: Free Press, 2008), 19-20.

opponents. All of the names came from newspapers, which frequently reported the delegates to party conventions at the state and local level. In other words, they represent party activists, not ordinary voters, and can be more fruitfully compared with the list of rebels who received congressional amnesty.⁸

On the one hand, the numbers on amnestied Confederates validate Baggett’s conclusion that Southern Republicans came from a somewhat more modest background than Democrats. On the other hand, the comparison indicates that when southern Republicans had a Confederate record, civilian or military, they were more likely to share a common economic background with their opponents.

Table 1: Status Categories of Reconstructed Rebels, White Southern Republicans, and Redeemers (in percentages)

	1860 Wealth (thousands)			Slaveholdings in 1860		
	<10	10-19.999	>20	0	1-19	20+
Reconstructed Rebels*	51	17	32	46	42	11
"Scalawags"***	54	20	26	59	31	10
"Redeemers"***	37	22	37	44	38	17

*Based on a random statistical sample of 355 persons from the statutes on congressional amnesty.

**Adapted from James A. Baggett, *The Scalawags*, 274-279.

*** Adapted from James A. Baggett, *The Scalawags*, 274-279.

Compared with Baggett’s southern Republican “scalawags,” a similar percentage of the amnestied “reconstructed rebels” could be found in the lowest two of three wealth brackets. The

⁸ James Alex Baggett, *The Scalawags: Southern Dissenters in the Civil War and Reconstruction* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2002), 274-279.

percentage of those amnestied rebels with over \$20,000 in property, however, is squarely between Baggett's southern Republican "scalawags" and Democratic "Redeemers." As for slaveholding, the percentage of non-slaveholders among amnestied rebels is similar to that for Redeemers and thirteen percentage points below that of Baggett's "scalawags." The reconstructed rebels on the amnesty list were more likely than either group to own fewer than twenty slaves, which is the traditional cutoff for who counted as planters. Democratic Redeemers counted more plantation owners among their leadership, though even these were less than a quarter of Redeemers. Overall, it seems clear that southern Republicans with a Confederate background were more similar than different from their Democratic opponents when it comes to economic origins.

Reconstructed rebels varied in how they made their wealth, both before and after the Civil War. James Alcorn was one of the wealthiest men in Mississippi, owning a quarter million dollars of property in 1860, including seventy-seven slaves on his Delta cotton plantation. Others like Arkansan Edward Gantt, who owned eight enslaved people in 1860, were born outside the planter class, but hoped to join it. The end of slavery opened some southerners' eyes to new opportunities. Joseph E. Brown of Georgia made the switch from agriculture to new extractive industries like mining after the Civil War. Williams C. Wickham partnered with railroad magnate Collis Huntington after the war. Wickham's father had owned almost three hundred enslaved people in the Richmond area, but finding that avenue cut off, he sought other kinds of power. Like most politically-inclined elites, reconstructed rebels on the amnesty list often entered the legal profession. A smaller number chose different professions, such as physician James Ramsay and Methodist minister John H. Caldwell. By 1870, thirty-seven percent of those who received congressional amnesty listed a profession on the census, while thirty-six percent

considered themselves planters or farmers, and fourteen percent thought of themselves as commercial men.

When more political historians began employing quantitative methods in the 1960s and 1970s, there was a vigorous debate over whether the “scalawags” had been antebellum Whigs or old-time Democrats. In Mississippi, many of the wealthiest Delta planters were former Whigs, and some of them like Alcorn joined the Republican party. Western North Carolina was also a prewar stronghold for Whigs, which later gravitated toward the Republicans. However, Whig leaders in the North Carolina piedmont also dominated the leadership of the anti-Reconstruction opposition and for a time helped rename the Democrats as the “Conservative Party.” In reaction, some former Democrats in the central and eastern parts of the state joined the Republicans. Likewise, in Alabama, upstate counties that were traditionally Democratic became bastions of wartime Unionism and then postwar Republicanism. It may be worth at some point analyzing the congressional amnesty list according to prewar party allegiance. For now though, it seems clear that the dynamics of interparty movement varied by region and were very idiosyncratic.⁹

In all likelihood, there is more in their prewar background to separate reconstructed rebels from wartime Unionists than from Redeemers. Before the war began, Unionists included many big planters who accurately predicted that secession would risk their investments in slavery. After the fighting started, however, such men usually became Confederates and those who remained loyal to the Union were a humbler sort. One study of North Carolina’s wartime

⁹ For attempts at quantitative analysis of partisan origins, see David H. Donald, “The Scalawag in Mississippi Reconstruction,” *The Journal of Southern History* 10, no. 4 (1944): 447-460, Thomas B. Alexander, “Persistent Whiggery in the Confederate South, 1860-1877,” *The Journal of Southern History* 27, no.3 (1961): 305-329. Allen W. Trelease, “Who Were the Scalawags?” *The Journal of Southern History* 29, no. 4 (1963): 445-468; Warren A. Ellem, “Who Were the Mississippi Scalawags?” *The Journal of Southern History* 38, no. 2 (1972): 217-240. For an analysis focused more on ideology, see Mitchell Snay, “Freedom and Progress: The Dilemma of Southern Republican Thought During Radical Reconstruction,” *American Nineteenth Century History* 5, no. 1 (2004): 100-114.

Unionists found that almost twenty percent owned slaves. In the hill country sub-region of Alabama, another area with a high number of Unionists, the rate of slaveholding was only five and a half percent.¹⁰ These numbers come from the Southern Claims Commission, a body that attracted claims from many non-elite southerners who had been loyal to the Union and suffered because of the proximity of the Union army. Therefore, a comparison to the list of amnestied rebels, all politically experienced or politically ambitious, must be made with care. Still, the much higher incidence of slaveholding for amnestied rebels—sixty-three percent—strongly hints at the economic gap between the two groups who would later disagree about what direction to take the Republican Party in their states.

The elite status of the reconstructed rebels did not determine which party they chose after the war, though it does ultimately help to explain their conservative influence from within the Republican Party. Moreover, these former Confederates were able to exert more influence than wartime Unionists, even to the extent of crafting their own anti-Confederate narrative that repudiated southern nationalism and embraced defeat for their own benefit.

Confederate Service and Anti-Confederate Dissent

Wartime Unionism was a strong indicator of postwar support for the Republican Party.¹¹ However, the number of Unionists cannot be counted in full toward the Republicans, since some were unable to swallow the party's support for biracial citizenship. It should also be clear that white supporters of the Republican Party could not have all been wartime Unionists. The

¹⁰ Barton Myers, *Rebels Against the Confederacy: North Carolina's Unionists* (NY: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Margaret M. Storey, *Loyalty and Loss: Alabama's Unionists in the Civil War and Reconstruction* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2004).

¹¹ James Alex Baggett, *The Scalawags: Southern Dissenters in the Civil War and Reconstruction* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2003).

electoral support for Republicans in various southern states exceeds most estimates of wartime Unionists. For example, in North Carolina, Republicans received at least twenty-three percent of the white vote in 1868, but only four to six percent of the 1860 white male population were Unionists.¹² Additionally, of the former rebels whom Congress considered reconstructed, at least a third actually served in Confederate or state forces. Why would some former Confederates adopt a cause seemingly so antithetical to their past commitments? Part of the answer is that the postwar actions of reconstructed rebels, like those of Unionist-Republicans and unreconstructed rebels, had roots in wartime experience.

Historians have created a rich portrait of Confederate nationalism and anti-Confederate dissent. Numerous scholars have argued, with strong evidence, that attachment to slavery, the Confederate nation, and its armies, is what sustained resistance through four long years. In many cases, suffering, hardship, and the loss of slavery deepened white southern antipathy toward the North. Historians have also made a convincing case that Confederate nationalism, at least for some, endured beyond the failure of the Confederate state and fed into the resistance to Reconstruction.¹³ Another group of scholars have probed the extent and nuances of anti-

¹² My calculation of white Republican voting is taken from numbers in *The Tribune Almanac and Political Register* for 1869. A minimum calculation can be reached by assuming full turnout by the African Americans who registered for to vote from the total Republican vote. A more likely estimate can be formed assuming equal turnout from both Blacks and whites. With the latter method, the white Republican vote in North Carolina for the 1868 presidential election rises to 25%. The statistics on Unionism are taken from Barton Myers's study, *Rebels Against the Confederacy: North Carolina's Unionists* (NY: Cambridge University Press, 2014). To reach his estimate, Myers combines the 10,000 North Carolinians who served in the Union army with the 10,000 who belonged to the Heroes of America. This number therefore excludes deserters, recusant conscripts, as well as more occasional dissenters, who I consider part of the conditional loyal for the purpose of analyzing the background of reconstructed rebels.

¹³ The scholarship on Confederate nationalism is now immense, but see particularly Gary W Gallagher, *The Confederate War* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997); Anne S. Rubin, *A Shattered Nation: The Rise and Fall of the Confederacy, 1861-1868* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005); Jason, Phillips, *Diehard Rebels: The Confederate Culture of Invincibility* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2007); David C. Willard, "What a fall was there--my country ruined!: Confederate Soldiers and Southern Society, 1861-1880," Dissertation at UNC-Chapel Hill, 2012.

Confederate white southern resistance. Thousands of white southerners fought an inner civil war against the Confederacy from beginning to end. For even more white southerners, national allegiance was conditional, responding to battlefield developments, and competing with other loyalties to state, community, and family.¹⁴ Reconstructed rebels did not emerge as a distinct group until after the war, but their origins often lay in this context of conditional loyalty. Despite the nominal adherence to the Confederacy of the overwhelming majority of white southerners, the conditional nature of their allegiance provides one explanation for why some of them later joined the Republican Party.

North Carolina harbored many southerners who were reluctant secessionists; it also was the home of a spirited peace movement that emerged halfway through the war. Newspaper editor William Woods Holden was a reluctant secessionist and the peace movement's leader. Before the war, he had demonstrated considerable upward mobility. Born the illegitimate son of a mill owner, he got his start as a printer's apprentice, slowly accumulated capital and connections, married well, and eventually became the editor of the *Raleigh Standard*. Like most professional and commercial southerners, Holden was also a small slave-owner. He owned 6 enslaved persons in 1860, and given his occupation, likely hired out their labor around town. Though he never held political office until after the war, he was considered an influential leader in the state's Democratic Party.¹⁵

¹⁴ See especially Carl N. Degler, *The Other South: Southern Dissenters in the Nineteenth Century*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1974); Richard Nelson Current, *Lincoln's Loyalists: Union Soldiers from the Confederacy* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1992); Margaret M. Storey, *Loyalty and Loss: Alabama's Unionists in the Civil War and Reconstruction* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2004); Myers, *Rebels Against the Confederacy*; Victoria E. Bynum, *The Long Shadow of the Civil War: Southern Dissent and Its Legacies* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010).

¹⁵ William C. Harris, *William Woods Holden: Firebrand of North Carolina Politics* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987), 8-14, 50. Another excellent biography of Holden is Horace W. Raper, *William W. Holden: North Carolina's Political Enigma* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985).

Holden's experience of disunion exemplified that of a conditional Confederate. In early 1861, he helped to defeat the state's first call for a convention to take North Carolina out of the Union. After the beginning of hostilities, however, voters sent him to a constitutional convention and he voted for secession. In the columns of *The Standard*, he then urged a united front against Lincoln's armies. At the same time, though, he criticized Confederate and state leaders who appeared to be excluding reluctant secessionists from patronage appointments. Holden denounced the state's ruling faction as "Destructives" and organized the "Conservative Party" in opposition. The Conservative Party's victorious candidate, Zebulon Vance, soon proved too dedicated to the Confederate war effort for Holden, and in 1863, the editor began to encourage local "peace" meetings. A year later, he ran an unsuccessful campaign to unseat Vance, purposefully leaving it unclear whether his platform of peace meant reconstruction into the Union. While not overtly disloyal to the Confederacy, he was not a Confederate nationalist.¹⁶

By early 1865, there were plenty of pragmatic Confederates who thought that diehard nationalists were insane. In April, Samuel F. Phillips, a former Whig from Chapel Hill, North Carolina, was enraged by a friend's suggestion that white southerners needed to "rouse" themselves to victory. "Have they not been roused," Phillips asked, "were they not intoxicated by political nostrums before 1861, & stimulated to volunteer in running *amok* with Christendom upon the subject of slavery; & when that fever was wearing off, were they not then spurred forward without mercy in the same cause?" They had been "coerced by the Confed. Administration" and "all their means of force & fraud" employed on its citizens. Phillips felt astonished that anyone would think "a few words of encouragement, a few words of warning—

¹⁶ Harris, *William Woods Holden*, 109.

an Address, or a Proclamation can have the smallest effect in restoring vital energy.”¹⁷ Both Holden and Phillips became reconciled to reunion, and later, the Republican Party.

Holden and Phillips were Confederate civilians, but dissent was not limited to the home front. Edward Gantt of Arkansas was a Confederate colonel when he switched sides halfway through the war. To diehard rebels, he was the Benedict Arnold of the Confederacy—though unlike Arnold, he picked the winning cause. His defection in late 1863 and subsequent speaking tour of northern cities brought him both fame and notoriety. Northern newspapers sometimes referred to him as a “Unionist,” ignoring Gantt’s past, even though Gantt himself never dodged the fact that he was an ex-Confederate officer.¹⁸ The Unionist label said more about how many northerners understood loyalty during the war years. To Abraham Lincoln and a large swath of northern opinion, Unionism meant anyone presently loyal to the United States, including the returning loyalty of rebels. What it meant to be a “Unionist” and “reconstructed” would change during the postwar years, and Gantt would eventually become a supporter of Congressional Reconstruction, but his personal reconstruction began with wartime disillusionment.

Like Holden, Gantt was a man-on-the-make in the decade before the Civil War. In 1853, at the age of twenty-four, he moved from his native Tennessee to Arkansas, following the pattern of many ambitious young southerners moving westward. Rather than fighting to penetrate the Delta elite on the eastern border of the state, he ventured further to the southwestern corner and settled in the new, but growing town of Washington. A lawyer, like his father before him, he

¹⁷ Samuel Phillips to Kemp Battle, 10 Apr 1865, Battle Family Papers, SHC, Chapel Hill, N.C.

¹⁸ *Lancaster Gazette* (Lancaster, Ohio), 21 Jan 1864.

quickly set up practice and successfully ran for the office of prosecuting attorney. Two years later he married the daughter of a planter who had moved to Arkansas the same year he had.¹⁹

The sectional conflict presented even greater opportunities for Gantt. In 1860, he was elected to Congress as a Democrat, though this victory was overshadowed by the presidential election. After the Republican victory, Gantt stoked the fires of secession by appealing to white manhood. The following year, the 12th Arkansas infantry chose Gantt as its colonel. Observers speculated that he would ascend higher still. However, on April 7, 1862, Union troops surrounded and captured Gantt and his men at an outpost on the Mississippi River. Five months in a Massachusetts prison were followed by his exchange and return to Arkansas, and then, nothing, as he waited in vain almost a year for a new commission. Perhaps Gantt's injured pride collided with a realistic assessment of the Confederacy's falling star and the mortal toll on white Arkansans. After the defeat at Vicksburg on July 4, 1863 cut Arkansas off from the rest of the Confederacy, Gantt crossed into Union lines and surrendered.²⁰

A week later, Gantt was in Washington, D.C., conferring with President Lincoln. At the end of the trip, he put some of the points he raised in the meeting on paper. He began by saying that he was not looking for a political or military position. Perhaps he was sincere—his only offices after 1863 were a short stint in the Freedmen's Bureau, and later, his old job as state prosecutor. Gantt then expressed his opinion that Arkansas could not be restored to loyalty through military power. An effort would have to be made to change the hearts of white Arkansans. A loyal newspaper, he argued, "would be worth more than a corps of soldiers."

¹⁹ Randy Finley, "'This Dreadful Whirlpool' of Civil War: Edward W. Gantt and the Quest for Distinction," *The Southern Elite and Social Change*, ed. Randy Finley and Thomas A. DeBlack (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2002), 54-56.

²⁰ Finley, "'This Dreadful Whirlpool' of Civil War," 56-64.

Practicing some of the arguments he would later make directly to white Arkansans, Gantt told Lincoln that the war had destroyed the wealth of slaveholders, ravaged the poor, and would soon wipe out the fortunes of the middle classes too. “Though,” Gantt continued, “we might not at once cut through their prejudices & educate them to the belief that the old flag and the old Government are their best friends & best protectors; yet having them once back, we can trust to Time, confident in all hope for results.”²¹ Gantt’s conversion, along with his faith that others would renew their loyalty, appealed to Lincoln’s beliefs about white southerners. Gantt was the first Confederate officer who Lincoln pardoned, and the Arkansan would continue to advise the president on Reconstruction.²²

In a pamphlet dated October 7, 1863, Gantt addressed white Arkansans with his new views. He asked them to reject the Confederate nationalist policy of “let the last man die” and instead submit to Union authorities. He argued that the national armies could give more protection to life and property than the Confederacy. As for slavery, he contended that it stunted economic development and the South would be better without it. Though Gantt had owned eight slaves himself and had played an active role launching a war to protect the institution, he blamed the war’s continuation on the wealthy and interpreted its consequences in class terms. “The rich have mostly fallen,” he wrote. “The poor have drunk deep of the cup of sorrow.” Now, he warned “tide of ruin, in its resistless surge, sweeps toward the middle classes.”²³

Gantt held out hope, however, that in a post-emancipation South, Arkansas’s industrial manufactures “will reverberate to the music of machinery in New-England, and the whirl of

²¹ E. W. Gantt to Abraham Lincoln, 15 Jul 1863, Abraham Lincoln Papers, LOC, Washington, D.C.

²² William C. Harris, *With Charity for All: Lincoln and the Restoration of the Union* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1997), 132-33.

²³ *The New York Times*, 14 Nov 1863.

Georgia spindles will meet responsive echo upon the slopes of the far off Pacific.” Economic development and national reunification would proceed together. He prophesied that without the peculiar institution of slavery, “the next generation [will] be more homogeneous and united than any since the days of the Revolution.” Homogeneity had negative connotations for white southerners who associated it with the loss of whiteness, as well as manhood, due to racial mixing. For Republicans, however, it suggested national unity. Homogeneity became a mantra for Gantt and other reconstructed rebels.²⁴

After addressing Arkansans, Gantt commenced on a tour of northern cities to bolster support for the Union war effort, Lincoln’s reelection, and recognition of a free state government back home. In January 1864, he spoke in Cincinnati and Harrisburg. The following month, he addressed audiences in New York City and Brooklyn.²⁵ Mixing providential and industrial language, he said that God had determined “that we should be blasted together by the furnace of civil war, and welded into one great homogeneous and powerful government.” Union victory would bring a “new order of things,” “regeneration,” a “new destiny of greater importance,” and “a grander march of power and progress.” He predicted increased white immigration to the South once slavery was removed, and he advertised the region’s natural resources to his northern audiences. At the Cooper Institute in New York, he even recommended white Arkansas women as “some of the prettiest girls in the world,” suggesting that inter-sectional marriage would help bring homogeneity. He marveled at the future: “The American genius will spread all over this land, will climb the hills of the West and roam on the shores of the Pacific, and the time will

²⁴ *The New York Times*, 14 Nov 1863. Richard White argues that homogeneous citizenship was at the center of the Radical Republican vision for *Reconstruction: The Republic For Which It Stands: The United States During Reconstruction and the Gilded Age, 1865-1896* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 56.

²⁵ *The New York Times*, 11 Jan 1864, 2 Feb 1864, 3 Jun 1864; *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 11 Feb 1864; *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 16 Jan 1864.

come when your Yankees, and Germans and Irish will settle all over that beautiful land of ours.”²⁶

Gantt did not address the future of freedpeople during his speaking tour. He boasted that there was room enough on the Oachitta River for every freedperson in Arkansas as well as Mississippi, Tennessee, and Kentucky, thus reserving the rest of the state for whites. Native Americans, he said, were doomed to fade before the westward expansion of white Americans. Homogeneity meant the assimilation of northerners, southerners, and European immigrants into a single people, but whether African Americans also could be assimilated was unclear.²⁷ A month after Confederate defeat, Gantt wrote in a public letter to Pennsylvania Congressman William Kelley that he believed Black southerners were “capable of culture and improvement.” He also noted “that all loyal men should accord to [them] the principle of suffrage and equality before the law is becoming a wide-spread conviction.”²⁸ His concept of uplift was paternalistic, but by including African Americans in a vision of national citizenship, he was already far removed from the ideas he held in 1860.

By March, Gantt was back in Arkansas. A Union colonel wrote to Lincoln, “Mr. Gantt has returned, having been as far North as my native county in New-Hampshire. He says if he had known as much of the North three years ago as he does now he never would have favored secession. I give him credit for being truly sincere in the sentiment.”²⁹ Despite Gantt’s previous appeals to white racism and his wartime participation in the Confederacy, he never went back on

²⁶ *The New York Times*, 2 Feb 1864.

²⁷ *The New York Times*, 2 Feb 1864.

²⁸ *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 11 May 1865.

²⁹ Christopher C. Andrews to Abraham Lincoln, 9 Mar 1864, Abraham Lincoln Papers, LOC.

his new position. He supported Johnson before Congressional Republicans fully broke with his policy, and he remained a committed Republican until his early death in 1874.

Gantt was atypical in the extent to which he carried his disillusionment during the war itself. More frequently, Confederates who criticized the insurgent government's policies remained loyal to the cause of slavery and independence at least until the war's end. Nevertheless, wartime dissent was important in shaping the postwar reconstruction of former rebels. Even in less extreme cases where it did not produce an early break with Confederate allegiance, dissent provided a path for rationalizing later actions. Gantt belonged to a section of wartime society that was only conditionally Confederate. Lincoln looked to them for leadership in reconstructing the South. Not all conditional Confederates became Republicans, but those who did frequently dwelled on their wartime experience and disillusionment.

Anti-Confederate Memory

Given the later dominance of "Lost Cause" collective memory, one might be surprised that many Confederates attempted to repudiate the southern nation in the immediate aftermath of defeat. Some emphasized their opposition to secession or dissatisfaction with Confederate policies. Others described a conversion experience, by which they realized that slavery had inhibited southern economic development. In all cases, their retrospection represented a break with the past. It placed them in an antagonistic position to the diehard rebels and the earliest apostles of "Lost Cause" memory. Embracing defeat in this way was a key step toward joining the Republican Party.

Edward Gantt was the highest-ranking Confederate officer to defect during the war, but Williams C. Wickham's embrace of Reconstruction only two weeks after Appomattox was

equally shocking to diehards. Born and raised outside Richmond, he had been elected as a Whig to the Virginia senate in 1859 and voted against secession at the convention that took the state out of the Union. Nevertheless, he raised his own company of Confederate soldiers and was commissioned as colonel of the 4th Virginia regiment. By the middle of the war, he was promoted to brigadier general, but at the same time that Gantt fled to the North, Wickham took a seat in the Confederate Congress, where he advocated an early peace with the Union.³⁰ Then, on April 23, 1865, he wrote a public letter telling Virginians that the Confederacy had “met with a deserved and violent death.”³¹

Wickham blamed secessionists for wrecking the state’s prosperity and expressed a hope that Virginians would now choose wiser leaders who would devise speedy means for the state’s recovery. Wasting no time mourning the Confederacy, he listed as subjects for immediate attention “the reorganization of our system of labor, the resuscitation of our internal improvement system, and the establishment of a financial and monetary system.”³² Later, he would deny a story circulated by one of his Republican friends that during the war he had shed tears whenever he saw the United States flag. Nevertheless, he admitted that the sight always inspired in him “emotions of regard,” that he was pained when he saw a Confederate soldier dragging it in the dust after Manassas, and that “there was no day during the late war on which I would not have hailed with pleasure an announcement of the restoration of peace and the Union.”³³ In his 1865 letter, Wickham did not explicitly align himself with the Republican Party,

³⁰ “A Guide to the Williams Carter Wickham Letterbook, 1881-1882,” *Virginia Heritage*, <<http://ead.lib.virginia.edu/vivaxtf/view?docId=vt/vibl/v01925.xml>>.

³¹ Williams C. Wickham to Franklin Stearns, 23 Apr 1865, *Richmond Whig* 28 Apr 1865.

³² Williams C. Wickham to Franklin Stearns, 23 Apr 1865, *Richmond Whig* 28 Apr 1865.

³³ *The Norfolk Virginian*, 31 Mar 1869.

but his party loyalty would be confirmed after the breach between the president and congress emerged.³⁴

John H. Caldwell was another Confederate who embraced defeat, though he had never been a fighting man. By 1865, Caldwell had been a Methodist minister for the past twenty years. Living in the Georgia piedmont, he had gained two slaves through marriage, but sold them to pay off the debts on a women's college he founded. During the war, Caldwell told his congregation that God was on the Confederacy's side.³⁵ In contrast, a couple months after defeat, he reconsidered where he and "[his] people" fit in God's plan.³⁶ Starting with the epiphany that God had been against the Confederacy, he reasoned that God had allowed white southerners to be defeated because of the evils of slavery. In a sermon on June 11, 1865, Caldwell explained to former slaveowners like himself that they had sinned, that they were being punished, and that they must repent.³⁷

Caldwell's sermon also provided hope for the future. If slavery and the Confederacy were immoral, southerners both Black and white could rejoice in the dawn of "a new era." The future would be "an era of light and knowledge, dispelling the shades of a long darkness. New light flows in upon our minds; new ideas are afloat in our midst; a new regime takes the place of the old; and society, upturned in its foundations by war, revolution, social and moral disorder, will settle down at last upon a new basis."³⁸ His language of light and darkness was biblical, and it

³⁴ Charles H. Lewis of Virginia to Henry Wilson, 19 Nov 1867, Henry Wilson Papers, LOC.

³⁵ Daniel W. Stowell, "'We Have Sinned, and God Has Smitten Us!'" John H. Caldwell and the Religious Meaning of Confederate Defeat," *The Georgia Historical Quarterly*, vol. 78, no. 1, 7-11.

³⁶ John H. Caldwell, *Slavery and Southern Methodism Two Sermons Preached in the Methodist Church in Newman, Georgia* (Printed for the author, 1865), 16.

³⁷ Caldwell, *Slavery and Southern Methodism*, 28-29. Caldwell reiterated his interpretation more directly in a second sermon preached the following week; see p. 74-75 of the same pamphlet.

³⁸ Caldwell, *Slavery and Southern Methodism*, 40.

also mirrored the way antebellum Republicans described the benefits that free labor would bring to the South.³⁹ Caldwell went on to describe a future South characterized by wage labor, equal justice under the law, a homogenous culture shared with the North, and a thriving economy.⁴⁰

Caldwell's congregation refused to abide his repudiation of the Confederate cause. They condemned him as a traitor, assailed his motives, and ultimately forced him out of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. However, he was not alone in his decision to embrace defeat, nor were his new views ephemeral. He joined the northern branch of the Methodists, served in the Georgia legislature as a Republican, and later worked as a detective for the Justice Department, ferreting out Klan activities.

At the same time that Caldwell was repudiating slavery, a former Confederate ordnance officer expressed concern over a similar sort of revisionism among his peers. An Alabama dinner host disturbed the man with "retrospection of his opposition to the doctrine of secession," and what he considered "the necessary deduction that we fought so valiantly & bled so freely in a cause radically wrong." The dinner guest attributed such reflections to a sort of cognitive dissonance: "he has I learn however done his share to sustain the war, & perhaps that consciousness makes him talk the more freely of his former views."⁴¹

Repudiation of the Confederate cause was most common in states with considerable wartime dissent like Georgia and North Carolina. A Macon judge admitted publicly that he had defended the legality of secession and slavery as both necessary and morally right. After the war, however, he considered the war a "chasm which separates the old South from the new." He

³⁹ Eric Burke, "Egyptian Darkness: Antebellum Reconstruction and Southern Illinois in the Republican Imagination, 1854-1861," M.A. Thesis at UNC-Chapel Hill, 2016.

⁴⁰ Caldwell, *Slavery and Southern Methodism*, 40.

⁴¹ *The Journals of Josiah Gorgas, 1857-1878*, ed. Sarah Woolfolk Wiggins (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1995), 175-177.

hoped that an “improved and enlightened civilization” would grow out of defeat and urged fellow white southerners that they “let not pride, prejudice and folly blind us, and lead us stumbling backward over a wilderness of graves to meet the embrace of death; for we must be men, not monuments.”⁴² One white North Carolinian was even less gracious about the past. When his state held a new constitutional convention to repudiate secession, he declared it his view that “secession has wellnigh ruined the country,” and he did not care “how strong the language in which I express my detestation of it.” A reluctant secessionist who saw himself as having been forced into rebellion, the delegate drew a distinction between himself and “the leaders of the Rebellion.” Since they had forced him to swallow “a bitter pill,” he would have them take a strongly-worded resolution repudiating secession “without the least sweetening.”⁴³

William Woods Holden became one of the most vitriolic repudiators of the Confederacy, and his transformation gives deeper illustration to the role of memory in shaping postwar political divisions. Wartime dissent took on new meanings when the war was over. A record of conflict with Confederate and state leadership allowed Holden to recast his old opponents as villains and imagine himself as the herald of a “new order.”⁴⁴ In a proclamation printed in his newspaper, Holden told white North Carolinians that they had “been delivered by the armies of the Union from one of the most corrupt and rigorous despotisms that ever existed in the world.” Confederate authorities had violently conscripted them to fight for slavery “and also for a state of slavery for yourselves and your children.” Families had been deprived of “freedom of speech and

⁴² O. A. Lochrane in *The New York Times*, 22 Aug 1865.

⁴³ John B. Odom in Sidney Andrews, *The South since the War: As Shown by Fourteen Weeks of Travel and Observation in Georgia and the Carolinas* (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1866), 143-44.

⁴⁴ Raleigh *Daily Standard*, 17 Apr 1865.

of the press, and of every essential guarantee of liberty and of protection to person and property.” Thankfully, under the Union, they were once more “free citizens.”⁴⁵

Ex post facto Unionism dominated North Carolina’s first postwar election. President Andrew Johnson, taking over for the assassinated Lincoln, appointed Holden provisional governor of the state in May 1865. In October, Holden hoped to win the same position by regular election. *The Standard*, now managed by Holden’s son, described the provisional governor as “an unflinching national Union man” and maintained that his patronage appointments likewise “have been during the war consistent Union men, so far as they could be.”⁴⁶ The qualification, “so far as they could be,” suggested both the complexity of political loyalty during the Civil War and the constructed nature of postwar Unionism. Holden’s secretary of the treasury, Jonathan Worth, challenged him for the position of governor, asserting that Andrew Johnson “would rather a Union man, of any consistent record, were elected over Mr. Holden.” Worth had reluctantly accepted secession, taken an oath to the Confederacy as state legislator and treasurer, and managed wartime finance until the surrender. Nevertheless, like Holden, Worth underscored his opposition to disunion, disdain for the Confederacy leadership, and nostalgia for the old union.⁴⁷

Ultimately, public perceptions of Holden and Worth determined the legitimacy of their claims. Both diehard Confederates and wartime Unionists rejected Holden’s claims on the past. One diehard rebel considered Holden “the lowest, most abject, & degraded man [northerners] could find among us,” “a base born bastard with neither the breeding nor the instinct of a

⁴⁵ Raleigh *Daily Standard*, 13 Jun 1865.

⁴⁶ Raleigh *Daily Standard*, 18 Oct 1865.

⁴⁷ Worth to John Pool & Lewis Thompson, 16 Oct 1865, to A. M Tomlinson, 18 Oct 1865 in Worth, 1:429-431, 435-436. For a biography of Jonathan Worth, see Richard L. Zuber, *Jonathan Worth: A Biography of a Southern Unionist*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1965).

gentleman.”⁴⁸ As Holdenites predicted, the counties that had once provided the strongest support for secession turned out for Worth. For Worth’s supporters, reconstructed Union loyalty did not mean repudiating the “Lost Cause,” as Holden had done.

The Standard used satire to reflect on Holden’s defeat and underline the increasing ambiguity of postwar loyalty. “We ar all union men now,” a fictional backwoods yeoman observed with mock resignation. “Uncle Jim says his old coon dog lyon has got to be union, and its union every whar and every body, some how or somehow else.” The captain of the home guard who “ketched the desarters, and sich as he could’nt ketch he shot, he’s union.” The fictional narrator thought back on his own record—he had opposed secession, supported peace, voted for Holden in 1864, took the oath of loyalty—but when he went to cast his vote in the recent election, he was shocked to hear that Holden had once voted for secession, that he was the disloyal candidate, and that anyone who supported Holden was a secessionist. “I sum times look at the glass and wonder ef its me....Are *you* union? Am *I* union? ...Have I gone astray, or am I what I was? This is a distressin question.”⁴⁹ Claims to Union loyalty could appear deceptive, even empty, when individuals disagreed on what kind of Union the postwar United States was to become.

Competing definitions of postwar Unionism were a reflection of national disagreements over what it meant for an ex-rebel to be reconstructed. To Andrew Johnson, someone like Jonathan Worth was fully reconstructed and North Carolina deserved full status in the Union. To moderate Republicans, however, Worth was an unreconstructed rebel who refused to protect the civil rights of Union men—Black and white, northern and southern. The ambiguity of postwar

⁴⁸ Catherine Devereux Edmondston, *Journal of a Secesh Lady: The Diary of Catherine Ann Devereux Edmondston, 1860-1866*, ed. Beth G Crabtree and James Welch Patton (Raleigh: Archives and History, 1979), 714.

⁴⁹ Raleigh *Weekly Standard*, 17 Jan 1866.

loyalty can thus explain the sarcasm with which northern newspapers used the term “reconstructed rebels” in the first year after the war. In July 1865, *The Pittsburg Gazette* provided a “graphic picture of reconstructed rebels” in Washington, D.C.: “He was long of limb, broad of shoulder, hollow of chest, loose of joint, unkempt of hair, sallow of face, dirty of finger nails, and gray of clothing. He used very broad accent of speech, was loud and coarse of voice, begged tobacco of anybody, drank whisky by the glass full at the expense of the Northern man with Southern principles, and was, in a word, every way obnoxious to cleanliness, liberty, manhood and loyalty.” The man was “as great a stickler now as ever for State rights.”⁵⁰ In other words, he was not reconstructed at all.

During the war, there was some agreement that Union loyalty included white southerners who ceased their resistance to the United States authorities—hence, why papers could write about Gantt as a “Unionist.” After the war, however, northerners gave increasingly greater consideration to *what kind* of nation they wanted to build. While Democrats were largely content with prewar federalism, Republicans had already in the prewar years developed a nation-building vision based on common institutions, such as free labor, public schools, and the bourgeois household. For former Confederates, repudiating secession and slavery did not necessarily mean giving up on regionalism, states’ rights, or white supremacy. However, for those who continued to reconstruct themselves, like Gantt, Caldwell, and Holden, embracing the past was an essential first step.

⁵⁰ *The Pittsburgh Gazette*, 11 Jul 1865.

Embracing the Republican Party

The political conflict between President Johnson and Republicans in Congress forced white southerners to take sides. Though most sided with Johnson, those who eventually joined the Republican Party gradually came to the conclusion that opposing Congress would prevent them from attaining their goals: returning the South to the Union, restoring economic prosperity, and stabilizing the social and political order in their local communities.

In 1866, Johnson attempted to form a “National Union Party” that would bring together Democrats and conservative Republicans in opposition to more radical Republicans who wanted to transform the South. Republican gains in the midterms showed that Johnson was not an effective standard bearer against Congress. Congress continually overrode Johnson’s vetoes, and in 1867, passed the Reconstruction Acts, which would require the southern states to write new constitutions that included Black voting rights. Democrats promised to overturn everything that Congressional Republicans had started. Though most reconstructed rebels did not start out as supporters of Congressional Reconstruction, the Democrats’ rhetoric gradually convinced them that a Democratic administration could only lead to greater conflict and ruin.

Ex-Confederate elites wanted their states readmitted to the Union and longed for an economic recovery. Some even saw Confederate defeat as an opportunity. *DeBow’s Review*, a New Orleans journal that had advocated agricultural and industrial reforms prior to the war, proposed a plan to “revive the former prosperity of these states.”⁵¹ In an 1867 article titled, “New Era for Southern Manufactures,” Alabama’s Johnsonian Governor Robert M. Patton insisted on the necessity of shifting from cotton agriculture to textile mills.⁵² Atlanta’s aptly named *New Era*

⁵¹ J. D. B. DeBow, “The Future of South Carolina—Her Inviting Resources,” *DeBow’s Review* 2:1 (Jul 1866), 38.

⁵² Robert M. Patton, “The New Era of Southern Manufactures,” *DeBow’s Review* 3:1 (Jan 1867), 56-69.

declared its mission to become “an acceptable auxiliary to business men” by having “less to do with politics than with markets, North and South.”⁵³ In another editorial, it argued that the state needed “more railroads, more rolling mills and foundries, more machine shops, more mining operations, more cotton mills, more mechanics, more scientific and industrial energy.”⁵⁴

Slavery had made considerable wealth for planters, but as historians and economists have noted, it depressed farm values and left the region underdeveloped.⁵⁵ The editor of the *New Era* understood this. “We have,” he wrote, “been in the rear ranks of progress long enough. We have never been sufficiently active, and have never had active capital enough.—Heretofore our wealth has been locked up in negroes; hereafter wealth must be invested in profitable enterprises.” Moreover, he predicted that if Georgia adopted a more industrial political economy, “animosities will die out more rapidly” and there will “no longer [be] any sections, but that the interests of every part [will be] identical.”⁵⁶ In the South’s loss of its sectional identity, it would find new economic life.

Commercial-minded elites like the editor of the *New Era* embraced the early postwar order under Johnson while still asserting white dominance. In 1866, the *New Era* broke its promise to eschew partisan politics by criticizing the Fourteenth Amendment and declaring itself an “unyielding advocate of Constitutional equality to the white race.”⁵⁷ When Robert Patton had earlier announced his candidacy for governor, he referred to Alabama as a “white man’s

⁵³ The Atlanta *New Era*, 27 Oct 1866.

⁵⁴ The Atlanta *New Era*, 11 Nov 1866.

⁵⁵ Gavin Wright, *Old South, New South: Revolutions in the Southern Economy since the Civil War* (New York: Basic Books, 1986), 17-33.

⁵⁶ The Atlanta *New Era*, 11 Nov 1866.

⁵⁷ The Atlanta *New Era*, 19 Oct 1866 and 31 Oct 1866.

government” and said “we must keep this a white man’s state.”⁵⁸ Arkansas’s ex-Confederate “Unionist,” Edward Gantt, distinguished himself from “radicals” but still hoped that he could prove to Congress that Arkansas was ready to be brought back into the Union promptly with full congressional representation and minimal changes to government.⁵⁹ William Holden, even after losing to Jonathan Worth in late 1865, did not immediately embrace the radical cause. Early the next year, he opined in his newspaper that Black suffrage “ignores hundreds of thousands of white Unionists in the South” and “puts the freedmen above them.”⁶⁰

By 1867, all of these men changed their tune. Republicans added to their majority in the 1866 midterms, and then in March 1867, passed their plan for reorganizing the southern state governments. To reconstructed rebels, it was apparent that their states would not be readmitted to Congress under Johnson’s terms. They would have to “accept the situation,” as many southern elites began to say. Making an about-face, the *New Era* embraced the Congressional terms in May. The goal was to restore southern political power and economic prosperity. Restoration to the Union, with congressional representation, it noted, would mean “stability, confidence, increase of capital and population and productiveness, and general prosperity.”⁶¹

Others reached similar conclusions after speaking with northern investors. Alabama Governor Robert Patton, returning from a trip to New York City in early 1867, reported that capitalists there were unwilling to lend money because of the state’s “disjointed condition.”⁶² When Congress passed the Reconstruction Acts in March, Patton grounded his pleas for

⁵⁸ *Chicago Tribune*, 20 Oct 1865.

⁵⁹ Edward W. Gantt to Andrew Johnson, 29 Jun 1865, *The Papers of Andrew Johnson*, ed. Paul H. Bergeron (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1989), Vol. 8, 313.

⁶⁰ *The Raleigh Weekly Standard*, 28 Mar 1866.

⁶¹ *Atlanta New Era*, 5 May 1867.

⁶² *Huntsville Advocate* quoted in *Chicago Tribune*, 13 Jan 1867.

cooperation with the Republican plan on economic development. In a public letter, Patton told Alabamians that the state's resources "are known and appreciated by capitalists who are eager to come among us and make investments, but who will not do so in the present condition of uncertainty."⁶³

Conceding the authority of Congress did not always mean joining the Republican Party, but the options were limited. Johnson's National Union movement was a failure, and the Democratic Party made Reconstruction a campaign issue. The Democratic nominee for the vice-presidency, Frank Blair, published a letter in early July 1868 where he announced his opinion that "there is but one way to restore the Government and the Constitution, and that is for the President elect to declare [the Reconstruction Acts] null and void, compel the army to undo its usurpations at the South, disperse the carpetbag Southern government, allow the white people to reorganize their own governments and elect Senators and Republicans."⁶⁴ Many soon-to-be southern Republicans found this sentiment too extreme.

North Carolina physician James G. Ramsay had opposed Black suffrage earlier that year, but he could not swallow Blair's position. North Carolina had already formed a government with Black suffrage and to overturn it, he reasoned, would take a military coup. He noticed that besides Blair's letter, there were southern newspapers defending secession and predicting a new war. Ramsay predicted that a Democratic counterrevolution would only lead to another Republican revolution, and the nation would be "Mexicanized and ruined." He said he could not fully endorse either party, but having concluded "that it is neither wise, politic, nor safe to attempt to unsettle and subvert the present order of things," he declared that in the upcoming

⁶³ *The Montgomery Advertiser*, 22 Mar 1867.

⁶⁴ Frank Blair to James O. Broadhead, *New York World*, 3 Jul 1868.

election he would support Grant and Colfax, the Republican candidates. Once in the Republican camp, he never left.⁶⁵

Williams C. Wickham was all-in for Grant. At a Republican meeting in Richmond, he labeled Grant “the peace candidate” and Seymour and Blair “the war candidates, in view of Blair’s declaration.” The attempt by a Democratic president to disband the South’s Republican governments would “launch the country again into civil war more bloody, more brutal, and more disastrous in its consequences than that through which we have passed.” He believed that the terms Johnson offered to the South “were the best” and that they would have been accepted “had not the unfortunate variance between Mr. Johnson and Congress aroused in the breasts of the old leaders of the Democracy the hope of re-establishing their way.” The election of Grant, he promised, would repair the state’s fortunes and show people “that they must look at Grant and the Republican party alone for restoration,” relieving them of “the uncertainty that now bears them down,” giving “confidence in investments in the South to capital seeking employment,” as well as providing “a fresh impetus to business of every kind.”⁶⁶

Other prominent rebels joined in the fear that the Democratic Party might do more harm to the economic and social order of the South than if southerners simply allowed things to settle. James Longstreet wrote that he could find nothing in the Democratic Party “except the issues that were staked upon the war and there lost.”⁶⁷ James Alcorn of Mississippi called the Democrats’ theories on states’ rights “mummies” and “fossils of the pre-secession period.” He urged white Mississippians to collaborate with African Americans under Congressional

⁶⁵ James G. Ramsay to R. W. Lassiter, 8 Oct 1868, Ramsay Paper, SHC.

⁶⁶ Williams C. Wickham, *Address of Gen. W. C. Wickham, delivered before the Grant and Colfax ratification meeting, held in the City of Richmond, Va., August 25th* (Alexandria: Republican State Central Committee, 1868).

⁶⁷ *New Orleans Times*, 8 Jun 1867.

Reconstruction as a practical necessity. Both Longstreet and Alcorn joined the Republican Party shortly after making these statements—and after experiencing heavy criticism for making them. Democratic newspaper editors in the South made sure that there was no place for cooperation with Congressional Reconstruction outside the Republican Party.

Former rebels also joined the Republican Party because they feared it was the only way to prevent racial violence or Black control of government. Wickham advised other Virginia Republicans to adopt policies that would “prevent the success of the effort to array the races against each other.” Longstreet believed that by joining the party, ex-Confederates could influence Black voters and prevent them from injuring the interests of white southerners. They could do the work of Reconstruction themselves and “have it white instead of black.”⁶⁸ James Alcorn compared his cooperating with Congressional Reconstruction to what one does in the case of a runaway horse: “*first run on with it for a distance sufficient to check its speed.*”⁶⁹ Ramsay, the North Carolina physician, wrote that “with the advantages we have of race, education and property, it will be the fault and disgrace of the white race if the negro dominates.” He exhorted white southerners, “let us move onwards and upward, leading and elevating the negro as we ascend, and prove our vaunted superiority, not by keeping him back, but by keeping ourselves in the van.”⁷⁰

Reconstructed rebels did not see a contradiction between these views and Republican shibboleths like legal equality and national homogeneity. Former Confederate colonel William

⁶⁸ James Longstreet to R. H. Taliaferro, 4 Jul 1867, Boagni Collection, quoted in William Garrett Piston, *Lee's Tarnished Lieutenant: James Longstreet and His Place in South History* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1990), 106.

⁶⁹ James Lusk Alcorn, *Views of the Hon. J. L. Alcorn, on the Political Situation of Mississippi* (Friar's Point, Miss., Aug. 8, 1867).

⁷⁰ James G. Ramsay to R. W. Lassiter, 8 Oct 1868, Ramsay Paper, SHC.

B. Rodman of North Carolina summed up the goals of the Republican Party as “one law, one civilization, one government for the whole United States.”⁷¹ A former member of Confederate General James Longstreet’s staff, Rodman considered “there can be no evil so baleful as local self-government.” He reached this conclusion because of the racial strife in the South. Black and white southerners continually feared that the other race would gain control, and only national power could prevent violence.⁷² An anonymous letter to the Raleigh *Standard* read, “The road to reconstruction, recuperation, and power for the South lies only in the loyal and political equality of the races. I did not formerly think so, but am now a CONVERTED CONFEDERATE.”⁷³

Republican converts criticized their anti-Reconstruction opponents for holding onto a “Lost Cause” that would hold the South back from recovery and stability. Conservative anti-reconstructionist Edward Pollard had coined the term “Lost Cause” in an 1866 book in which he argued, ironically, that the Confederate cause was not lost because white southerners could preserve white supremacy within the restored Union. A military conflict had become “a war of ideas.”⁷⁴ By contrast, Amos Akerman, a reconstructed rebel from Georgia, considered Confederate defeat to mean the surrender “not only of our persons and territory but also of our local governments and of the political theories on which the rebellion rested.”⁷⁵ He believed that “a surrender in good faith really signified a surrender of the substance as well as the form of the

⁷¹ “Suffrage and Eligibility to Office: Speech of William B. Rodman, Esq. of Beaufort County, Delivered in the Constitutional Convention of North Carolina, at Raleigh, on February 20, 1868,” pamphlet, William Blount Rodman Papers, East Carolina University, Greenville, NC.

⁷² Thomas Walton in the *Clarion Ledger* (Jackson, Mississippi), 30 Jan 1873.

⁷³ Raleigh *Standard*, 22 May 1867.

⁷⁴ Jack P. Maddex, *The Reconstruction of Edward A. Pollard: A Rebel’s Conversion to Postbellum Unionism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1974), 8.

⁷⁵ Amos Akerman to George S. Boutwell, 17 Feb 1869, HSCR, NARA.

Confederate cause.”⁷⁶ At the same time, however, reconstructed rebels were able to restore the power of white elites by joining the Republican Party. Embracing defeat had led them to embrace the Republican Party, but they did so because they could not rely on the Democratic Party to achieve their goals: economic growth, racial stability, the restoration of antebellum elites. By capturing the Republican Party, they might turn defeat into victory.

Manly Allegiance and Unmanly Submission

James Longstreet told the editor of the New Orleans *Times* that he would speak his mind with the “bluntness of a soldier.” Former Confederates had two choices: they could rejoin the Union “by returning to our allegiance, in good faith” and adhering to Congress’s terms, or they could “seek protection under some foreign government.” Returning to allegiance was the action of men who still had the power to control their destiny. By contrast, seeking protection abroad implied that they had lost an essential trait of manhood: the ability to protect themselves and their families.⁷⁷ With his choice of words, Longstreet suggested that embracing Reconstruction was the more manly course.

Reconstruction’s southern opponents offered a different interpretation of what makes a man. To Democrats, abandoning their party meant unmanly submission to the North. Lucius Quintus Cincinnatus Lamar, a relation of Longstreet’s by marriage, wrote that the general had “gone over bag and baggage to the conquerors.”⁷⁸ A Virginia newspaper interpreted Williams C. Wickham’s Reconstruction letter as “counselling submission.”⁷⁹ Such an action also incurred a

⁷⁶ Amos Akerman to James Jackson, 20 Nov 1871, Akerman Letterbooks, UVA.

⁷⁷ New Orleans *Times*, 7 Apr 1867.

⁷⁸ Hay and Sanger, *James Longstreet*, 334.

⁷⁹ *The Norfolk Post*, 6 Jul 1865.

loss of whiteness. Another paper chided Wickham for his “desertion of the White and adherence to the Negro party.”⁸⁰ When William Holden joined the Republican Party, opponents called him a “damned negrofied son of a bitch.”⁸¹ Others insisted that he was a “mulatto.”⁸² A group of North Carolina Republicans were called “Flounders or white sided Negros” by members of the opposition.⁸³ Verbal assaults on reconstructed rebels were gendered as well. One North Carolina Conservative, hearing a rumor that a prominent citizen had joined the Republicans because he needed money, asked how “a man, who has *any manhood* at all” could do so “and expect a gentleman to treat him with civility.”⁸⁴

Ultimately, whiteness and manliness were bound together. To Reconstruction’s opponents, joining the Republican Party meant abdicating white men’s duty to protect white women from Black men. One anti-Reconstruction cartoon depicted men and women of both races in close proximity. The artist drew their leader, “Simon Pure,” with his arms around two African Americans. The men and women also have similar facing features, effectively degendering them.

⁸⁰ *The Progress Index*, 12 Mar 1868.

⁸¹ John W. Hofler to Holden, 22 Aug 1868, Holden Governors' Papers.

⁸² Henry Little to William W. Holden, 2 June 1868, Governor's Correspondence, NCAH.

⁸³ A. J. McDonald, Alex McDonald, et al. to W.W. Holden, 10 May 1868, Governor’s Correspondence, NCAH; see also Jane Dailey, *Before Jim Crow*, 133-136, 152-153.

⁸⁴ Walter L. Steele to Kemp P. Battle, 18 Jul 1870, Battle Family Papers, SHC.

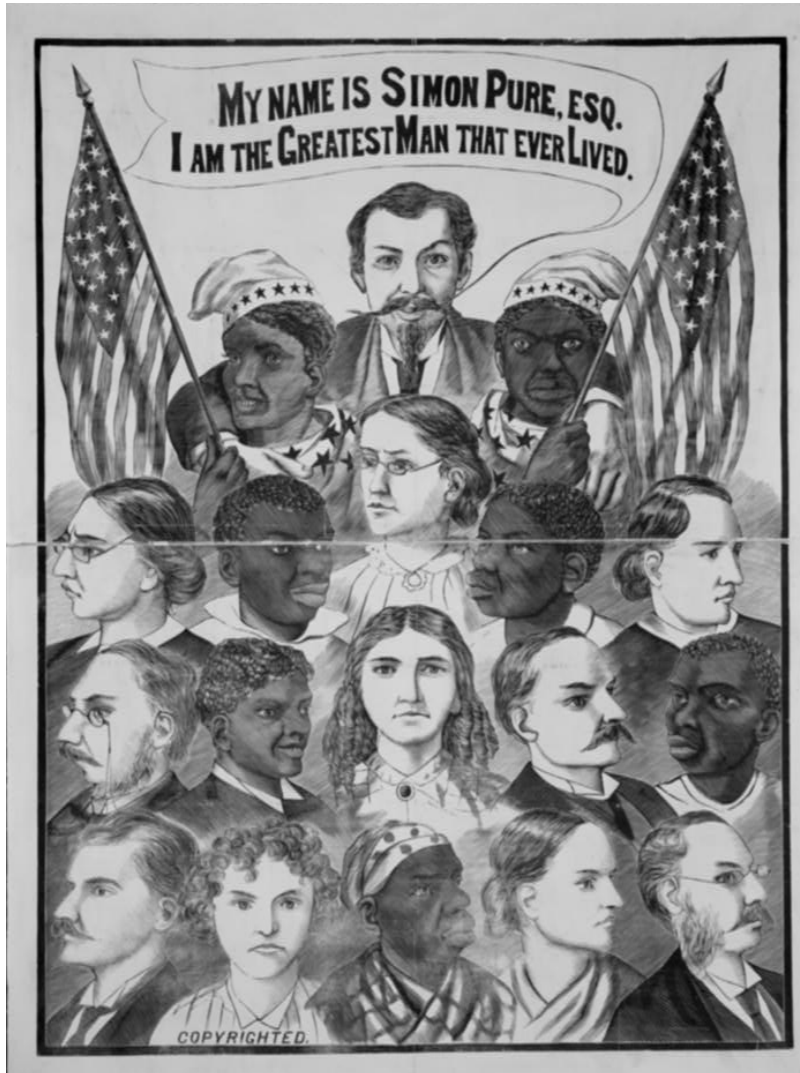


Figure 1: “My name is Simon Pure, Esq. : I am the greatest man that ever lived,” [c.a. 1870], <<https://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/93505760/>>.

Even northern voices tended to undermine the manliness of reconstructed rebels, however unintentionally. Popular fiction of the postwar era frequently used the romantic pairing of a northern man with a southern woman to symbolize “the romance of reunion.” For example, John W. De Forest used this trope in his *Miss Ravenel’s Conversion from Secession to Loyalty*. Lillie Ravenel, the rebellious daughter of an exiled southern unionist, meets Edward Colburne, an emotionally temperate northerner, in a fictional New England state. After failing to convince Colburne of the superiority of state to national loyalty, she is gradually converted to a belief in

free labor and American nationalism. Her conversion comes after a romance with chivalric Union colonel from Virginia, social ostracism in occupied New Orleans, her father's assault by rebels, a troubled marriage to the colonel, and finally courtship by Colburn after the colonel's death. By the end she confesses that she does not want to return to her native New Orleans, emphatically declaring her preference for the North.⁸⁵

As historian Nina Silber has argued, stories like *Miss Ravenel* reflected what postwar northerners thought about power relations between the sections. The North would reassert its authority over the South, while simultaneously restoring bonds of nationalism. Miss Ravenel's conversion also reflected northern ideas about appropriate gender roles in the two sections. War had proven that southern manliness, despite its explosive sensitivity to slights against honor, was no match for northern self-discipline. Southern men had also allowed women to become excessively political, as De Forest showed through the violently aggressive women of New Orleans. To the victors, the northern model of restrained manhood and domestic womanhood was necessary to restore order in the South.⁸⁶

Such portrayals mattered to reconstructed rebels for multiple reasons. For one, if the new power relations between North and South were gendered male and female respectively, then reconstructed rebels were abandoning their manliness by submitting to northern authority. Diehard rebels who clung to political resistance said as much, and reconstructed rebels would need to find a way to respond, both to establish legitimacy and for their own sense of dignity. Secondly, reconstructed rebels would tap into the conception of manliness in novels like De

⁸⁵ John W. De Forest, *Miss Ravenel's Conversion from Secession to Loyalty* (New York: Penguin Books, 2000, originally published by Harper & Brothers, 1867).

⁸⁶ Nina Silber, *The Romance of Reunion: Northerners and the South, 1865-1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 6-7, 19, 23-24, 28-29, 38.

Forest's—the idea that men were reserved and emotionally disciplined. What De Forest portrayed as a regional conception of masculinity, rooted in Yankee culture, reconstructed rebels still understood very well because there existed a similar understanding among white southern elites. In the way they presented themselves and explained their conversion to loyalty, reconstructed rebels implied that they were not being submissive, but rather acting out the bourgeois norms of masculinity. They also suggested that their male opponents were acting like hysterical women.

For example, Richard C. Badger, an elite North Carolinian, attributed his decision to join the Republican party to the opposition's effeminacy. He said he might still belong to the Conservative Party—as the anti-Republican opposition in North Carolina was still calling itself—if they had possessed the manliness to accept defeat in the 1868 presidential election, worked to “preserve the peace,” and “quiet[ed] the passions” of those still bitter about Confederate defeat. Conservatives, he said, “have been adding fuel to the flame by a fool-hardy and childish ‘kicking against the pricks.’” He likewise considered the recent activities of the Ku Klux Klan, which served as the Conservatives' military arm, “cowardly and unmanly.” Republican manhood was peaceful and restrained by contrast. When he described a speech by Samuel F. Phillips, the Republican nominee for attorney general of North Carolina, as “unimpassioned,” Badger meant it as a compliment.⁸⁷

The man Badger so highly endorsed was neither a staunch Unionist, nor a staunch Confederate, and not even a publicly committed Republican until he received the nomination. Nevertheless, Sam Phillips had a reputation for personal integrity and shared Badger's view that

⁸⁷ Richard C. Badger, "Speech of Richard C. Badger, Esq. Delivered Before the Republican State Convention, Held at Raleigh, N.C., May 12, 1870," NCC.

the Conservative penchant for heated emotion betrayed a lack of true manhood. In 1865, Phillips had described the rhetoric of Confederate politicians as “the language of officials...of speculators...of many ladies.” In other words, it was the language of people who asked others to sacrifice in a way they personally would not. Phillips even discounted the manhood of the Confederate president, writing that Jefferson Davis “talks like a school miss about the enemy polluting our soil & capital.”⁸⁸ Though martial valor and resolve were manly virtues to many in the South, Phillips tapped into more bourgeois gender norms, defining reason as masculine and passion as feminine.

When the war was over, Phillips still considered it wrong to array the people against unalterable realities. In response to a constitutional argument against the legality of Reconstruction, he asked “Is it kind to our people who are now suffering from calamities which come in great measure from ill-considered declamations of this sort—to arouse their passions against a matter which they can no more help now than they can the eclipse of the sun?” He believed that the lesson behind defeat was the need for restraint.⁸⁹ In 1870, he deprecated the continued “heat and intemperance” of political rhetoric and argued that it had incited the people to vigilante violence. Rather than appealing to martial manhood, Phillips called for a return to “moderation and tolerance.” He suggested that “all quiet men who wish to establish a foundation upon which the fabric of private fortune, for themselves and their children, may be erected” would join him in cooperating with the Republican party. Samuel Phillips believed that the

⁸⁸ Samuel F. Phillips to Kemp Battle, 10 Apr 1865, Battle Family Papers, SHC.

⁸⁹ Letter to the *Raleigh Sentinel* from "Orange" [S. F. Phillips], issue of 30 July 1866, in *The Papers of Thomas Ruffin*, ed. J.G. de Roulhac Hamilton (Raleigh: Edwards & Broughton Print. Co., State printers, 1918), 4:101.

interests of future peace and prosperity required reconstructed men who exhibited restraint and approached the future pragmatically.⁹⁰

Williams C. Wickham agreed, and told Virginians who would listen that it took more “moral courage” to announce oneself as a Republican. He would rather be called a “scallawag” than a Democrat, because “no scallawag could legislate more injuriously for the interests of the South and of the whole country, than, when in power, did this same Democratic party, which is now struggling to regain the reins of Government.”⁹¹ Gentlemen did not choose a party based on popular emotion and a desire to maintain good public standing; they placed their community’s interests above their own reputation and wisely divined the best course of action for the public good.

Reconstructed rebels did not lack pride in their martial abilities, but they were more likely to recognize the state’s monopoly on violence, exercised through legal institutions and the militia. James Longstreet is the most obvious example. He led the Louisiana state militia on multiple occasions to protect the Republican state government against insurrection. James Alcorn’s exhortation that white Mississippians treat Reconstruction as a runaway horse, which they must run alongside to control, framed his political platform as a manly one. In eastern Mississippi, former Confederate Colonel Greene Chandler explained that the conversion of both of these men convinced him to join the Republican Party.⁹² Chandler twice refused to meet an opponent on the dueling field. In one case, Chandler responded by calling his opponent’s threats

⁹⁰ Samuel F. Phillips, “Speech of Mr. Samuel F. Phillips at Concord, Cabarrus County, July 4th, 1870,” NCC.

⁹¹ Williams C. Wickham, *Address of Gen. W. C. Wickham, delivered before the Grant and Colfax ratification meeting, held in the City of Richmond, Va., August 25th* (Alexandria: Republican State Central Committee, 1868).

⁹² Greene Callier Chandler, *Journal and Speeches of Greene Callier Chandler*, ed. Walter Chandler (n.p., 1954), 95-96, 223; Chandler to J. F. H. Claiborne, 24 Mar 1880, and see also Chandler to Longstreet, 28 Mar 1880, both in J.F.H Claiborne Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

of violence “unmanly.” He also mocked the notion “that every gentleman is bound in honor to turn and kick the cur that bays him,” something he considered a “peculiarly Southern idea.” Refusing to ask for a duel in one case, he declared that “it requires a higher courage to brave a wrong public sentiment than to punish a ruffian.” By showing restraint and criticizing men who lacked it, Chandler was articulating a different conception of manliness from that of diehard rebels.⁹³

In another case where Chandler refused a duel, he argued that Congressional Reconstruction and amnesty made him more of a man. His Democratic opponent, Chandler pointed out, was under political disabilities due to the Fourteenth Amendment, while he had been relieved from his. White southern men frequently took their disenfranchisement and disqualification for office under Reconstruction policies as an insult to their manhood. They would be stripped of the political privileges of being a white man, while those same privileges would be conferred on former slaves. Chandler’s rationale for refusing a duel reinforced the notion that political disabilities made a white man less of a man, and that being a reconstructed southerner meant a reconstructed manhood.⁹⁴

The onslaughts of abuse directed at reconstructed rebels sometimes brought unwanted attention to the power dynamics in their households. Camilla Rodman became distressed by a rumor going around that her husband, William Rodman, had joined the North Carolina Republican Party to satisfy her ambition. William trusted her with the business of his plantation business, and one can imagine that she was heavily invested in her husband’s political career.⁹⁵

⁹³ Chandler, *Journal and Speeches*, 117, 119.

⁹⁴ *Jackson Clarion* (Mississippi), 21 Apr 1870.

⁹⁵ William Rodman to Camilla Rodman, 31 Jan 1873, William Blount Rodman Papers, East Carolina University, Greenville, NC.

In other cases, the political conversion of reconstructed rebels seems to have placed them at odds with their wives. Greene Chandler, after mingling with other Republicans in Jackson, Mississippi, noted that Governor Alcorn's wife was a Democrat. However, Chandler did not express contempt or even surprise at this difference between husband and wife. Instead, Chandler continued his commentary to his own wife, "Says she was raised [a Democrat], but when they abuse her husband so badly, she falls out with them, but forgives them directly." According to Chandler, her politic identity was relational, the result of her family and friends, not particular convictions, and it could be compromised by insults toward her husband. She would support him, even if she did not share a Republican identity.⁹⁶

Reconstructed rebels actively worked to present a united household, and this sometimes meant silencing their wives. This was the case for William J. Clarke and Martha Bayard Clarke of North Carolina. Martha was the daughter of an elite planter family. From an early age, she was determined to make a career as a professional writer, and in her marriage to William she found a partner who would support those ambitions.⁹⁷ William encouraged Martha's literary career, which took off after the war when she published a series of bitterly satirical pieces in poor white dialect under the name "Betsey Bittersweet." One topic that Betsey tackled was the South's postwar gender crisis: northern Republicans had "turned our men into wimen—or tried to do it by disfranchising of 'em," and because of this, she argued, "we wimen, who was always counted politically with the niggers, you know, is got demoralized, and has gone into politics."⁹⁸ Martha's unreconstructed politics, however, conflicted with the public stand that her husband

⁹⁶ Chandler, *Journal and Speeches*, 105

⁹⁷ Terrell Armistead Crow, "Mary Bayard Clarke: Design for 'Upsetting the Established Order of Our Dear Old Conservative State,'" *North Carolina Women: Their Lives and Times* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2014), 174-179

⁹⁸ "Letter from Betsey Bittersweet," *Southern Home Journal*, 21 December 1867, 8.

took in 1868 by joining the Republican Party. It is not clear to what extent William discussed the decision with his wife. Perhaps she became reconstructed as well. After Democrats took the state legislature in 1870, she deprecated their “meanness” and added that “they can say nothing of the Republicans that cannot be said of them with equal truth now.” She even expressed the fear of many who joined the Republican Party that the actions of Democrats would result in Congress returning them to military rule.⁹⁹ Whatever her views, she stopped writing on topics of a political nature and let her husband be the sole political voice of the family after 1868.¹⁰⁰

Perhaps for William Clarke, joining the Republican Party was a way to reclaim some power for himself. It was commonly said in the North that unnaturally political southern women had pressured men to secede. In one of her early postwar articles, Martha lent credence to this idea, writing that “the women of the Southern Confederacy were the unrecognized ‘power behind the thrown,’ during its whole existence.”¹⁰¹ Then, as Betsey Bittersweet pointed out, disenfranchisement could be understood as emasculation. Added to this, the Clarkes seem to have had a marriage that was loving, companionate, but also sexually open. Mary wrote to another romantic interest that she and her husband gave each other “the largest liberty...neither expecting the other to do more than *observe the proprieties* and avoid scandal.”¹⁰² William does not appear to have resented the arrangement, but given the larger questioning of southern male

⁹⁹ Mary Bayard Clarke to Willie Clarke, 28 Jan 1871, in Terrell Armistead Crow and Mary Boulton Barden, eds., *Live Your Own Life: The Family Papers of Mary Bayard Clarke, 1854-1886* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2003), 306.

¹⁰⁰ Crow, “Mary Bayard Clarke,” 183.

¹⁰¹ Mary Bayard Clarke, “The South Expects Every Woman to Do Her Duty,” in *Live Your Own Life*, Crow and Barden, eds., 222.

¹⁰² Mary Bayard Clarke to Nathan Abbott, 12 Dec 1878, in Terrell Armistead Crow and Mary Boulton Barden, eds., *Live Your Own Life: The Family Papers of Mary Bayard Clarke, 1854-1886* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2003), 390-391.

authority after 1865, perhaps Clarke's political activities allowed him to recapture the sense of personal independence so key to conceptions of manhood at this time.

If the dynamics of reconstructed rebels' households were unclear, it is far more certain that manly pride played a key role in reinforcing Republican Party identity. One reconstructed southerner responded to criticism that he was flip-flopping by telling a rally, "I shall ever have the manliness to surrender opinion when I am convinced that I am in error." After being insulted by a female acquaintance, physician James Ramsay wrote that he "might have retained the smiles and approbation of more friends...by voting the democratic ticket, but if I had done so, with my convictions of duty, I would have been bought, by public opinion, and could not have retained my self-respect."¹⁰³ When William Pearson later wrote a novel about reconstructed southerners like himself, he made masculine pride the driving force behind his protagonist's decisions. After giving a patriotic Fourth of July speech, his Democratic neighbors vilify him. When he later gets into legal trouble, Republicans help him out. Threats from the Ku Klux Klan cement his emotional commitment to the party of his new friends.¹⁰⁴

Without a doubt, personal idiosyncrasies played a role in determining party affiliation, and men on both sides used the same scripts for defining manliness against each other. Democratic elites also acted out of pride and alternately rooted their manliness in violence or restraint. However, the key point is that the social and economic background of reconstructed rebels manifested itself when they defended their political choices. Responding to those who said that submitting to northern conquerors was unmanly, they framed their embrace of defeat as an

¹⁰³ Ramsay to "Cousin Lou," 8 Feb 1869, R. G. Ramsay Papers, SHC.

¹⁰⁴ Brinsley Matthews [pseud. for William S. Pearson], *Well-Nigh Reconstructed: A Political Novel* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2010),

assertion of their political agency as elite white men. In doing so, they paved the way for a redemption of southern elite power more broadly.

Embracing Defeat

Andrew Johnson's plan to let traditional southern elites rule at home was a failure. Many of Johnson's supporters continued their opposition to Republican Reconstruction through the Democratic Party. Not all ex-Confederates, however, were done with "self-reconstruction." A substantial minority of them decided that they could continue to manage Reconstruction by working with the Republicans.

In contrast to other types of southern Republicans, reconstructed rebels were more likely to be members of the prewar elite. These elites believed that by embracing defeat, they could open a path to economic prosperity, peace, and political power. For some, remembering the experience of internal conflict in the Confederacy helped them to accept and embrace defeat. In other cases, Johnson's weakness and the destabilizing rhetoric of Democrats convinced them that the Republican Party was the best vehicle for realizing their goals.

Even when they had been active in the South's first period of "self-reconstruction," these southerners continued to reconstruct their political identities and play a role reconstructing their states. Though they were a minority among those who fought for Confederate independence, their actions had important consequences for regional and national history. Their association with the Republican Party guaranteed that even when African Americans were enfranchised, traditional southern elites would still be able to shape the direction of Reconstruction. Their story is essential to explaining the redemption of the white southern elites.

CHAPTER 2
TO THE DEFEATED GO THE SPOILS:
CONGRESSIONAL AMNESTY AND PATRONAGE

Less than three years after Confederate defeat, Massachusetts Congressman Henry Dawes urged his colleagues that “such men as Gantt, of Arkansas, and Governor Holden, of North Carolina, and Governor Patton, of Alabama must be drawn by the strongest possible cords into support of this Government.” Gantt was a former Confederate colonel. Holden had signed his state’s secession ordinance. Patton was a plantation owner who served in Alabama’s wartime legislature. “Longstreet!” Dawes continued. “Who would not rather to-day trust General Longstreet than any man who sneaked through four years and saved his neck by acting neither for the rebellion nor for the Union.” The men that Dawes named were disqualified from holding office by either the Fourteenth Amendment’s officeholding ban or the federal loyalty oath. And yet, unlike the majority of former Confederates, they had joined the Republican Party. They were reconstructed rebels, and Dawes believed the government need them. He asked that Congress pass a bill to remove their “political disabilities.”¹

Many historians have described the North’s eventual “retreat from Reconstruction,” but this paradigm risks obscuring how reconstructionist and reconciliationist imperatives sometimes merged.² Such was the case when Congress offered amnesty to reconstructed rebels. From the

¹ *Congressional Globe*, 40th Cong, 2nd Sess., 1710.

² On the “retreat from Reconstruction,” see William Gillette, *Retreat from Reconstruction, 1869-1879* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979); Richard H. Abbott, *The Republican Party and the South, 1855-1877* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1986); Heather Cox Richardson, *The Death of Reconstruction: Race, Labor, and Politics in the Post-Civil War North, 1865-1901* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001); David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge, Mass. and London, England: Harvard University Press: 2001); Edward J. Blum, *Reforging the White Republic*

very beginning of Congressional Reconstruction, Republican policy combined intervention in southern politics with North-South reconciliation and a gradual restoration of prewar elites to power. To their credit, Congress did not merely take former rebels at their word, as President Andrew Johnson did in his own amnesty policy. Rather, as several Congressional Republicans put it, they only wanted to help ex-Confederates who had performed “works meet for repentance.”³ By this phrase, they meant former rebels who spoke in support of Congressional Reconstruction, defended the political rights of Blacks, and voted for Republican candidates. Congress was careful—they required endorsements from known Republicans to prove these men’s allegiances. Even so, white Unionists and Black southerners were more reliable allies, and arguably more deserving of support. National leaders sought to empower these previously marginalized groups, but as Dawes’s words indicate, they simultaneously worked to put a subset of the South’s traditional elite back in power.

For their part, reconstructed rebels saw Congressional amnesty as a way to build the Republican Party’s capacity to govern in their states and local communities. Historians have usually characterized white southern Republicans as advocates of general amnesty.⁴ There is some truth to this, but it has escaped scholarly attention that southern Republicans also benefited from the officeholding ban. While they received individual amnesty based on their new loyalties,

(Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2005); and Charles W. Calhoun, *Conceiving a New Republic: The Republican Party and the Southern Question, 1869-1900* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2006).

³ *Congressional Globe*, 40th Cong., 2nd Sess., 766, 1931.

⁴ For southern Republican support for the Amnesty Act of 1872, see Terry L. Seip, *The South Returns to Congress: Men, Economic Measures, and Intersectional Relationships, 1868-1879*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1983), 131 and Abbott, *The Republican Party and the South*, 216. Relatedly, for opposition to additional state-based restrictions on white political rights, see Michael Perman, *The Road to Redemption: Southern Politics, 1869-1879* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 13, 26. Others have noted, however, that wartime Unionists typically opposed amnesty measures and pushed for disfranchisement of ex-Confederates. For example, see Michael W. Fitzgerald, *Splendid Failure, Postwar Reconstruction in the American South* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2007), 82.

their opponents were still left out in the cold, giving the reconstructed rebels a temporary advantage. Southern Republicans did urge a more general, or even universal, amnesty bill to conciliate and win greater white support, but in the short-term they used the officeholding ban to preserve state and local offices for Republicans.⁵

A growing body of scholarship on late nineteenth century citizenship explores the role that allegiance played in southern claims to belonging and officials' evaluation of those claims.⁶ Political disabilities were a key part within the postwar redefinition of citizenship. The Fourteenth Amendment's first section extended citizenship to include African Americans by basing it on native birth, while the third section limited officeholding rights for former Confederates and enabled Congress to remove the same restriction by a two-thirds vote. Prior to the Amnesty Act of 1872, Congress removed political disabilities on an individual basis, in the process equating party loyalty with national loyalty. Public support for the Republican definition of nonracial citizenship became the standard for measuring whether white southerners were "reconstructed." Ironically, that same principle of uniform citizenship later undermined the rationale for maintaining officeholding restrictions, leading to the separation of reconstructed citizenship policy from partisan identity as both parties moved toward general amnesty.

⁵ The most comprehensive study of congressional amnesty is William Adam Russ, Jr., "Congressional Disfranchisement, 1866-1898" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1933). Jonathan Truman Dorris's *Pardon and Amnesty Under Lincoln and Johnson: The Restoration of Confederates to Their Rights and Privileges, 1861-1898* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1953) has a chapter on congressional amnesty, but it is derivative from Russ's dissertation. Also see Abbott, *The Republican Party and the South*, which is one of the few monographs to even mention congressional amnesty prior to the Amnesty Act of 1872. However, none of these works examine the individual petitions for amnesty that are collected in the records of the House Select Committee on Reconstruction.

⁶ Susanna Michele Lee, *Claiming the Union* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014); William A. Blair, *With Malice Toward Some: Treason and Loyalty in the Civil War Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014); Carol Emerton, *Beyond Redemption: Race, Violence, and the American South after the Civil War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015); Erik Mathisen, *The Loyal Republic: Traitors, Slaves, and the Remaking of Citizenship in Civil War America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018); Jonathan White, "'I Do Not Understand What the Term 'Loyalty' Means': The Debate in Pennsylvania over Compensating Victims of Rebel Raids," in *Contested Loyalty: Debates Over Patriotism in the Civil War North*, ed. Robert M. Sandow (New York: Fordham University Press, 2018).

Political Disabilities

The Fourteenth Amendment was the centerpiece of Republican nation-building. Passed by Congress in 1866 and ratified in 1868, its first section granted citizenship to “all persons born or naturalized in the United States” and guaranteed the “privileges or immunities of citizens” and “equal protection of the laws.” Additional sections tinkered with the South’s congressional representation, banned former Confederates from holding office, and guaranteed the national debt.

Historian Eric Foner has argued that the officeholding ban in the third section “aimed to promote a sweeping transformation of Southern public life” by making “virtually the entire political leadership in the South ineligible for office.”⁷ Not all ex-Confederates were excluded; since the ban was limited to prewar officeholders only, it affected perhaps 20,000 former Confederates. These men would not be able to hold future office at any level. The Amendment did not go into effect until its ratification in 1868, but the Reconstruction Acts of 1867 included provisions temporarily disqualifying and disfranchising the same group during the state constitution-writing process. A federal test oath from 1862 also prevented a larger section of white southern society—any who had aided the Confederacy, regardless of whether or not they held prewar office—from holding a federal job, from congressman down to postmaster.⁸

However, the Fourteenth Amendment stated that Congress could remove the officeholding disability by a two-thirds majority. From June 1868 until the Amnesty Act of 1872, Congress bestowed individual amnesty on 4,616 former Confederates who had been subject to

⁷ Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America’s Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), 259-60.

⁸ Russ, “Congressional Disfranchisement,” 36.

exclusions based on the Fourteenth Amendment, Reconstruction Acts, or federal test oath. These recipients of congressional amnesty were listed by name in statute books.

It is important to note how this policy differed from President Johnson's earlier program of presidential amnesty. Johnson had been far more lenient, promising to restore the civil rights and political privileges of ex-Confederates so long as they renewed their allegiance to the United States. The Fourteenth Amendment overrode this presidential amnesty as Congressional Republicans decided to create their own policy that would help only ex-Confederates who had proven their support for Congressional Reconstruction. The officeholding ban was both more and less radical than Foner suggested—it transformed public life not only by taking old political leaders out of it, but also by encouraging a segment of them to support the Republican Party. On the other hand, congressional amnesty returned a portion of the prewar elite to positions of power.

The recipients of congressional amnesty were only a subset of the total number of reconstructed rebels. Historians have estimated that some 20 percent of white southerners voted with the Republican Party during Reconstruction. In Upper South states like Tennessee, many of these white Republicans were former Unionists, but in the Deep South, most were former Confederates. Despite the small number of reconstructed rebels compared to overall population, Congressional Republicans saw cultivating them as a necessity. Only in South Carolina, Mississippi, and Louisiana could Republicans afford to ignore the white vote. Elsewhere, statewide majorities required southern whites.⁹

⁹ On the number of white southern Republican voters, see Carl Degler, *The Other South: Southern Dissenters in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), 193; Allen W. Trelease, "Who Were the Scalawags?" *The Journal of Southern History* 29, no. 4 (1963): 458; William C. Harris, "A Reconsideration of the Mississippi Scalawag," *Journal of Mississippi History* 32 (Feb. 1970), 38; Hyman Rubin III, *South Carolina Scalawags* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2006), xxi. For a breakdown of white southern Republicans by

Moreover, despite their interest in creating a new kind of nation, Congressional Republicans feared that a failure to win some degree of southern white consent would make Reconstruction illegitimate by Republicans' own sense of democratic norms. Ohio Senator John Sherman, for example, argued that the Military Reconstruction Acts should protect African Americans in their life and property, and that they should benefit from universal suffrage, but he said he would not deprive former rebels of the ability to vote on the new constitutions. To do so he worried would "violate the republican doctrine that all governments be founded on the consent of the governed" and "supersede one form of oligarchy in which the blacks were slaves by another in which the whites are disenfranchised outcasts."¹⁰ Confederate leaders could be banned temporarily from holding office, but only as a means of giving Reconstruction a head start and buying time to cultivate white support.

Northern Friends

Since the end of the war, white southerners had been traveling to Washington, D.C. in an effort to influence policy or get personal favors. Many of them contributed to President Johnson's lenient plan of restoration. After Congress took control of Reconstruction in 1867 with the Reconstruction Acts, some of the same southerners offered their support despite the fact that Congress had just imposed new officeholding disabilities on them. In doing so, they hoped to earn special exemptions and privileges for themselves and their network of allies back home.

Robert M. Patton of Alabama was the only governor elected under the presidential phase of Reconstruction to endorse the Fourteenth Amendment. He represented the possibility that men

wartime record, see James Alex Baggett, *The Scalawags: Southern Dissenters in the Civil War and Reconstruction* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2002), 274-279.

¹⁰ *Congressional Globe*, 39th Cong., 2nd Sess., 154.

who had supported Andrew Johnson's policies could be converted to the congressional plan, and thus lend it legitimacy among moderate southern whites. Patton was born in 1809 to a family of merchants in northern Alabama. Though he acquired a plantation and over one hundred slaves, Patton also had family ties to early southern textile operations and he saw manufacturing as essential to the region's economic development. He was a reluctant secessionist in 1861, and after serving in the state senate for the first year of the war, retired to his home in Union-occupied northern Alabama. Three sons continued to fight in the Confederate army, and he lost two of them. In 1865, he returned to public life, serving in the first postwar constitutional convention ordered by Johnson, and then became the state's first postwar elected governor. Though his inaugural address promised to maintain white political control, events proved that he was not inclined to fight against the tide of racial or constitutional change. Concerned for the reputation and economic future of his state, he vetoed provisions of his legislature's "black code." Patton's primary goal was the economic development and financial stability of his state, which would ultimately lead to his decision to cooperate with the Republican Party.¹¹

Trips to New York City and Washington, D.C. convinced Patton that completing Congressional Reconstruction was essential to Alabama's economic recovery. After returning, he urged the legislature to ratify the Fourteenth Amendment—they did not—and he continued to urge cooperation with Congress when it passed the Reconstruction Acts. Financial considerations likely moderated Patton's opinion on congressional policies, including the exclusion of himself and others from officeholding rights. In one speech, he downplayed the significance of the officeholding ban, estimating the number in Alabama who would be affected at only 3,000. He

¹¹ Michael W. Fitzgerald, *Reconstruction in Alabama: From Civil War to Redemption in the Cotton South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2017), 86-90.

said that such a small group should not “stand in the way of peace, prosperity and reunion.” The Reconstruction Acts added temporary disfranchisement, but Patton argued that “those who are disfranchised should use their influence for the accomplishment of all possible good.”¹²

In making his stand for Congressional Reconstruction, Patton also believed that Republicans would lift his political disqualifications and that he would be reelected governor. Patton had strong allies in Congress, financial circles, and the military. On May 10, 1867, he sent a telegraph to Ohio Senator John Sherman stating his opinion that Alabama would conform to the Reconstruction Acts.¹³ Five days later, Sherman introduced a resolution to relieve Patton of his “political disabilities.” The Ohio Senator believed that the support of moderate southern whites was necessary for Reconstruction to succeed, and he was dismayed radicals had pushed to go beyond the officeholding ban and disfranchise rebels. Sherman sent a pamphlet of his senate speech opposing this measure to numerous southern contacts. Likely, he intended his resolution on Patton’s behalf as another show of sympathy.¹⁴ Senators Sherman soon met with James A. Raynor, a New Yorker who headed the New Orleans, Mobile, and Chattanooga Railroad, and Oakes Ames, a representative from Massachusetts and leading promoter of the Union Pacific Railroad. Likely they talked about the Patton resolution; the next day, Raynor wrote Sherman to press it.¹⁵

Though Sherman was unsuccessful, the Senate debated a similar bill in January 1868. Senator William Stewart mentioned having received numerous letters on Patton’s behalf from

¹² *Huntsville Advocate* quoted in *Chicago Tribune* 13 Jan 1867.

¹³ R. M. Patton to John Sherman, John Sherman Papers, LOC.

¹⁴ “Speech of Hon. John Sherman, of Ohio, on Representation of Southern States; Delivered in the Senate of the United States, February 26, 1866” (Washington: Congressional Globe Office, 1866). See also back of letter from R.S. Taylor to John Sherman, 1 April 1867, regarding disabilities, on which Sherman has written “send speech.”

¹⁵ James A. Raynor to Sherman, 16 Mar 1867, John Sherman Papers, LOC.

the chief of the Alabama Freedmen's Bureau. Stewart also read a letter from the commander of the Third Military District, who endorsed Patton as "an open and active supporter of the reconstruction measures" and credited his "firm and consistent support of the military authorities."¹⁶ Patton's lobbying was representative of efforts by reconstructed rebels to influence congressional policy, though he ultimately failed to have his disqualification removed. Joseph Brown and James Longstreet would be more successful.

By the end of the war, Joseph Emerson Brown was only forty-three, but he had already served four two-year terms as governor of Georgia. In 1867, Brown went to Washington to gather information. He was introduced to James Garfield, an Ohio congressman and future president, as well as William Darrah Kelley, a Pennsylvania congressman whose support for manufacturing and protective tariffs would earn him the sobriquet "Pig-Iron Kelley."¹⁷ Kelley kept up a correspondence with several prominent reconstructed rebels, one of whom referred to Kelley as "my only hope."¹⁸ Kelley and Brown would become particularly close allies.

From his conversations with Kelley, Brown learned that northern Republicans were not going to back down on Black suffrage. Since passing the Fourteenth Amendment the previous year, Republicans had actually gained strength, and there was enough popular and political will for them to require southern states to write Black suffrage into their constitutions. Brown saw that the only question was whether greater penalties like disfranchisement and confiscation would be mandated if white southerners refused to acquiesce.¹⁹

¹⁶ *Congressional Globe* 40th Cong., 2nd Sess., 651.

¹⁷ Joseph H. Parks, *Joseph E. Brown of Georgia* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977), 365-66.

¹⁸ James Sinclair to William D. Kelley, Unnumbered Application James Sinclair, HSCR.

¹⁹ Parks, *Joseph E. Brown of Georgia*, 366-67.

When Brown returned from Washington, he published a letter urging white Georgians to cooperate with Congress. “It is no longer a question of whether the freedmen will vote,” he explained. “That is already decreed in his favor; but the question is whether the white men who aided in the war against the United States shall vote.” On this point he contrasted Sherman’s Senate version of the reconstruction bill with the final House version that added temporary disfranchisement. He feared the possibility of greater penalties and a period of political limbo that prevented northern investment. It would be unwise for Georgians to cling to disfranchised leaders, Brown argued, “till by doing so they have made beggars of their wives and children, and plunged themselves into irretrievable ruin, when their fidelity to us can do no good.” True statesmanship required that leaders like Brown discourage such a course; he advised that white Georgians “agree with thine adversary quickly” and thereby ensure “peace, quiet, and returning prosperity.”²⁰

Throughout the spring of 1867, Brown canvassed the state in support of Reconstruction, and in early May, William Kelley joined him. Determined to reconcile ex-rebels to Reconstruction, Kelley made a speaking tour that began in Memphis, moved south and then east through Deep South cities, and then turned north along the east coast. In Montgomery, he shared a platform with Robert Patton, and in Atlanta, he stood side-by-side with Brown. Kelley bolstered the position of Brown and other reconstructed rebels by asserting that the Reconstruction Acts would be Congress’s final requirement unless met with continued resistance. He admonished white southerners to accept Black freedom and equality rather than having it forced on them: “accept the inevitable and find in it a good providence.” Moreover, Kelley mixed political arguments for individual liberty and national union with his economic

²⁰ Brown to Ira R. Foster et al., 23 Feb 1867, in the *Atlanta Daily Era*, 26 Feb 1867.

vision. He told southerners that “contempt for man as *man*” was the only thing that kept the South behind the North and that regional differences could be eliminated by uplifting the status of labor.²¹ When Kelley returned home from his trip, he told his Pennsylvania constituents, “the South must be regenerated, and we of the North must do it.” He explained that it was in the interest of northern capitalists to provide the South with capital, and that laboring men go south and carry with them their northern habits. Such efforts would “develop a population as loyal as was that of any Northern State during the war” and “make the South bloom like a garden.”²²

Brown and Kelley worked in tandem to convince white southerners to participate in Congressional Reconstruction and to persuade white northerners that they would benefit from such efforts. Brown stood to benefit politically if Georgia were reconstructed and his political disabilities removed, while Kelley and the Congressional Republicans would profit from Brown’s popularity.

However, Brown also understood that if he benefited directly through the relief of his officeholding disqualification, it would open him to the charge of opportunism. In his “agree with thine adversary quickly” letter, Brown wrote that being disqualified made him a selfless counselor. Unable to run for office, he could write “without regard to the effect which the communication of truth may have on my present or future popularity.” Brown mentioned the willingness of Congress to relieve worthy men of their disabilities and that “compliance with the terms on our part will so far soften the feelings of the people of the North, that our judges and other officers will very soon be relieved.”²³ Still, he asked Senator Sherman not to press a

²¹ Kelley, “Address at Montgomery, Alabama,” *The South—Its Resources and Wants* (D.C.: Union Republican Congressional Executive Committee, 1867).

²² Kelley, “Address at Philadelphia, Penna,” *The South*.

²³ Brown to Ira R. Foster et al., 23 Feb 1867, in the *Atlanta Daily Era*, 26 Feb 1867.

resolution for his amnesty.²⁴ Brown feared that the resolution would create conflict between the House and Senate, while also opening him to abuse at home. Brown told Kelley, “I of course make no objection to the relief of Gov. Patton, but I do not wish my name to be used in that connection at present.”²⁵

By March 1868, however, the situation looked different. Georgia Republicans needed to put forward candidates for election under a new state constitution. In some cases, reconstructed rebels looked like attractive candidates, with their past experience and political capital, but they nevertheless found themselves benched by the officeholding ban. Kelley told Brown that the position of the House against removing disqualifications had softened; Brown should put together a list of men who should be relieved.²⁶ The convention itself forwarded such a list, probably at Brown’s suggestion, though added in a letter to Kelley, “I am not a suppliant for relief. I can live without it and without office.”²⁷

Nevertheless, Brown emphasized the work he had done for Reconstruction and said that he resented the insult when some members of Congress opposed his relief in open debate. Brown warned against humiliating men like him “who have sacrificed position and all that is most dear to aid reconstruction” by “still calling for fruit of repentance after the terrible struggle through which they have passed to sustain the Congressional plan.” If reconstructed rebels were not given their due, Brown prophesied, “it will soon make our white people a unit in opposition to Congress.” Wrapping up his letter, Brown insisted, “it is impossible to build up and maintain a

²⁴ Brown to Kelley, 21 Mar 1867 and Brown to Sherman, 21 Mar 1867, Joseph E. Brown Papers, Hargrett Library, UGA.

²⁵ Brown to Kelley, 9 Jul 1867, Joseph E. Brown Papers, Hargrett Library, UGA.

²⁶ Kelley to Brown, 8 Mar 1868, quoted in Parks, *Joseph E. Brown of Georgia*, 404.

²⁷ Joseph E. Brown to William D. Kelley, 18 Mar 1868, Brown Papers, Hargrett Library, UGA.

party here on the reconstruction line without the aid of leading Southern men who know our people and sympathize with them.”²⁸

Brown leveraged his popularity in Georgia in order to reap concessions from Congress—the relief of political disabilities for reconstructed rebels and the promise not to impose additional requirements on the southern states. Brown knew the symbolic value of the part he could play for the party, as he did at the Republican National Convention in May 1868. Called upon to speak, he began by affirming, “I came here, as has been well remarked, a reconstructed rebel.” From this platform, Brown asked Republicans to support Georgia’s new leadership.²⁹

Like William Kelley, Massachusetts Senator Henry Wilson made a speaking tour through the South during the summer of 1867, moving in the opposite direction, from east to west. Thus, by the time he reached New Orleans, he had already conferred with Joseph Brown and Robert Patton. Wilson’s southern tour had a significant impact on former Confederate General James Longstreet. When Longstreet publicly explained his conversion to the Republican Party, he directly cited the impression that Wilson had made on him.

Henry Wilson was a more committed supporter of African American rights than John Sherman, but he agreed with the moderate Republicans on the need to win over the support of southern whites. The New Orleans *Republican* reported Wilson’s words for the disfranchised: “Those who cannot vote or hold office can speak and act with us, and give us their influence. Let them do so and the country will never forget those who are true to it in the dark and troubled night through which we are passing.”³⁰ The Raleigh *Standard*’s report of Wilson’s speech three

²⁸ Joseph E. Brown to William D. Kelley, 18 Mar 1868, Brown Papers, Hargrett Library, UGA.

²⁹ *Speech of Ex-Governor Brown of Georgia, Delivered in the National Republican Convention at Chicago, May 20, 1868.*

³⁰ *New Orleans Republican*, 17 May 1867.

weeks earlier gave a better indication of what Wilson meant. “When proof is furnished that the disfranchised have acted properly and mean to do right hereafter,” Wilson promised, “then the disability will be once more removed by the hand of love itself.” However, for “those who favor the lost cause, who await reactionary measures,” he continued, “the government breathes defiance.”³¹ Wilson would later take the same position in the Senate, pronouncing his preference for universal amnesty in the abstract, while admitting that such rights must be withheld from former rebels until they respected the rights of Black southerners.³²

Longstreet was part of the committee that welcomed Wilson to New Orleans, and he was a vice-president of the meeting that the senator addressed. In a public letter on June 3rd, Longstreet reported that he was “pleased to have the opportunity to hear Senator Wilson and was agreeably surprised to meet such fairness and frankness in a politician whom I had been taught to believe uncompromisingly opposed to the white people of the South.” He went on to describe the Fourteenth Amendment and the Military Reconstruction Acts as “peace offerings.” Then he turned explicitly to partisan politics. He declared himself “willing to work in any harness that promises relief to our distressed people and harmony to the nation.” Henceforth he would affiliate with the Republicans.³³

The idea that Wilson offered a quid-pro-quo to Longstreet during their meeting seems possible, since Longstreet later wrote to a mutual friend that the senator had “intimated when I saw him in N.O. that these political disabilities would be removed.”³⁴ The former general spent the next two years traveling between various locations in the South, the national capital, and

³¹ Raleigh *Weekly Standard*, 8 May 1867.

³² *Congressional Globe* 40th Cong., 2nd Sess., 3180.

³³ *New Orleans Times*, 8 Jun 1867.

³⁴ Longstreet to Frederick T. Dent, in *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant*, ed. John Y. Simon, Vol. 18, 241.

New England, before returning to Louisiana in April 1869 with the federal patronage appointment of surveyor for the port of New Orleans.

Patton, Brown, and Longstreet each became convinced that it was in their best interest to support the Fourteenth Amendment. They were behaving opportunistically, but from their perspective, self-interest aligned with the good of their communities. The South needed its best men. From Congress's perspective, what mattered was that white southern support for their plan was growing. Even if congressional Republicans did not originally expect that the disqualification would cause some former rebels to change their party allegiance, Congress quickly sought to take advantage of such a welcome turn of events.

Works Meet for Repentance

While the southern states were rewriting their constitutions in the spring of 1868, Congressional Republicans were confronted with the possibility that their most experienced allies in the South might not be able to hold office in the new governments. Nevada Senator William Stewart tested the waters by offering a bill to remove Robert Patton's disabilities. Immediately, questions were raised about the Alabama governor's wartime loyalty. Stewart evaded, claiming, "I did know the particulars of that, but they have escaped my memory." Actually, Stewart considered wartime loyalty unimportant. "I have rather been investigating what he did since the rebellion," Stewart continued. Another senator agreed, "It does not make so much difference what a man did in the past; if he is willing now to come forward and unite with us upon our plan and method of reconstruction, act cordially with our friends in the conventions,

and agree to reconstruct upon the basis we have laid down, why should we not relieve disabilities?”³⁵

Support among Senate Republicans was assured when Jacob Howard offered a formula for proceeding. Howard announced, “I understand that Mr. Patton has shown his faith by his works.” He would support Patton’s relief and act similarly on any “case of this kind,” while also insisting on “proof to the Senate that the party has really shown his faith by his works; in short, that he has done works meet for repentance.” Howard’s choice of language was biblical, evoking the Second Letter of James: “What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? Can faith save him?” Any duplicitous rebel might claim to love the Union, as many had done in their letters to Andrew Johnson. The only ones who could be trusted with office were those whose postwar behavior gave proof to their confessions of faith.³⁶

Though Thaddeus Stevens buried the bill for Patton’s relief in the House, another congressman brought up a bill to relieve James Longstreet, Joe Brown, and sixteen others. Objections emerged from the more radical faction of House Republicans represented by Stevens. John Logan thought that Longstreet’s letter “accepting the situation” was insufficient. Logan protested that if that were enough, “every rebel general would write one to be relieved from disability under the law.” The Illinois congressman made his case even more plainly by attacking Joe Brown. “Governor Brown is a politician,” Logan said bluntly. “He saw the handwriting on the wall, and the war having ceased he has taken advantage of it.” Building to a more general position, Logan continued, “No people ever lived on earth who loved political power as these leaders at the South do, and, in my judgment, there are no people who will change their opinions

³⁵ *Congressional Globe*, 40th Cong., 2nd Sess., 766.

³⁶ *Congressional Globe*, 40th Cong., 2nd Sess., 766.

faster and oftener than will these people for the purpose of obtaining power.” Logan was skeptical of rebel motivations, especially after so many of them had taken advantage of President Johnson’s lenient amnesty only to turn around and use their public power to oppress Black and white Unionists.³⁷

William Kelley was one of the first to respond. He had corresponded with half of the men in the bill, including his friend Brown. Kelley insisted that Brown had done more than any man to convince white Georgians to accept Congressional Reconstruction. He also vouched for the group as a whole and said that they had done “works meet for repentance.” James Garfield took up Kelley’s religious language. “It belongs not to us but to the Searcher of all hearts,” Garfield avowed, “to decide whether a man sincerely loves the Union. All we can fairly ask is that he will do what is required, and as soon as we are assured of that we should be willing to remove the disabilities now imposed upon him by our laws.” Amazingly, even John Farnsworth, who had lost a son in an ill-fated cavalry charge against Longstreet’s corps at Gettysburg, defended the former general. Farnsworth told the House that “without probing very deeply into the recesses of Longstreet’s heart, I would only inquire, is he acting heartily with the loyal people of the country?” In response to another representative who objected that Longstreet only accepted the situation “under duress,” Farnsworth replied, “I do not care whether it is under duress or not. One man like Longstreet can do the loyal cause in the South more good than a thousand ordinary men.” Southern elites were particularly valuable to Republicans for their fame and influence.³⁸

Farnsworth further voiced another layer of concern. The Reconstruction Acts, by combining Black suffrage with temporary white disfranchisement and disqualification for office,

³⁷ *Congressional Globe*, 40th Cong., 2nd Sess., 1930-31.

³⁸ *Congressional Globe*, 40th Cong., 2nd Sess., 1931, 1933.

might lead to “a white man’s party and a black man’s party.” Though sympathetic to the rights of freedpeople, Farnsworth feared that if parties in the South divided on racial lines, “the black man’s party will go to the dust.” There was certainly condescension regarding the capabilities of Black people in Farnsworth’s remark, but also a realistic fear of white counterrevolution. If former Confederates were excluded from participation in the new governments, they might argue that they had no stake in their success. Without white southern consent, Farnsworth reasoned, it would take military force to prevent the constitutions from being overturned. Farnsworth believed that rewarding loyalty and allowing rebels back into some positions of power would prevent the racialization of party politics.³⁹

Congressional Republicans also alluded to the need for experienced leadership in the South. Henry Dawes would later gain notoriety for Indian policies that aimed at racial assimilation; in 1868, he was more focused on assimilating white rebels. Listing the most prominent prewar leaders in the amnesty bill, Dawes argued that “the mind and character and the influence which those men must necessarily exert in those States are absolutely essential and necessary to a healthy reconstruction of those States.” The implication was that white southerners, once reconstructed, would provide better leadership than Black southerners. The former, after all, had experience in leadership and administration. Moreover, while northern Republicans believed former slaves were worthy of citizenship, they also associated political virtue with education and wealth, which fell along racial lines.⁴⁰

Some of the supporters of congressional amnesty, such as Dawes in the House and Sherman in the Senate, were moderates on Black civil rights. It is not too surprising that they

³⁹ *Congressional Globe*, 40th Cong., 2nd Sess., 1933.

⁴⁰ *Congressional Globe*, 40th Cong., 2nd Sess., 1710. On white northerners’ disillusionment with African American citizenship, see Richardson, *The Death of Reconstruction*.

would advocate a policy that empowered white men. However, Garfield and Farnsworth were early supporters of Black suffrage and still supported congressional amnesty for whites. William Kelley and Henry Wilson consistently advocated for both Black civil rights *and* reconciliation with reconstructed rebels. Even Thaddeus Stevens frequently consulted the leader of North Carolina's Republican apparatus, William W. Holden, and asked him for a list of reliable names for relief. Radical and moderate proponents of African American rights alike agreed that they should reward white southerners for joining the party, give them a stake in the success of Reconstruction, and even allow them to hold power.⁴¹

In June 1868, both houses of Congress agreed to a bill with over a thousand names. Before it passed, however, Democrats seized the opportunity to object to its partisan nature. A Democratic congressman complained that the bill "selects men of one particular school of politics for pardon and omits all others." Farnsworth retorted that his party could not help it if all southern Democrats were diehard rebels. Asked whether loyalty meant support of the Reconstruction Acts, which Democrats also saw as partisan, Farnsworth explained that it was "necessary that a man who acted with the rebels during the war shall give some evidence of repentance," and that it was "very good evidence of repentance when he gives the reconstruction measures of Congress his cordial support. If he cooperates with the loyal people of his State, black and white, and helps in good faith and heartily to reconstruct and restore this State upon the basis of liberty and equality, he gives evidence of returning loyalty and repentance." Another Democrat asked whether opposition to Black suffrage therefore made a man a rebel. Farnsworth denied this formula as an absolute rule, but admitted that he considered it evidence against a

⁴¹ Michael Benedict, *A Compromise of Principle: Congressional Republicans and Reconstruction* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1975), 339-377; William W. Holden to Thaddeus Stevens, 17 February 1868, HSCR.

man's reconstruction: "if we find that all rebels oppose negro suffrage, it casts a little suspicion upon men who oppose it, whether you call them rebels or not." Party loyalty proved national loyalty, and works that furthered Reconstruction proved both.⁴²

Only a few of the names in this first bill were avowed Democrats, and a conference between the two houses struck them out. Nearly all of the names came from lists provided by state constitutional conventions, which were dominated by southern Republicans. The House Select Committee on Reconstruction and the Senate Judiciary Committee also used their own contacts to vet the names. Patton's name was left out, possibly because he objected to the Alabama constitution, which included additional disfranchisement measures. However, both Brown and Longstreet made the cut. Neither man had run for office, but others on the list had, even before they knew for sure that they would be relieved from their disabilities. For example, Holden was the Republican candidate for governor in North Carolina, and it was only because of the amnesty bill that he and numerous other reconstructed rebels were able to take their seats. Ultimately the Fortieth Congress provided relief to 1,431 former rebels. The Forty-First Congress acted on another 3,185, including some moderate Democrats who accepted the legality of Reconstruction and Black suffrage.

Republican Patronage Networks

In 1860, southern secessionists had feared the extension of Republican patronage networks into the South.⁴³ In 1868, those fears were validated. Once relieved of their disqualifications, the initial recipients of amnesty recommended others, who in turn wrote

⁴² *Congressional Globe*, 40th Cong., 2nd Sess., 2414-15, 3301.

⁴³ Steven A. Channing, *Crisis of Fear: Secession in South Carolina* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1970), 235.

applications for relief. Freed from their political disabilities, many went on to serve in federal, state, and local offices. Senator Jacob Howard had been right to expect that congress's policy would "multiply, vastly multiply, the number of our friends and supporters in those States."⁴⁴

Joseph Brown endorsed a number of petitions, activating networks that he had established years earlier. For example, Charles E. Broyles came from the same corner of the state as Brown. In the late 1850s, he served on Brown's staff and in the state legislature. On the reverse side of his application to Congress, Brown wrote that Broyles was "as true a republican as any in Georgia" and that "the party has use for him soon." Though Broyles declined a nomination for Congress, his relief allowed him to serve as solicitor general for his circuit.⁴⁵ Another Brown devotee, James J. Findley, was a prewar legislator and rose to the rank of major in the Confederate service. He and Brown shared an interest in their region's mineral wealth as well. Findley spoke for himself in his application, claiming he "supported Gen. Grant for President and do belong to the Republican Party and shall continue to give my support to that party whether pardoned or not." Perhaps Brown's decision to join the Republican had influenced Findley's new allegiance. Freed of his disabilities, Findley made an unsuccessful bid for Congress and was subsequently appointed deputy U.S. marshal.⁴⁶

One of the earliest Mississippians to receive amnesty was James Lusk Alcorn. He would go on to serve as a Republican governor and U.S. senator, and, like Brown, he brokered congressional amnesty in his state. Alcorn described a man from Bolivar county as "sincere,

⁴⁴ *Congressional Globe*, 40th Cong., 2nd Sess., 766.

⁴⁵ Unnumbered Application, Charles E. Broyles, HSCR; Broyles autobiography, <https://www.wikitree.com/photo/pdf/Broyles-315>.

⁴⁶ James J. Findley to Congress, 15 Mar 1869, Application #6050 James J. Findley, HSCR. Jonathan D. Sarris, "An Execution in Lumpkin County: Localized Loyalties in North Georgia's Civil War," Kenneth W. Noe and Shannon H. Wilson, eds., *The Civil War in Appalachia: Collected Essays* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2004), 136-37.

hates the democrats; wept when the state seceded, but afterwards became a genuine rebel, now inclined to the Republican party.” He called another former rebel from Coahoma “a good republican” as well as an “honest and trustworthy man.” Alcorn added, “we wish to make use of him for some office.”⁴⁷ On a longer list of names that he sent to Congress, Alcorn scratched various notes such as “Republican. Elected to state senate on my ticket,” “Unionist, old line Whig, held some small office, good man, will be with us,” “Secesh Dem, C.S. M. C. [Member of Congress], Republican, all right.”⁴⁸

North Carolina provides the best setting to illustrate how reconstructed rebels made use of amnesty and patronage networks. States in the Upper South typically had more former Unionists in the Republican Party than former Confederates, but North Carolina had an exceptionally high number of reconstructed rebels. James Baggett’s research on 82 of North Carolina’s native white Republican leaders found that 73 percent of them had served or held office in the Confederacy.⁴⁹

Governor William W. Holden had overseen amnesty under Johnson, and now that he was a Republican, he did so again for Congress. This time, his definition of loyalty had shifted. “Well, we all experienced in 1865 a kind of pentecostal [*sic*] repentance among rebels,” he recalled. Rebels had given “lip service” to the Union loyalty back then. In 1868, however, “*bona fide* repentance and *good works*” would be necessary. To receive amnesty, Holden announced, former rebels “must vote, talk, write, travel, labor, and spend their money for the Republican party, the nation, and government, as other loyal men do.”⁵⁰

⁴⁷ J. L. Alcorn to C. C. Washburn, 5 Mar 1869, Application #4032 David S. Pattison, HSCR.

⁴⁸ J. L. Alcorn to C. C. Washburn, Application #4257 Greene C. Chandler, HSCR.

⁴⁹ Baggett, *The Scalawags*, 275.

⁵⁰ William C. Harris, *William Woods Holden: Firebrand of North Carolina Politics* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987), 164, 180-185; Raleigh *Weekly Standard*, 24 Jun 1868.

Leading Republicans sought to tap into local networks and used amnesty to do so. A North Carolina congressman recommended two men because “they will make us friends in their *neighborhoods*.”⁵¹ The use of amnesty to proselytize from the top down can also be seen in the activities of William Blount Rodman. Though a former Confederate colonel and a wealthy planter, Rodman was an early convert to the Republican Party. After defending his choice to join the Republican Party, he said that “there are thousands of men in North Carolina whose antecedents were like my own—who have pursued independently the same course of reasoning which has led me to the support of the Republican party.... I receive letters from them.” According to Rodman, they would accept Black suffrage and risk making violent enemies. However, they could not serve the party without the relief of their disabilities, nor would they support the party if the new state constitution added its own disfranchising measures. “We cannot afford,” Rodman insisted, “no party can afford, to shut its doors against men like these.”⁵²

Rodman did what he could to woo friends to the party, though not always successfully. In early 1868, he wrote to David M. Carter, a fellow coastal planter, trying to cajole him to rejoin the Republicans. Carter had worked alongside Holden and Rodman to found the party the previous year. After a party convention refused to unequivocally renounce confiscation or disfranchisement, he defected. Rodman told Carter that the constitution they were working on would be moderate on such issues and avoid the radicalism that Carter dreaded. When Carter asked Rodman about his disqualification under the Fourteenth Amendment, Rodman told him that his break with the Republican Party would make amnesty unlikely. Rodman ultimately

⁵¹ John T. Deweese to Benjamin F. Butler, 16 Mar 1869, Application #11047 S. W. Smith and B. V. Smith, HSCR, emphasis in the original.

⁵² “Suffrage and Eligibility to Office: Speech of William B. Rodman, Esq. of Beaufort County, Delivered in the Constitutional Convention of North Carolina, at Raleigh, on February 20, 1868,” pamphlet, William Blount Rodman Papers, East Carolina University, Greenville, NC

failed to bring Carter back, and when Rodman raised Carter's name with the party's executive committee anyway, "objection was made." As he told Carter, "You were convicted of political heresy & your name stricken off."⁵³

Rodman had more success with William J. Clarke. Clarke was also Confederate colonel, though from a more modest background. In early 1868, Clarke moved from Raleigh to New Bern to hunt for legal or literary work. While there, he also attended and spoke at conservative political rallies. He was not opposed to listening to Republican speakers, but he made his antipathy to them clear in his diary. Of one Republican meeting, he wrote, "miserable puerile & vile speeches to an audience composed principally of negroes." Clarke joined the opposition to the new constitution, but when his side lost at the polls, he began to reconsider the company he kept. One spring night, he spent the evening discussing politics with Rodman.⁵⁴

Clarke continued to meet with Rodman and other Republicans throughout the summer. In July, he was appointed attorney for the state-owned North Carolina Railroad. "The Republicans seem to be rallying to me," he wrote. "God knows I need help and encouragement." Clarke's new friends made him aware of a judgeship that might come his way if he joined the party. In late August, Clarke gave his first Republican speech, and that fall, he stumped the eastern half of the state for Grant. Then on December 24, he received a Christmas present: a letter from North Carolina Congressman David Heaton informing him that his Fourteenth Amendment disabilities had been removed. That same day he was sworn in as a judge. Though the self-interest in Clarke's conversion appears obvious, Clarke did not see it that way. Reflecting on his decision, he wrote in his diary, "I know not whether I have acted wisely, but God knows that none but

⁵³ William B. Rodman to David M. Carter, 23 Jan 1868, 11 Feb, and 7 Mar 1868, David Miller Carter Papers, SHC.

⁵⁴ Clarke Diary, William J. Clarke Papers, SHC.

patriotic just and humane motives influenced me.” Clarke convinced himself that he was doing right for his country. Ultimately though, what is most apparent from Clarke’s meticulous diary is the increasing influence that Rodman and other Republicans had over him.⁵⁵

In contrast to Rodman’s top-down efforts to win party converts, local contests for power also made amnesty necessary and pushed applications for relief from the bottom-up. In late July 1868, a Republican leader in Fayetteville called Holden’s attention to the unfortunate circumstance that two of the town’s commissioners could not qualify for office under the Fourteenth Amendment. This was a major problem because the other local officers who *could* qualify *would not* be qualified, since it was the job of town commissioners to certify them. The writer emphasized the urgency of the matter by mentioning that the district court circuit would begin in two weeks. The new legal order of Reconstruction, which now protected the rights of both Blacks and whites, required that Holden quickly appoint interim commissioners free from the officeholding ban.⁵⁶

At the local level, reconstructed rebels needed amnesty because without it, anti-reconstruction whites could use the Fourteenth Amendment against them. The application of James Monroe Pugh illustrates this point. Pugh was a Raleigh merchant who anticipated being appointed postmaster, a federal position that required an individual to swear that they had never aided the Confederacy in any way. A false statement would constitute a federal crime. Pugh believed he could take the oath, but in his official petition to Congress, he declared himself “very desirous to have my disabilities removed...for the reason that certain persons cannot after

⁵⁵ Clarke Diary, William J. Clarke Papers, SHC.

⁵⁶ Ralph Buxton to William W. Holden, 31 Jul 1868, Governors’ Papers, State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh, NC.

removal cast the matter in my teeth.”⁵⁷ Given the difficulty of avoiding complicity in the rebellion, it was better to be pardoned than face the accusation of perjury.

Disqualification from local office also meant that someone else would get the job, perhaps even a diehard rebel, since the Fourteenth Amendment had only banned rebels who held prewar office. If reconstructed rebels remained under the ban, unreconstructed rebels not under the ban had a greater chance of taking power. For example, Starkey S. Harrell was a Republican superior court clerk in Hertford County. In addition to his petition for amnesty, he wrote a pointed letter to his congressman. “I do not crave the office I hold, but am unwilling to yield an inch until subjection of Rebel sympathizers is plain,” Harrell fulminated. “If I am unable to hold the office, the whole county will be in possession of secessionists.”⁵⁸ A couple of months earlier, Governor Holden asked the chairman of the House Select Committee on Reconstruction to stop a general amnesty bill—one without regard to partisan loyalty or works—because “we have not yet held our township elections. It is important that no general relief should be granted until these offices are filled.” Likely it was cases like Harrell’s that Holden had in mind. Reconstructed rebels needed amnesty to get in, but unreconstructed rebels needed to be kept out.⁵⁹

Multiple levels of Republican officials handled pleas for relief before they reached the House Select Committee on Reconstruction. When North Carolina’s constitutional convention met in the spring of 1868, delegates produced the names of men from their counties whom they wanted relieved. Sometimes the delegates relied on information from even more local sources to determine who needed and deserved amnesty. A delegate from Robeson County closed a lengthy petition on behalf of another Republican, “All the *loyal* men of my county unite with me in this

⁵⁷ J. M. Pugh to Congress, 22 Nov 1869, Application #11121 J. M. Pugh, HSCR.

⁵⁸ S. S. Harrell to C. L. Cobb, 25 Mar 1869, Application #11023 S. S. Harrell.

⁵⁹ W. W. Holden to George Boutwell, 28 Jan 1869, both in HSCR.

petition.” The constitutional convention added the man’s name to the list they sent to Congress, and the House Committee included him in the first amnesty bill. After this initial list by the constitutional convention, later applications generally moved from individual towns to the Republican State Committee, then to the state’s congressional representation, and finally to the House Committee, all the while picking up signatures of endorsement.⁶⁰

The contents of the petitions reveal what it meant to be “*thoroughly reconstructed*,” as one North Carolinian put it.⁶¹ Applicants typically began their letters by describing the reason for their disqualification—any offices they held before the war; whether they were affected by the Fourteenth Amendment or the federal test oath; and their subsequent involvement with the Confederacy. Applicants sometimes sought to excuse their involvement in the rebellion. In North Carolina, many petitioners argued that in their hearts they had never been rebels at all. However, being “reconstructed” meant something different than claiming wartime Unionism.⁶² Successful petitioners universally expressed their support for the Fourteenth Amendment and the Reconstruction Acts. A typical petition stated that the author was “in favor of supporting the Reconstruction measures of Congress & the state governments established thereunder.”⁶³

Some petitioners were more specific. A soon-to-be internal revenue assessor wrote that “he has been active & persistent in supporting the reconstruction measures of Congress & in public speeches & newspapers of his state, he has advocated, on all occasions, the principles of

⁶⁰ O. S. Hayes, Petition on behalf of James Sinclair, Correspondence of the State Constitutional Convention of 1868, State Archives of North Carolina.

⁶¹ John A. Richardson to Oliver Dockery, 8 Dec 1868, Application #11004 J. A. Richardson, HSCR, emphasis in the original.

⁶² For examples of suppliants seeking to excuse their support of the Confederacy, see S. S. Harrell to Congress, 25 Mar 1869, Application #11023 S. S. Harrell; and H. M. Pritchard to Congress, [Apr? 1868], Unnumbered Application H. M. Prichard, HSCR.

⁶³ Samuel Reeves to Congress, n.d., and Samuel Reeves to N. Boyden, Application #11038 Samuel Reeves, HSCR.

the Radical Republican party.”⁶⁴ A future Republican mayor of Charlotte mentioned voting for Grant in the 1868 presidential election, editing a newspaper “in favor of universal suffrage,” and supporting all party nominees, even “to his great pecuniary loss and the alienation of his friends and business.”⁶⁵ Another supplicant described himself as “a pioneer in the land of equal rights and manhood suffrage.”⁶⁶ By contrast, one petitioner who wrote that he would comply with the acts of Congress “until they may be legally altered or amended” was not relieved.⁶⁷ Together the petitions suggest that reconstructed rebels and Congress adopted an understanding of loyalty based on postwar party works, such as voting, canvassing, writing, speaking, advocating for the freedpeople, and bringing in more converts.

The public nature of these actions made it difficult for applicants to get away with lying. Multiple gatekeepers stood between the applicants and amnesty. Holden told the chairman of the House Committee that North Carolina’s “rule in regard to relief from disabilities in this state is, that the Republican State Committee investigate each case in which relief is asked, and that none but those recommended by the Committee be proper cases to be relieved.”⁶⁸ The secretary of the state committee wrote to his congressional counterpart, “We desire to prevent any man from being relieved from political disabilities unless sanctioned by the members of Congress from this state or recommended by the Republican State Executive Committee.”⁶⁹ North Carolina’s

⁶⁴ W. F. Henderson to Congress, undated, Application #11017 W. F. Henderson, HSCR.

⁶⁵ H. M. Pritchard to Congress, [Apr? 1868], Unnumbered Application, H. M. Prichard, HSCR.

⁶⁶ James Sinclair to William D. Kelley, Unnumbered Application James Sinclair, HSCR.

⁶⁷ Neil S. Stewart to Congress, 25 Nov 1868, Application #11022 Neil S. Stewart, all in HSCR.

⁶⁸ W. W. Holden to George Boutwell, 28 Jan 1869, HSCR.

⁶⁹ Thomas L. Tullock to the House Select Committee on Reconstruction, 9 Dec 1868, HSCR.

congressional delegation also asked that no more names be added to relief bills until it could review them first.⁷⁰

The petitions that ended up in the hands of the House Committee reflected this vetting process. Almost all of the North Carolinians who were successful had been endorsed by the state Republican committee or by a Republican congressman. Petitions that lacked endorsements were not acted upon, and neither were those that included the signatures of numerous citizens but failed to go through the party officials. North Carolina's lieutenant governor successfully blocked one petition by writing, "there is not a more stiff necked rebel in this county, Burke... He is the rebel candidate for Superior Court Clerk in this County."⁷¹

Restoration

Amnesty was a key party-building and nation-building tool that allowed southern Republicans to create networks linking individuals to centers of state power. Moreover, it gave a powerful cohort of reconstructed rebels a stake in biracial democracy. Yet, in doing so, it also channeled greater power to a subset of the prewar elite.

Congressional amnesty, both in effect and by intention, empowered white southerners. Williams C. Wickham told a meeting of Republicans, "Without a large infusion of the native white element into the party, its existence here will come to a speedy end."⁷² One of Holden's advisors wrote, "It is to the interest of the Republican party to conciliate and win over the white men of the country. Indeed I think the very existence of the party at the South will depend on our

⁷⁰ North Carolina Congressional Delegation to Thaddeus Stevens, n.d. 1869, HSCR.

⁷¹ Tod R. Caldwell to T. L. Tullock, 23 April 1868, Application #11005 J. B. and J. R. Kincaid, HSCR.

⁷² Williams C. Wickham, *Address of Gen. W. C. Wickham, delivered before the Grant and Colfax ratification meeting, held in the City of Richmond, Va., August 25th* (Alexandria: Republican State Central Committee, 1868).

success in such an effort.”⁷³ Amnesty was part of that effort. The way to recruit the mass of southern whites, it seemed to some Republicans, was to recruit their “natural” leaders.

The class dimension of amnesty often showed through, as when one North Carolinian endorsed an application by writing, “We need such Republicans as he is to fill offices where business capacity is required.”⁷⁴ Reconstructed rebels exploited the fact that certain jobs required a skill set that they had been fortunate enough to obtain because of their wealth and education. Even though the Reconstruction Acts gave poor whites and former slaves unprecedented access to government power, Reconstruction’s northern architects wanted the state governments to be managed at the top by experienced prewar elites who embraced the new order.

Once relieved of their disabilities, reconstructed rebels ran for office, took government jobs, and became patronage brokers in their own right. The president of the North Carolina Railroad, for instance, gloated that if there was anyone working for the road who had opposed the Republicans at the last election, “he was some clever business man who has long since *repented* of his *sins* and is now for the Governor and the great National Conservative Republican Party.”⁷⁵ African Americans benefited from railroad jobs, but a thorough study of North Carolina railroads in this period found that none were given a position of responsibility like director or conductor.⁷⁶ Joseph Brown estimated that Republican control of Georgia’s Western and Atlantic Railroad would net between 1000 and 1500 votes because its Democratic employees would be

⁷³ William B. Rodman to Holden, 5 May 1868, William Woods Holden Papers (private collection), State Archives of North Carolina.

⁷⁴ Robert E. McDonald to N. B. Judd, 14 Jul 1868, Application #11048 R. C. Cook, HSCR.

⁷⁵ Charles Lewis Price, “Railroads and Reconstruction in North Carolina, 1865-1871” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1959), 272-73.

⁷⁶ Price, “Railroads and Reconstruction,” 263, 268

replaced with Republican ones.⁷⁷ One may reasonably doubt that Brown was hoping to pick up additional votes among African Americans, who had no better alternative than the Republican Party. Some jobs might go to Black Georgians, but a careful use of patronage to win votes meant mostly giving the jobs to whites. The same pattern held for other kinds of patronage.

Endorsements for registers in bankruptcy included known Republicans. However, out of the North Carolina applicants, there was only one African American, who wrote a poorly spelled letter and was not appointed.⁷⁸

Republican political organization was ballasted by public jobs for whites, who were then charged with redistributing goods and services to Blacks. Georgia Methodist John H. Caldwell and his wife opened day, night, and Sunday schools for African Americans with funds from the American Missionary Association. Finding the salaries for himself and other teachers insufficient, he sought additional resources from the Freedmen's Bureau. The Bureau appointed him district superintendent in January 1867. With the government's help he was able to open additional schools, hiring his wife, son, niece, and nephew as teachers. Caldwell pointed out to Bureau leaders that his brother, also a Methodist minister, owned a building that could be used as a school, and yet another relative was Bureau superintendent in a different district.⁷⁹ Attorney General Amos Akerman—another reconstructed rebel from Georgia—claimed that on a recent

⁷⁷ Joseph E. Brown to U. S. Grant, 5 May 1868, Joseph E. Brown Papers, Hargrett Library, UGA.

⁷⁸ Applications and Endorsements, Registers in Bankruptcy, RG 267 U.S. Supreme Court Records, NARA.

⁷⁹ John H. Caldwell, 8 Oct 1866, Freedmen's Bureau, Records of the Superintendent of Education and of the Division of Education, Georgia, Roll 28, Miscellaneous lists and memoranda; School reports from agents and subassistant commissioners, Freedmen's Bureau, Records of the Superintendent of education and of the Division of Education, Georgia, Roll 16; J. H. Caldwell to J. R. Lewis, 5 Aug 1867, Freedmen's Bureau Field Office Records, Georgia, Roll 66, Unregistered letters received; J. H. Caldwell, 18 Jan 1867, Freedmen's Bureau, Records of the Superintendent of Education and of the Division of Education, Georgia; John H. Caldwell to G. L. Eberhart, 27 Mar 1867, Freedmen's Bureau, Records of the Superintendent of education and of the Division of Education, Georgia, Letters Received, Roll 8; William L. Caldwell to E. A. Ware, 11 Feb 1868, Freedmen's Bureau, Records of the Superintendent of Education and of the Division of Education, Georgia, Letters Received, Roll 10.

visit to York County, South Carolina he found that nearly all of the schools “were taught by men who had been in the Confederate armies,” until intimidation by the Klan caused them to stop. Like political offices, teaching provided reconstructed rebels with employment, and as Akerman added sympathetically, “one or two were cripples.”⁸⁰

Black southerners had mixed feelings about empowering members of the prewar elite. The New Orleans *Tribune*, for example, was skeptical of James Longstreet’s conversion in 1867. A bilingual newspaper dedicated to serving the city’s Black and creole communities, *The Tribune* argued, “our only advisors should be ourselves. None of these so called wise men...has our interest or welfare at heart. They speak for their people, not us.”⁸¹ However, when Grant appointed Longstreet surveyor for the Port of New Orleans in 1869, the attitude of the *Tribune* changed dramatically. Its editorials called him “an enlightened man, a true patriot,” and used him as a foil to criticize unreconstructed rebels: “After having shown bravery on the battlefield, he demonstrated in political life a great moral courage and, if his example were followed by our fellow citizens of the South, all our dissensions would soon be appeased.”⁸²

African American leaders sometimes opposed restricting the rights of ex-Confederates because they feared that it would undermine their own claim to citizenship. As the New Orleans *Tribune* put it, “If we refuse the franchise to any class, it can as well be withheld from us.”⁸³ However, few supported universal amnesty from the officeholding ban. More often, they paired individual amnesty with support for Reconstruction, as the authors of the Fourteenth Amendment had done. Black leaders like James Rapier of Alabama and Hiram Revels of Mississippi offered

⁸⁰ *The Brooklyn Union*, 4 Nov 1871.

⁸¹ *New Orleans Tribune*, 11 Apr 1867.

⁸² *New Orleans Tribune*, 24 Feb 1869. The translation from French is the author’s.

⁸³ *New Orleans Tribune*, 25 Sep 1866.

resolutions to help reconstructed white southerners regain the right to hold office.⁸⁴ Twenty-eight members of the Alabama legislature signed a petition to grant amnesty to Samuel Rice, the former chief justice of the state supreme court, who had joined the Republican Party after Grant's election. As evidence of Justice Rice's trustworthiness, the signers testified that he had consistently advocated equal rights during the eighteen months after his conversion and that "he has ever shown his faith by his works."⁸⁵ Conflict between African American leaders and reconstructed rebels would come later, but for now they helped each other.

Southern Unionists and northern settlers were sometimes quicker than African Americans to challenge reconstructed rebels' leadership. One Georgia Unionist protested against a petition for amnesty, writing, "if the Fourteenth Amendment means anything...if the test oath means anything, they mean to exclude just such men."⁸⁶ In Arkansas, a recent northern arrival told Congress that "there is no disposition on the part of the Union men in Arkansas to confer office on those who have been in rebel service; we are willing to have them come into our church as converts, but are disposed to let them occupy back seats for some years to come."⁸⁷ The objections of white Unionists, however, did more to weed out unreconstructed rebels who sought amnesty deceptively than to stop Congress from rewarding verified converts to the party.

⁸⁴ For examples of African American leaders supporting selective amnesty, see Loren Schweninger, *James T. Rapier and Reconstruction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 57; Edmund L. Drago, *Black Politicians and Reconstruction in Georgia* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982), 45; and Michael W. Fitzgerald, *Reconstruction in Alabama: From Civil War to Redemption in the Cotton South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2017), 159.

⁸⁵ L. S. Speed, et al., to the Senate, Application of Samuel F. Rice, Papers of the Senate Select Committee on Removal of Political Disabilities, NARA.

⁸⁶ Howell C. Flournoy to Henry L. Dawes, 29 Dec 1868, Application #6029 John H. Christy, HSCR. See also Fitzgerald, *Reconstruction in Alabama*, 145 and Adam Domby "War within the States: Loyalty, Dissent, and Conflict in Southern Piedmont Communities, 1860-1876" (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2015), 343-350. Domby examines Unionist efforts to keep ex-Confederates disenfranchised, though the targets of their protests were usually not Republican converts.

⁸⁷ *Report of the Joint Committee on Reconstruction* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1866), 124.

Congressional amnesty was at least partially based on the assumption that Reconstruction needed the support of native southerners to give it legitimacy. At the same time though, African Americans and unconditional Unionists were native southerners too. To them, their consent was enough to mean that Reconstruction was not being imposed from outside. Northern Republicans saw these groups as vital partners in reconstructing the South, and yet, they were insufficient in northern eyes. They saw that white southerners were necessary to secure Republican majorities in all but a few states. They also knew that conservative southerners would see any government by African Americans and lower-class whites as illegitimate. Perhaps most importantly, white northerners shared with southerners the basic assumption that elite white men were more capable leaders, even though for Republicans, it now came with the caveat that officials must uphold the rights of African Americans.

Toward General Amnesty

The Enforcement Act of May 1870 authorized the federal government to prosecute individual violations of voting rights. It also required the Justice Department to prosecute southerners who held office in violation of the Fourteenth Amendment's officeholding ban.⁸⁸ Attorney General Amos Akerman, himself a recipient of amnesty, instructed U.S. attorneys to vigorously enforce the law not only against the Klan, but also against ineligible officeholders.⁸⁹ However, Akerman's men did not get far with these cases before the Amnesty Act of 1872. Most of the enforcement came directly from the Republican state governments themselves.

⁸⁸ *US Statutes at Large*, 41st Cong., 2nd Sess., Ch. 114, Sec. 14 and 15, pp.142-143.

⁸⁹ Amos Akerman to R. McPhail Smith, 21 Oct 1870 and Akerman to Darius Starbuck, 17 Oct 1871, Letters Sent by the Department of Justice: Instructions to U.S. Attorneys and Marshals, 1867-1904, National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Maryland.

Enforcing the ban against unreconstructed rebels depended on Republicans holding the state legislature. In North Carolina, the presiding officers of the general assembly notified Holden of vacancies caused by ineligible candidates being elected.⁹⁰ Holden then ordered new elections for the vacant seats.⁹¹ In one case, a vacancy due to ineligibility led to the election of John W. Stephens, a Republican Confederate veteran who was later murdered by the Klan.⁹² In contrast to North Carolina's vigorous application of the officeholding ban, Georgia Republicans were either unable or unwilling to eject ineligible whites because of the partisan split in the legislature. Instead, a block of conservative Republicans combined forces with Democratic legislators, several of them ineligible for their seats, and expelled thirty-two Black legislators.⁹³

The Georgia imbroglio not only demonstrated the haphazard enforcement of the ban; it also highlighted the ambiguous and contested nature of postwar citizenship. Black Georgians could vote under the Reconstruction Acts and the new state constitution. Anti-Reconstruction conservatives, though, argued that officeholding was not one of the "privileges or immunities of citizenship" protected by the Fourteenth Amendment and that the state constitution said nothing about officeholding.⁹⁴ African Americans and their allies disagreed. A meeting of African Americans in Savannah petitioned Congress, condemning the expulsion of the Black legislators as "an unjust deprivation of our most sacred rights as citizens."⁹⁵ Joseph Brown had campaigned for the state constitution by telling reluctant whites that since there was no explicit provision for

⁹⁰ Tod Caldwell to Holden, 9 Sep 1868, Governor's Papers, State Archives of North Carolina.

⁹¹ Governor Holden Letterbook, 2 Oct 1868, State Archives of North Carolina.

⁹² *The Eagle* (Fayetteville), 12 Nov 1868.

⁹³ Elizabeth Studley Nathans, *Losing the Peace: Georgia Republicans and Reconstruction, 1865-1871* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1968), 105-113, 120-23.

⁹⁴ *The Atlanta Constitution*, 4 Sep 1868.

⁹⁵ *Condition of Affairs in Georgia*, 40th Cong., 3rd Sess., House Mis. Doc. No. 52, 89.

Black officeholding, such a right did not exist. After receiving amnesty, he was appointed Chief Justice of Georgia's Supreme Court and found himself in a position to rule on a test case.

Contradicting what he said on the campaign trail, though, he wrote a majority opinion that since prewar statutes had recognized all citizens as eligible to hold office, African Americans had that right under the new constitution as well. Even more decisively, Congress remanded Georgia to military oversight, reinstated the Black legislators, and removed the ineligible whites from the legislature.⁹⁶

If officeholding was a right of citizenship, though, what did this say about the citizenship of ex-Confederates who were prevented from holding office? Reconstructed rebels who petitioned for congressional amnesty saw officeholding as a right of citizenship, just as African Americans did. One supplicant asked “that he may be relieved of his disabilities, and be permitted to spend the remnant of his days in the full enjoyment of all the rights and privileges of an American citizen.”⁹⁷ Similar language can be found in almost every petition. Reconstructed rebels acknowledged that they had lost full citizenship rights by constitutional authority, while also arguing that they merited an exception because of their support for Reconstruction. Petitioners from Georgia also mentioned their opposition to the expulsion of the Black legislators as evidence that they were fully reconstructed.⁹⁸

Reconstructed rebels used the combination of exclusion and amnesty to their advantage, but after gaining political control in their states, they began to call for general or universal amnesty. Such magnanimity, they hoped, might pacify discontented whites or at least undercut

⁹⁶ *White v. Clements*, 39 *Georgia Reports* 232 (1869).

⁹⁷ Application #6042 Dickenson H. Walker, HSCR.

⁹⁸ For an example of a petitioner mentioning his support for the Black legislators, see Application #6059 T. J. Speer, HSCR.

the argument that Republicans were giving Blacks more rights than whites. Holden used his message to the legislature at the end of 1869 to suggest the time for general amnesty had arrived.⁹⁹ James Lusk Alcorn of Mississippi, campaigning for governor in late 1869, paired universal amnesty and universal suffrage as his platform.¹⁰⁰ A Virginia Republican, who only a few months earlier had opposed general amnesty because “these people are not and *cannot* now be loyal,” argued following the state’s first election that the masses only needed “nursing.” He believed generosity would win their gratitude and “turn their hate into friendship.”¹⁰¹

Meanwhile, Democrats and “liberal” Republicans who favored reconciliation with former Confederates condemned selective amnesty as an example of political corruption. The frequent accusation was that Republicans were “peddling out pardons.”¹⁰² One petition, though satirical, reflected this view of amnesty as a corrupt business. The front of the application read, “James B. Kennedy of Emanuel NC, recommended by Eggs, chicken, fish, and venison,” and inside, “Dear Jake, Do please remove my disabilities & eggs chicken & fish as well as venison... will be yours etc, James B. Kennedy.”¹⁰³ Even the Republican *New York Times* assailed the “bitterly proscriptive” policy of “retailing pardon as a recompense for partisanship.” Piecemeal amnesty, it said, “suggests a system of bargain and sale, of subserviency on one side and patronage on the other, of rewards doled out to partisan adherents and punishment inflicted on all who dare to be

⁹⁹ Holden Letterbooks, 16 Nov 1869, State Archives of North Carolina.

¹⁰⁰ James Lusk Alcorn to Bassett G. Lawrence, *The Friar’s Point Delta*, 1 Sep 1869, clipping in the Rainwater Collection, Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Jackson, Mississippi.

¹⁰¹ G.K. Gilmer to unknown recipient [House Select Committee on Reconstruction], 27 Jan 1869 and G. K. Gilmer to Halbert E. Paine, 11 Dec 1869, HSCR.

¹⁰² *Congressional Globe*, 41st Cong., 2nd Sess., 1462.

¹⁰³ Application #1914 James B. Kennedy, HSCR.

opponents.” The *Times* instead called for “a measure removing all disabilities as a means of promoting reconciliation, local and national.”¹⁰⁴

In 1872, Republicans would pass a general amnesty bill to remove political disabilities from all but the highest-ranking Confederate leaders. White northerners increasingly came to see white southerners as having been sufficiently reconstructed. The moment had not yet arrived, but in time, it would appear to some northerners that identity as a Republican was no longer a prerequisite for loyalty like it once was.

If the Fourteenth Amendment Means Anything

The Fourteenth Amendment repudiated the Supreme Court’s *Dred Scott* decision and wrote birthright citizenship into the Constitution. The Amendment’s authors hoped that a uniform standard of citizenship would result in homogenous institutions across the land, in contrast to the prewar South’s “peculiar institution.” By the end of the nineteenth century, however, uniform citizenship was eroded by judicial interpretation, Jim Crow’s badges of inferiority, and other discriminatory legislation like the Chinese Exclusion Act.¹⁰⁵ Even in the 1860s, Congressional Republicans admitted that there were limits to inclusion when asked about the rights of women or Native Americans.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ *The New York Times*, 23 Jun 1868. On the “Liberal” movement, see Andrew L. Slap, *The Doom of Reconstruction: The Liberal Republicans in the Civil War Era* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), 90-95; Mark Wahlgren Summers, *The Ordeal of the Reunion* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 154-155.

¹⁰⁵ Richard White, *The Republic for Which It Stands: The United States During Reconstruction and the Gilded Age, 1865-1896* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 1-3.

¹⁰⁶ See Laura Free, *Suffrage Reconstructed: Gender, Race, and Voting Rights in the Civil War Era* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2015); Stephen Kantrowitz, “‘Not Quite Constitutionalized’: The Meanings of ‘Civilization’ and the Limits of Native American Citizenship” in *The World the Civil War Made*, eds. Gregory P. Downs and Kate Masur (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015); Catherine A. Jones, “Women, Gender, and the Boundaries of Reconstruction,” *Journal of the Civil War Era* 8, no. 1 (2018), 111-131.

The exclusion of ex-Confederates from officeholding was written into the Amendment itself. Though the ban was always meant to be temporary, the exclusion and Congressional amnesty should inform how historians understand the postwar redefinition of citizenship. Congress intended the ban to exclude Confederates first, then transform them and return them to power through selective amnesty. Reconstructed rebels, for their part, did perform works supporting Black freedom, verifying their faith in non-racial citizenship. At the same time, their active use of the amnesty process reflected a desire to reestablish the authority of white elites. Their efforts to regain not only citizenship, but also control, foreshadowed their enemies' arguments for "home rule" in the mid-1870s.

CHAPTER 3
MAKING THE SOUTH SAFE FOR INVESTMENT:
THE SEARCH FOR PEACE AND PROSPERITY

In the fall of 1867, Rufus Bullock was in New York City, hunting for capitalists to invest in Georgia railroads. Though he had lived in Augusta, Georgia since 1859, he was no stranger to this capitalist mecca. In fact, he was born near Albany, New York, where he got his start in the telegraph industry before the Adams Express Company sent him south. During the war, he offered his expertise to the Confederacy and helped manage Confederate telegraph and railroad operations. Some southerners would later say he was a northern spy, though Bullock always boasted of his southern and Confederate bonafides, even after becoming a Republican. Closer to the truth, Bullock had an emotional attachment both to New York and Georgia, but little loyalty to larger regions like North and South. He seized opportunity wherever he found it.¹

In 1867, he found it in the Republican Party and railroads. In July, Bullock attended Georgia's first Republican convention. If he lost friends because of politics, he gained others, and in November, the board of directors for the Macon and Augusta Railroad elected him president of their operation. And so, Bullock briefly returned to his home state looking for others like himself who appreciated a good opportunity. However, to his dismay, the nation's leading financiers turned him down. "If you want to run a railroad in the Indian territory or anywhere else we will be glad to hear of the project," they said. "But under a military government, it means

¹ David Ross Zimring, *To Live and Die in Dixie: Native Northerners Who Fought for the Confederacy* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2014), 300-303; Russell Duncan, *Entrepreneur for Equality: Governor Rufus Bullock, Commerce, and Race in Post-Civil War Georgia* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1994), 5-19.

that one man can dictate policy in a way that is not conducive to the best interests of speculation and investment. Go back and establish a civil government and then come back.”²

The comparison to “the Indian territory” was apt. In the decades after the Civil War, northern finance capital increasingly turned its sights west, not south. Investors were able to get advantageous terms for capital while the West was in a territorial stage, and then shape the new state constitutions through local agents. The status of the postwar South was much more uncertain. Under the Reconstruction Acts, multiple states were consolidated into military districts until their component states wrote new constitutions that provided for Black suffrage. The provisional civil governments might invest in railroads and issue bonds for investor to purchase, but there was the real possibility that any action could be annulled through military oversight. Completing the reconstruction process that Congress had set up became essential to attracting northern capital.³

Bullock followed New York’s advice. As the state’s first Republican governor, he liberally pledged the state’s credit to railroads in order to make outside investors more confident that they would succeed. Most Republican governments in the South did the same.⁴ Many southern states would later cancel their Reconstruction-era debt and pass laws against further pledging the state’s credit to private businesses. Democrats were not unanimous on debt

² *The Atlanta Constitution*, 6 Nov 1903. It is possible, though not likely, that Bullock was making up this story, more than thirty years later. By 1903, he frequently framed his involvement in Reconstruction as essentially conservative, while also situating himself as part of the “New South.” However, Robert Patton of Alabama reported back to his constituents that New York investors had made similar statements when he visited the city in 1867. See *The Montgomery Advertiser*, 22 Mar 1867.

³ On northern investment in the West, see Noam Maggor, *Brahmin Capitalism: Frontiers of Wealth and Populism in America’s First Gilded Age* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2017), especially pp.168-175.

⁴ On “hypothecation,” the method by which corporate debt was exchanged for state debt and then sold to investors, see Mark W. Summers, *Railroads, Reconstruction, and the Gospel of Prosperity: Aid under the Radical Republicans, 1865-1877* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984), 42; Scott Reynolds Nelson, *Iron Confederacies: Southern Railways, Klan Violence, and Reconstruction* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 20-22.

repudiation, however, and they shared with Republicans a desire to make the South look attractive to outside capital.⁵

By aggressively courting northern capital, reconstructed rebels set the trajectory that many of their opponents would follow. Ultimately, neither the reconstructed rebels, nor their successors, challenged the South's distinct character as a low-wage economy in a high-wage nation. Unable to attract workers from outside the region, the South failed to develop a diversified economy as in some parts of the West and instead took on all the appearances of a "colonial economy."⁶

Southern Underdevelopment and the Need for Outside Investment

Reconstructed rebels were ready to start over. Even those who had invested heavily in slavery began to see that the institution had held back southern economic development. It had made slaveholders like themselves rich but left the land itself undeveloped. Perhaps now they could start over by building factories, mines, railroads, and schools. As one reconstructed rebel told a meeting to promote a railroad through western Georgia, "Some of you in this country own

⁵ On the post-Reconstruction debt controversy, see Michael Perman, *The Road to Redemption: Southern Politics, 1869-1879* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 213-220; Summers, *Railroads, Reconstruction, and the Gospel of Prosperity*, 296-297; James Tice Moore, *Two Paths to the New South: The Virginia Debt Controversy 1870-1883* (Lexington, Ky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1974); Benjamin U. Ratchford, *American State Debts* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1941), 181-196.

⁶ In a chapter of *Origins of the New South*, titled "The Colonial Economy," C. Vann Woodward argued that northern investments in the post-Reconstruction period kept the South wedded to producing raw materials for shipment North. More recently, Scott Reynolds Nelson has found that even during Reconstruction, northern capitalists worked to gain control of southern railroads. However, economist Gavin Wright makes a convincing case that the South remained an industrial laggard more in spite of northern capital than because of it. According to Wright, the real problem was policies that preserved a low-wage economy. Even when local investments created tobacco and textile industries in the piedmont, they were low-wage and technologically unsophisticated. See Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877-1913* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951), 291-320; Nelson, *Iron Confederacies: Southern Railways, Klan Violence, and Reconstruction* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 163-178; Wright, *Old South, New South: Revolutions in the Southern Economy Since the Civil War* (New York: Basic Books, 1986), 12-16.

land worth \$25 an acre, that if it were in the state of Ohio would be worth \$200 an acre.” The legacy of slavery was strong, but maybe by choosing their investments wisely, southerners could catch up with the North.⁷

Though recent historians have argued that southern slavery made the Industrial Revolution possible, a more careful look at the prewar southern economy makes it clear that the reconstructed rebels were right in their assessment that slavery had held the South back.⁸ Human chattel represented two-third of the wealth of the average slaveowner. The value of this investment was independent of local development like villages, factories, schools, and roads, so planters had little incentive to put their money in such projects. Though railroads needed stock subscriptions to build, one prominent North Carolinian urged his neighbors not to buy stock until a road was complete. Instead, railroads sometimes rented slaves from planters to do their construction labor, since planters were most interested in maximizing their investment in slavery. Southern railroad building accelerated in the 1850s, but it had to be paid for by the government. Planters also showed little interest in mining the region’s mineral wealth and seldom bothered to

⁷ Atlanta *Daily New Era*, 18 Oct 1870. The speaker was Henry K. McCay, a Confederate officer, postwar Republican, and member of Georgia’s Supreme Court.

⁸ For the view that slavery was essential to the Industrial Revolution and American prosperity, see Sven Beckert and Seth Rockman, eds., *Slavery’s Capitalism: A New History of American Economic Development* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016) and Edward E. Baptist, *The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism* (New York: Basic Books, 2014). For an explicit critique of this view, see Alan L. Olmstead and Paul W. Rhode, “Cotton, Slavery, and the New History of Capitalism,” *Explorations in Economic History* 67 (January 2018): 1-17. The view presented here is more indebted to historical economists. See Roger L. Ransom, *Conflict and Compromise: The Political Economy of Slavery, Emancipation, and the American Civil War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Gavin Wright, *Old South, New South: Revolutions in the Southern Economy since the Civil War* (New York: Basic Books, 1986) and *Slavery and American Economic Development* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006). For a thorough overview of this debate, see Harry L. Watson and John D. Majewski, “On the Banks of the James or the Congaree: Antebellum Political Economy,” in Craig Thompson Friend and Lorri Glover, eds., *Reinterpreting Southern Histories: Essays in Historiography* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2020), 166-196.

look for such opportunities. They focused on cotton agriculture, which quickly wore out the soil, and they reinvested their gains in slavery because it promised surer profits.⁹

After emancipation, however, that investment was wiped out. As historical economist Gavin Wright convincingly argues, planters stopped thinking of themselves as “laborlords” and began thinking of themselves as “landlords.” Southern elites increased their investments in railroads, factories, and mining.¹⁰ The reconstructed rebel who earlier compared land values in Ohio and Georgia explained the logic: “a railroad is the very best investment you can make, because it increases the value of the land,” he told listeners. “Formerly if a man had \$1200, he would send to Virginia and buy a negro. Virginia got the money, and Georgia got the negro. Georgia now gets the negro, but it don’t cost her anything. Every new man that comes to Georgia now is worth just as much now as when we used to send money to buy a negro. Every country increases in wealth in proportion to the number of people in it.” Black farm labor was cheap, and rather than invest in human chattel, Georgians could invest in internal improvements that would boost the value of the land. Georgia could become like the Midwest, if only it committed to the northern model of development.¹¹

Southern elites saw the way forward, but many of them lacked the means. The destruction of slavery had wiped out their primary source of capital. Moreover, southern wealth exclusive of slaves fell by forty-three percent by the end of the war. Due to low land values, planters would find trouble securing credit on generous prewar terms. Repudiation of Confederate bonds depleted banking capital from \$61 million to \$17 million over the 1860s, and

⁹ Wright, *Old South, New South*, 17-33; Nelson, *Iron Confederacies*, 16, 20-21.

¹⁰ Wright, *Old South, New South*, 33-50.

¹¹ *Atlanta Daily New Era*, 18 Oct 1870. The speaker was Henry K. McCay, a Confederate officer, postwar Republican, and member of Georgia’s Supreme Court.

circulating currency fell from \$51 million in the region to \$15 million during the same period.¹²

This situation posed a problem for southerners wanting to try out new opportunities. For example, a reconstructed rebel from Mississippi opened a textile mill in 1867, but he failed to raise enough money to keep it going. He despaired because “raising money in this country” was “out of the question,” and his attempts to get loans from St. Louis and New Orleans were rebuffed. He concisely summed up the South’s biggest economic problem: “It is evident we must have *working capital*.”¹³

Outside investment was the most obvious solution. As one advocate of this remedy put it, the South needed “Yankees and Yankee notions.” The former captain of a North Carolina regiment imagined a kind of postwar economic imperialism that would help, not hurt the South: “We want [northern] capital to build factories, and work shops, and railroads, and develop our magnificent water powers,” he explained. “We want their intelligence, their energy and enterprise to operate these factories, and to teach us how to do it... We want some of those same Yankee tricks played down here that have covered the north with rail roads and canals.”¹⁴ As this Republican convert made clear, the South could become like the North, but it would take northern investment and immigration to do it.

Northerners initially demonstrated considerable excitement over the prospect of going south. Many of them believed that free wage labor was superior to slave labor and that they could make handsome profits by running southern plantations with the newly emancipated

¹² Lawrence N. Powell, *New Masters Northern Planters During the Civil War and Reconstruction* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1980), 37. On the reconfiguration of agricultural credit arrangements, see Harold D. Woodman, *King Cotton & His Retainers: Financing & Marketing the Cotton Crop of the South, 1800-1925* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1968).

¹³ Cited in William C. Harris, *The Day of the Carpetbagger: Republican Reconstruction in Mississippi* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979), 570

¹⁴ Thomas Settle, Jr., “Spring Garden Speech,” March 1867, Thomas Settle Papers, SHC.

freedpeople. If they did not go south themselves, they could offer credit. In 1867, however, cotton prices came crashing down due to overproduction. Hard times, combined with the threat of Congressional Reconstruction, ended a brief period of goodwill between native-born planters and northern settlers. Growing violence toward Blacks as well as northern settlers convinced many of the latter to either leave or join the Republican Party.¹⁵

Moreover, as Rufus Bullock observed firsthand, northern capitalists were not going to invest in a place under military rule. Some white southerners, as well as northern capitalists, placed their faith in President Johnson and hoped that Republicans would be defeated at the polls.¹⁶ An influential segment of the southern elite, however, decided that the best way to attract northern capital was to comply with Congressional Reconstruction and resolve their states' ambiguous political status.

Republican Home Rule

Though Democrats would later use the phrase "home rule" to refer to the overthrow of Republican state governments in the 1870s and the end of federal intervention in 1877, compliance with Congressional Reconstruction also signified a kind of home rule. In fact, many reconstructed rebels would later remember their part in Reconstruction as a success, arguing that by joining the Republican Party, they had helped to restore civil government and congressional representation to their states. By this definition, Republicans achieved home rule in the South between 1868 and 1870. However, unlike the Redeemers, who defined home rule as federal non-

¹⁵ Powell, *New Masters*, 8-34, 38-40, 146-155; Roger L. Ransom and Richard Sutch, *One Kind of Freedom: The Economic Consequences of Emancipation* (New York: Cambridge), 64-65.

¹⁶ Sven Beckert, *The Monied Metropolis: New York City and the Consolidation of the American Bourgeoisie, 1850-1896* (New York, Cambridge University Press, 2001), 162-167.

intervention, reconstructed rebels like Rufus Bullock primarily associated their earlier accomplishment of statehood with access to outside investment and a growing economy.

The dangers of military rule were illustrated in the railroad partnership between Williams C. Wickham and Collis P. Huntington. Wickham was a former Confederate Brigadier General from Virginia, and perhaps as early as 1865, a member of the Republican Party. Huntington was a New York industrialist who built the western portion of America's first transcontinental railroad. In October 1868, Virginia's military commander, George Stoneman, told the secretary of war that he had uncovered a plot by Huntington to take over the Chesapeake and Ohio Railway. Huntington's plan was to convince the state to vote its shares to elect Wickham as president, who would then contract with Huntington to finance the road, before the railroad tycoon finally took control himself. General Stoneman wanted to know if he should intervene. Fortunately for Huntington and Wickham, the secretary of war favored private ownership of the railroads over the South's antebellum pattern of state ownership. Huntington and Wickham were allowed to go forward. With the former as president and the later as vice-president, they completed the road by 1873. Had Stoneman intervened, Virginia's ports might not have had access to the coal mines of West Virginia.¹⁷

To avoid such dangers and attract outside capital, it was wise to finish Reconstruction. Atlanta's commercial elite certainly felt that way. Though most of the town had been razed in 1864, its leaders were too busy to hate Congressional Republicans. In the first two years after the war, they had already taken advantage of Atlanta's position at the nexus of railroad trunk lines to start an economic revival. With the demise of the factorage system, which had directed cotton

¹⁷ Scott Reynolds Nelson, *Steel Drivin' Man: John Henry, the Untold Story of an American Legend* (Oxford University Press 2008), 70.

through seaboard ports, inland cities like Atlanta used the rails to channel cotton north. Atlanta also benefited from the South's first national bank in December 1865, as well as from an influx of northern entrepreneurs. City founder and railroad builder Richard Peters wanted to dispense with the Congress's requirements as quickly as possible, so he called a meeting of local citizens "to take into consideration the duty of Georgia in the pending crisis."¹⁸

Peters himself had already considered and decided. As chair of the meeting, he appointed Henry Farrow to head a resolutions committee. Farrow was a former Confederate colonel and an early convert to the Republican Party. Farrow's committee resolved that Georgians should meet the Congressional requirements "promptly and without the least hesitation." As explanation, Farrow told the audience that Congress had "provided a way to escape from onerous military governments," and that they "owed it to the impoverished widows and orphans of our brave and noble dead to improve the opportunity thus offered us for inaugurating loyal State governments in conformity to the provisions of the bill just passed." Obtaining the floor, another ex-Confederate offered counter-resolutions advocating inaction, which would "thereby preserve at least, their self-respect, their manhood and honor." Peters outmaneuvered the opposition, prevented them from voting, and ensured that Farrow's resolutions passed unanimously.¹⁹

Haste is not a term usually associated with the supporters of Congressional Reconstruction. After all, President Johnson's plan had been quick and relatively painless for white southerners; the congressional plan meant a period of military oversight, a new round of constitution writing, and Black suffrage. Yet the minority of former rebels who embraced Congressional Reconstruction did so to end military government and to return to civilian rule and

¹⁸ *The Daily Intelligencer* (Atlanta), March 5, 1867.

¹⁹ *The Daily Intelligencer* (Atlanta), March 5, 1867.

congressional representation as quickly as possible. Businessmen were divided on the issue, and most probably sat quietly on the fence; even Peters was never an avowed Republican.

Nevertheless, after Peters corralled Atlanta's leaders in favor of acquiescence, some of them continued to support Reconstruction. The Republican leadership relocated the state's capital to the commercial entrepôt, and 45 percent of registered whites voted for Grant in 1868.²⁰

From nearby Augusta, Rufus Bullock observed a “very general disposition among our business men” in March 1867 “to cut loose from old wartime political leaders & act at once for a full & final settlement of our political troubles by hearty acquiescence” in the Reconstruction Acts. Further resistance, he believed, would cause the “prostration of all business & enterprise.”²¹ In July, he became active in Republican politics, and his trip in November on behalf of the Macon and Augusta Railroad convinced him of the necessity of statehood. At the end of the year, he attended Georgia's constitutional convention, and Republicans nominated him as their candidate for governor. Ex-Governor Joe Brown, who supported Congressional Reconstruction for the same reasons, described Bullock as “a gentleman of ability, of unimpeachable character, of industry and energy, of first-rate business habits, and strong common sense.”²² The party chairman, also a reconstructed rebel, argued that “Col. Bullock possesses the business capacity and practical ability necessary for such an emergency and that every financial and commercial interest of the State could be safely confided to his care.” Curiously, the Republican chairman added that Bullock played no part in the war—a blatant

²⁰ James M. Russell, *Atlanta, 1847-1890: City Building in the Old South and the New* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988), 177.

²¹ Rufus Bullock to Joshua Hill, 7 Mar 1867, Georgia Miscellany, Emory University, Atlanta, Ga., quoted from Russell Duncan, *Entrepreneur for Equality: Governor Rufus Bullock, Commerce, and Race in Post-Civil War Georgia* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1994), 19.

²² *Atlanta Daily New Era*, 11 Mar 1868.

falsehood—all the while prefacing his name with his Confederate military title. Akin to “General Longstreet,” he was still “Col. Bullock.”

Georgia was readmitted to the Union in the middle of 1868, and Bullock went to Atlanta to begin his term as governor. Home rule, however, would not last for long. In September, the state legislature voted to expel its African American members. Black Georgians, a majority of white representative felt, did not have the right to hold office because the state constitution did not explicitly recognize such a right. Governor Bullock fully embraced the Republican Party’s position on political rights for African Americans. He had been eager to restore Georgia to the Union, so he now began lobbying Congress to intervene.²³

Bullock’s request for a return to Congressional oversight opened a rift in the state’s Republican Party—on the surface over whether Blacks had the right to hold office, but more deeply over whether Georgia was a fully reconstructed state. Bullock and his wing of the party wanted Congress to toss out legislators who were banned under the Fourteenth Amendment and reinstate the African American members. Brown led the more conservative wing of the party. Brown advised the governor against asking for congressional intervention because it would alienate white voters. However, the issue was less one of Black political rights, than it was a question of the state’s political status. Bullock had appointed Brown chief justice of the Georgia Supreme Court, and even though Brown had finessed the issue of Black officeholding to win ratification for the constitution, once on the court, he ruled that Blacks did in fact have the right to hold office.²⁴ Brown was never as supportive of African American rights as Bullock, but he did not see those rights as a threat as long as whites were in control. Brown’s goal was to see

²³ Elizabeth Studley Nathans, *Losing the Peace: Georgia Republicans and Reconstruction, 1865-1871* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1968), 67-68, 120-26.

²⁴ Nathans, *Losing the Peace*, 152-159.

Georgia restored as a state, which would help both the state's credit and his own business interests.

Despite appearances, Bullock and Brown were not actually that far apart. Brown was not adamantly opposed to Black suffrage, and Bullock never claimed to desire military rule. In a letter to *The New York Times*, Bullock wrote that Georgia Republicans were not asking for "harsh terms imposed on our opponents, nor do we desire military government.... All we ask or desire is that Congress shall provide for the enforcement of its laws heretofore enacted."²⁵ Bullock believed that Congress could enforce the terms of the Reconstruction Acts without military intervention. Brown and Bullock disagreed over the uncertain status of federal-state relations in the postwar era, but both hoped to restore Georgia to the Union and create a competitive Republican Party. Both goals were tied to encouraging northern investment and promoting economic reconstruction.

At the end of 1869, Congress sided with Bullock, but decided that it would have to reimpose military rule to do what Bullock wanted. Including the period after Union victory and then again during Congressional Reconstruction, Georgia was now under military rule for a third time. Georgia's third reconstruction worried property owners. Democratic leaders told them that Congress's action invalidated the acts of the state legislature from September 1868 to January 1870. This fear was aggravated when Bullock asked Congress not to seat the U.S. senators chosen by the illegal legislature. Bullock offered reassurance in his message to the new legislature: "the impression which is sought to be created that contracts are invalidated, that State bonds are repudiated, and that corporations organized upon the basis of the late legislation, are without legal foundation, is entirely groundless." He pointed out that state bonds were selling

²⁵ *The New York Times*, 4 Dec 1869.

higher than those of any other state.²⁶ Nevertheless, Democrats correctly identified the alarming relationship between political uncertainty and economic uncertainty.

Georgia's military administrator restored Black legislators to their seats and appointed a commission of three officers to investigate the officeholding qualifications of white Democrats who were ineligible under the Fourteenth Amendment. Fourteen state representatives and five senators were expelled, giving Republicans firm control of the legislature. Congress also required Georgia to ratify the Fifteenth Amendment, which pushed the amendment over the threshold and into fundamental law. Georgia became a state once more in July 1870, and at least for a short time, Bullock was back at the helm.²⁷

To reconstructed rebels like Bullock, statehood was a necessary prerequisite for outside investment. However, there were opportunities all over the country, and especially in the West. To entice northern capital, southern leaders would have to do a lot more.

The Political Economy of Law and Order

First and foremost, Republicans needed to show that they were in control of their states. If most New York investors initially opposed Congressional Reconstruction, they also opposed the attempts of southern Democrats and Klansmen to overthrow it with violence after it was in place.²⁸ Most historians who have written about the efforts of white Republicans to enforce the law have emphasized either their commitment to Black rights or their personal concern for survival.²⁹ White terrorists intimidated, assaulted, raped, and murdered African Americans who

²⁶ Bullock message, 16 Feb 1870, in Georgia House Journal, 1870

²⁷ Duncan, *Entrepreneur for Equality*, 95-97, 129-131. Nathans, *Losing the Peace*, 152-191, 204.

²⁸ Beckert, *Monied Metropolis*, 167.

²⁹ See Allen W. Trelease, *White Terror: The Ku Klux Klan Conspiracy and Southern Reconstruction* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1971); William Gillette, *Retreat from Reconstruction, 1869-1879* (Baton Rouge:

exercised social and political autonomy. Victims of the Klan also included white Republicans, such as ex-Confederate John W. Stephens of North Carolina.³⁰ Moreover, by threatening to reduce voter turnout among Republicans of both races, the Klan endangered the longevity of Republican governance. Reconstructed rebels had an incentive to protect the lives of African Americans—whom they especially valued as voters—and to make sure that terrorism did not lead to a wider insurgency against the state government. Historians have, however, been less attuned to white Republicans' perception that law and order was essential to attracting outside investment. By fighting the Klan, they would make the South safe for northern capital.

Governor Bullock of Georgia hit on this theme at a meeting of railroad boosters. Setting aside the discussion of government support for the railroads, he decided to define his political position in a different way: "It is this: I am opposed to the next war." Maybe Bullock was thinking of two years earlier, when the Democratic vice-presidential candidate Frank Blair had advocated using the military to overthrow the reconstructed state governments. Or, perhaps he wanted listeners to think about the impact the Klan was having on the state. "When we remember the improvement that has been made in our State during the last two or three years," Bullock continued, "I am sure no one will wish to have them destroyed; and therefore I think you will all agree with me in the political sentiment I have expressed. We will say nothing about the last war."³¹ Bullock crafted his words wisely, intending them not only for home consumption,

Louisiana State University Press, 1979); Richard Abbott, *The Republican party and the South, 1855-1877* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986); Charles W. Calhoun, *Conceiving a New Republic: The Republican Party and the Southern Question, 1869-1900* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2006).

³⁰ James E. Wise, *Murder in the Courthouse: Reconstruction & Redemption in the North Carolina Piedmont* (Charleston, SC: History Press, 2010).

³¹ *Atlanta Daily New Era*, 18 Oct 1870. On the popular fear that the Civil War could lead to multiple consecutive civil wars, see Mark Wahlgren Summers, *A Dangerous Stir: Fear, Paranoia, and the Making of Reconstruction* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009) and Gregory P. Downs, "The Mexicanization of American Politics: The United States' Transnational Path from Civil War to Stabilization," *American Historical Review* 117, no. 2 (2012): 387-409.

but also for northern capitalists who worried over whether southern railroads were a safe investment.

Among the officials who had the power to do something about the Klan, the most ardent supporter of national law enforcement was Amos Akerman. A former Confederate from Georgia, Akerman took a legalistic perspective on Reconstruction, siding with the liberal authority of national law over the illiberal authority of local custom. The Reconstruction amendments transformed the legal landscape as Akerman saw it. However, he hardly would have considered himself a radical; he believed he was helping to restore order and prosperity.

Akerman was not a native southerner, but his pursuit of a legal career brought him to the South, and his respect for legal authority influenced his political evolution through the 1860s. Akerman left his native New Hampshire in 1842, eventually settling in the northwestern Georgia hill-country, where he both practiced law and farmed corn with slave labor. During the Civil War, Akerman was loyal to the Confederacy, serving in the Georgia home guard and then as supply officer during General William T. Sherman's advance into the state. His decision to support the Confederacy, however, grew not out of unquestioning state loyalty, but as he later recalled, from disdain for the weakness of the federal government.³²

Akerman took a soldierly view of defeat, one that was similar in a way to that of James Longstreet, but ultimately more ideological. Akerman believed that "a surrender in good faith really signifies a surrender of the substance as well as the forms of the Confederate cause." Losing meant acceding to the result and marching forward together in the new direction. Moreover, he believed the Republican Party's ideas about nationality and equality were both

³² William S. McFeely, "Amos T. Akerman: The Lawyer and Racial Justice," in *Region, Race, and Reconstruction: Essays in Honor of C. Vann Woodward*, ed. J. Morgan Kousser and James M. McPherson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 397-400.

“expedient and right.”³³ He had once “recoiled from the horrors that we anticipated as the effect of emancipation,” but admitted in August 1865, he “had no conception that slavery could be abolished as easily and safely as was actually done.”³⁴ Convinced that his fears of disorder from emancipation were wrong, he saw more disorder coming from unreconstructed rebels.

For Akerman, Black suffrage became a way to guarantee the success of the new legal regime, as well as economic prosperity. As with emancipation, he had initial concerns. He worried that freedpeople’s lack of education might make them unsuited to the ballot. But after reflecting that poor whites voted as well, he thought it equitable to extend male suffrage. Moreover, he thought that Union victory was a sign that the northern political economy held the best recipe for economic growth. Speaking for himself and other reconstructed rebels, he explained to a friend, “we saw that it was idle for the South to seek prosperity now by the old means of involuntary labor or any thing akin to it.” Prosperity could only be found the same way that “other parts of the country prosper,” that is, “by the industry of those who broke the soil and those who voluntarily labor for others, encouraged by fair wages, by the protection of the law, by the hope of advancement, by the respect of the community, and by the ennobling presence of an equal voice in public affairs.”³⁵

Akerman quickly gained the confidence of party leaders. In the 1868 presidential campaign, he published a letter in the *New York Times* endorsing Grant.³⁶ Akerman also increased his political profile by lobbying Congress to reject Georgia’s electoral votes—which went for Seymour, the Democratic candidate—on account of the expulsion of the Black

³³ Akerman to James Jackson, 20 Nov 1871, Akerman Letterbooks, UVA.

³⁴ Akerman to sister, 2 August 1865, quoted in McFeely, “Amos T. Akerman,” 400.

³⁵ Akerman to George W. Heidy, 22 Aug 1876, Akerman Letterbooks, UVA

³⁶ *New York Times*, 12 Sep 1868.

legislators and election violence.³⁷ Grant likely appreciated Akerman's opposition to state debt repudiation as well, which put him in line with the increasingly pro-creditor position of the party. In 1869, Akerman received an appointment as U.S. district attorney for Georgia, and a year later, President Grant elevated him to U.S. attorney general. In a letter to Charles Sumner, Akerman expressed some of the sentiments that would motivate his vigorous prosecution of the Klan. He believed that the people must "become used to the exercise of these powers now, while the national spirit is still warm with the glow of the late war," or else "there will be an indisposition to exercise them hereafter, and the 'state rights' spirit may grow troublesome again." Akerman thought that "a greater assimilation of the states to one another ought to be one of the results of the late conflict," and he wanted legislation that would do so by enforcing the Fourteenth Amendment. "I desire that the people should get the habit of looking more to the general government," Akerman wrote imperiously.³⁸

In late May 1870, Congress passed the first of three "Enforcement Acts," so named because they would enforce the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments. In response to the expanding legal needs of the nation stemming from this legislation, Congress also created the Department of Justice in July. Though the office of Attorney General had existed since the Washington administration, Akerman was the first to head an independent department. The first Enforcement Act made it a felony to bribe or intimidate voters, or to deprive anyone of a right or privilege of citizenship. However, throughout 1870, the government made no attempt to enforce it, hoping instead that it would serve as a deterrent. As a result, Akerman spent 1870 focusing on

³⁷ Nathans, *Losing the Peace*, 148.

³⁸ Akerman to Sumner, 2 Apr 1869, Charles Sumner Papers, LOC.

railroad matters, examining whether companies had met the necessary requirements to receive federal aid.³⁹

In 1871, Akerman became convinced that the Klan “combinations amount to war” and that they “cannot be effectively crushed on any other theory.”⁴⁰ In February, the Second Enforcement Act tightened federal oversight of elections, and in April 1871, a third act empowered the president to use the military to suppress conspiracies against civil and political rights.⁴¹ Akerman personally supervised the trials of Klansmen in North Carolina, which produced 49 convictions in the fall. Next, with the help of the military, Akerman’s Justice Department turned to South Carolina. Over 200 were arrested, and many more voluntarily surrendered, were deposed, and released. The courts could not keep up with the cases, and so only 58 of the South Carolinians were brought to trial, of which 53 pled guilty and 5 more were convicted.⁴²

Despite the success of the Klan trials, the use of the U.S. military divided native white Republicans. Georgia Governor Rufus Bullock and Atlanta’s Republican paper, *The New Era*, both opposed the third enforcement act, naively arguing that the state’s legal system could handle the Klan.⁴³ Mississippi Governor James Lusk Alcorn, also a reconstructed rebel, minimized the extent of Klan activity in his state and insisted that state laws were working. Perhaps he worried about the potential backlash against federal enforcement, or the interference

³⁹ McFeely, “Amos T. Akerman,” 405; John Y. Simon, ed., *Papers of Ulysses S. Grant*, Vol. 22 (Southern Illinois University Press, 1998), 188.

⁴⁰ Akerman to B. D. Silliman, 9 Nov 1871, Akerman Letterbooks, UVA

⁴¹ Trelease, *White Terror*, 384-386.

⁴² Trelease, *White Terror*, 400-408. See also Lou Falkner Williams, *The Great South Carolina Ku Klux Klan Trials: 1871-1872* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996).

⁴³ *Atlanta Daily New Era*, 25 May 1871.

of his leading rival, Mississippi's Republican Senator Adelbert Ames.⁴⁴ Republican governors needed to put down the Klan, but they also needed to make it look like they already had things under control for appearances' sake.

Other reconstructed rebels, however, agreed with Akerman that federal counterterrorism measures would create a good environment for economic growth. One Arkansas congressman, engaging in some wishful thinking, insisted "the true Southron and brave confederate soldier" does not belong to the Klan, and "having an interest in the repose of society and the prosperity of the country, they will cooperate with the Government." With a united front against the Klan, he believed, "general contentment and prosperity will prevail for all time to come, immigration will then flow to our State even more rapidly than now, our industries will spring into life, our railroads will be but vast avenues for the ingress of millions of wealth."⁴⁵ Samuel F. Phillips of North Carolina told an audience that "all quiet men who wish to establish a foundation upon which the fabric of private fortune, for themselves and their children, may be erected" would join the Republican Party. "Industry cannot flourish but with an assured peace. Labor cannot prosper with one eye averted from work and fixed apprehensively upon public affairs."⁴⁶

These sentiments were echoed in the majority report on Congress's inquiry into what it called the Klan "outrages." It conceded that ex-Confederates were "brave men, however mistaken," credited their sincerity, and acknowledged that the government could not expect more than "a reluctant obedience," but simultaneously insisted that Congress should not accept any less. It would not tolerate those "who permit the remnants of rebellious feeling, the antagonisms

⁴⁴ Lillian A. Pereyra, *James Lusk Alcorn: Persistent Whig* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press), 134-136.

⁴⁵ Speech of Oliver Snyder, *Congressional Globe*, 42nd Cong., 1st Sess., appendix, 202.

⁴⁶ Samuel F. Phillips, *Speech of Mr. Samuel F. Phillips at Concord, Cabarrus County, July 4th, 1870*, NCC

of race, or the bitterness of political partisanship to degrade the soldiers of Lee and Johnston into the cowardly midnight prowlers and assassins who scourge and kill the poor and defenseless.” Moreover, “If the resuscitation of the State is desired by [the Black man’s] labor, neither will be secured by a persecution which depopulates townships and prevents the introduction of new law and capital.”⁴⁷ Political and financial security went hand-in-hand, the Republican congressmen implied.

Akerman couched his goals in economic terms less frequently than other reconstructed southerners. His primary motivation seems to have been his conviction that the war had created a revolution in federal relations and that the law should triumph over social custom. He aimed to create a consistent legal regime that protected life and property uniformly. Nevertheless, Akerman was keenly aware of the relationship between stability and prosperity. In late 1871, a Wall Street investor wrote to Akerman not for a legal opinion, but a financial one. Akerman had worked on cases involving government subsidies to railroads, in addition to prosecuting the Klan. This concerned capitalist wanted to know whether Akerman would recommend investing in a Texas railroad from Galveston to Houston and San Antonio. The attorney general responded that he did not know the particulars of the company, but went on to boast that the resources of the South were such that there would soon be a rising demand for its products. Against the land’s natural endowments, Akerman counted the continued “disturbances” since the war. He optimistically wrote, though, that such violence was subsiding and the results of the 1870 elections “must have a powerful influence upon the malcontent portion of the people, by convincing them that further resistance to the established order of things is hopeless.” Akerman

⁴⁷ U.S. Congress, *Report of the Joint Committee to Inquire into the Condition of Affairs in the Late Insurrectionary States* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1872), Vol. 1, 98-99.

concluded with encouragement: “Among the consequences of the political quiet which I thus anticipate, will be an increased attention to the business interests of the south, greater security both to capital and labor, extensive immigration and investments of capital from abroad.”⁴⁸ Countering domestic terrorism was about creating stability, and creating stability meant attracting investment.

As recent scholars have emphasized, the Reconstruction amendments and enforcement legislation created a liberal framework of rights, but it remained subject to the power of illiberal local customs, courts, and illegal violence.⁴⁹ Akerman hoped that the nation-state might reach deeper, that the laws might be enforced. He longed for order, stability, and security, which incidentally, financiers commonly saw as necessary mediators of risk. If, however, Akerman believed that national homogeneity was necessary to promote industrial growth, he was wrong. Later in the century, northern capital would be happy to invest in a Jim Crow South. Segregation and disfranchisement created a different kind of stability, and investors found in the South a lack of regulation, tax incentives, and low wage labor. Later generations would be loath to admit it, but those economic conditions owed much to another set of actions that reconstructed rebels took to encourage outside investment.

Railroad Bonds and Cheap Labor

A year after Richard Peters appointed Henry Farrow to outline Atlanta’s support for Congressional Reconstruction, Farrow went on a trip to St. Paul, Minnesota. The contrast with

⁴⁸ Akerman to George Walker, 10 Nov 1871, Akerman Letterbooks, UVA.

⁴⁹ On the tension between liberal ideology and illiberal social practice during Reconstruction, see *The World the Civil War Made*, ed. Gregory P. Downs and Kate Masur (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), especially Downs and Masur, “Echoes of War: Rethinking Post-Civil War Governance and Politics,” 1-21 and Laura F. Edwards, “Reconstruction and the History of Governance,” 22-45.

Georgia left him depressed. Writing home to his wife, he lamented, “There is too much Western Country for the exhausted South ever to become very prosperous. I can’t imagine why any one would turn from this rich west and go south—they won’t do it.”⁵⁰

This was a private confession of the reality that most southern boosters recognized. It was unfair to expect the South to quickly overcome a laggard economy. The region’s success in large part remained tied to the fortunes of the global market for cotton. The local merchants who provided credit to both planters and sharecroppers forced the region into greater dependence on cotton, which was still the most profitable crop, even when overproduction caused prices to fall. On top of this, the Republican Party’s commitment to the gold standard caused deflation that hurt farmers in both the South and West. At least the West was free from the legacy of slavery and cotton dependency. Men like Farrow, however, were determined to do all they could to make the South attractive to outside capital.⁵¹

Much of their effort centered on railroad finance and cheap labor. Railroads were a risky investment, but there were ways to reduce that risk that were proven by history. The South’s Republican governments endorsed railroad bonds with state credit, making them look like a safer investment for northern and European investors. They also leaned into the region’s pool of cheap

⁵⁰ Henry Farrow to Carrie Farrow, 27 May 1868, Henry P. Farrow Papers, UGA Special Collection, Athens, Ga.

⁵¹ Scholars have debated whether sharecropping, the crop-lien system of credit, the postwar revival of southern cotton was the result of free market forces or institutions that elites shaped to their benefit. For the free market argument, see Joseph D. Reid, “Sharecropping as an Understandable Market Response: The Post-Bellum South,” *The Journal of Economic History* 33, no. 1 (1973): 106–30; Stephen J. Decanio, *Agriculture in the Postbellum South: The Economics of Production and Supply* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1975), 123-130; Robert Higgs, *Competition and Coercion: Blacks in the American Economy, 1865-1914* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1977). For the institutional argument, the groundbreaking work was Ransom and Sutch, *One Kind of Freedom: The Economic Consequences of Emancipation*, Woodman, *King Cotton & His Retainers*, 2. Gavin Wright and others have objected to parts of Ransom and Sutch’s argument, but nevertheless emphasize the interests of elites in keeping the South a low-wage region. Sven Beckert also argues that state power was key to the postwar cotton economy. See Wright, *Old South, New South*, 78, 110-115 and Beckert, *Empire of Cotton: A Global History* (New York: Knopf, 2014), 280-292. On the role of the gold standard, see Richard Franklin Bense, *The Political Economy of American Industrialization, 1877-1900* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 355.

Black labor and leased convicts to private corporations. Outside investment allowed the South to grow at an equal pace with the North and more outside investment looked like the only way to ever catch up.⁵² However, outside investment also funneled profits out of the region, making it difficult for the South to develop a diversified economy like the Midwest and parts of the Far West. Places like Idaho, Montana, and Wyoming also received outside aid, but crafted laws to retain some of the profits and protect workers.⁵³ Cheap labor left little incentive for immigrating to the South. The North sent its capital, but not its people, yet again a heavy contrast to patterns in the West. Ultimately the South's problem was not so much the colonial nature of outside investment, but the incentive that planters had to keep labor inexpensive. There were alternatives, but they would have gone against the personal interests of reconstructed rebels.⁵⁴

To take railroad finance first, southern Republican administrations like Rufus Bullock's in Georgia drew on prewar methods to attract investment. Starting the 1850s, southern states had begun buying up railroad stock with state bonds. Northern investors were wary of railroad startups and they did not sell well in Europe. On the other hand, outside investors trusted state bonds because states rarely went bankrupt. Out of the states that repudiated their public debt before the war, few were in the South, and their administrations were Democratic. The

⁵² Wright, *Old South, New South*, 60-62.

⁵³ Maggor, *Brahmin Capitalism*, 175-177.

⁵⁴ C. Vann Woodward proposed the thesis that northern investors used their control over southern businesses to prevent the South from catching up. See *Origins of the New South*, chapter eleven. Harold Woodman makes a similar argument, though with less conspiratorial overtones. See *King Cotton and His Retainers*, 355-359. Gavin Wright offers a strong critique of the colonial economy thesis in *Old South New South*, pp.12-16. In line with Wright's side of the debate, Douglas Dowd had much earlier offered a comparison between the South and the West. According to Dowd, "The West also showed a disparity in per capita income compared to the North, and the North had control over development; but it was highly linked to the industry it benefited, reaped the majority of its own benefits, and likely could not have developed any more than it did." By comparison, the South remained impoverished because it relied on cheap labor, and therefore failed to develop a balanced economy. See Dowd, "A Comparative Analysis of Economic Development in the American West and South," *Journal of Economic History* 16 (December 1956), 570. Noam Maggor's study of northern investment in the West, plus Wright's analysis of the South, seem to bear out this conclusion. See Maggor, *Brahmin Capitalism*, especially chapter five.

Republican party stood firmly for the interests of creditors. So, through a process known as hypothecation, railroad companies exchanged their stocks for state bonds and then sold those in national and international markets. Southern states gained a controlling interest in the roads, and the companies could generate the capital they needed to begin construction.⁵⁵

During Reconstruction, southern Republican government continued the pattern, financing railroads with state credit even as northern railroads were increasingly falling into private hands. Every reconstructed state constitution except Mississippi's allowed the state to pledge its credit. North Carolina's constitution actually preempted the work of the legislature by granting \$2 million in bonds to five roads. By the end of 1869, the legislature issued an additional \$28 million in bonds and stock subscriptions to 18 companies.⁵⁶ In Georgia, Bullock approved \$8 million in bonds during the course of his administration.⁵⁷ In all reconstructed states that pledged their credit, the constitutions created limitations, such as requirements that a certain number of miles had to be built and a given amount of private stock had to be subscribed before the state would release its bonds. Not to be deterred, North Carolina's William Holden and Georgia's Rufus Bullock each found reasons to release the bonds early.⁵⁸

To reconstructed rebels, railroad aid held advantages besides attracting investment. Railroads, once constructed, would raise property values. Purchasing additional slaves had once been a better investment than anything else, but with slavery gone, landowners looked to

⁵⁵ Nelson, *Iron Confederacies*, 20-22; Summers, *Railroads, Reconstruction, and the Gospel of Prosperity*, 36. See also John D. Majewski, *A House Dividing: Economic Development in Pennsylvania and Virginia before the Civil War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

⁵⁶ William C. Harris, *William Woods Holden: Firebrand of North Carolina Politics* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press), 268.

⁵⁷ Duncan, *Entrepreneur for Equality*, 107.

⁵⁸ Harris, *William Woods Holden*; Duncan, *Entrepreneur for Equality*, 107; Summers, *Railroads, Reconstruction, and the Gospel of Prosperity*, 47-59.

increase the value of their real estate through other investments. Moreover, southern states found that with emancipation they also lost a substantial tax base and had to fund new social programs like public schools—though these were never adequately funded—by increasing the taxes on land. If land values went up, it would both appease landowners who faced higher taxes and raise extra revenue for the state. As Governor Bullock explained at a local meeting of railroad boosters, “The advantage to the state is in the increased value of taxable property by development and increase of population.”⁵⁹ He pointed to the Midwest as a vindication of state aid in promoting railroads: there, “the value of taxable property is enhanced, the resources of the State are increased, and the products of the mine, the factory and the farm find ready sale.”⁶⁰

Bullock was confident that railroad aid would also benefit African Americans. The governor told Black Georgians that “the enhanced price of land brings up with it the value of labor.” Though Bullock sought to dignify labor, he also assumed that labor and capital corresponded to Black and white. Despite their conversion to free labor ideology, reconstructed rebels seldom imagined it would offer much social mobility for Blacks. “You, colored men have muscle,” Bullock told Black Georgians, “your white friends have money. Let the two be united, and the road will be promptly built.”⁶¹ In this formulation, Bullock may have anticipated Booker T. Washington, with whom Bullock would share a stage at the Atlanta Exposition of 1895.⁶²

⁵⁹ *Atlanta Daily New Era*, 18 Oct 1870. On postwar taxation, see J. Mills Thornton III, “Fiscal Policy and the Failure of Radical Reconstruction,” in *Region, Race, and Reconstruction: Essays in Honor of C. Vann Woodward*, ed. J. Morgan Kousser and James M. McPherson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 349-394.

⁶⁰ *Atlanta Daily New Era*, 14 Apr 1868.

⁶¹ *Atlanta Daily New Era*, 18 Oct 1870.

⁶² Paul Yandle makes a convincing argument that Washington drew on the mutualistic rhetoric of conservative Republicans. See Yandle, “Different Colored Currents of the Sea: Reconstruction North Carolina, Mutuality, and the Political Roots of Jim Crow, 1872-1875,” in *North Carolinians in the era of the Civil War and Reconstruction*, Paul D. Escott, ed. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 221-268. Heather Cox Richardson makes a similar connection in *The Death of Reconstruction: Race, Labor, and Politics in the Post-Civil War North, 1865-1901* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2001), 1-5.

Bullock was right about the potential benefits to property owners, but less so about what railroads would mean for African American workers. Railroad jobs did pay good wages, and they provided some African Americans much-needed resources and a degree of power that drew the ire of white Democrats and the violence of Klansmen.⁶³ However, these jobs were temporary, and wages in all sectors remained low. Southern wages in both farming and cotton textile production—the latter off-limits to African Americans—fell drastically during the late nineteenth century compared to those in the North.⁶⁴

Certainly, wages remained low for many reasons, including overproduction, low cotton prices, and the credit trap of the crop-lien system. Government policies like convict leasing only exacerbated the downward pressure on wages. Though the Redeemers often take the blame for convict leasing, the policy was innovated by southern Republicans like Bullock, who themselves built on prewar precedents. As boosters for business, southern Republicans saw convict labor as a strong incentive for outside investment. Convicts helped to build the initial mileage a road needed in order to receive state aid and investors saw that the project had a sure source of labor. According to Alex Lichtenstein, who has made a meticulous study of convict labor in Georgia, “state aid in the form of financial security went hand in glove with state provision of forced labor.”⁶⁵

There were key differences between convict leasing and antebellum slavery, but fundamentally, it was a new form of highly racialized, forced labor. In 1870, Georgia’s convict

⁶³ Nelson, *Iron Confederacies*, 103-105.

⁶⁴ Wright, *Old South, New South*, 76, 130.

⁶⁵ Alexander C. Lichtenstein, *Twice the Work of Free Labor: The Political Economy of Convict Labor in the New South*, London: Verso, 1996), 44. Lichtenstein focuses on Georgia, but for a more thorough overview of convict leasing in the South, see Matthew J. Mancini, *One Dies, Get Another: Convict Leasing in the American South, 1866-1928* (Columbia: University of South Carolina, 1996) and Edward L. Ayers, *Vengeance and Punishment in the Nineteenth-Century American South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984).

population was eighty-three percent Black. A year earlier, Bullock leased the entire state penitentiary to Grant, Alexander and Company, which in turn provided labor to individual roads. With this forced labor, the company graded 469 miles of road from 1869 to 1871.⁶⁶ Likewise, in Virginia, Huntington and his reconstructed partner Wickham used Black convict labor to blast tunnels through the mountains so the state would have a railroad to the coal mines of West Virginia.⁶⁷ Opposition to these policies from Black Republicans was muted at times, but at least one such leader cried the practice as “A New System of Chain Gang Slavery.”⁶⁸

Convict labor was not the sole reason why wages in the South remained low. Even in 1890, there were only 27,000 convict laborers in the South, compared to more than half a million total workers in the region’s mining and manufacturing industries, and a figure several times higher for agriculture.⁶⁹ Convict labor was one part of a low-wage regional economy. Low wages were also a response to the cotton market, and the regional elite had a stake in keeping them low. As a result, the South was able to draw outside investment, but failed to draw much immigration from outside the region, which in turn limited economic growth.

Reconstructed rebels used railroad aid and convict labor to draw outside investment and make the South more like the section of the country that had defeated them. The New York stock, bond, and commodity brokerage firm of Henry Clews purchased \$3 million in Georgia and Alabama securities.⁷⁰ Even more came from Europe.⁷¹ Their actions drew capital from the North, and even more so from Europe. Over the 1870s, southern states such as Virginia, North

⁶⁶ Lichtenstein, *Twice the Work of Free Labor*, 27, 47.

⁶⁷ Nelson, *Steel Drivin' Man*, 78.

⁶⁸ A. Alpeora Bradley, *A New System of Chain Gang Slavery in Georgia* [n.p. 1870].

⁶⁹ Ayers, *Vengeance and Punishment*, 212.

⁷⁰ Henry Clews, *Fifty Years in Wall Street* (New York: Irving, 1908), 551.

⁷¹ Nelson, *Iron Confederacies*, 147-148.

Carolina, and Georgia divested themselves from the railroad game, selling their shares into private hands. For example, by the end of the decade, the main artery through the southeast was owned by Pennsylvanian Tom Scott.⁷²

Outside investment, however, also meant outside control, and though the reconstructed states benefited from rising land values and access to markets, they lost much of the profits from the corporations themselves. Tax-breaks for railroads and other industrial property were yet another mechanism in the Republican arsenal for spurring development. Perhaps by taxing the railroads more heavily, they could have retained more of the profits. That potential revenue could have been spent within the state or used to reduce the tax burden on landowners.⁷³ A couple decades later, Western states would use taxation and various regulations to limit the power of outside ownership, leading to more balanced economies.⁷⁴ For Reconstruction-era southerners, however, the primary fixation was getting the railroads built, one way or another. One comprehensive study of western North Carolina in this period finds that “mountain leaders were warm to outside interests and never saw their presence in the state as an intrusion or a tragedy.”⁷⁵ In Virginia, one newspaper noted some popular dissatisfaction over the “Huntington contract,” but concluded “it was a question of 'to be, or not to be,' as to the completion of the road to the Ohio river.”⁷⁶ There was an understandable haste everywhere in the South to get resources.

Most essentially, the policies of reconstructed rebels were shaped by their interests as landlords. Though historians have debated the relative influence of planters versus industrialists

⁷² Nelson, *Iron Confederacies*, 139-162.

⁷³ Summers, *Railroads, Reconstruction, and the Gospel of Prosperity*, 155-156.

⁷⁴ Maggor, *Brahmin Capitalism*, 175-177.

⁷⁵ Paul D. Yandle, “‘The Relapse of Reconstruction’: Railroad-building, Party Warfare and White Supremacy in Blue Ridge, North Carolina, 1854-1888,” (Ph.D. dissertation, West Virginia University, 2006), 7.

⁷⁶ *Staunton Spectator and Vindicator*, 7 Dec 1869.

in the postwar South, both shared a fundamental interest in raising property values and keeping wages down. If this class perspective had not existed, they might have redistributed land by lending African Americans money on easy terms or taxing idle land until landowners put it on the market.⁷⁷ Reconstructed rebels generally did not favor such a course. The president of South Carolina's 1868 constitutional convention, a reconstructed rebel, declared on the second day, "I am opposed to all confiscations of property, because the confiscation of all the lands of rebel owners in the State can have no effect in promoting the welfare of the state."⁷⁸

Instead, most reconstructed states created "stay laws," which delayed the collections of debts and kept landholding intact. Georgia went even farther, canceling its pre-1865 debt entirely, though the provision was ruled unconstitutional. Additionally, homestead exemptions guaranteed that a certain amount of property could not be seized in debt proceedings. Though studies of Reconstruction governance have sometimes counted the stay laws and homestead legislation as indices of economic radicalism, they did much more to benefit white southerners than African Americans, since it was the former who had property to lose. Radicals tended to urge no exemption, which would force land onto the market. Moderates argued that the debtors were small farmers, not elite planters, but some of the exemptions were quite high, ranging from \$1,500 in North Carolina to \$7000 in Arkansas.⁷⁹

Reconstructed rebels also sought to avoid heavy property taxes. Some, drawing on antebellum precedent, proposed linking the rate of taxation on property to the poll tax, which

⁷⁷ Summers, *Railroads, Reconstruction, and the Gospel of Prosperity*, 152-153.

⁷⁸ *Proceedings of the Constitutional Convention of South Carolina* (Charleston: Denny & Perry, 1868), 17.

⁷⁹ John Luther Bell, Jr., "Constitutions and Politics: Constitutional Revision in the South Atlantic States, 1864-1902" (UNC-Chapel Hill, Ph.D. Diss., 1970), 197-198; Richard L. Hume and Jerry B. Gough, *Blacks, Carpetbaggers, and Scalawags: The Constitutional Conventions of Radical Reconstruction* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2008), 253.

would discourage anyone from raising the former. Ultimately, only North Carolina did so, through the agency of William B. Rodman. A reconstructed rebel, Rodman convinced his colleagues in the constitutional convention to require that the poll tax be equal to the tax on \$300 of property.⁸⁰ Moreover, even though North Carolina was the most reckless of the reconstructed states in pledging its credit to railroad companies, the legislature repeatedly failed to raise the tax revenue necessary to pay interest on its bonds, ultimately to the ruin of the state's credit.⁸¹

Reconstructed rebels like Williams C. Wickham and Rufus Bullock at times seemed like lackeys for foreign corporations, but their ultimate goal was the restoration of personal and regional prosperity. Southern Republicans in Congress often supported protectionist tariffs to support coal and iron industries, but they did so to support their own region's resources, not out of fealty to the North. On monetary policy, moreover, southern Republican Congressmen actually broke with the party, siding with southern Democrats to support monetary expansion that would combat the deflation that was hurting their constituents.⁸² Some revision of the Republican political economy, which benefited the northeast over all other regions, might have helped the southern economy catch up, but reconstructed rebels were not able to exert much influence in that direction. Though reconstructed rebels were able to capture the Republican Party locally and make its racial policies more conservative, they were not able to exert a similar influence in the national party when it came to political economy.⁸³

⁸⁰ Bell, "Constitutions and Politics," 209; Judith Conner Smith, "A Redeemer as Republican: William B. Rodman at the North Carolina Constitutional Convention of 1868" (Eastern Carolina University, M.A. thesis, 1987), 94-96. For antebellum precedent, see Robin Einhorn, *American Taxation, American Slavery* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 228.

⁸¹ Summers, *Railroads, Reconstruction, and the Gospel of Prosperity*, 206.

⁸² Terry L. Seip, *The South Returns to Congress: Men, Economic Measures, and Intersectional Relationships, 1868-1879* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1983), chapters five and six.

⁸³ On the northeastern control over the postwar political economy, see Bensel, *The Political Economy of American Industrialization*, 1-11; Steven Hahn, *A Nation Without Borders: The United States and Its World in an Age of Civil Wars, 1830-1910* (New York: Viking, 2016), 6; Steven Hahn, "What Sort of World Did the Civil War Make?" in

There were alternatives to the policies pushed forward by reconstructed rebels. They might have anticipated the tactics of Western states at the end of the century, or they might have given more support to Black freedpeople. However, they did not foresee the pitfalls of outside investment, and they were not going to endanger their own class interests. In some areas like monetary policy, they did try to challenge northeastern power, but they were Republicans and the Northeast shaped the party. Reconstructed rebels, in some sense, were in the wrong party to challenge the unequal benefits that different regions of the country received from industrialization.

Party Recrimination and Debt Repudiation

The Republicans' aid policies, together with convict leasing, succeeded in drawing investment. However, several factors undermined the impact of such achievements. The faith that investors put in a state's credit was misplaced. States promised more than they could support in revenue. The Panic of 1873 also hit the South particularly hard. For instance, New York investor Henry Clews lost \$2 million out of a \$3 million investment in the South because of the crash.⁸⁴ During hard times, southern Democrats also attacked railroad aid as evidence of Republican corruption. In fact, Democrats were equally involved in railroad ventures and received help from Republican administrations. Railroad-building was bipartisan, and Republicans hoped that success would happen on their watch and draw more white southerners into the party. However, when roads failed, the Republican Party likewise took the blame.⁸⁵

The World the Civil War Made, eds. Gregory P. Downs and Kate Masur (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 343-347.

⁸⁴ Henry Clews, *Fifty Years in Wall Street* (New York: Irving, 1908), 278, 548-551.

⁸⁵ Summers, *Railroads, Reconstruction, and the Gospel of Prosperity*, 68-84.

For example, George Swepson, a banker and entrepreneur from the North Carolina piedmont, used phony construction contracts to obtain state bonds from Governor William Holden. Rather than selling the bonds to fund construction, Swepson invested them in Florida railroads. No one might have noticed had the state's credit remained good, but a gold panic on September 24, 1869 brought the value of state bonds crashing down, forcing Swepson to sell off all of his railroad investments. Democrats pressed for an investigation. No one could figure out for sure if Swepson was a Democrat or a Republican, which mattered for pinning the blame on one party or the other. Swepson received congressional amnesty for aiding the Confederacy and probably voted for Grant in 1868. He certainly benefited from Governor Holden's trust, but he also brought many Democrats into his scheme. One former railroad president in the state mused of Swepson, "I do not think he has any politics; I do not think he wastes his time on politics."⁸⁶

However, the question of responsibility could not stop with the politics of railroad presidents like Swepson. Railroads were built with state funds. "Whether Swepson calls himself a Democrat or Republican matters little," retorted a Democratic paper. "But who is responsible for his *official* conduct? Who made him President of a great railroad? Who placed seven millions of bonds in his possession?... What party is responsible for our extravagant system of government? What party endorses the corrupt administration of Governor Holden?"⁸⁷ There was no denying that the Republicans were responsible for the program of railroad aid. They had hoped to win more political support for the party through successful infrastructure, but they wound up saddled with a reputation for self-interest, fraud, and failure.

⁸⁶ Charles L. Price, "The Railroad Schemes of George W. Swepson," *East Carolina College Publications in History* 1 (1964); Charles L. Price, "Railroads and Reconstruction in North Carolina, 1865-1871," (Ph.D. dissertation, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1959), 366, 393, 458-62; Harris, *William Woods Holden*, 269-275; Testimony of H. W. Guion, U.S. Congress, *Report of the Joint Committee to Inquire into the Condition of Affairs in the Late Insurrectionary States*, Vol. 2, 275.

⁸⁷ *Wilmington Journal*, 22 Apr 1870.

While Democrats accused the Republicans of corruption in railroad building, they developed a related attack centered on Republicans' law enforcement policy. When Holden requested the North Carolina legislature pass a stronger militia law, one Democratic representative said that "the whole thing was gotten up to create political capital." Republicans had exaggerated Klan activities and distorted the motive behind them, according to Democrats. North Carolinians "have ever been a law-loving and a law abiding people," and the militia bill was "a miserable party measure to intimidate the people in the next election."⁸⁸

The counterterrorism efforts of reconstructed rebels opened them to charges of opportunism just as much as railroading schemes had. In Congress, Democrats tried to show that Klan violence was either made up, or that it was the justifiable result of Republican corruption. The anti-Reconstruction Raleigh *Sentinel* said the Enforcement Acts would enable Grant to "declare the State in insurrection and, by military terror, carry the [1872] election."⁸⁹ When Attorney General Akerman brought the power of the U.S. government to bear on the South Carolina Klan, another editor commented, "These men have been taken from their homes by an arbitrary edict of a central despotism and incarcerated at the instigation of partisan conspirators for the sole purpose of making political capital and maintaining the ascendancy of the party in power."⁹⁰

In fact, shining light on Klan activities in the South was a good strategy for Republicans. Akerman wrote to a fellow Republican, "such atrocities as Ku Klux fire up Congress and the North."⁹¹ He told a Georgia ally that the congressional investigations would "horrify the North"

⁸⁸ Harris, *William Woods Holden*, 278-283; *The Raleigh Sentinel*, 30 Jul 1868.

⁸⁹ *The Raleigh Sentinel* 10 May 1871.

⁹⁰ *The Greensboro Patriot*, 7 Dec 1871.

⁹¹ Akerman to J. R. Parrott, 6 Dec 1871, Akerman Letterbooks, UVA.

and that “all that is necessary to hold the majority of the northern voters to the Republican cause, is to show them how active and cruel the Confederate temper still is in the South.”⁹² Evidence of Klan terrorism is well documented. Nevertheless, its partisan significance made it easy for anti-Reconstructionists to accuse Republicans of opportunism and exaggerating.

Even Northern Republicans started to express skepticism as their constituencies grew tired of supporting military intervention in the South. Grant’s Secretary of State wrote about Akerman in his diary: “He tells a number of stories, one of a fellow being castrated, with terribly minute and tedious details in each case. It has got to be a bore to listen twice a week to the same thing.”⁹³ Akerman was forced out of the administration at the end of 1871. By his own admission, he was “garrulous on the Klan,” and he also made enemies with powerful railroad interests by denying them federal assistance unless they met all the legal requirements.⁹⁴ Matters of national political economy were coming to dominate the identity of the Republican Party, even though for Southern Republicans, security and prosperity were intimately linked.

After leaving Washington, Akerman noted that northerners were increasingly scapegoating Southern Republicans and interpreting their requests for military intervention as attempts to “cloak [Southern Republicans’] own corruption by an affection of party zeal, and to maintain themselves here [in the South] by Northern support in places which they ought not to hold.”⁹⁵ Northerners were becoming more accepting of the Democratic Party ruling the South, a solution that finance capital also did not mind, so long as there was cheap labor and the anti-debt repudiation, pro-creditor wing stayed on top.

⁹² Akerman to Foster Blodgett, 8 Nov 1871, Akerman Letterbooks, UVA.

⁹³ Hamilton Fish Diary, 24 November 1871, LOC.

⁹⁴ Akerman to B. D. Silliman, 9 Nov 1871, Akerman Letterbooks, UVA.

⁹⁵ Akerman to John Sherman, 17 Jul 1876, Akerman Letterbooks, UVA.

When Democrats came into power, however, they turned their critique of Republican corruption toward the state debts. Republicans had amassed these debts by pledging the state's credit to support railroads. Democrats had been part of the railroad bonanza, but now many of them argued that the state bonds were fraudulent and that instead of paying the purchasers with tax revenue, the debt should be adjusted down or even repudiated. Not all Democrats agreed with this solution, especially the "New South" Democrats who supported industrial growth. Some of the Democrats who opposed repudiation had even been Republicans at one time, such as Confederate Governor Joseph Brown whose stay in the Republican Party ended in 1872.⁹⁶ The opposition of Brown and other industrialists prevented repudiators from cancelling as much debt as they wanted. Nevertheless, the post-Reconstruction South repudiated \$116.3 million and avoiding paying much more in interest payments. The Redeemers also rewrote the state constitutions to prevent their states from pledging the state's credit to private corporations in the future.⁹⁷

Williams C. Wickham was one of the strongest opponents of debt repudiation. The movement to adjust down the debt was unique in Virginia for several reasons. First, most of the debt was contracted before the war, not during Reconstruction, so it was easier for "fundlers" like Wickham to argue convincingly that it was legitimate. Unlike other reconstructed states, Virginia never had a period of Republican government because in the first election under the new state constitution, Republicans were defeated by a coalition of conservative Republicans and Democrats. In 1871, this coalition of conservatives passed a bill to fund the debt, exchange old bonds for new ones that could be used to pay taxes, and raise taxes on land. These measures

⁹⁶ Joseph H. Parks, *Joseph E. Brown of Georgia* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977), 480.

⁹⁷ Perman, *The Road to Redemption*, 213-220.

proved insufficient to pay down the debt, and by the late 1870s, Virginia was in the middle of a fiscal crisis. The crisis was compounded by the fact that the Democrats who succeeded the conservative coalition government diverted revenue from the public school system toward paying down the debt. Rather than repudiate like most other southern states, Virginia's leaders were determined to honor their obligations even if it meant slashing social services.⁹⁸

Wickham had supported the Republicans against the conservative coalition of 1869, and he remained a Republican through the 1870s and 1880s, even though he agreed with Democrats that the state debt should be funded. In this stance, he was in line with the pro-creditor positions of the national Republican Party, but increasingly out of step with Virginia's Republican organization. In the late 1870s, an independent movement called the "Readjusters" brought together men of both parties who supported measures to repudiate part of the debt, invest in public schools, and protect the voting rights of African Americans. In 1879, they won a majority in the legislature, and two years later they elected their candidate for governor and put their leader, ex-Confederate General William Mahone, in the Senate.⁹⁹

Mahone had not been a Republican during Reconstruction, nor was he able to attract the support of all the former rebels who had. Williams C. Wickham was also a former Confederate general, but in contrast to Mahone, he led a faction of Republicans that in the late 1870s chose to fuse with Democrats instead of independent movements like the Greenback Party or the Readjusters. In 1878, Wickham urged Republicans to vote for the Democratic candidate for congress over an independent who favored the circulation of paper money unbacked by gold coin. Though the idea was to curb deflation and help farmers, Wickham argued against it

⁹⁸ Jane Dailey, *Before Jim Crow: The Politics of Race in Postemancipation Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2000), 17, 28-31.

⁹⁹ Dailey, *Before Jim Crow*, 37-47.

because inflationary paper money would “inflict injury upon both the national and State credit.” The great principle of the Republican party, he said, “is the preservation of the credit of the nation.”¹⁰⁰ One funder newspaper published a letter from Philadelphia arguing that the election of a Republican Governor who stands with the party on financial principles—“such a man as Gen. Wickham for instance”—would bring a flood of northern investment.¹⁰¹

Wickham’s role as vice-president of the Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad, in which he played second to Collis Huntington, undoubtedly shaped his staunch support for the gold standard and other pro-creditor positions like funding the state debt. In 1880, the editor of the Richmond *Whig* insinuated that Huntington had influenced legislation to fund Virginia’s debt, to which Wickham offered a strong rebuttal.¹⁰² Virginians were increasingly concerned about the role of outside money, and Readjuster Senator William Mahone was a champion of locally owned railroads, yet another reason for Mahone and Wickham to find themselves at odds.¹⁰³

During the presidency of Republican Rutherford B. Hayes, Wickham had been allowed to control federal patronage in Virginia, but the Readjuster victories convinced later presidents James Garfield and Chester Arthur to shift that privilege to Mahone. In order to crack the Democratic “Solid South,” the Republicans in Washington were willing to overlook the Readjusters’ heresy on financial principles. While most Virginia Republicans probably supported the Readjusters, Wickham declined a straight-out Republican nomination for governor in 1881 in order to keep the race between two parties and gave his support to the Democratic candidate. Two years later, he ran for a seat in the state senate. Though still a Republican, he declared

¹⁰⁰ *Richmond Dispatch*, 8 Oct 1878.

¹⁰¹ *The Valley Virginian* (Staunton, Virginia), 28 Jul 1881.

¹⁰² *The Valley Virginian* (Staunton, Virginia), 19 Aug 1880, card from Williams C. Wickham to editor of *Richmond Whig*, 9 Aug 1880.

¹⁰³ Dailey, *Before Jim Crow*, 40.

himself “in full accord with the Democratic party of this State.” Adopting the language that Democrats used when they opposed Republican Reconstruction, he expressed a desire to see Virginia “redeemed from misrule.”¹⁰⁴

The election gave Wickham a chance to redeem not only Virginia politics, but also his own reputation. In Wickham’s native Hanover county, just north of Richmond, court day provided the opportunity for both a Confederate reunion and a campaign event, with Wickham starring in both.¹⁰⁵ The Democratic anti-Readjuster organ, the *Richmond Dispatch*, was a good friend to him throughout the 1880s, absolving him of blame for his party label. “Reputable Republicans of the State such as General Wickham and men like him...give to the Republican party in Virginia all the character it has,” the *Dispatch* commented.¹⁰⁶ Wickham won election to the state senate in 1883 and again in 1887.

The political career of William Mahone has drawn more scholarly interest than that of Wickham. Mahone was a former Confederate general, and though not an opponent of white supremacy, he was nevertheless willing to support Black voting rights and education over conservative economic interests. However, the path of Williams C. Wickham was more typical of reconstructed rebels. Unlike Mahone, who had fought against the Republican Party in 1869, Wickham was an early adherent because he believed that Republican economy policies were necessary to make the state attractive to northern capitalists like Collis Huntington. Rather than support policies that might help alleviate the suffering of farmers and educate a skilled work force, Wickham held to the northeastern, pro-creditor Republican Party line.

¹⁰⁴ *The Norfolk Landmark*, 14 Aug 1883.

¹⁰⁵ *Richmond Dispatch*, 20 Sep 1883.

¹⁰⁶ *Richmond Dispatch*, 10 Jun 1881.

Debt repudiation was a risky move. After Georgia repeatedly repudiated portions of its Reconstruction debt, New York banks became skeptical of requests for new loans. New York and Connecticut both prohibited banks from investing in Georgia bonds.¹⁰⁷ On the other hand, Virginia's fiscal crisis, the product of conservative funding policies in the 1870s, showed that repudiation may have been the best policy if the goal was to direct revenue toward one's own citizens instead of letting it flow out of the state.

Some reconstructed rebels did take a stand against northern creditors and non-resident corporations. For instance, Daniel Lindsay Russell was one of the last reconstructed rebels to serve in office. By drawing on a coalition of Republicans and Populists, he was elected governor of North Carolina in 1896. In his inaugural address, he attacked the Democrats' economic record and promised he would "not encourage, sanction or countenance financial repudiation in any form." At the same time, however, he opposed leasing. In his inaugural address, Russell condemned leasing the North Carolina Railroad to J.P. Morgan's Southern Railway Company or any other "foreign or non-resident corporation." He tasked legislators with using all possible measures "looking toward the recovery of this property for the benefit of the people and the taxpayers of the state." He also predicted public ownership of railroads at a future date and advocated a reduction of freight rates.¹⁰⁸ Russell was an exception. To ex-Confederates, support for Reconstruction did not neatly transfer into support for the Populist party, and those ex-Confederates who did support the Populists usually did not have good things to say about Reconstruction. Economic populism had been growing in the South since the 1880s, and perhaps if racial division did not impede its success, or if such attitudes had been more common earlier,

¹⁰⁷ Duncan, *Entrepreneur for Equality*, 110-112; Bensel, *The Political Economy of American Industrialization*, 96.

¹⁰⁸ Jeffrey J. Crow and Robert Franklin Durden, *Maverick Republican in the Old North State: A Political Biography of Daniel L. Russell* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977), 82.

the South could have retained more of the profits of industrialization.¹⁰⁹ Economic radicalism, however, was not the legacy of reconstructed rebels.

The Redeemer Democrats rejected some of their predecessors' tactics, like pledging the state's credit to private corporations, and they even repudiated some of the Reconstruction-era state debt. Their reactionary behavior, however, gave little indication of how much their own policies owed to the reconstruction rebels. Democrats aided railroads by expanding on the generous tax breaks that Republicans had given them. They continued the policy of convict leasing and did little to challenge the region's low-wage economy. The "New South" movement of the 1880s employed much of the same rhetoric that reconstructed rebels had used, emphasizing sectional reconciliation and southern opportunities for investment and industrial growth. It is little wonder that many of the reconstructed rebels found a place of honor in the post-Reconstruction South, whether they abandoned the party like Joseph Brown, or stayed in it like Bullock and Wickham.

¹⁰⁹ Because of the weak connection between reconstructed rebels and southern populism, the latter is beyond the scope of this study. On southern populism, see C. Vann Woodward, *Tom Watson: Agrarian Rebel* (New York: Macmillan, 1938); Lawrence Goodwyn, *Democratic Promise: The Populist Moment in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976); Steven Hahn, *The Roots of Southern Populism: Yeoman Farmers and the Transformation of the Georgia Upcountry, 1850-1890* (New York: Oxford University, 1983); Elizabeth Sanders, *Roots of Reform: Farmers, Workers, and the American State, 1877-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); Deborah Beckel, *Radical Reform: Interracial Politics in Post-Emancipation North Carolina* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2011).

CHAPTER 4
BOTTOM RAIL ON THE BOTTOM:
THE RACIAL CONSERVATISM OF RECONSTRUCTED REBELS

James Lusk Alcorn went to Washington almost immediately after the war, hoping to divine the South's future. Far from his Delta plantation in Coahoma, Mississippi, Alcorn sent the political forecast to his wife, Amelia. Almost two years before the Reconstruction Acts, Alcorn predicted that Congress would not readmit the southern states to the Union without Black suffrage, though perhaps they would accept one limited by literacy requirements. Jumping in front of the coming revolution, he told Amelia, "it would be politic for the Southern States to meet this issue with an acceptance at once. We must make the negro our friend. We can do this if we will." Black suffrage did not provoke his indignation, as it did for so many other white southerners, because "to let the negro approach the witness stand & the ballot box by no means implies his social equality." American political tradition had long reconciled popular participation and inequality. As Alcorn noted, "we don't recognize the social equality of the low and base of our own color who enjoy these prerogatives to an extent equal to the proudest." Moreover, if white Mississippians resisted Black suffrage, it would make freedpeople "our enemy under the promptings of the Yankee, whose aim is to force us to recognize an equality," and the result would be bloody. "Will the southern people secure the friendship of the negro?" Alcorn asked rhetorically. "I fear they will not."¹

¹ James Lusk Alcorn to Amelia Alcorn, 26 Aug 1865, J. L. Alcorn Papers, SHC.

When Congress required the South to adopt Black suffrage, bitter ex-Confederates spoke about the “bottom rail on top.” The phrase implied that the political, as well as social, hierarchy had been reversed. Reconstructed rebels like Alcorn, however, were confident that this would not be the case. Many were antebellum elites. They had plenty of experience asking poor whites and yeomen farmers for their votes, at times complying with their preferences in a way that a true aristocracy would not have tolerated. Still, elites did not see yeomen as their equals, and they knew that wealth, education, and political office gave them more power than the average voter. As experts in unequal patron-client relationships, reconstructed rebels looked upon Black political rights as something familiar—as something still compatible with white supremacy and class power.

Reconstructed rebels were rationalizing their actions, however, and they were doing so in the face of the pervasive fear of “social equality” between Blacks and whites. As historian Hannah Rosen has argued, “‘social equality’ referred broadly to forms of association between white and black people that did not convey a hierarchical meaning for race and that did not serve to mark racial difference.”² It included such scenes as Black and white men “sitting down together at a table or on a train, sharing a smoke at a club, or belonging to the same organization

² Hannah Rosen, *Terror in the Heart of Freedom: Citizenship, Sexual Violence, and the Meaning of Race in the Postemancipation South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 140. See also Kate Masur, *An Example for All the Land: Emancipation and the Struggle Over Equality in Washington, D.C.* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 9-10; Rebecca J. Scott, "Public Rights, Social Equality, and the Conceptual Roots of the Plessy Challenge," *Michigan Law Review* 106, no. 5 (2008), 786-87; Michele Mitchell, *Righteous Propagation: African Americans and the Politics of Racial Destiny After Reconstruction*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 200–201; Jane Dailey, *Before Jim Crow: The Politics of Race in Postemancipation Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2000), 79-86; Kevin Kelly Gaines, *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 59; Martha Elizabeth Hodes, *White Women, Black Men: Illicit Sex in the Nineteenth-Century South* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 166–67; Nell Irvin Painter, “‘Social Equality,’ Miscegenation, Labor, and Power,” in *The Evolution of Southern Culture*, Numan V. Bartley and Immanuel Maurice Wallerstein (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1988), 53; Forrest G Wood, *Black Scare: The Racist Response to Emancipation and Reconstruction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), chapter seven.

on a footing of equality,” as historian Nell Irvin Painter has explained. “When a servant sat with an employer, that was not ‘social equality.’”³ An underlying fear was that social equality would lead to Black men entering, wanted or unwanted, into spaces that included white women, thus violating white men’s ability to protect white women from the sexual advances of social inferiors. The most dreaded symbol of social equality was interracial sex and marriage. Homosocial mingling did not pose as great a threat, but some saw a slippery slope. Even on its own, interracial politicking carried the implication that white men were surrendering their power and dignity.

Black southerners insisted that they wanted only political and civic equality, not social equality, but they also expected their white “friends” to treat them with dignity and respect. African Americans allied with antebellum southern elites in the Republican Party because these men used their social capital to support Black voting rights and economic uplift. In return, Black southerners supported reconstructed rebels’ applications for congressional amnesty, as well as their pursuit of high office. However, freedpeople also kept their own counsels, put their own interests first, and bristled when their “friends” treated them with condescension. When African Americans expressed their desire for a greater share of political offices, more economic opportunity, and equal access to public spaces, interracial political friendship tended to break down. Reconstructed rebels told their Black constituents that legal equality was the law of the land and that Blacks were needlessly stoking the politics of racial division.

Historians of Reconstruction at the beginning of the twentieth century frequently claimed that white Republicans supported Black suffrage purely for political power. In particular, the “Dunning School” was wholly unsympathetic to Reconstruction and argued that the project was

³ Painter, “‘Social Equality’ Miscegenation, Labor, and Power,” 53.

driven by corrupt white officeholders.⁴ A more sympathetic view of the time, however, would root white Republicanism in political realism, rather than corruption. Nothing could protect Black freedom so much as a strong Republican Party supported by Black as well as white votes.⁵ A careful analysis of the reconstructed rebels shows that political realism and the desire for power both played a role. Men like Reverend John Caldwell and Edward Gantt seem to have truly sympathized with the freedpeople, but at the same time, they still expected to lead and for Blacks to follow.

Recognizing the reconstructed rebels' desire for racial control, however, does not have to lead to the cynical conclusion that African Americans were manipulated and that Reconstruction was at its core an attempt by some whites to gain power over others. The freedpeople were not so easily fooled. Reconstruction was the expression of their personal and collective aspirations for freedom, safety, and opportunity. They were willing to criticize white leaders in the party, and if their political friends proved false, they would find others or rely on their own agency.⁶

During Reconstruction, white southerners disagreed fiercely about how to preserve white supremacy. A significant minority of former Confederates thought that joining the Republican Party would be the best way to preserve the maximum amount of white control. Democrats saw these reconstructed rebels as race traitors, but then Democrats in the late 1870s and 1880s came

⁴ For example, see William A. Dunning, *Essays on the Civil War and Reconstruction* (New York: Macmillan, 1897), 353-54.

⁵ This is the view in most studies of white southern Republicans, especially biographies. For example, see William Warren Rogers Jr., *Scalawag in Georgia: Richard Whiteley and the Politics of Reconstruction* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007); Hyman Rubin III, *South Carolina Scalawags* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2006), xxi; Russell Duncan, *Entrepreneur for Equality: Governor Rufus Bullock, Commerce, and Race in Post-Civil War Georgia* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1994); William Warren Rogers, Jr., *Black Belt Scalawag: Charles Hays and the Southern Republicans in the Era of Reconstruction* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1993).

⁶ On Black efforts to achieve collective self-determination during Reconstruction, see Steven Hahn, *A Nation Under Our Feet: Black Political Struggles in the Rural South from Slavery to the Great Migration* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003), especially chapter five.

to agree with them that Black suffrage was not a fundamental threat to white supremacy so long as white elites remained on top. Through fraud, intimidation, and violence, Democrats suppressed enough Black votes to keep themselves in power, but legal disfranchisement awaited the last decade of the nineteenth century. The confidence that reconstructed rebels and their Redeemer successors maintained in the resiliency of white supremacy ultimately helps explain why Black disfranchisement did not happen sooner.

“Friendship” and “Social Equality”

Eli Jackson and his brother were freedmen who owned a blacksmith shop in New Bern, on the North Carolina coast. A trade such as theirs, likely learned under slavery, helped to elevate similar men to positions of community leadership during Reconstruction. In 1870, Eli Jackson’s neighbors chose him to represent them at the state Republican convention in Raleigh. While in the city, he went to the National Hotel for a drink, “the House being kept by a Northern man and a Republican.” Jackson later wrote that he had “expected to be treated like a friend and brother; but I was refused a drink.” Jackson first complained to Judge Charles R. Thomas, a reconstructed rebel, and asked his advice. According to Jackson, “The Judge told me to consult my friends.” Jackson was taken aback. “I told him I thought I was consulting my friend then,” Jackson wrote. The Black Republican found a better friend in another reconstructed rebel, William J. Clarke, husband to author Mary Bayard Clarke. The former Confederate colonel attempted to order drinks for a half dozen African Americans at the bar, but he too was refused.⁷

⁷ *The Raleigh Sentinel*, 18 May 1870. On Eli Jackson, see Catherine W. Bishir, *Crafting Lives: African American Artisans in New Bern, North Carolina, 1770-1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 277.

After embracing the Republican Party, reconstructed rebels had to renegotiate their relationship with Black southerners. Frequently, they did so by deploying the language of “friendship,” a metaphor for patron-client relationships that went back to the eighteenth century. Political friendship presented a façade of equality, but also depended on a reality of inequality—the patron’s superior access to resources, which the patron could distribute to clients in return for political fealty. But what if a patron couldn’t, or wouldn’t, deliver? What about when Black southerners’ expectation to be treated with dignity and respect exposed the contradictions of political friendship?

Reconstructed rebels understood what African Americans expected from them, even if they often failed to live up to Black expectations. James Alcorn, in a letter to other white Mississippians, boldly rejected slaveholder delusions about Black fidelity. “The Loyal League is upon you,” he said, referring to the Black grassroots political organizations, also called Union Leagues, which were springing up throughout the South. “Even a brief experience of the workings of that voting machine would satisfy you, as it has me, that all which our people claim for the influence of the old master is *nonsense*.” The freedman was “free, erect, enfranchised, with all the rights of American citizenship attaching to him.” Alcorn proposed “to vote with him; to discuss political affairs with him; to sit, if need be, in political counsel with him.”⁸

By saying this, however, he hoped to gain some of the same influence that other former slaveholders thought the freedpeople would automatically accord them based on their prior relationships. By adopting a Republican platform “guaranteeing to the freedman all his rights as a citizen, providing generously for the education of his children, securing to him, by its

⁸ James Lusk Alcorn, *Views of the Hon. J. L. Alcorn, on the Political Situation of Mississippi* (Friar's Point, Miss., Aug. 8, 1867); emphasis in the original.

exemption from seizure for debt, the endowment of a generous homestead, an influential and respectable mass of white people of Mississippi may maintain their position as advisors of the old and devoted servants of the South—the colored people.” With such an alliance of Black and white, they could then negotiate with northern Republicans to abolish the wartime tax on cotton, obtain money for levee construction, and relieve ex-Confederates from their political disabilities.⁹

Men like Alcorn were willing to collaborate with African Americans in the Republican Party, which meant defending their new political rights *and* actually talking and listening to them. As men who thought of themselves as refined gentlemen, many former elites believed they knew how to do this. William Rodman, ex-Confederate and Republican patronage broker, wrote home to his wife during the 1868 constitutional convention: “I am on easy terms with all our delegates—Yankees & niggers,—I treat the last with civility & they amply return it. A little courtesy—which to them is particularly valuable from a Reb.—goes a great way.”¹⁰

Rodman’s private condescension toward Black allies suggests how little his racial attitudes had actually changed. It also mirrored the condescension that prewar elites had privately expressed when they found that they had to pander to poor whites and yeomen for their votes. For example, one planter in low country South Carolina complained that universal white suffrage gave “a class of people power which they are totally incompetent to exercise.” Nevertheless, such men continually feted voters before election time and provided important services

⁹ Alcorn, *Views of the Hon. J. L. Alcorn*.

¹⁰ William B. Rodman to Camilla Rodman, 16 Feb 1868, William Blount Rodman Papers, East Carolina University, Greenville, NC.

throughout the rest of the year like ginning their cotton, all the while expecting political fealty in return.¹¹

Reconstructed rebels did more than flatter and take political positions that would convince Blacks to vote for them. They also provided freedpeople with much needed resources, and on much better terms than Democratic employers. In Spartanburg, South Carolina, prominent upstate planter, physician, and Republican John Winsmith attracted Black tenant farmers by offering them average wages and providing them with a schoolteacher. When Winsmith's plantation was assaulted by a party of Klansmen, neighboring men alleged that the raid was made because Winsmith had quite understandably armed his tenants and was using them to picket the area.¹²

Dr. Winsmith's assailants also charged him with being a proponent of "social equality" between the races, though he denied it when a congressional committee questioned him about the incident. "Far from it," he responded.¹³ The white man who taught contract law to Winsmith's tenants likewise denied ever teaching "social equality" to the freedpeople "because I knew this generation never could do that." Nevertheless, the teacher admitted that he participated in Union League meetings with them. Was this not social equality? The man conceded that biracial politics "would bring social equality this far: that we would be obliged to associate with the

¹¹ James Henry Hammond, quoted in Stephanie McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds: Yeoman Households, Gender Relations, & the Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 251. McCurry's study is also an excellent resource on the political dynamic of inequality and popular democracy in the South; see chapters three and seven especially.

¹² Scott Reynolds Nelson, *Iron Confederacies: Southern Railways, Klan Violence, and Reconstruction* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 129-131; Testimony of E.W. Seibels, William M. Champion, Clem Bowden, and John Winsmith, in *Testimony Taken by the Joint Committee to Investigate Condition of Affairs in the Late Insurrectionary States*, Senate Report No. 41, 42nd Congress, 2nd Session (1872), Vol. 3: 99-100, 371, 382, Vol. 4: 620-623 [hereafter referenced as *Late Insurrectionary States*].

¹³ Testimony of John Winsmith, *Late Insurrectionary States*, Vol. 4: 622.

negro enough for his friendship; this is, we would neighbor with him and be friendly to him. We would be obliged to do that. Every public man would be compelled to do that.”¹⁴

Certainly, reconstructed rebels like Winsmith did not support interracial sex or interracial marriage, and this is what they meant when they denied believing in “social equality.” Moreover, men like Alcorn and Rodman clearly retained many of their old attitudes concerning the capability of African Americans. At the same time, however, they were willing to engage with Black southerners on a footing of equality that other whites clearly found disturbing. In one case, a reconstructed rebel and his wife were ostracized because they frequently invited “negro visitors” into their home.¹⁵ To most whites, there was a fine line between Black and white men having political discussions in private spaces, where white women typically entertained guests, and interracial sex. In the antebellum South, male political candidates might be forced to mingle with the hoi polloi for votes, but women were supposed to represent and defend class privilege.¹⁶ Even homosocial politicking could suggest sexual deviancy. Ex-Confederate General Wade Hampton was not a Republican by any means, but in early 1867, he told Black leaders that he would support Black suffrage if it were limited by a literacy or property requirement. The illustrated magazine *Harper's Weekly* lampooned the anti-Reconstruction leader with a cartoon where Hampton asks a Black voter, “Of course you’ll *Dine* with me on Thursday?” and the Black man responds, “Not on Phursday, Massa HAMPTON. On Phursday, I’s promised to *sleep* with Massa PINCKNEY.” The cartoonist seemed to be saying that whites who solicited

¹⁴ Testimony of William M. Champion, *Late Insurrectionary States*, Vol. 3: 371.

¹⁵ Jane H. Pease and William Henry Pease, *A Family of Women: The Carolina Petigrus in Peace and War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 241.

¹⁶ McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds*, 121.

Black votes were sacrificing their manliness. Black voters, the cartoon also suggest, held more power than whites because they had options of who to “sleep with.”¹⁷

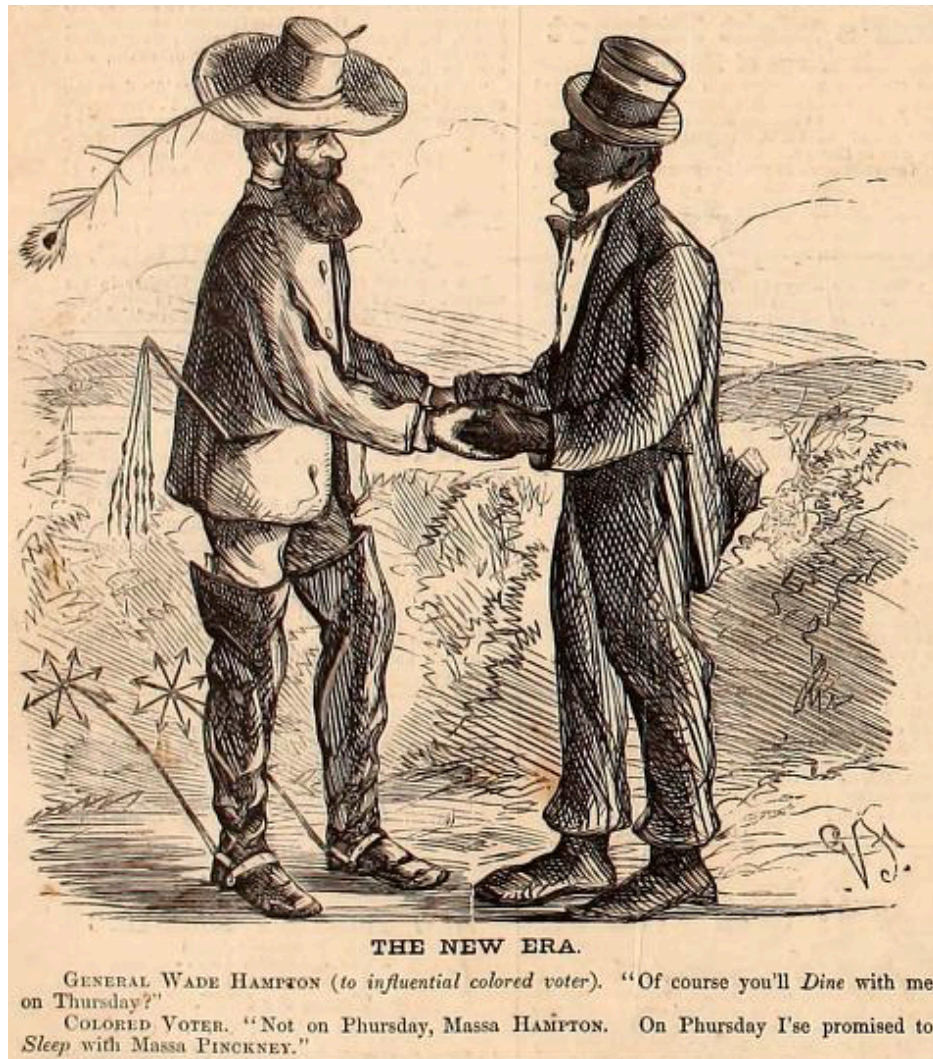


Figure 2: “The New Era,” *Harper’s Weekly* (New York), 6 April 1867.

Even when opponents of Black equality did not try to excite sexual anxiety, they might still interpret interracial “friendship” as “social equality.” For example, J.F.H. Claiborne, a prominent ex-congressman on the Mississippi Gulf Coast, became the subject of editorial ridicule simply for hosting the visiting John Roy Lynch, a former slave and Republican

¹⁷ *Harper’s Weekly* (New York), 6 April 1867.

candidate for Congress. Claiborne felt compelled to respond, and he offered a defense that mixed antebellum paternalism with the postwar reality of biracial politics. First, he argued that he had “no prejudices to conquer,” having been “raised among colored people, nursed by them, waited on by them since through weary stages of illness, never deserted by them during the war, owning my fortune to their labor and my life to their fidelity and vigilance.” The trope of happy and loyal slaves would later become a mainstay of Lost Cause mythology and defense of southern race relations. Claiborne, however, used it to justify extending friendship toward African Americans in the postwar world, where they were legally the political equals of whites. Claiborne continued by pointing out the irony that Democrats were seeking to woo African Americans away from the Republicans, “yet it is a grave offence...if I call to see the Republican candidate for Congress, who in every respect is a representative man of his race and his era.” With both parties soliciting their votes, he concluded, “I cannot see how we are to count on their support and exclude them from our civilities.”¹⁸

According to reconstructed rebels, “friendship” between Black and white men did not mean “social equality.” Universal suffrage for white men had not resulted in a breakdown of class power or social distinctions. Elites had to pander to the masses, but they still considered themselves superior and would have balked at yeomen holding office except only occasionally, here and there, and exclusively with the backing of wealthy patrons like themselves. Imagining their former slaves as voters was a gigantic intellectual leap, and for most white southerners, impossible. Opponents of Black political rights also saw the political hobnobbing between white and Black Republicans as clear evidence of “social equality.” Reconstructed rebels, nevertheless, were able to rationalize their political behavior by drawing on metaphors from antebellum

¹⁸ *Clarion-Ledger* (Jackson, Miss.), 21 Nov 1872.

society, such as the “friendship” between patrons and clients, and the imaginary fidelity of enslaved people toward their masters.

White Patrons and Black Clients

“Friendship” was a metaphor that helped reconstructed rebels to embrace Black political agency without conceding white supremacy. This is what historian Gregory Downs has accurately labeled patronalism: “a belief that services are distributed by big men on behalf of favored clients.”¹⁹ Eventually, confidence in the resilience of white supremacy and class privilege would throw reconstructed rebels into conflict with Black voters. From the start, however, their relationship was shaped by the freedpeople’s need for access to resources.

Black southerners preferred to rely on each other when they could, rather than turning to former slaveholders for help.²⁰ When a congressional joint committee asked one North Carolina freedman whether certain whites were part of the Union League, he replied that he could not say because he was “not interested in white people’s business, only colored people’s.” The man said that he belonged to a “Loyal League,” but not a “white folks League,” and that his organization only had 3-4 white people.²¹ A freeborn man from the same state confessed that if it were not for freedpeople in his county uniting their money to help him purchase six acres of land, he would not have been able to build his house, as well as a school for the community.²²

¹⁹ Gregory P. Downs, *Declarations of Dependence: The Long Reconstruction of Popular Politics in the South, 1861-1908* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 5.

²⁰ Hahn, *A Nation Under Our Feet*, 80-82, 238-249.

²¹ Testimony of Essie Harris, *Late Insurrectionary States*, Vol. 2: 97.

²² Testimony of Samuel Allen, *Condition of Affairs in the Southern States: North Carolina*, Senate Report No. 1, 42nd Congress, 1st Session (1871), 181 [hereafter referenced as *Condition of Affairs*], 50.

However, capital-deprived and newly emancipated freedpeople did frequently turn to white Republicans for help furthering their individual or collective aims. John Winsmith's plantation was not the only one that doubled both as a workplace for African Americans and a space for Union League meetings.²³ North Carolina freedpeople lived on an Alamance plantation owned by a white Republican who served as constable in a different county; no other whites lived there and their patron only visited once every other week. Freedpeople appear to have found greater autonomy working for Republican employers.²⁴

African Americans were supported in their efforts to protect themselves against the Klan by another landowner who gave them permission to use his gun to defend themselves. Eventually, a large group of Klansmen pulled the man from his house one night and whipped him in front of the freedpeople. The Klansmen told him to abandon his Republican principles and stop living with so many Black people on his land. Refusing to be intimidated, he responded that God knows how he would vote and that the freedmen needed a place to live. He told a congressional committee that he was widely reputed as a "white nigger" for voting Republican, and he fully expected his employees to vote Republican too.²⁵ Democratic landowners sometimes forced their workers to vote against their own interests; working for a Republican landowner offered more freedom, even if it did not guarantee their safety from the Klan.

Reconstructed rebels frequently expressed a desire to help in the moral and intellectual uplift of the freedpeople. James Ramsay, a North Carolina physician given to deep introspection, often reflected on the welfare of his Black neighbors and offered them free medical services. In his diary, Ramsay wrote, "the poor free-people—my former slaves have no homes and it makes

²³ For another example, see Daniel Lindsey Russell's testimony in *Condition of Affairs*, 181.

²⁴ Testimony of William G. Turrentine, *Condition of Affairs*, 46.

²⁵ Testimony of Andrew L. Ramsour, *Condition of Affairs*, 415-416, 419.

my heart bleed to see them thus.” Later in the year, the election of township officers gave him cause to examine his racial privilege: “The poor negro asked but little and I gave it to him. But he has done much for me, in past days[;] but for his labor I would not, in all probability, enjoy the benefits of an education, which is denied to him.” Reconstructed rebels like Ramsay were willing to imagine a more equitable racial order. However, he could not escape the desire to preserve his own status: “That God will bless and protect [the negro], without injury to the white man, is my prayer and belief. Let the races live together in peace, to do so, justice must be done each towards the other.”²⁶ Justice, he believed, should not entail any loss on his part.

Reconstructed rebels frequently lectured freedpeople on middle class virtues. In a draft of a speech to “my colored friends,” Ramsay planned to outline the duties of freedom: industry, honesty, temperance, manners, and honoring one’s contracts.²⁷ Another reconstructed rebel advised Blacks that “honesty, industry, economy, sobriety, truth, virtue and intelligence” would secure their success.²⁸ These values reflected what any respectable men were expected to embody, though in this context, their articulation could be racially condescending as well as blind to the particular disadvantages of the freedpeople.

Moreover, anti-Reconstruction whites tended to give the same speeches about Black responsibility; the difference was that reconstructed rebels were optimistic and believed that Blacks would, as John H. Caldwell put it, “prove themselves worthy” of the political rights granted by Congress. Caldwell, the Methodist minister, started teaching freedmen’s schools in 1866, and a year later he was a district superintendent for the Freedman’s Bureau. Writing to the state board of education, he praised African Americans for their progress in freedom: “When the

²⁶ Ramsay diary, 6 Jan 1869 and 5 Aug 1869, Ramsay Papers, SHC.

²⁷ Ramsay, speech draft, “My Colored Friends,” 1868, Ramsay Papers, SHC.

²⁸ “Spring Garden Speech,” 1867, Thomas Settle Papers, SHC.

benign influences of education and religion have prevailed, the colored population have been marked for their morality and industry. No crime of any magnitude has been committed and they are every where rising above the dominion of their biases which were nurtured in them in the times of slavery.” Reconstructed rebels believed that given assistance in their moral and intellectual reformation, African Americans could be made into useful citizens.²⁹

Edward Gantt, Arkansas’s wartime turncoat, also became a superintendent for the Freedmen’s Bureau, distributing legal and educational services to African Americans. He was a particularly well-meaning patron, frequently proclaiming his belief that national laws could change conservative social traditions. On December 22, 1865, a crowd of anxious freedpeople gathered at his office. Another agent had threatened to “hire them out.” Hiring out was the practice of slaveholders leasing the labor of their slaves to other whites. The Freedmen’s Bureau had been tasked with regulating contracts, so it was not irrational for the formerly enslaved to see the Bureau as a white master contracting them to another white employer. Gantt gave an impromptu speech. “Why you have just as much right to hire me out,” he told them. “I don’t belong to you, nor do you belong to me or anybody else.” The Freedmen’s Bureau, Gantt explained, was not their new master. It would leave them alone unless they or their employers broke the law. The Bureau, as Gantt understood it, was a temporary safeguard of free labor until laws and public sentiment converged to guarantee equal protection. If the Bureau touched the bodies of Black people, it would not be as a personal master, but as the impersonal enforcer of laws that disciplined wrongdoers of any race.³⁰

²⁹ Caldwell to John R. Lewis, 5 Oct 1867, Freedmen's Bureau, Records of the Superintendent of Education and of the Division of Education, Georgia, Letters Received, Roll 9.

³⁰ E. W. Gantt to J. W. Sprague, 23 Dec 1865, Freedmen’s Bureau Papers.

There is little reason to doubt Gantt's claim to his supervisor that his Black audience went away satisfied. They may have believed Gantt that the law would protect them equally and that they would not be subject to another form of oppression. However, Gantt held many of the same blind spots as northern proponents of free labor. The Bureau "will not give you any land," he told his Black neighbors. Ignoring federal support for white western settlers and railroads, he claimed that the government had never given land to white people. A former slaveowner, he also drew a false equivalency between himself and his audience: "There was a time when I did not have any land. But I worked and saved my money and bought some. Now I have a good deal." Defending the equitability of the contract system, he told them that "in the North, where I have traveled, a large number of white people...make contracts and labor by the month or year just like you do. They work faithfully, and never leave home in business hours without permission. It is easy & proper for you to do the same. They are free & so are you." Gantt assumed a degree of social mobility that was already disappearing in the North, that was inhibited by the legacy of slavery in the South, and that was contradicted nationally by federal policies that privileged white Americans. Gantt told the Black Arkansans in his charge that politeness and respectability, "honesty and industry," would make them "a good name" and in turn would "always secure you a good place and good wages." Gantt was wrong, but these were the blind spots of the national middle class and free-labor ideology, more so than the blind spots of slave-labor ideology.³¹

Gantt's idealization of the law as an impersonal arbiter was also faulty, but he was neither intentionally deceptive, nor completely naïve. As a white southerner, he understood that civil courts were run by prejudiced men who would not enforce the laws equally. When the state legislature passed laws allowing employers to "apprentice" the children of indigent parents, he

³¹ E. W. Gantt to J. W. Sprague, 23 Dec 1865, Freedmen's Bureau Papers.

warned privately that it “would touch 99% of the freedpeople and would send them into the control of their former masters.” The reason, he argued, was that white Arkansans “have not reached the time when they can do complete justice *to all men*.” Violations could be taken to court, “but where,” Gantt asked, “is the public sentiment to enforce it? Where is the Judge that would enforce it? ...And where would be found the orphan negro who could go to Court *in person* and make ‘complaint.’ And where that ‘*any other person*’ in all our community advanced enough—unshackled of prejudice enough—and having the moral courage to take the part of the *oppressed, if that oppressed be a negro?*” He still entertained a certain naiveté that prejudices would inevitably fade and that the law could become an impersonal arbiter in a legally homogeneous nation. But this naiveté was not the same as hoping, as other white southerners did, that the law could be used to reassert the old racial power dynamics. “My conviction,” Gantt wrote, “is that nothing assimilating [*sic*] slavery should be entrusted to our people until they are thoroughly *weaned from this evil*—until all hope of its future existence *in any shape* has been dispelled—until they have walked in the sunlight of the new order of things long enough to distinguish realities from dreams.”³²

Gantt was more concerned with white attitudes toward the law than with Black attitudes toward labor. “Their prejudices give way slowly,” he told his supervisor. Nevertheless, he was hopeful that “by extending the existence of the Bureau, what education & strength failed to do, might be supplied by an influx of liberal-minded people.”³³ Gantt waged a constant battle to break up apprenticeship, teach white employers that they could not use physical discipline, and prevent them from arresting self-employed freedpeople in the town. When whites asked him

³² E. W. Gantt to J. W. Sprague, 5 Jan 1866, Freedmen’s Bureau Papers.

³³ E. W. Gantt to J. W. Sprague, [n.d. December 1865], Freedmen’s Bureau Papers.

what to do about disobedient employees, he told them they should first send their petition, then he would rescind the contract, and alluding to the high demand for labor, he threatened that he would find other employers who will hire them and treat them like other laborers. Gantt was not disturbed by the economic leverage Black Arkansans had during the labor shortage, and he insisted that white planters treat their employees equitably. In another case, a white man informed Gantt that a Black mechanic was living alone, with little food, and that the man should be forced to contract. "My dear sir," Gantt replied, "if that be so, you had better force me to contract, for I have not two days rations on my place."³⁴ Even if Gantt continued to draw false equivalencies, he was determined to teach whites to see Blacks as their legal equals.

Gantt's position as a Bureau agent gave him government-sanctioned status as an arbiter of the law between Black wards and unreconstructed rebels. His personal reconstruction did not make him everything that the Black southerners needed or wanted in an ally. The Bureau did not provide land or other forms of capital needed to safeguard and give meaning to their freedom. Moreover, Gantt's focus on abstract legal rights made it difficult to fully confront the unequal social and economic power embedded in southern race relations.

Gantt was probably a more sincere advocate for African Americans than most reconstructed rebels. His blind spots were shared by northern proponents of free labor ideology. Other reconstructed rebels carried more of the slaveholder's desire for control into the postbellum world. One Black landowner noted that some white Republicans called him a "very mean nigger," "a mean son of a bitch," and "a damned rascal."³⁵ It is nonetheless worth remembering why African Americans would be willing to trust reconstructed rebels with power.

³⁴ E. W. Gantt to J. W. Sprague, 13 Jan 1866, Freedmen's Bureau Papers.

³⁵ Testimony of Samuel Allen, *Condition of Affairs*, 49-50.

Legal equality would be a significant accomplishment, and having local elites defending it mattered. African Americans, long excluded from politics, also valued that willingness of reconstructed rebels to act as patrons, providing them with access to the resources that gave freedom its substance. Soon, however, the inequality of these patron-client relationships would come into more obvious conflict with the democratic aspirations of the freedpeople.

Under their Influence?

While Virginia was moving through Congressional Reconstruction, Williams C. Wickham told an audience of Black Republicans, “It is your bounden duty so *to conduct yourselves as to bring white men of influence to unite with you who will sustain you in the rights with which Congress has invested you.*” A reporter summarized, “he didn't believe that they wanted to dominate over the white men.”³⁶ In other cases, reconstructed rebels more subtly and unintentionally revealed their expectations that the bottom rail would stay on the bottom. Just prior to the organization of a Republican Party in Georgia, John Caldwell warned his superior in a letter in the Freeman's Bureau that Democrats like Wade Hampton were trying to control the Black vote with bribes and “unscrupulous representations.” Reconstruction's opponents were only wooing Black voters to get elected. “Very different,” he explained, “are the principles and measures set forth by the new party organized in conformity with the suggestions of Gov. Brown of Georgia.” What Caldwell said next, however, suggested not only his confidence in the righteousness of the Republican cause, but also his implicit assumption that reconstructed rebels like him would be at the head of the party: “All rebels reconstructed in spirit, converted by the

³⁶ *The Daily Dispatch* (Richmond, Virginia), 3 Jun 1868; emphasis in the original.

logic of events from the error of their ways together with the great mass of freedmen combined under their influence should be fused into one great omnipotent Republican party.”³⁷

Moreover, Caldwell’s ideal statesman, Joseph Brown, at one point inadvertently disclosed his fear that Blacks might look elsewhere for leadership. It began when Black minister and political leader Henry McNeal Turner asked Brown whether land confiscation and redistribution was likely. Brown replied that if confiscation happened, northerners would probably use it to pay down the national debt or give pensions to Union veterans before they would help Blacks. “Your people could expect to gain very little,” Brown counseled, “by an exchange of the people with whom they have been raised for strangers who would become purchasers of the lands[,] who know little of their habits and would probably have little sympathy with them when settled among them.”³⁸ This argument revealed more about what Brown feared than what a likely outcome of land redistribution might have been. Brown realized that if he could not influence Black Georgians through the Republican Party, the alternative was that they might rally around more radical northern men who had come south since the war.

But how much influence did reconstructed rebels really have? Not much, Thomas Walton thought. Walton was a planter in the Mississippi Delta, a former military aide to General Longstreet, a law professor at the University of Mississippi, and a committed Republican. Speaking to a congressional committee, he said that African Americans had been very generous in their personal support of him, naming in particular Senator Blanche Bruce, Congressman John Roy Lynch, and Mississippi Secretary of State James Hill. However, he admitted that he did not feel welcome in the freedpeople’s grassroots political meetings. “I am quite certain that my

³⁷ John H. Caldwell to G. L. Eberhart, 27 Mar 1867, Freedmen's Bureau, Records of the Superintendent of education and of the Division of Education, Georgia, Letters Received, Roll 8.

³⁸ Joseph Brown to H.M. Turner, 17 Jun 1867, Brown Papers, Hargrett Library, UGA.

personal influence with the negroes is not a bit greater than that of any democrat in my county,” he told Congress. “I am quite certain that I was never able to influence a vote or influence a colored man on any single question of politics; which I confess with some mortification.” The reason, he believed, was “the enormous gulf between the races in all social relations—that confidence which springs from personal friendship and an unrestrained social intercourse being, in my judgment, an essential cement to a political party, and being absolutely out of the question between the white and Black races.”³⁹ The “friendship” that people like Alcorn wrote about was a very specific, and limited, relationship indeed.

Biracial cooperation was tempered by distrust growing out of Blacks’ unequal relationship with white patrons, and so African American leaders and their communities often insisted on more direct access to state power.⁴⁰ In 1870, Henry McNeal Turner, now a member of the Georgia legislature, reminded his colleagues how few political offices Blacks had gained in the state. Only two years earlier, the white legislators had declared that Turner and other representatives of his race were not qualified to hold office, and Congress had to insist that they be reseated. “But for all, what have we got in Georgia,” Turner lamented, “simply the right to vote and sit in the General Assembly after being elected twice, once by the people and then by the United States Congress.” Beyond that, there was “not a colored juror or a colored police [sic] in all the State.” He counted “two colored magistrates, one colored clerk of court, and one or two

³⁹ "Mississippi in 1875. *Report of Select Committee to Inquire into the Mississippi Election of 1875* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1876), 50 [hereafter referenced as *Miss. 1875*].

⁴⁰ Hahn, *An Nation Under Our Feet*, 252-254; For analysis of a similar tension between white patrons and Black leaders in 1890s North Carolina, see Jeffrey J. Crow, "Fusion, Confusion, and Negroism": Schisms among Negro Republicans in the North Carolina Election of 1896, *The North Carolina Historical Review* 53, no. 4 (October 1976), 364-384.

colored bailiffs” for all of Georgia.⁴¹ Republicans lost control of Georgia in 1871, so Turner would not see an improvement, but in other states the first couple years of the decade saw an increase in Black officeholders. By the end of the decade, more than 2000 African Americans had held office in the South.⁴² As historian Steven Hahn explains, “The combination of black militance in the plantation districts and white retreat in many of the nonplantation districts turned the southern Republican party blacker and blacker over time.”⁴³ Where they did not hold power themselves, Black southerners made their own influence felt by deciding between competing Republican factions that wanted their vote.⁴⁴

Black southerners and reconstructed rebels frequently found themselves at odds when Black aspirations to wield power on behalf of their communities conflicted with reconstructed rebels’ racial pride. In some cases, reconstructed rebels were quite willing to support Black officeholding, even paying the surety bonds necessary for them to hold office.⁴⁵ They had done as much for the occasional white yeoman in the antebellum South.⁴⁶ In such cases, however, they did so because it did not contradict their desires or what they perceived to be their interests. When Black leaders mounted a direct challenge to the authority of reconstructed rebels, the latter began to see their Black rivals as corrupt demagogues who invented imaginary racial issues to get power and, in doing so, threatened to bring about “negro supremacy.”

⁴¹ Henry McNeal Turner, *The Civil and Political Status of the State of Georgia, and Her Relations to the General Government* (Atlanta, Ga., New Era printing establishment, 1870).

⁴² Eric Foner, *Freedom's Lawmakers: A Directory of Black Officeholders During Reconstruction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), xi.

⁴³ Hahn, *A Nation Under Our Feet*, 254.

⁴⁴ Michael Perman, *The Road to Redemption: Southern Politics, 1869-1879* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 40-41.

⁴⁵ Justin Behrend, *Reconstructing Democracy: Grassroots Black Politics in the Deep South after the Civil War* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2015), 155.

⁴⁶ McCurry, *Master of Small Worlds*, 244.

Still, reconstructed rebels' indignation at Black challengers was complicated by their sense of themselves as the freedpeople's friends. Moreover, they depended on African American voters to remain in office. The following cases serve to illustrate in greater personal depth the complicated and tenuous "friendship" between Black political leaders and reconstructed rebels, as well as how those relationships unraveled.

Bill Holden and Jim Harris

William Woods Holden had embraced Confederate defeat early on, and in the summer and fall of 1865, he tried to rally North Carolinians around an anti-Confederate narrative of their experience. Andrew Johnson had made him provisional governor, but he failed to be elected in his own right later that fall. Less than three years later, he succeeded in becoming governor as a Republican.

Holden's relationship with African Americans shifted dramatically in that time. In October 1866, he spoke at a Black educational convention. The convention was chaired by James H. Harris, a Black North Carolinian who was destined to prominence in the state, and who would soon be working very closely with Holden. The ex-provisional governor told his Black audience that they should focus on labor and education. "He urged the colored people to keep out of politics," Holden's own newspaper reported. "They had no time to waste at public gatherings," he said, and "they should avoid all temptations to idleness and dissipation." He advised them that "the true interest of the colored race was to cultivate the friendship of the whites; and the whites would also find their true interests in doing justice to the blacks and in cultivating their

friendship.” Holden promised that “the colored people would always find him a friend and well-wisher.”⁴⁷

Perhaps James Harris already saw Holden as a potential ally, despite Holden’s discouraging words about Black political activity. Others, however, were certainly skeptical. Black author Frances E. W. Harper shortly after told a North Carolina audience that she believed Holden should not be trusted.⁴⁸ Regardless, when Holden spoke at the educational convention, his reconstruction was still incomplete. At the state Republican Party convention in September 1867, he responded to a conservative pamphlet that laid out some of his old statements about African Americans. Holden was emphatic: those statements “are *no longer* my views; and my colored friends know that as far as I am concerned I heartily welcome them to the freedom which the Union arms have secured for them.” He told them he did not “pretend...to be either consistent or infallible,” but by January 1867, he had declared himself for Black suffrage and now went even further: “I can afford to say that as a man and a gentleman, when I take a colored friend by the right hand and call him, politically and civilly my equal.”⁴⁹ At the same convention, James Harris quipped that the same individuals so worked up against social equality “have invited colored men into their parlors in secret—I don’t tell where I have been—but I tell you these very gentlemen...have tried mighty hard to pull black negroes into their parlors and endeavor to win them to the Conservative side.”⁵⁰

Holden’s star was finally rising, and so was James Harris’s. With typical wit and humor, Harris told an African American audience, “Well, when I go anywhere the people, white and

⁴⁷ *The Weekly Standard* (Raleigh, NC), 17 Oct 1866.

⁴⁸ *The Semi-Weekly Raleigh Sentinel*, 7 Aug 1867.

⁴⁹ *The Tri-Weekly Standard* (Raleigh, NC), 7 Sep 1867.

⁵⁰ *The Tri-Weekly Standard* (Raleigh, NC), 7 Sep 1867.

black, follow me around like a bear. I can scarcely get any rest.”⁵¹ The freedpeople loved his bold advocacy for their claims to justice and equality, while whites were attracted by his tone, “moderate, but firm and decided.” At one meeting of African Americans in Raleigh, he set out his position: “I am a radical. I hope the Republican Party is radical enough for anyone. But I do not wish to abuse the mass of the Southern people.”⁵² Harris understood that the Republican Party was the best vehicle for the freedpeople’s interests, but he was also determined to cultivate white allies.

Harris was born in 1832 in Granville County, North Carolina and was free by at least 1848, after which he worked as an artisan in Raleigh. Though Harris would become a strong supporter of Holden during Reconstruction, in the 1850s, Harris fled to Ohio largely because of the wave of racial hysteria that had been stimulated by Holden’s newspaper. Harris studied at Oberlin, and then during the early years of the Civil War, he traveled to Canada, Liberia, and Sierra Leone. By 1863, he was back in the disunited states, encouraging Black enlistment in Indiana. After the war, he returned to North Carolina as a vice-president of the National Equal Rights League. During the following two decades, he organized and directed numerous organizations that increased the power of African Americans at the grassroots and linked them to sympathetic whites: the Freedmen’s Savings and Trust Company, the Wake County Co-operative Business Company, the Raleigh Co-operative Land and Building Association, and a school for handicapped Black children. He frequently found himself placed at the head of political meetings called by state’s freedpeople, served the people of Raleigh in a municipal capacity as justice of the peace, assessor, and alderman, attended the 1868 state constitutional convention, was elected

⁵¹ *The Tri-Weekly Standard* (Raleigh, NC), 4 Jun 1867.

⁵² *The Tri-Weekly Standard* (Raleigh, NC), 4 Jun 1867.

to multiple terms in both houses of the General Assembly, and attended several national Republican Party conventions.⁵³

Harris aimed to connect African Americans to biracial institutions while also serving their interests in the Republican Party. Doing so, however, meant that he needed to avoid alienating southern whites. In his speech at the September 1867 party convention, Harris said that “we the colored people, have not learned our political alphabet” and should “remain quiet, sir, and receive a little wholesome counsel from those who have been brought up with superior advantages.”⁵⁴ In 1868, he also declined a nomination to Congress, and at other critical junctures told other Black leaders not to run for an office that might fire off racial tension.⁵⁵ Nevertheless, Harris frequently held office himself, and his public image even drew the attention of Massachusetts Senator Henry Wilson, who dined with Harris in Wilmington. There in Wilmington, Harris gave a speech that drew the approval of Wilson as well as the Union men of the port city.⁵⁶ Sometimes Conservative newspaper editors even got the wrong idea from his conciliatory overtures, thinking that they might be able to detach him from the Republicans and make him the Black poster-boy for the Conservative Party.⁵⁷

Harris’s moderation occasionally got him in trouble with the freedpeople and more militant grassroots activists. Some freedpeople interpreted his dismissal of land confiscation as “playing into the hands of the rebs.”⁵⁸ Abraham Galloway, a former slave who escaped from

⁵³ Foner, *Freedom’s Lawmakers*, 96-97; Deborah Beckel, *Radical Reform: Interracial Politics in Post-Emancipation North Carolina* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2011), 45, 86.

⁵⁴ *The Tri-Weekly Standard* (Raleigh, NC), 7 Sep 1867.

⁵⁵ Beckel, *Radical Reform*, 64, 85.

⁵⁶ *The Tri-Weekly Standard* (Raleigh, NC), 4 Jun 1867.

⁵⁷ *The Weekly Standard* (Raleigh, NC), 14 Dec 1867.

⁵⁸ *The Tri-Weekly Standard* (Raleigh, NC), 4 Jun 1867.

Wilmington by sea and spent much of the war helping enslaved families make their way from their plantations to the Union army, was considered by some to be Harris's rival after the war. Both opposed outright confiscation, but Galloway thought higher taxes on land might be a good way to force planters to sell, while Harris advocated a temporary tax moratorium due to the difficult circumstances faced by all. Galloway cultivated an image of grassroots radicalism that starkly contrasted with the attitude of moderate statesmanship that Harris cut.⁵⁹

Freedpeople often felt uncertain whom they should trust during Reconstruction, but Harris was continually able to defend himself against charges of being bought by whites. To a crowd of freedpeople in Raleigh who had been alerted to Conservative newspapers that reported favorably on Harris's more conciliatory speeches, Harris read, explained, and sometimes refuted the articles line by line. He respected the skepticism of his audience, while also defusing it with humor: "Now let me read a further extract from this Edgecombe speech. I will read it all, for if I do not you will say that I tried to conceal something. I know you,—that is what you will say. (Laughter, and cries of read, read!)" After responding to that one and a report of a speech he made in Halifax, Harris joked "if I reply to the reports of two of these speeches, then some of you will say, why don't he reply to all. Why it would take five clerks to keep up with them. (Laughter.)"⁶⁰ Yes, Harris admitted, he did not want to insult white southerners, but he also explained that he was dedicated to bringing them over to an acceptance of Black people's rights.

The image of white Republicans like William Woods Holden was built by the support of Black spokesmen. On July 8, 1867, Harris sent a petition to Washington on behalf of the Equal

⁵⁹ *The Tri-Weekly Standard* (Raleigh, NC), 7 Sep 1867. For an excellent biography of Abraham Galloway, see David S. Cecelski, *The Fire of Freedom: Abraham Galloway and the Slaves' Civil War* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012).

⁶⁰ *The Tri-Weekly Standard* (Raleigh, NC), 4 Jun 1867.

Rights League, asking Congress to remove Holden's disabilities under the Fourteenth Amendment. Harris professed that Holden had been "especially conspicuous and indefatigable in his efforts in behalf of the Union, the cause of Liberty, humanity, and justice." Harris considered Holden a "true and tried friend," persecuted only by the disloyal, and necessary to the state's reconstruction into the Union. Though Harris had not been in North Carolina during the war, he wrote that "all the nation knows that [Holden] alone struck blow after blow at the rebellion from *within*."⁶¹ Three years later, when Governor Holden was being impeached and tried by a Conservative legislature for his use of martial law to fight the Klan, leading Blacks published a broadside comparing Holden, "our good friend," to the biblical Mordecai who stood between the murderous Haman and genocide.⁶²



Figure 3: "Holden Being Pulled in the Back Window," *The Holden Record* (Raleigh, NC), 9 Apr 1868. A Conservative Party paper mocked Holden's relationship with African Americans by lampooning a wartime incident when Holden sought the Confederate governor's protection from a mob.

⁶¹ Petition of the Equal Rights League, signed by Harris as president, to Congress, 8 Jul 1867, James H. Harris Papers, NCAH.

⁶² George L. Mabson, Stewart Ellison, et al., "Address to the Colored People of North Carolina," 19 Dec 1870, NCC.

Though African American leaders knew how to boost the reputation of native white allies among ordinary Black people, they also sought to shape white Republicans and retain as much leverage in biracial politics as they could. A Wilmington man wrote a letter to Governor Holden on behalf of “the Colard people of north carolina,” who “are very much dissatisfied with the laws we are working under.” He accused Holden of “doing Every thing” for their white employers, who “did not put you in the office,” and “not for us,” who did. This citizen hoped that his letter would make Holden “open your heart and be a companen to us and do every thing in your power for us and you will.”⁶³ Jordan Chambers, “a colored man...who has tried to do his full duty to you and our noble party,” tried to leverage his grassroots activism in Iredell County by mentioning all the incentives he had *not* to be a Republican. “During the late election my influence was sought on both sides,” wrote Chambers, and though he ran as a Republican, he said “the Conservatives vainly endeavored to induce me, by the most *tempting* considerations, to take that name off, to come out and curse the party, and thus bring the colored men of Iredell and Rowan *en masse* to their standard, for these were all looking (and pardon the egotism) how *I* was going.” Since the contingency of Chambers’s activism was again up in the air because of a “general conspiracy among the landowners of this section, to starve me and my family out, and to kill or drive me from the country,” he asked for an appointment to office that would give him power and an independent subsistence.⁶⁴

It was of particular importance to Black leaders like James Harris that they demonstrate loyalty to the Republican Party while also insisting that that they were not blind adherents. Mixing dedication with conditionality, Harris promised, “Never, unless it falls short of its duty to

⁶³ John Alfred to W.W. Holden, 24 Apr 1868, Governor’s Correspondence, NCAH.

⁶⁴ Jordan Chambers to W.W. Holden, 20 May 1868, Governor’s Correspondence, NCAH.

the great principles which it now advocates, will I leave its ranks.” More directly asserting the political independence of African Americans, he said, “I do not tie myself hand and foot merely to party, forever and forever. But I do bind myself to the principles of humanity, liberty, equality and justice, and will follow whithersoever they lead into or out of parties as it may be.”⁶⁵ Though statements like this one made some Conservatives think that Harris could be detached from the Republicans, it was more likely a reminder to African American listeners that Harris was not in the pocket of whites, and to white Republicans that he expected them to live up to their biracial commitments.

Harris had observed that after emancipation, southern whites and Blacks became “unacquainted with each other,” such that “the white man does not know what disposition to make of the negro, or the negro of the white man, after they have lived together in the same country for so many years. I can tell you gentlemen it is because they have become strangers to each other. Let us get acquainted once more, gentlemen, and all the difficulties will be removed.”⁶⁶ Harris and other Black leaders worked to create a new relationship with southern whites, and those whites who adopted a Republican identity had some incentive to do so. Moreover, Black Republicans sought to make this relationship one that *worked* for African Americans. In the shifting circumstances of the 1870s, however, it would become increasingly difficult to maintain political friendship across the color line while still mobilizing the power of white allies for racial justice.

Patronage politics touched off factional disputes over the role of race in the Republican Party and who were the freedpeople’s real friends. For example, Union veteran George M.

⁶⁵ *The Tri-Weekly Standard* (Raleigh, NC), 4 Jun 1867.

⁶⁶ *The Weekly Standard* (Raleigh, NC), 3 Apr 1867.

Arnold worked for the Freedmen's Savings and Trust Company in Wilmington after the war, but rather than developing connections to the local party leaders, he frequently accused them of not giving African Americans their fair share of offices. Instead, Arnold cultivated the friendship of Greensboro's prominent white Republican, Thomas Settle, Jr. When Wilmington Republicans accused Arnold of turning traitor to the party in late 1872 and Arnold heard that Settle credited the charge, he wrote an anxious letter to Settle asking for confirmation whether Settle believed he had "sold you out." Arnold added, "I only want to say this, that I never tried harder to secure anyone's election than I did yours and am perfectly convinced to let time show you of the fact." Apparently Settle believed Arnold, because a year later Arnold was again at work against what he considered the "Anti-Negro Ring" of Wilmington and urged that one of North Carolina's U.S. senators be replaced with Settle. Meanwhile, another Black Republican wrote to Settle denouncing the patronage machine, while yet another Black Wilmingtonian asked for Settle's help getting the appointment of postmaster. To add to the mess of patronage, Settle received a letter from a white Republican defending the current postmaster as "a loyal white Republican threatened with replacement by a colored Republican simply for color's sake." Several others accused George Arnold of maligning the Republican collector of the port in a movement to replace him with an African American collector.⁶⁷

William Woods Holden's own patronage debacle demonstrated how the distribution of employment opportunities could test and even destroy biracial "friendship." After being impeached and removed from office, Holden spent some time editing a Republican newspaper in

⁶⁷ *The Daily Era* (Raleigh, NC), 2 Nov 1872; *The Wilmington Morning Star*, 25 Mar 1873, 5 Apr 1873; *The Wilmington Post*, 3 Jun 1873; George M. Arnold to Settle, 20 Aug 1872, William H. Thurber to Settle, 23 June 1873, George L. Mabson to Settle, 21 Jul 1873, William P. Canaday to Settle, 10 Jul 1873 Alex T. London to Settle, 3 Apr 1874, Silas N. Martin to Settle, 3 Apr, and Daniel L Russell to Settle, 3 Apr 1874, in Thomas Settle Papers, SHC.

Washington D.C. Then, in 1873, he returned to North Carolina as regional postmaster, headquartered Raleigh. By 1876, Holden still retained his popularity among African Americans. Black political activist Charles N. Hunter wrote to Holden in March of that year that he had been reading Holden's publications on temperance to other African Americans and found that Blacks still had great respect for Holden. "No man has ever gained as fully the heart of our colored people in the state as yourself," Hunter wrote. "A very considerable proportion of them here, are under the impression that you are still their Governor, while not a few anxiously inquire if, and hope that, you will be a candidate on the Republican ticket for Governor in the next election. With the exception of the few local politicians hereabout, you and Gen. Grant are the only public men they know anything about."⁶⁸

However, with Republicans no longer in control of any part of the state government after 1876 and their influence waning, African Americans became even more openly skeptical of white Republicans, who had not always adequately supported African American bids for local office or federal patronage. In 1880, James Harris started his own Black newspaper that directed its fire toward Democrats as well as racist white Republicans. In particular, Harris called out his old political ally, Holden, for not appointing any African American clerks in the Raleigh post office. Harris had helped to build up Holden's reputation in 1867, but he now asked "if Gov. Holden is inclined to pander to a perverted taste of caste entertained by the white citizens of Raleigh."⁶⁹ In early 1881, Harris began a campaign to convince President Garfield to put him in Holden's place. Charles N. Hunter, who had five years before so highly praised Holden, now told a visiting Post Office official from Washington that Holden, "like the other white

⁶⁸ Charles N. Hunter to William Woods Holden, 26 March 1876, Charles N. Hunter Papers, Duke University.

⁶⁹ *The North Carolina Republican* (Raleigh, NC), 12 Nov 1880; Beckel, *Radical Reform*, 103-105.

Republican office holders, were opposed to the negro enjoying official patronage, and to that extent I was opposed to them.”⁷⁰

Holden remonstrated in a letter to the president that since the formation of the party he had “held and practiced the rule that colored men, adopted citizens, and native white Republicans should be placed on the same footing of merit in regard to office and honor.” He explained that when he entered the office of postmaster all the clerks were white Republicans of merit and only two African Americans had applied for positions since then, and neither qualified.⁷¹ Charles N. Hunter’s biographer and historians since have repeated the claim that after Holden was removed from office, his successor immediately appointed Hunter to a clerkship.⁷² However, newspaper evidence, as well as Holden’s statement to Garfield, indicates that Holden himself had appointed Hunter sometime in March before being removed, and that Hunter had been merely retained by Holden’s successor.⁷³ It is even possible that Hunter wrote his letter regarding Holden’s failure to support Black patronage while holding a clerkship under him in the Raleigh post office.

Despite Holden’s last attempt to profess the biracial southern Republican creed of 1867, personal disappointment and disillusionment about the direction of his region led him to renounce the Republican Party in 1883. He accused northerners of discriminating against the southern wing of the party and falsely claimed that Virginia Republicans wanted integrated

⁷⁰ Charles N. Hunter to Osborne Hunter, 26 March 1881, Hunter Papers, Duke University.

⁷¹ William Woods Holden to James Garfield, undated draft, William Woods Holden Papers, Duke University. The letter was likely sent in the first two weeks of April, since it was responding to a meeting called by Harris on April 2 and Holden wrote to his wife about the letter “producing a deep impression” on April 25, 1881.

⁷² John Haley, *Charles N. Hunter and Race Relations in North Carolina* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 57; Beckel, *Radical Reform*, 108.

⁷³ *News and Observer* (Raleigh, NC), 7 Jun 1881; William Woods Holden to James Garfield, undated draft, William Woods Holden Papers, Duke University.

schools, which he denounced as “Negro equality.”⁷⁴ Holden had come a long way from 1867. African Americans like Harris and Hunter had worked to build his reputation among the freedpeople, and Holden had embraced them as political equals. It would not be fair to say that Holden adopted a faith toward equal rights opportunistically, and that once he lost his job that faith disappeared. Self-interest is a partial explanation, but not all. When the Confederacy stood defeated and it looked like Republican ideology might create a new future for the region, reconstructed rebels made a realistic assessment. However, when racial conflict only increased from both within and outside the party, they started to believe that African Americans were asking too much and the “friendships” fell apart.

Governor Alcorn and Sheriff Brown

According to one estimate, James Alcorn paid nine-tenths of the taxes in Coahoma county. Alcorn owned 20,000 acres of fertile cotton land just 14 miles east of the Mississippi River. According to one visitor in the 1870s, the estate included two hundred fifty cottages, each with “two rooms, fourteen feet square and an open piazza along the whole, ten feet wide.” These provided habitation to over a thousand African Americans—Alcorn’s field workers and their families. “These houses,” the visitor wrote:

are left open to trespassers and homeless, nomadict [sic] blacks are soon ensconced within. They must need have bread and bacon, and soon appear at the office of Mr. Jones, the Senator’s factotum. A contract is soon made, the negroes are paid for their labor in food or money, tree are ‘deadened,’ and the dense undergrowth is swept away, and within a brief period cotton and corn grow luxuriantly [sic] about the congeries of white cottage not long before hidden in the foliage of the matted vines and among great towering oak and cypress trees.

⁷⁴ Horace W. Raper, *William W. Holden: North Carolina’s Political Enigma* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 237; Harris, William C. *William Woods Holden: Firebrand of North Carolina Politics* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987), 316.

This description of “Alcorn’s Acres” made its way into the columns of the New York *World* as a local color story about Black life on a Mississippi estate. It was 1876, and according to this witness, Black Coahomans had lost their old obsession with guns and schooling. It was an idyllic picture to demonstrate the senselessness of Reconstruction: “Fat, healthy and greasy as these negroes are, their oily, black faces glistening in the sunlight, and seeming blacker by contrast with the snowy cotton fields, I am not sure that they are thus blest because of radical legislation.”⁷⁵

Unmentioned in this picture was the way Reconstruction had brought James Alcorn and his employees into the same political party, and then put them at odds over what that would actually mean in terms of local power. In 1865, Alcorn had seen the inevitability of Black suffrage and the necessity of interracial “friendship.”⁷⁶ Two years later, he wrote a pamphlet encouraging white Mississippians to not only accept Congressional terms, but also join African Americans in the Republican Party. He said he would sit with African Americans, discuss politics with them, vote with them, and share with them a common political platform that guaranteed their rights and safety. His goal, however, was a conservative one. He wanted to check the revolution of Reconstruction like he would a runaway horse, that is, by running with it for a distance.⁷⁷ Alcorn believed that Republican Reconstruction could still be managed by whites if they joined the party in power.⁷⁸

Alcorn’s views were not shared by most white Mississippians at the time, and they probably never were. Still, on March 10, 1870, Alcorn gave his inaugural address as the first

⁷⁵ L. J. Du Pree for the New York *World*, “Senator Alcorn’s Acres,” quoted in *The Clarion-Ledger* (Jackson, Miss.), 24 May 1876 and *The Atlanta Constitution*, 13 Apr 1876.

⁷⁶ James Lusk Alcorn to Amelia Alcorn, 26 Aug 1865, J. L. Alcorn Papers, SHC.

⁷⁷ James Lusk Alcorn, *Views of the Hon. J. L. Alcorn*.

⁷⁸ James Lusk Alcorn, *Views of the Hon. J. L. Alcorn*.

governor of a Republican Mississippi. As might be expected, Alcorn's speech was a political balancing act and it reflected the practical necessity of governance. More importantly, it stated his view that Black political rights did not represent a fundamental challenge to the racial order. Though promising equality in voting, jury selection, and distribution of offices, he added that, "wealth, intelligence, social position have always, as I trust they ever shall be, great power in the state."⁷⁹ In the distribution of offices, Alcorn was more concerned with winning political capital with white southerners. Of Alcorn's 546 patronage appointments, historian Lillian Pereyra found that 247 went to Republicans and 217 to Democrats, but only a handful went to African Americans. These African Americans typically were placed on the board of county supervisors and were there outnumbered by white members. Black Mississippians attained more coveted positions like sheriff later when offices were opened to election; they owed their success to voters of their own race, not to Alcorn's careful engineering.⁸⁰

In addition to patronage, access to public accommodations and education were areas where Alcorn's attempts to "make the negro our friend" fell short of how some African Americans understood equity within friendship. Though the Republican legislature passed an antidiscrimination law for railroads, Alcorn quibbled with particular provisions, and the law was ignored in practice. As to education, Alcorn expressed a preference for racially separate public schools. A Washington, D.C. paper edited by a former slave criticized Alcorn for not allowing his children to attend school with those of Hiram Revels, a Black minister whom the Mississippi legislature had recently chosen to fill the final year of Jefferson Davis's vacated seat in the U.S. Senate. Anticipating the argument that Black people must adhere to "their white Republican

⁷⁹ *Hinds County Gazette* (Raymond, Mississippi), 16 Mar 1870.

⁸⁰ Lillian A. Pereyra, *James Lusk Alcorn: Persistent Whig* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press), 131-32.

friends” to prevent Democrats from taking the state, the author answered, “In God's name let them come, for they can do no more than poison the fountain of our political existence, and GOVERNOR ALCORN has done his best to do that.”⁸¹

Alcorn responded publicly to the editorial by denying that his policy position was motivated by prejudice. He insisted that his childhood in a slave society had actually taught him less prejudice than could be found among white northerners. He had been “nursed by a woman of color” who followed his fortunes from one state to another and “lives, to-day, in the enjoyment of an old age of ease and plenty on my plantation, under but a poor requital of the life-long devotion which has tied me to her in love as a son to a mother.” Nevertheless, Alcorn feared that mixed schools would enflame the prejudices of whites which had formerly been aroused by political equality. Alcorn counted himself among “those of us who have risen superior to the very natural repugnance that struggled against” political equality, but his conversion was recent enough that he could sympathize with “thousands of good and true men of the South who wrestle today with their own prejudices towards an acceptance of the enlightened policy of equality before the law.” As evidence that African Americans did not want mixed schools and would not force them on unwilling whites, he pointed to the fact that the legislature of Black-majority Mississippi did not insist on integration.⁸²

Despite his paeans to the interracial harmony of the Old South, Alcorn won the friendship of leading Black Mississippians like Hiram Revels. Revels appeared an ideal surrogate for Alcorn. In the Senate, he was a vocal proponent of civil rights as well as a general amnesty bill for former Confederates. After Alcorn’s tussle with the Washington press, Revels published a

⁸¹ D.C. *New Era*, 5 May 1870. The paper edited by Silas Martin, who had escape slavery before the war and became a well-known abolitionist before moving to D.C. The corresponding editor of the paper was Frederick Douglass.

⁸² Alcorn to the editor of the *New Era*, 15 May 1870, in the D.C. *New Era*, 2 Jun 1870.

statement testifying that the governor's efforts to ensure "that all persons, irrespective of race, color or former condition may prosper and do well if they desire and try to do so...have been a perfect success and have my approval and appreciation."⁸³ When Revels's term expired, Alcorn appointed him as the first president of a new university for Black Mississippians.

Nevertheless, after Alcorn left the governor's mansion to succeed Revels in the Senate, Black Mississippians shifted their support to a more progressive ally, Adelbert Ames. A Union general from Massachusetts and now Mississippi's other U.S. senator, Ames had publicly challenged Alcorn when the latter said that he had the Klan situation under control. When Ames announced that he would run for governor as the regular Republican nominee in 1873, Alcorn saw it as a personal affront, as well as a threat to his influence over Black Mississippians. In 1865, Alcorn had supported befriending the freedpeople because if white Mississippians did not do it, then northern men like Ames would, and they would turn Blacks against them. Alcorn announced that he would run against Ames, and he did so with mostly Democratic backing, even though he still claimed to be a Republican. Alcorn blamed Black disloyalty to him on Ames, who he called "an enemy to the white people of the State." In one campaign speech he alleged that Ames "cares nothing for the colored people except to use them as instruments in working the degradation of the Southern whites. His purpose is, I repeat, to antagonize the races; to exclude the Southern whites from all share in the administration of the State government."⁸⁴ Alcorn would support political equality, but not African Americans defying his friendly counsel.

The battle against Ames in some ways was a proxy for Alcorn's fight for control on his own plantation. Back in Coahoma, Alcorn's workers had voted for him in 1869, but in the

⁸³ Letter from H. R. Revels, 2 June 1870, in *The Weekly Mississippi Pilot*, 11 Jun 1870.

⁸⁴ *The Clarion-Ledger* (Jackson, Mississippi), 25 Sep 1873.

following years they also chose local officials of their own race. In 1873, while Alcorn was again campaigning for governor, African American Sheriff John Brown made speeches against him. Brown was a schoolteacher who had been educated at Oberlin College in Ohio before moving to Coahoma County. As Alcorn recalled, Brown “denounced me as a hypocrite, a cheat, a democrat, and a jackass.” More galling, Alcorn felt straightjacketed, since if he responded, “this would have rendered me liable to the charge of fighting the negroes because they refused to vote for me.” Alcorn’s only recourse was to deflect responsibility to northern carpetbaggers: “I have taken more from Brown than I have ever submitted to from any man in all my life. I well knew he was set upon me by Ames and I sought to make him Ames [sic] responsible, but he shirked the issue.” Alcorn confessed that the majority of Black employees on his plantation voted against him, though he still believed he was the truer friend to Black Mississippians and that they only rejected him due to the cunning deception of northerners.⁸⁵

The situation in Coahoma only got worse for Alcorn in the following years. In 1875, white Democrats across the state used violence to win local elections in what became known as “the Mississippi Plan.” Alcorn, who still considered himself a Republican, interpreted the violence as proof that “no state can be maintained under carpet-bag rule” and added that he could not support the state party with Ames in control.⁸⁶ In fact, he would work with Democrats to overthrow the Republican organization in his county. Two years earlier he had refused to confront Sheriff Brown, but now that he was no longer running for office, he held an opposition meeting where he accused Brown and other officers of misappropriating public funds and inciting violence. Alcorn later supported an opposition ticket led by a white northerner who had

⁸⁵ James Lusk Alcorn to P. B. M. Pinchback, 29 Oct 1875, in miscellaneous Alcorn collection, Hayes Library.

⁸⁶ James Lusk Alcorn to P. B. M. Pinchback, 29 Oct 1875, in miscellaneous Alcorn collection, Hayes Library.

supported Ames in 1873, suggesting the cause of Alcorn's ire was Black political power, not his feud with Ames. Alcorn explained later that he held this candidate in low regard, but thought he would not be as likely to incite the colored people to violence as Brown.⁸⁷

A couple days later, a local Black militia completed drills to show their determination to defend an upcoming rally for the Brown ticket. Rumors quickly circulated that the militia planned to burn Alcorn's plantation at Friar's Point. In response, Alcorn helped to raise a band of forty to fifty cavalry led by an ex-Confederate Democratic general who had supported Ames in 1873 purely as the best way to set Republicanism on a course of self-destruction. A cavalry charge disbursed the Black militia without casualties, though later the murder of a white man led to the lynching of at least one African American and two more missing.⁸⁸ Sheriff Brown fled across the Mississippi River, writing to Governor Ames, "J. L. Alcorn says that I shall not be sheriff any more." Two days later, he wrote again, "I have attempted to go home three times to settle up my business, but I have met with an armed force to take my life each time."⁸⁹ Alcorn had redeemed Coahoma County from what he saw as perversion of Republicanism and Reconstruction.

If the correspondent of the New York *World* is to be believed, things settled down on "Alcorn's Acres" by 1876. Perhaps the author of the colorful vignette had intended to convey the failure of Reconstruction's attempt to transform the South, and therefore the futility of Alcorn's part in it as well. Or perhaps he simply meant to depict the benevolence of a Mississippi plantation owner, leaving aside his Republican politics. In truth, Alcorn did not expect

⁸⁷ *Miss. 1875*, vol 1, p.26-28, 67-71; George Maynard, "The Coahoma County Riot," 14 May 1925, Rainwater Collection, MDAH.

⁸⁸ *Miss. 1875*, vol 1, p.26-28, 67-71; George Maynard, "The Coahoma County Riot," 14 May 1925, Rainwater Collection, MDAH.

⁸⁹ *Miss. 1875*, vol 2, appendix, 20.

Reconstruction to dramatically transform social relations on his plantation; he saw racial and class power as resilient enough to withstand Black political participation. Alcorn was unable to make the Republican Party respectable in Mississippi in his view, but his vision of white patronalism would live on after Redemption.

A Post-Racial Fantasy and The Facts of Reconstruction

Reconstructed rebels supported Black political rights and relied on Black votes, but ironically, they often expressed a desire to avoid the politics of race. As they put it, by bringing about a consensus on Black equality, they hoped to make Black interests politically irrelevant. With both parties in agreement on racial issues, reconstructed rebels theorized, African Americans would divide politically on economic issues and exert less influence overall. As historian Steven Hahn has argued, Black southerners often practiced the politics of racial solidarity; anti-Reconstruction whites did the same, while also employing a divide-and-conquer strategy. They regularly stoked divisions between Black and white Republicans, and even between different factions of Blacks.⁹⁰ In contrast to both groups, reconstructed rebels saw that whites would benefit if both races divided evenly between the two parties. African Americans would become a minority in each party, unable to exert influence in either, or at least not for collective racial gain. The power of white elites would remain intact.

William Rodman expressed this view explicitly. Countering Conservatives' arguments that Black suffrage would lead to "negro supremacy," he argued that if the other side would concede the right of Blacks to vote, then "the colored people will divide among the different

⁹⁰ Hahn, *A Nation Under Our Feet*, 226-230; 387. See also Eric Anderson, *Race and Politics in North Carolina, 1872-1901: The Black Second* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1981), 34-35.

parties, just as white men do, and while individually enjoying the advantage of suffrage, as a distinct political power they will cease to be either dangerous or important.”⁹¹ Rodman was honest in this belief. Privately, he predicted that African Americans would vote “in mass” for Grant in 1868, “but *after that*,” he anticipated “it will be difficult if not impossible to prevent the splitting up of the colored vote.” For this reason, he advised making up the difference by encouraging white voters, especially ex-Confederates.⁹² Rodman had made a controversial move by joining the southern Republican Party, but he did not think this institution would have a Black-majority for long.

As Rodman’s characterization of Black political power indicated, reconstructed rebels saw their own base as a potential threat to society, even as they depended on them for votes. When one Alabama judge left the Republican Party, he wrote that “stupendous evils” had come “from congregating the entire mass of negro voters into one party, constituting seven-eighths of the whole.” Denying Black agency, he blamed northern settlers who had stirred up racial hatred. “I cannot see how any tolerable solution to this negro question is to be found,” he continued, “otherwise than by distributing them, as a minority, into two parties, in both of which the white element will preponderate.”⁹³ This view was shared by Louisiana’s Republican “carpetbagger” governor who defended a Black Democrat by saying, “The more negroes becoming Democrats will bring more white men into the Republican Party and in that is the safety of the Republic and the prosperity of the people.”⁹⁴

⁹¹ William B. Rodman, *Suffrage and Eligibility to Office. Speech of William B. Rodman, Esq*, 20 Feb 1868, Rodman Papers, ECU.

⁹² Rodman to Holden, 5 May 1868, Governor’s Papers, NCAH.

⁹³ M. J. Saffold to W. J. Bibb, 12 Sep 1870 in *Selma Morning Times* (Selma, Alabama), 17 Sep 1870.

⁹⁴ Henry Clay Warmoth, *War, Politics and Reconstruction: Stormy Days in Louisiana* (New York: Macmillan, 1930), 5.

African Americans believed that political equality meant that they would be able to confront the issues that most impacted their lives, such as inequalities in public accommodations, livelihood, and legal justice. While reconstructed rebels wanted racial conflict to fade away, African Americans wanted a truly equal say over their lives and their society. When a Black spokesman criticized James Lusk Alcorn for his stance on integration, he responded, “It seems to me that some of the prominent men of your race are over-sensitive on the subject of social equality.”⁹⁵ When a New Jersey man of color wrote to Attorney General Amos Akerman complaining about the miniscule numbers of African Americans employed by the federal government, Akerman responded that this result was not because of prejudice, but rather because of the difference in education. When his correspondent tried to make Black political power felt by threatening to abandon the Republican Party, Akerman wrote back, “It would be an instance of political ingratitude which would justify all that their enemies have said against [Blacks].... I cannot believe that they are capable of such meanness!”⁹⁶

With their own power at stake, reconstructed rebels frequently saw the freedpeople’s preference for leaders from their own communities as reverse discrimination. Charles R. Thomas’s refusal to help Eli Jackson get a drink at the Raleigh National Hotel foreshadowed problems to come for the reconstructed judge. From 1871 to 1875, Thomas would represent North Carolina’s first Black-majority district.⁹⁷ Up for reelection in 1874, his constituents pressed him to take a stand in favor of a new civil rights bill that guaranteed equal treatment in public accommodations. Thomas knew that some were talking about elevating African American

⁹⁵ D.C. *New Era*, 2 Jun 1870.

⁹⁶ Amos T. Akerman to William E. Walker, 8 Sep 1871, Akerman Letterbooks, UVA.

⁹⁷ On North Carolina’s second congressional district, see Anderson, *Race and Politics in North Carolina, 1872-1901: The Black Second*.

John Hyman to replace him. Thomas reiterated his belief in equality, but at the same time told Blacks to refrain from pressing the civil rights issue or discriminating against white Republicans for office. “Whenever you raise the question of color,” Thomas fumed, “I’ll go out. I’ll repudiate [the party].”⁹⁸ Thomas blamed the problem of race on African Americans. Republicans in his own district voted to replace him with Hyman, who went on to win Thomas’s seat in Congress. When Thomas went over to the Democrats two years later, he claimed “no prejudice toward any man on account of their color, race or nativity” and reaffirmed his belief in equality before the law. However, he considered full justice to African Americans as having become embodied in constitutional amendments.⁹⁹ Though the nation at large was abandoning its commitment to racial progress, Thomas saw Reconstruction as a success. If there was still any conflict over race, he blamed it on unnecessary agitation from African Americans.

Williams C. Wickham stayed in the Republican Party long after Virginia was “redeemed” by Democrats, but when the Readjuster Party drew Black support, he accused Blacks of racializing party politics. “Whilst charging upon their opponents a desire to draw the color line,” Wickham said that Black leaders:

are actually drawing it themselves in the worst and most dangerous way by forming club of the colored people in all communities where their votes will be of possible service to them in the next elections, inducing them to come together in the dead hours of the night by the unlimited distribution of free whiskey and a regular moneyed stipend, have them addressed by incendiary speaker, who endeavor to inflame and incite them against the white people amongst whom they live, thus endangering the peace, welfare, and good feeling of the community; whilst if they had one spark of the interest which they, for selfish ends, profess to have in the colored people, or one iota of patriotism, they would labor to bring about good feeling and friendship between the two races, whose interests here are so similar and so intimately connected, and between whom it is so important that the most kindly relations should exist.

⁹⁸ *Goldsboro Messenger* (Goldsboro, North Carolina), 20 Apr 1874.

⁹⁹ *The Newbernian* (New Bern, North Carolina), 2 Sept 1876.

Though Wickham claimed that he was “recognized as a friend of the colored people,” he was fundamentally opposed to the politics of Black solidarity and their spokesmen’s attempts to push back against white supremacy. Dismissing their just concerns, he insisted that “under the laws of Virginia, as well as under the laws of the United States, the whites have no rights that are not equally possessed by the colored people.” He promised to defend their rights if they elected him to the state legislature, but warned that if they did not, “it would confirm the claims of their opponents that they are blinded by race prejudice.”¹⁰⁰

African American spokesmen advocated the interests of their communities, but they also understood the need for white support. Few African American spokespersons were more respected by white southerners—Republican and Democrat—than John Roy Lynch. A former slave from Natchez, Mississippi, he served as the speaker of the Mississippi legislature and then in the U.S. House of Representatives. In his 1913 reminiscences, *The Facts of Reconstruction*, Lynch wrote that the relations between Blacks and “the aristocrats of former days...had been friendly, cordial and amicable even during the days of slavery.” According to Lynch, this led to the accession of numerous ex-rebels to the Republican Party: “in Mississippi they were led by such men as Alcorn, in Georgia by Longstreet, in Virginia by Moseby [sic], and also had as leaders such ex-governors as Orr, of South Carolina; Brown, of Georgia, and Parsons, of Alabama.” Lynch argued that “the administration of James L. Alcorn as Governor of the State of Mississippi is one of the best with which that unfortunate State has been blessed.” As historian Justin Behrend points out, Lynch was writing in response to the arguments of racist white historians that Reconstruction had been an era of misrule. He distorted the truth to suggest a moderate Reconstruction and ignored much of his own activism for civil rights and Black self-

¹⁰⁰ *Richmond Dispatch*, 17 Aug 1883.

governance. In an era of Jim Crow, Lynch sought to build a memory of positive collaboration across the color line.¹⁰¹

Even in the 1870s, however, Lynch expressed ideas about racial politics that resonated with the assumptions of reconstructed rebels like Alcorn. In a speech on the House floor Lynch denied that the Civil Rights Bill of 1875 “would in any way affect the social status of anyone.” He pointed out that social class created distinctions between white people as well as between African Americans. In a quip that could be read both as reassurance to whites and an assertion of Black dignity, he told his white colleagues, “if at any time I should meet any one of you at a hotel and occupy a seat at the same table with you, or the same seat in a car with you, do not think that I have thereby accepted you as my social equal.” Moreover, Lynch argued that the school integration portion of the bill should be included because “the Negro question ought to be removed from the politics of the country. It has been a disturbing element in the country ever since the Declaration of Independence and it will continue to be so long as the colored man is denied any right or privilege that is enjoyed by the white man. Pass this bill as it passed the Senate, and there will be nothing more for the colored people to ask or expect in the way of civil rights.”¹⁰² Like Alcorn and other reconstructed rebels had done before, Lynch suggested that it was possible to put an end to racial issues in politics.

Lynch had risen from the Black grassroots politics of the Natchez district, and at the same time knew how to gain an advantage by speaking to white assumptions and beliefs. Lynch would continue to do the same after Redemption, engaging in “fusion politics” that brought together

¹⁰¹ Justin Behrend, “Facts and Memories: John R. Lynch and the Revising of Reconstruction in the Era of Jim Crow,” *The Journal of African American History* 97, no. 4 (Fall 2012).

¹⁰² *Congressional Record*, 43rd Cong., 2nd Sess., 945.

African Americans with Democrats like L.Q. C. Lamar. Reconstructed rebels, for their part, came to believe that they had fulfilled their duty to African Americans.

Reconstructed rebels were more genuinely supportive of Black freedom than their opponents in the Democratic Party. It is transparently clear, however, they never intended to surrender white political control; at times, they even thought they might increase their own power by cultivating Blacks as clients and voters. They also imagined that by pursuing the course that they did, race would cease to be a source of political contention, and whites would remain the top rail. Three decades before Black disfranchisement, they concluded that joining the Republican Party would, in the words of James Longstreet, allow southerners to make Reconstruction “white instead of black.”¹⁰³ Their actions failed to establish a lasting two-party system, but they help explain why disfranchisement was not whites’ immediate response after Redemption.

¹⁰³ Longstreet to T. J. Goree, 12 May 1875, Goree Papers, LSU, quoted from Thomas R. Hay and Donald B. Sanger, *James Longstreet* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1952), 376.

CHAPTER 5
REDEEMERS AS RECONSTRUCTED REBELS:
HOME RULE AND AMERICAN NATIONAL IDENTITY

Ten years after Confederate defeat, Thomas Settle, Jr. spoke at a soldiers' home in Dayton, Ohio. Far from his native North Carolina, the first-time visitor introduced himself as “a thoroughly-whipped and reconstructed rebel.” Confederate veterans, he confessed, had followed “vain gods” and could have been hanged for treason. For this reason, he continued, they owed a greater obligation to protect their common country in the future than did his audience, who had been faithful to the country and now received pensions for it.¹ His message hit the increasingly fashionable theme of North-South reconciliation, but his penitent attitude was unfashionable by 1875. Other ex-Confederates combined reconciliationist rhetoric with bitterness about the northeastern bent of Republican economic policy, or they equated the morality of the Union and Confederate cause. Settle spoke of white southerners more as loyal subjects than as equal citizens. Not only did Southern Democrats condemn Settle's words—northern newspapers now considered such submissiveness unnecessary and unmanly.²

Campaigning for governor of North Carolina a year later, Settle attacked the central tenets of pro-Confederate remembrance and defended the state's Reconstruction constitution. Settle's Democratic opponent, Zebulon Vance, had been the state's Confederate governor. In 1876, Vance still characterized the postwar amendments to the federal constitution, the

¹ *New York Times*, 18 Sep 1875.

² For criticism of Settle, see *The Charlotte Observer*, 28 Sep 1875. For northern reaction to a similar statement by David Key, who is examined later in this chapter, see the *New York Daily Herald*, 23 Aug 1877.

Reconstruction Acts, and the 1868 state constitution as fraudulent. Vance triumphed over Settle and Democrats subsequently amended the state constitution, making it harder to vote and giving the legislature control of county and township governments.³ Other historians have portrayed this event as the defeat of reconstructed southern identity by its unreconstructed alternative. Were Settle and other reconstructed rebels forgotten prophets of modernization and racial progress? Their words and actions suggest otherwise. Reconstructed rebels were important partners in abandoning Reconstruction.

According to the usual narrative, “Reconstruction” ended in southern “home rule.” The transition is called “Redemption” and its agents were “Redeemers.” More specifically, Redemption can mean either the moment Democrats won a legislative majority in a particular state between 1870 and 1876, the subsequent revision of state constitutions, or President Hayes’s southern policy of non-intervention starting in 1877. Historians have rightly reversed the moral implications of the term “Redemption,” pointing out that white Democrats won by fraud and violence. Home rule, historians have also made clear, meant not just a return of state sovereignty, but also white supremacy and elite rule. White southern elites were the ones who would rule at home. Another group of scholars have added to our understanding of Redemption by pointing out the role that white northerners played. Increasingly over the 1870s, white northerners sympathized with white southern property holders over propertyless African Americans, and few northern voters wanted to see the U.S. military permanently intervening in the South.⁴

³ Jeffrey J. Crow, “Thomas Settle Jr., Reconstruction, and the Memory of the Civil War,” *The Journal of Southern History* 62, no. 4 (Nov 1996), 717-722.

⁴ On Southern Redemption and “home rule,” see Michael Perman, *The Road to Redemption: Southern Politics, 1869-1879* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 80; Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America’s Unfinished Revolution: 1863-1877* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), xvii-xviii; Scott Reynolds Nelson, *Iron Confederacies: Southern Railways, Klan Violence, and Reconstruction* (University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 163-178; Deborah Beckel, *Radical Reform: Interracial Politics in Post-Emancipation North Carolina* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2011), 54-55; Emberton, *Beyond Redemption* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 3-10. On the North’s retreat from Reconstruction, see William Gillette, *Retreat from*

While historians have correctly emphasized the racial dynamics of “home rule” and the complicity of white northerners, the prevailing view misses three crucial elements, all tied to the national conversation about what it meant for white southerners to be “reconstructed.” First, at the same time that white southerners used violence to overthrow Republican state governments, Democratic leaders redefined themselves to northern audiences, arguing that they were fully reconstructed, fully American. They claimed they were rooting out corruption from their states and insisted they should rule those states themselves. Some like Zebulon Vance still criticized the Reconstruction Amendments notwithstanding, but other Redeemers publicly accepted them as legitimate. Second, Northern Republicans, for a variety of reasons, accepted the sincerity of the Redeemers and removed the Fourteenth Amendment officeholding disqualification from all but a few hundred ex-Confederates. Third, reconstructed rebels—that is, ex-Confederates in the Republican Party—echoed the Redeemers’ claims about misrule and helped to rehabilitate the image of native white elites against that of northern “carpetbaggers” and southern Blacks. Taken together, Redeemers, northerners, and reconstructed rebels created a nation-state in which southern home rule did not look like an anomaly or a defeat.

Most reconstructed rebels came to embrace Redemption and home rule. True, Thomas Settle and other Republicans continued to run against Democrats, but they simultaneously adopted their opponents’ criticism of Reconstruction. Rufus Barringer, North Carolina’s Republican candidate for lieutenant governor in 1880, was representative of this pattern. Barringer, a former general in Lee’s army, inveighed against Democrats for undemocratic practices, but also admitted that he was glad President Hayes removed federal troops from the

Reconstruction, 1869-1879 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979); Richard Abbott, *The Republican party and the South, 1855-1877* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986); and Heather Cox Richardson, *The Death of Reconstruction: Race, Labor, and Politics in the Post-Civil War North, 1865-1901* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001).

South. He criticized the Redeemer legislature for taking away county and township self-government, but he also shared his opponents' core assumptions about the proper racial order.⁵ At the state constitutional convention of 1875, he opposed integrated schools and interracial marriage. "I frankly admit the abuse of power by the negro governments South," Barringer told the press. "I go further and declare that it is a fearful blunder, not to say crime, for these people and their ignorant allies to assume to rule and govern." He blamed this result on the intolerance of Democrats, not on Black themselves, but still concluded that if white North Carolinians would "deal with [Black men] as any other voter," then "'negro power' is at an end."⁶

Despite Barringer's criticism of Redeemer Democrats, the latter at times reached out to African American leaders and won a substantial share of Black votes in the 1880s.⁷ Though Redeemers worked to keep the South solidly Democrat by reducing Black political participation, they had come to agree with reconstructed rebels that Black suffrage was not a fundamental threat to white supremacy. Some reconstructed rebels even joined the Democratic Party, as Barringer would do in 1888.⁸ Looking back, they prided themselves that they had helped create a consensus based on accommodation to the North in exchange for home rule.

More so than Redemption, Black disfranchisement at the turn of the century was a strong repudiation of the political views most associated with being "reconstructed" in the 1860s. The remaining reconstructed rebels, however, did not always see the contradiction. In the 1870s and 1880s, the Supreme Court issued conservative interpretations of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth

⁵ *Greensboro North State*, 12 Aug 1880.

⁶ Rufus Barringer to the editors, 29 Oct 1875 in *The Daily Journal* (Wilmington, NC), 6 Nov 1875.

⁷ J. Morgan Kousser, *The Shaping Southern Politics: Suffrage Restriction and the Establishment of the One-Party South, 1880-1910* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), 15, 28.

⁸ On Barringer, see Sheridan R. Barringer, *Fighting for General Lee: General Rufus Barringer and the North Carolina Cavalry Brigade* (El Dorado Hills, CA: Savas Beatie, 2016).

Amendments, undercutting federal protection for Black civil rights.⁹ Simultaneously, northern states circumscribed voting rights based on residence and literacy, factors that were ostensibly non-racial, but in fact discriminated against the poor and racial minorities.¹⁰ From this vantage point, reconstructed rebels who lived to the end of the century hardly saw the gap between Reconstruction nationalism and Jim Crow America. It was ironic. Reconstructed rebels became complicit in the late nineteenth century's tragic outcome.

General Amnesty

In 1868, Congressional Republicans had settled on a policy of offering relief from the Fourteenth Amendment's officeholding ban to individual Confederates who were known supporters of Reconstruction. The policy was made possible by the party's supermajority in the 40th and 41st Congress. Public opinion in the North, however, quickly turned against the policy, which newspaper editors argued was too partisan. Democrats also prepared to make universal amnesty a campaign issue in 1872. When the 42nd Congress met in the spring of 1871, Republicans no longer had a supermajority, and it appeared politically expedient to undercut Democrats by offering amnesty to most former Confederates affected by the officeholding ban.

Republicans naturally denied that they were acting out of expediency, and their defense of a general amnesty bill is revealing of the shifting conversation about reconstructing individuals. First, they argued that the ban was not reaching the perpetrators of Klan violence, and that it might even be fueling it. Second, they adopted the Democrats' view that the ban

⁹ Richardson, *Death of Reconstruction*, 135, 150; Alexander Keyssar, *The Right to Vote: The Contested History of Democracy in the United States* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 107; Michael Perman, *Struggle for Mastery: Disfranchisement in the South, 1888-1908* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 123.

¹⁰ Keyssar, *The Right to Vote*, chapter five.

robbed the South of its most capable leaders. These arguments dovetailed with the Democratic refrain that Reconstruction was discriminatory against whites and that equality before the law required lifting the officeholding restriction. The Amnesty Act of 1872 removed disabilities from all but a few hundred ex-Confederates who held high political office or military commissions before the war. Passed with bipartisan support, it reflected not only a concession to expediency, but a consensus that the reconstruction of individuals was complete.

In the debates on the general amnesty bill, Democrats simultaneously criticized Congressional Reconstruction and argued that amnesty would make equality before the law complete. In the congressional hearings on Klan violence, Representative Frank Blair of Missouri continually sought to show that the disturbances were not racially motivated and that white unrest was caused by the officeholding ban. Speaking in favor of the general amnesty bill, he again accused Black southerners of seeking “to degrade and humiliate the white people of this country.”¹¹ James Beck of Kentucky revived the charge that Republicans were “peddling out” amnesty for party purposes. Beck argued, “we ought to put all men, white as well as black, upon terms of equality before the law.” If some adult white men could not hold office, he reasoned, they were not equal to the African Americans. Implicitly reminding his colleagues that Republican Reconstruction policy had been about both reforming whites and transforming institutions, he contended, “if this bill passes, then the work of reconstruction of individuals as well as States is at an end.”¹²

Congressional Republicans joined in the chorus that their own policy had become unworkable. Nevada Senator William Stewart reflected that such “special legislation” had led to

¹¹ *Congressional Globe*, 42nd Cong., 1st Sess., 103.

¹² *Congressional Globe*, 42nd Cong., 1st Sess., 62.

“embarrassment” because the beneficiaries of amnesty sometimes told their constituents that they had not asked for relief. Stewart considered it “impossible for Congress to investigate and pass upon the cases of individuals with any degree of fairness and impartiality.”¹³ Reconstructed rebels frequently benefited from selective amnesty, both through their own relief and through the exclusion of their rivals; however, they also frequently supported general or universal amnesty to conciliate white constituents. The waters became quite muddy when the political value of exclusion conflicted with the political value of amnesty. Illinois’s John Logan criticized Southern Republicans for first advocating universal amnesty and then delaying the bill when it looked like it would allow Zebulon Vance to be elevated to the Senate. Logan pointed out that some of the Senate’s current members—such as Alcorn of Mississippi—had done no less than Vance to support the Confederacy, and President Grant had brought an ex-Confederate—Amos Akerman—into his cabinet.¹⁴ Ironically, in a previous Congress, Logan had opposed even minimal selective amnesty because he did not believe rebel converts were sincere; now he suggested that if such men were amnestied, relief should not be withheld from ex-Confederates who remained with the Democratic Party.

Another group of Republicans argued that, though former rebels might not be deserving of magnanimity, general amnesty would pacify them. Congressman John Farnsworth, an architect of the earlier policy, argued that disqualification from office had not reduced violence in the South. The Klan was the problem, he said, and the officeholding ban did not target nightriders. Instead, it created strife. Farnsworth pointed out that those who had only reluctantly gone into the Confederacy could not hold office, while their former slaves could.¹⁵ Luke Poland

¹³ *Congressional Globe*, 42nd Cong., 2nd Sess., 240.

¹⁴ *Congressional Globe*, 42nd Cong., 2nd Sess., 281.

¹⁵ *Congressional Globe*, 42nd Cong., 1st Sess., 62-63.

struck the same chord, claiming that proscription made the banned into martyrs. It was not a matter of whether these men deserved amnesty, but a matter of fostering tranquility.¹⁶

Robert Elliott, a Black congressman from South Carolina, responded to Farnsworth's assertion that the ban targeted the wrong people. If the elites banned by the Fourteenth Amendment were not actually those doing the nightriding, Elliott said, they nevertheless encouraged and financed it.¹⁷ Other Republicans insisted that former rebels needed to prove they were reconstructed. According to Massachusetts Senator George Hoar's reading of the Fourteenth Amendment, banned individuals could not hold political office until it was proven that they had changed their minds.¹⁸ Tennessee Unionist Horace Maynard agreed that the Republican Party's embrace of amnesty had as its condition that the proscribed first become law-abiding.¹⁹ James Nye of Nevada joined Charles Sumner in arguing that the amnesty bill should be linked to a supplemental bill for Black civil rights. Only by accepting the latter, he argued, could rebels show they were "in earnest about this thing."²⁰ This was the old gospel of James Garfield, that faith must be accompanied by works. Now, however, more Republicans were implying that amnesty should be freely distributed as an act of grace and that this peace offering would win former rebels to its side.

The other common argument by Republicans revealed the extent to which they had come to see white proscription as illegitimate. As Pennsylvania Senator John Scott put it, local and state governments in the South lacked both "character" and "capacity." Scott alleged that

¹⁶ *Congressional Globe*, 42nd Cong., 1st Sess., 104-105.

¹⁷ *Congressional Globe*, 42nd Cong., 1st Sess., 103.

¹⁸ *Congressional Globe*, 42nd Cong., 2nd Sess., 105.

¹⁹ *Congressional Globe*, 42nd Cong., 1st Sess., 103.

²⁰ *Congressional Globe*, 42nd Cong., 2nd Sess., 495.

disorder in the South was due to the disqualification of good men and the election of bad men. “I am satisfied,” he concluded, “that the character of many of the local administrations in the South can be very much improved by removing these disabilities.”²¹ White southerners in Congress, eager to win over more of their own race with conciliation, agreed with Scott. South Carolina’s northern-born Republican Senator Frederick Sawyer claimed that it was because a “large number of men in the southern States were shut out from the possibility of holding State and Federal offices that we have had so many abuses in the local government of those States.” Lack of proper leadership had made his state’s government “a disgrace to civilization.”²² Louisiana Senator William Kellogg, also of northern extraction, thought that amnesty would undercut the argument of hostile southern whites that they were taxed unjustly and their money put in the hands of “adventurers,” a label typically applied to men like himself.²³

Ironically, southern Republicans helped to create the perception of misrule and illegitimacy in the South. By repudiating the wisdom of the officeholding ban, they implied that native white elites were the South’s natural leaders and that their own hold on power—even if they too were native southerners—was based on the rigging of institutions. Northern journalists who traveled in the South during the 1870 popularized this view of Reconstruction in accounts like James Pike’s *The Prostrate State*. That Southern Republicans echoed these charges could have only confirmed to readers the veracity of travelogues.

²¹ *Congressional Globe*, 42nd Cong., 2nd Sess., 247.

²² *Congressional Globe*, 42nd Cong., 2nd Sess., 273.

²³ *Congressional Globe*, 42nd Cong., 2nd Sess., 279.

L.Q.C. Lamar: Teaching the North a Lesson in Reconstruction

It would be misleading to conclude that white northerners gave up on changing the South altogether. Rather, they began to see Southern Democrats as reconstructed. This growing perception had as much to do with the limited expectations of white northerners as Southern Democrats' efforts to craft a new image and then successfully sell it to the North. During Presidential Reconstruction, southern Democrats had argued that they accepted Confederate defeat and the end of slavery, and therefore they should be restored to full citizenship. Congressional Reconstruction changed the meaning of American citizenship, both by defining it on the nonracial basis of birth on U.S. soil and limiting the officeholding privileges of former rebels. Southern Democrats sought to "redeem" their states from the government that resulted, but by the 1870s, they simultaneously argued that they were reconstructed American citizens. Contradicting numerous reports of white violence, they argued that white southerners had changed and Democratic elites could be trusted to rule their states.

In 1874, Lucius Quintus Cincinnatus Lamar, a Democratic congressman from Mississippi, used a eulogy of the recently deceased Charles Sumner to present himself as the latest embodiment of reconstructed citizenship. "Strange as, in looking back upon the past, the assertion may seem," Lamar announced, Mississippi regretted the death of Charles Sumner "and sincerely unites in paying honors to his memory." After some back-handed compliments about Sumner's "high moral qualities," Lamar built a defense of sectional reconciliation based on recognition of sincerity and bravery on both sides. The Mississippi Senator made Sumner a symbol of reconciliation, arguing that despite the latter's egalitarian views, he held "no enduring personal animosity" toward white southerners. Lamar urged that northerners and southerners should join hands over the body of Sumner and confess that "on both sides we most earnestly

desire to be one...not merely in community of language and literature and traditions and country; but more, and better than all that, one also in feeling and in heart.” Lamar closed his eulogy by ventriloquizing for Sumner, imagining if that if the dead man could speak he would say, “My countrymen! Know one another, and you will *love* one another.”²⁴

As much as Lamar ascribed symbolic meaning to Sumner’s body, Lamar became a symbol himself, one of a reconstructed South. One Republican newspaper in the North called Lamar’s speech “the most significant and hopeful utterance that has been heard from the South since the war.” Another northern newspaper called it “evidence of the real restoration of the Union in the South.” A third wrote that Lamar “teaches us all a lesson in reconstruction,” that reconstruction should have been managed “by and through the ruling class in that section: the men of intelligence and character.” Lamar proved that “even Sumner was not wise in time.” As this last comment suggests, there was a contradiction between Lamar’s portrayal of Sumner as a conciliator and his self-presentation as a reconstructed rebel. If men like Lamar were the proper rulers of the South, Sumner had been wrong to exclude them from office, and he had been doubly wrong to link general amnesty with his supplemental civil rights bill.²⁵

Lamar drew mixed praise and condemnation from southern newspapers. Though several prominent ones congratulated Lamar, others saw a sacrifice of principle and honor. Some even classed him with James Longstreet, the Republican Party’s first symbol of reconstructed southern identity. Even more revealing, though, are the attempts of his supporters to refute the comparison. One Mississippi editor insisted, “There is not a single attribute in the nature of the Godhead that can take sides with Longstreet in his treason to the South, while everyone will

²⁴ Edward Mayes, *Lucius Q.C. Lamar: His Life, Times, and Speeches, 1825-1893* (Nashville: Pub. House of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1895), 184-187.

²⁵ Mayes, *Lucius Q. C. Lamar*, 189.

sustain Col. Lamar in his noble and manly eulogy of Charles Sumner.” Lamar himself lamented criticism from the southern press, but took consolation that his speech had won many northerners to the side of southern home rule.²⁶

Less than two months later, Lamar gave a floor speech in which he affirmed the completeness of Reconstruction. Defying the stories of racial terrorism in the South, he asserted that white southerners, “regard the new amendments to the constitution which secure to the black race freedom, citizenship, and suffrage, to be not less sacred and inviolable than the original charter as it came from the hands of the fathers.” Reconstruction was a success: “your policy of securing the results of the war, has reached its consummation,” Lamar told Republicans. According to this new paragon of reconstructed southern identity, Black southerners were free from even “the slightest restraints from the whites,” “equality before the law is without an exception,” and to go further would be to make Blacks “a privileged race.”²⁷

At the same time, Lamar pled the cause of white elites. “Is no regard to be had for the white population in these Southern States...?” he asked. It was they, he said, “in whose veins runs the blood of the races that uphold the Christianity and civilization of the world” and who alone represented “the intellectual culture, the moral strength, the material interests, the skilled labor, the useful capital of that entire section, as well as its political experience.” Military rule, according to Lamar, put into control incompetent Blacks and strangers in whom the white people had no confidence. These men received money from taxpayers who were inadequately represented. Moreover, the so-called civil governments in the South were in reality military

²⁶ *The American Citizen* (Canton, Miss.), 16 May 1874; Mayes, *Lucius Q. C. Lamar*, 192.

²⁷ Mayes, *Lucius Q. C. Lamar*, 662.

because of the force that backed them up. Their only constituency, Lamar argued, was the President of the United States.²⁸

Lamar's self-presentation implied that if Democrats like him were reconstructed, there was no need to maintain a different group in power. The argument dovetailed with the Republican Party's repudiation of the officeholding ban and the increasingly popular northern view that southern state governments needed their elites back in the saddle. Even against continued reports of racial violence in the South, white northerners came to accept Lamar's professions that Reconstruction had won, southern whites were reformed, and that Black rights were secure under home rule and Democratic elites.

Rutherford B. Hayes and David M. Key: The Lecturer and His Illustration

Even more so than Lamar, the story of Tennessee Democrat David M. Key's rise to national prominence exemplifies the relationship between American nationalism, citizenship, and southern home rule. When Republican President Rutherford B. Hayes appointed Key as his postmaster-general in 1877, newspaper editors speculated that it was part of the "compromise" that secured Hayes's inauguration while each side disputed the electoral count. Hayes's "southern policy," which pledged not to interfere in southern state elections, was also part of the alleged compromise. Historians have since disputed whether there was in fact a compromise—Hayes had outlined his southern policy before the post-election controversy, and he had already been mulling the advantages of a Democratic cabinet member from the South. Historians have also been kinder to Hayes in their interpretation of the motive behind his southern policy. Hayes likely considered the South already lost, and therefore sought promises from the South's

²⁸ Mayes, *Lucius Q. C. Lamar*, 662-665.

Democratic governors to protect Black rights in exchange for recognizing their mandate—a very different kind of compromise, aimed at protecting African Americans in a much more constrained political environment.²⁹

What end was served by the appointment of a Democratic cabinet member? The postmaster-general oversaw the appointment of thousands of postmasters and mail carriers throughout the country, a system of political “spoils” that rewarded party members and gave them an income while they, in addition to organizing the mail, engaged in local political organizing. Post office patronage had been crucial to the organization of the Republican Party in the South, and it was even more important in helping the party survive electoral defeat in the southern states. Hayes’s choice of a Southern Democrat to head this apparatus in part reflected the movement of civil service reform, an attempt to make the national bureaucracy less partisan. However, the effect was to abandon Southern Republicanism. Key removed controversial northern-born postmasters in Lynchburg and Petersburg, as well as a female ex-spy who had been Richmond’s postmistress. One newspaper estimated that one-third of the new postmaster appointments in the South were Democrats.³⁰ The *Official Register* did not list where postal appointees were born, as it did for other federal jobs, but even the Treasury Department, which was run by Ohioan John Sherman, showed a significant shift in southern customs appointments from northern-born agents to ones native to their state or the South.³¹ Democratic control of the

²⁹ For an older view that argues there was a compromise, see C. Vann Woodward, *Reunion and Reaction: The Compromise of 1877 and the End of Reconstruction* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1951). The revisionist scholarship on Hayes’s southern policy is best exemplified by Ari Hoogenboom, *Rutherford B. Hayes: Warrior and President* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1995) and Charles W. Calhoun, *Conceiving a New Republic: The Republican Party and the Southern Question, 1869-1900* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2006).

³⁰ David Abshire, *The South Rejects a Prophet: The Life of David Key* (New York: F.A. Praeger, 1967), 173-74.

³¹ This comparison is based on a comparison of the biennial *Official Register* from 1869 and 1877, which listed the place of birth of some appointees, including customs officers; unfortunately the Register did not list this information for postmasters, but anecdotal evidence suggests that the change in that bureaucracy would have been just as drastic if not more so.

state governments in South Carolina and Louisiana may have been unavoidable by 1877, but surrendering the federal patronage seems hardly necessary.

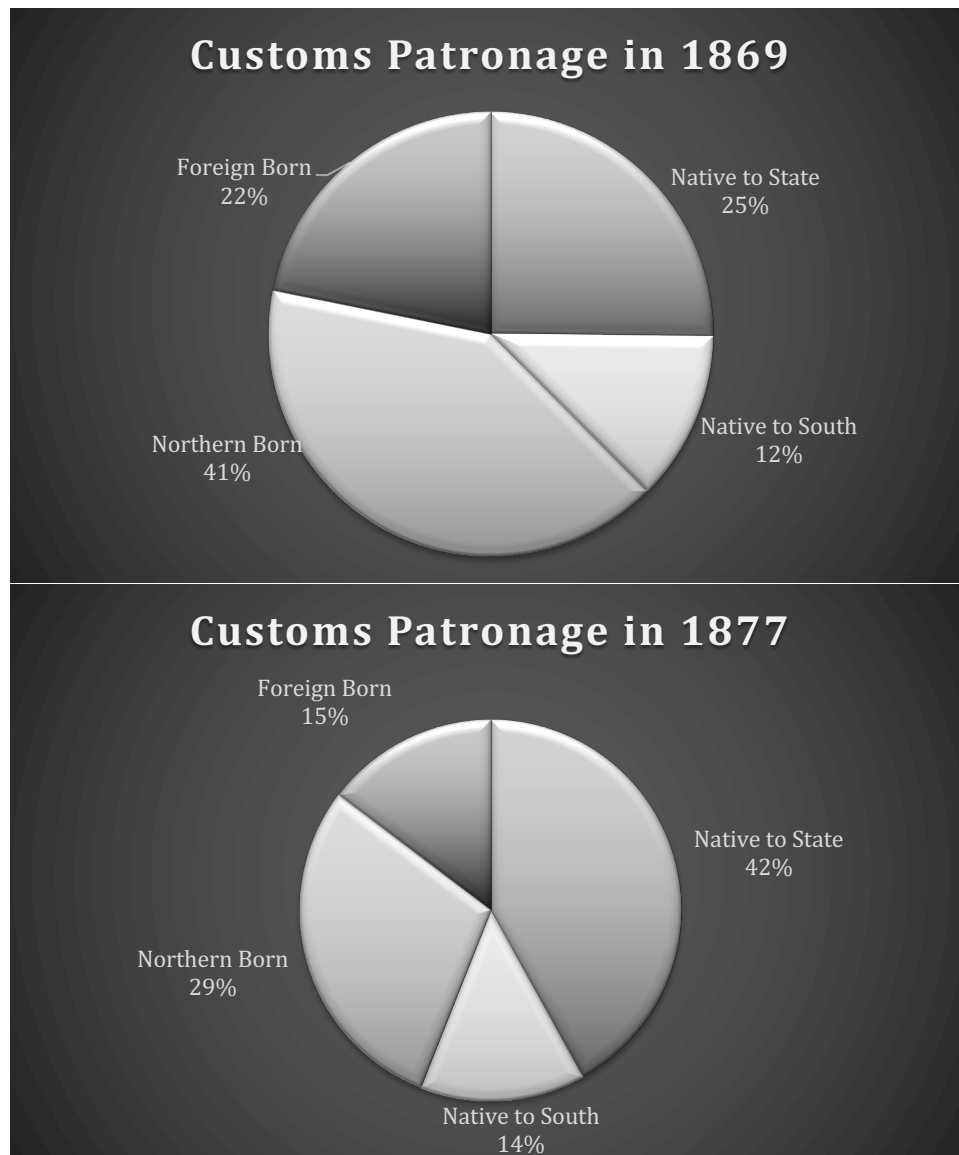


Figure 4: Customs Patronage in 1869 and 1877. Based on the *The Official Register* for 1869 and 1877.

Key functioned not only as an agent and a symbol of Southern Democratic home rule, but also for Hayes as a symbol of reconstructed American nationalism. In an article titled “The Lecturer and His Illustration,” a southern newspaper gave a sardonic description to Hayes administration’s post-election tour through the northeast: “Mr. Hayes is *exhibiting* Mr. Key in

New England. Mr. Hayes is the deviser and exponent of the Southern policy; Mr. Key is the living proof of its efficiency.”³² Key, who was an avid consumer of public opinion, meticulously cataloguing newspaper mentions in scrapbooks, was conscious of his symbolic role. The president’s embrace of Key, and Key’s embrace of the Hayes administration, illustrated the reconstruction of southern state sovereignty within the context of sectional reunion.

Key was born in 1824 in eastern Tennessee and settled in Chattanooga, where he married into a planter family, practiced law, and became active in the Democratic Party. He supported secession in 1861 and served as lieutenant colonel of the 43rd Tennessee infantry. Twice wounded, he spent the last two years of the war a refugee before returning to Chattanooga in 1866. He supported Andrew Johnson’s conservative plan for Reconstruction and in 1870 helped to “redeem” Tennessee with a new state constitution that eliminated restrictions on white suffrage. In 1872, he was defeated in a congressional race, but when ex-President and U.S. Senator Andrew Johnson died holding that latter office in 1875, the governor named Key as an interim replacement.³³

Despite this honor, Key was out of step with the dominant faction of Tennessee Democrats. His support for a return to the gold standard and opposition to repudiating Tennessee’s state debt aligned him with the Republicans nationally and New South boosters at the state level.³⁴ Moreover, after the violent redemption of Mississippi in the local elections of 1875, Key was the sole Democrat to join Republicans in voting for an investigation. Though he cast doubt on northern accusations that the election was fraudulent, he supported an inquiry to

³² *The Times Picayune* (New Orleans, La.), 24 Aug 1877.

³³ Abshire, *The South Rejects a Prophet*; *Cincinnati Commercial*, 23 Aug 1875, reprinted in *The Tiffin Tribune* (Ohio), 15 Mar 1877.

³⁴ Abshire, *The South Rejects a Prophet*, 73-74.

prove that white southerners favored law and order. In a letter to the *Memphis Avalanche*—edited by Key’s ally, ex-Confederate Colonel Andrew J. Kellar—Key wrote:

I have had my fight and want peace. I, for one, shall treat the war as over. I concede that I am whipped. I concede that the negroes are free and entitled to citizenship—that they shall not be enslaved again. That a state cannot secede I agree; and furthermore, I agree that a man may have opposed the South and yet be an honest man—misguided, if you please, but still honest. I believe that the South was right in the war, but the war decided that it was in the wrong, and I abide by the result. If the press of Tennessee can convince the North that I have misrepresented the temper and feeling of my people it will be unfortunate for that people.³⁵

The faction of Tennessee Democrats led by Isham Harris, Tennessee’s Confederate governor, thought Key had gone too far. Harris’s men prevented Key from being elected to the Senate in his own right, and even the governor repudiated his appointee. Still, Key framed himself as the representative face of the reconstructed South, and this, through the intercession of allies like Kellar, drew President Hayes’s attention in 1877.

Though Key never officially adopted the Republican label when Hayes appointed him postmaster-general, his acceptance of the offer prompted comparisons to Longstreet and other reconstructed rebels. In an article titled, “Longstreet, Mosby, Key & co,” the *Memphis Daily Appeal* classed Key with other respectable whites who had “deserted the tax-paying people and taken shelter with the thieves who were robbing and plundering them.” The “apostacy” of Longstreet, the editor said, could not be considered “patriotic” when performed by Key. “He becomes the willing instrument and agent of the most villainous band of freebooters that ever blighted a free government or stole the liberties of the people.”³⁶ Other southern commentators rejected the comparison, and at least one correspondent of Kellar’s *Memphis Avalanche* who

³⁵ *Memphis Avalanche*, 23 Apr 1876.

³⁶ *Memphis Daily Appeal*, 10 Mar 1877.

signed himself “ex-Confederate”—likely Kellar himself—turned the comparison into a defense of both men. By the late 1870s, more white southerners were beginning to credit Longstreet for racially conservative motives in joining the Republicans, and New South Democrats like the writer juxtaposed Longstreet and Key favorably to the “stay-at-home politicians” and the “Bourbon press.” The latter types criticized Confederate General Albert Sydney Johnson for retreating too much during the war; then, they attacked Longstreet for working with the north afterward; now they turned their sights on Key. These much-maligned Confederates, though, had all proven their devotion to the Confederacy, and the writer posited that other veterans agreed with him that the presence of southerners in the federal government was a sign of reconciliation.³⁷

Other New South writers saw Key as the herald of a revived federalism. When Key made the first of two trips through the South in 1877, this one with a Postal Commission, railroad president and banker Rufus McAden addressed the group in Charlotte, North Carolina. After cheering the end of sectionalism and crediting business as the “great liberalizer,” McAden called Key’s visit “auspicious” because “for the first time in sixteen years all the States are recognized as co-equal and co-ordinate branches of the government.” McAden was ebullient that “the attention of the government is turned to our section,” an attention which, of course, would not mean military interference, but “practical benefits, fast mail facilities, to quicken our commercial blood and by the aid of electricity and steam to annihilate time and distance, and to place us on the great highway of commercial prosperity.”³⁸

³⁷ *Memphis Avalanche*, 16 Sep 1877.

³⁸ *The Charlotte Observer*, 27 May 1877.

David Key's presence became even more freighted with symbolic meaning later that same year when he traveled with the president, first through the Northeast, and then in the South. In New England, Hayes presented Key as a model of a reconstructed rebel. Introducing the Tennessee Democrat to an audience in Bennington, Vermont, Hayes made Key into the illustration of his southern policy. In Louisville, Nashville, Chattanooga, and Atlanta, Hayes shared the stage with Key as well as South Carolina's Redeemer Governor Wade Hampton. Together, the three argued for the compatibility of American nationalism, legal equality, and state sovereignty.

The politics of being "reconstructed" proved difficult to navigate. Southern newspapers expressed indignation when they received reports of the northeastern tour. The New Orleans *Times-Picayune* gave a fanciful paraphrase of how Hayes introduced Key:

See this man! A few years ago he was clad in gray, and with the leagued cohorts of treason he made war against the integrity of the Union and fought against the old flag. ... Defeat could not conquer his obstinate disloyalty. He remained a Democrat after the war. ... He voted for Seymour, Greeley, and Tilden. He voted against me. For all that we know to the contrary he still believes that I was fairly defeated at the polls, and that my inauguration was the consummation of the most gigantic fraud on record. Yet, there he sits, perfectly harmless. ... That is what I have accomplished. I did it with my little policy.³⁹

Hayes and Key likely did direct a little humor at each other while presenting their unlikely alliance, but the *Times-Picayune* embellished their words to suggest that the South was being humiliated. White southerners wanted to see men of each section in a position of equality.

Key's words provoked even more outrage. In his speech at Bennington, the Tennessean referred to white southerners as his "erring brethren."⁴⁰ Even the leading journal of New South views, the *Atlanta Constitution*, called Key's actions "boot licking" and "eating dirt." Some

³⁹ *The Times Picayune* (New Orleans, La.), 24 Aug 1877.

⁴⁰ *Atlanta Constitution*, 24 Aug 1877.

northern papers also thought Key had gone too far; one, defending Republican magnanimity, wrote, “Neither Mr. Hayes nor the Northern members of his Cabinet ask the South to renounce its manhood and exhibit itself on the stool of repentance. A frank and sincere acceptance of the political results of the war is all that is expected.”⁴¹ *The Southern Home*, a Charlotte paper, went farther: “Post Master General Key, is such an ass! ...Won't somebody please kill him!”⁴² Key said he meant the phrase humorously, and a few southern papers came to his defense. Another Charlotte paper pointed out that many North Carolinians shared Key’s belief that southern leaders erred by seceding. The reconciliationist Louisville *Courier-Journal* called Key’s revilers “the worst enemies of the South” and shot back that “but for their jabbering we should have had peace four years sooner.”⁴³

During the president’s southern tour, Hayes and Key had another chance to define the relationship between the South and the nation-state. Hayes set the tone by interpreting the views of his white southern audience. Speaking from the train in Bowling Green, he said that though his audience might disagree with him on some points, he considered their attendance proof that they agreed the Union was perpetual, that the Constitution applied to everyone, that all parts of the country were equal, and that Americans had a duty to regard people of all classes and races the same.⁴⁴ In Nashville, Key likewise saw meaning to the crowd’s enthusiasm, reflecting that it “indicates that you feel that the people of Tennessee, just as the citizens of all the other States, are to control in their own way, under the Constitution of the United States with all its

⁴¹ *New York Daily Herald*, 23 Aug 1877.

⁴² *The Southern Home* (Charlotte) 20 Aug 1877.

⁴³ *Charlotte Democrat*, 31 Aug 1877; *Courier-Journal* (Louisville), 28 Aug 1877.

⁴⁴ *Chicago Tribune*, 20 Sep 1877.

amendments, your own affairs; that all your citizens are equal before the law.”⁴⁵ Wade Hampton said he would not have given his hand in peace while South Carolina “was pinned down by bayonets,” but “when we felt that every State was equal, every man in every States was equal, white and black” and northern leaders treated ex-rebels with respect, he said, “I felt as a Southern soldier, as a Rebel if you choose, I could come back.”⁴⁶ Hayes and his team declared that the mission was accomplished; they took the white South at its word that it was reconstructed and rejoiced that the states were now equal members of the nation.

By the time they reached Atlanta, state sovereignty had never seemed so complete, natural, and even harmless. Hayes explained his southern policy to Black listeners, telling them, “I believed your rights and interest would be safe if this great mass of intelligent white men were let alone by the General Government.”⁴⁷ Governor Alfred Colquitt, perhaps in an oblique reference to the furor raised by Key’s northern speeches, declared that his support of Hayes was rooted in “the generous confidence that you believe what we say, and your magnanimous trust will not exact cringing and servile guarantees.”⁴⁸ At a later banquet, Hayes and Key broke bread with Governor Colquitt, Joseph Brown, Benjamin Hill, Henry Grady and other elite proponents of the New South and the Lost Cause. Brown had declared himself a “reconstructed rebel” at the 1868 Republican National Convention but had since returned to the Democratic Party, and here he echoed Hayes’s view that local white southerners would do a better job taking care of Blacks than the federal government. Though, he qualified, “We do not make them our social equals. You would not do so yourself. God didn't intend it, probably, but as legal and political equals we

⁴⁵ *Chicago Tribune*, 20 Sep 1877.

⁴⁶ *Chicago Tribune*, 21 Sep 1877.

⁴⁷ *Chicago Tribune*, 23 Sep 1877.

⁴⁸ *Chicago Tribune* 23 Sep 1877.

intend that they shall be protected.”⁴⁹ Benjamin Hill, who had denounced both the Reconstruction Act and Joe Brown in 1868, had in short time embraced accommodation and obtained a reputation as a reconstructed southerner and spokesman of the New South. Hill told the presidential guest and fellow diners that both sections had learned a lesson from the disputed election of 1876. Southerners, who had been taught to fear the Republican Party as one of centralization, saw in the report of the eight Republicans on the commission that resolved the election “the strongest declarations of state sovereignty that have ever been made in our history.” Northerners, for their part, had been taught to fear that if former rebels got into power they would create another civil war, but in the 1876 electoral crisis, they said no to war.⁵⁰ Henry Grady, the New South editor of the *Atlanta Constitution*, also spoke at the Atlanta gathering, and a letter was read from another reconstructed rebel who rejoiced that Hayes “has inaugurated municipal [and] state sovereignty upon every portion of this continent.”⁵¹

David Key also used the tour to walk back his “erring brethren” comment. He “had no repentance or confession to make” for his service as a Confederate soldier, though he “would say frankly that we made a very great mistake—committed a very serious error.”⁵² American nationalism seemed to require a measure of regret for the war and its consequences, as well as rejoicing over reunion, but it also carried an assertion of white manhood, sectional equality, and state sovereignty. Following similar remarks in Lynchburg, Key alluded to a recent massacre of Mississippi Republicans, including African Americans as well as ex-Confederate sheriff W. W. Chisholm and his daughter. Despite the national attention it received, Key reassured white

⁴⁹ *Atlanta Constitution*, 25 Sep 1877.

⁵⁰ *Atlanta Constitution*, 26 Sep 1877.

⁵¹ *Atlanta Constitution*, 25 Sep 1877.

⁵² *Chicago Tribune*, 21 Sep 1877.

listeners that he considered it only a local disturbance, an anomaly not representative of southern loyalty to the United States.⁵³

Key's self-presentation as the embodiment of reconstructed southern identity suggested several lessons about American national identity. First, Confederates did not have to apologize for being rebels, but they did have to acknowledge equality before the law. Second, "equality before the law" was no longer a principle claimed exclusively by the Republican Party. In other words, national identity had become independent of partisan ideology. Third, though reconstructed rebels sung the praises of nationality, they were proud participants in the government because of a different kind of equality—the equality between states and their sovereignty over internal matters within constitutional bounds. The concept of Reconstruction had always implied that southern states would eventually be able to regulate their own populations like the northern states did. Key's recognition as a cabinet member implied that the time had come.

Solid South and Solid North

To a Republican faction that opposed Hayes's southern policy—men known as "Stalwarts"—the 1878 election proved the policy's failure. For the first time since before the Civil War, the Democrats gained control of the Senate, and they retained a majority in the House as well. Only three Republicans were elected from former Confederate states. Even more damning, 83% of the southern representatives had served the Confederacy in either a military or official capacity. In the run-up to the 1880 election, Republican pamphlets denounced the new "Confederate Senate and House of Representatives" as an oligarchic force that threatened the

⁵³ *Chicago Tribune* 26 Sep 1877.

nation as much as the old slave power. Because Southern Democrats used violence, intimidation, and fraud to reduce Black turnout, the region had a representation in Congress disproportionate to the actual number of voters. Republican Stalwarts worried that Democrats would use this power to pay Confederate pensions and reverse the northeastern orientation of the political economy.⁵⁴

Earlier attempts to reconstruct the South undermined the force of these arguments. The problem was not merely Hayes's policy of conciliation. Reconstruction had restored the southern states to equal membership in the nation and ex-Confederates to equal citizenship. The Grant administration had rewarded ex-Confederates with prime patronage spots when they held the right political views. Indiana's Democratic Senator Daniel W. Voorhees reminded Republican Stalwarts of this when he jeered that, by voting Republican, the former attorney general Amos Akerman had "washed away all his sins, and made him clean and pure in their eyes." Akerman and David Key had both been confirmed by the Senate to cabinet positions. John S. Mosby of Virginia, Thomas Settle of North Carolina, and James L. Orr of South Carolina were given diplomatic posts. North Carolina governor William Holden, after being impeached, was appointed postmaster of Raleigh. Longstreet was surveyor of the port of New Orleans and dozens more Confederate veterans that Voorhees named had received positions in the State Department, Post Office, Treasury, and Justice Department after becoming Republican. Using the language that Republicans had used to justify such preferment, Voorhees mocked his opponents: "I have heard of the means of grace. I used when a boy to attend camp-meetings...but I have never before heard of a fountain of grace so wide, so deep, so exhaustless,

⁵⁴ Calhoun, *Conceiving a New Republic*, 156; Richard Franklin Bense, *Yankee Leviathan: The Origins of Central State Authority in America, 1859-1877* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 405-406; The Republican Congressional Committee, *The Great Usurpation. The United States Under the Confederate Senate and House of Representatives. An Oligarchy* (Washington, D.C.: Rufus Darby, 1879).

so spontaneous in its unceasing flow as that of the republican party to confederate officers if they will only vote the republican ticket!”⁵⁵

Stalwart James G. Blaine retorted that Voorhees’s list only proved that the Grant administration did not discriminate against white southerners in patronage, while its recipients were persecuted by their white neighbors.⁵⁶ However, the Stalwart rhetoric of a “Solid South” convinced white southerners, including many former Republicans, that Republicans had given up on supporting the party there. Stalwarts, they said, were abandoning the South with a determination to carry the election with a “Solid North.”⁵⁷ In fact, Stalwarts continued to support measures that would use the army to protect the integrity of local election in the South, culminating in the failed Federal Elections Bill of 1890. Such men as the bill’s author, Henry Cabot Lodge, continued to hope that the rights of Black and white Republicans in the South could be protected through military intervention. What many in the North and South perceived as renewed sectionalism was actually the legacy of Republican’s earlier nationalist vision.⁵⁸

As Voorhees’s speech indicated, Reconstruction had also yielded another legacy, that of reincorporating southern states and former Confederates into full participation in governance. The vision of a unitary nation and protecting Black rights notwithstanding, Northern Republicans as a whole were less worried about southern home rule than Democratic ascendancy in Congress and what that could mean for their own states and the Republican political economy. The drive to preserve the Republican political economy combined with Reconstruction’s legacy of restoring the political power of states and individual ex-Confederates to create a model of

⁵⁵ *Congressional Record*, 46th Cong., 1st Sess., 2119-2121.

⁵⁶ *Congressional Record*, 46th Cong., 2121.

⁵⁷ John Pool, *The Cherry Letter* (Washington, D.C.: R.G. Polkinhorn, 1880), 7.

⁵⁸ See Calhoun, *Conceiving a New Republic*, especially chapter nine.

nationhood that accepted Southern Democratic home rule, as well as state sovereignty more generally.

Reconstructed Rebels on the Failure of Reconstruction

Reconstructed rebels offered a variety of postmortems for Reconstruction. Some blamed southern violence and Northern Republicans' lack of will. For example, Attorney General Amos Akerman wrote in 1876 that Southern Democrats still aimed "to keep the Confederate cause and Confederate ideas popular" and that "most of the Southern whites have not yet been able to dismiss the ideas, the feelings, and the hatred" that grew out of slavery.⁵⁹ The following year, he criticized President Hayes's southern policy as one that pretended to end "lawlessness by letting the lawless have their own way."⁶⁰

Akerman's indictment was accurate, but most reconstructed rebels placed the responsibility elsewhere. Instead of blaming government weakness and white racism, they blamed the North for not putting the right people in control. National policy, they argued, had alienated southern white elites like themselves. By arguing that Congressional Reconstruction had placed "carpetbaggers" and former slaves in control, reconstructed rebels not only stretched the truth, they redeemed the reputation of native white elites as the South's rightful leaders.

Northern Republicans who moved to the South after the war were a frequent target of acrimony, not only from Democrats, but also from reconstructed rebels. For example, Daniel Lindsay Russell, a Republican judge from eastern North Carolina, blamed the government's preferment of "the carpet bag class" in federal officeholding for the failure of Reconstruction.

⁵⁹ Akerman to George Friedley, 22 Aug 1876, Akerman Letterbooks, UVA.

⁶⁰ Akerman to Henry Daniel Chamberlain, 16 Apr 1877, Akerman Letterbooks, UVA.

Russell believed that “reconstruction can only be maintained by enlisting the support of a respectable portion of the Southern Whites.”⁶¹ In fact, except in a few states and counties with Black majorities, white southern elites held the majority of elective offices at the state and local levels during Reconstruction. Congress’s policy of selectively lifting the officeholding ban from reconstructed rebels also exhibited a preference for natives. Malcontents like Russell were right that northern settlers tended to be overrepresented in non-elective patronage positions like the post office and customs. Russell and other reconstructed rebels felt pushed aside by strangers who they sometimes saw as colonial administrators. William Woods Holden, shortly before he was impeached by North Carolina Democrats, threw some barbs at northerners. “The South is a sort of plantation,” he wrote to his wife, Louisa. “It ruled the North forty years and now the North is ruling. That explains all.”⁶² Reconstructed rebels believed that northern-born officeholders lacked legitimacy and blamed them for the unpopularity of the Republican Party in the South.⁶³

President Hayes adopted this view himself, appointing Postmaster Key, and through him, replacing northern-born officials with native southern whites. The fact that many of the new appointees were Democrats irritated some reconstructed rebels, but the greater outcry came when the Republican Party moved away from Hayes’s southern strategy after the 1878 midterm elections. To mobilize turnout in their own states, Northern Republican leaders began to hammer

⁶¹ Daniel L. Russell to Thomas Settle, Jr., 16 Sept 1874, Thomas Settle Papers, SHC.

⁶² William W. Holden to Louisa Holden 30 Apr 1871, cited in William Gillette, *Retreat from Reconstruction, 1869-1879* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982), 183.

⁶³ For a revisionist interpretation of northern-born Republicans in the South, see Richard Current, *Those Terrible Carpetbaggers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988). A detailed analysis of the bipartisan nature of Reconstruction-era corruption can be found in the work of Mark W. Summers, especially *Railroads, Reconstruction, and the Gospel of Prosperity: Aid under the Radical Republicans, 1865-1877* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984) and *The Era of Good Stealings* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

the white South as unrepentant Confederates. Both Southern Democrats and reconstructed rebels objected to that charge and revived the argument that Reconstruction had failed because of a policy preference for northerners.⁶⁴ In the run-up to the 1880 election, a meeting of native white Republicans issued an address renouncing their party loyalty. In doing so, they gave they fullest expression to the argument that Republican policy neglected white southern elites, and as a result failed to establish sectional reconciliation and non-racialized two-party politics in the South.

Eleven white southerners signed the letter; four more subsequently wrote letters to show their agreement. Most of them were from white majority states in the Upper South—especially North Carolina and Virginia—but even those names included men like William Rodman and John Pool who hailed from heavily African American plantation counties on the coastal plain. There, reconstructed rebels often vied with northern settlers for the loyalty of African American voters. Nearly all of the signers shared the experience of electoral defeat or being passed over for patronage.⁶⁵

The address charged that the Republican Party had disfranchised southern elites and alienated others by preferring outsiders in patronage appointments. Through these northern settlers, Congress had aimed to improve race relations, subverting “ideas, habits and conditions fixed by the usage and experience of generations.” This, plus the “disfranchisement of the principal property-holders, coupled with the enfranchisement of the whole body of former slaves,” had stirred fear among whites. However, they were not as angry over the Reconstruction legislation so much as they were outraged over Reconstruction’s management. Regardless of their apprehensions about Congressional Reconstruction, they thought that it could work if

⁶⁴ Calhoun, *Conceiving a New Republic*, 155-168.

⁶⁵ *The World* [New York City], 5 Oct 1880.

properly managed. When “the persons intrusted [sic] with the execution of this new order of things” engaged in “disgraceful and reckless conduct,” though, the national administration, rather than replacing them, “continually extended to them special countenance and favor and...repressed the exertions of the more worthy and judicious supporters of reconstruction.” National leaders had driven white southerners out of the party and thus destroyed its only chance of permanent viability.⁶⁶

The bolting Southern Republicans never suggested that Democratic tactics like terrorism might have been a factor in their failure. The South was “solid” for the Democratic Party because the Republican Party had created a Solid North prejudiced against them. The Republicans, they argued, were campaigning in 1880 on “section grounds,” which “have forced us to distrust their disposition to regard the Southern people as equals in the Union, or worthy to be trusted as participants in the common government of their country.” An earlier connection between American nationalism and the Republican Party had been severed; to reconstructed rebels, the Democratic Party was no longer the party of secession.⁶⁷

Having assigned blame for the failure of Southern Republicanism, the bolters then assessed what Reconstruction had accomplished and what it had not. Implying that the disfranchisement and the officeholding ban had been the principle objection of southern whites, they claimed that general amnesty had led to “a general acquiescence in the principles involved” in Reconstruction. “The Union has been reconstructed upon the basis of freedom and political equality” for Blacks, they proclaimed, “and there is no element in the South that would attempt to have it otherwise.” However, there were other goals which could now only be achieved by

⁶⁶ *The World* [New York City], 5 Oct 1880.

⁶⁷ *The World* [New York City], 5 Oct 1880.

supporting the Democrats. Electing the Democratic presidential nominee, they said, would remove further obstacles to “the perfect establishment of reconstruction,” restore “complete reconciliation and confidence between all sections of the country and among all classes of people,” and cause southerners to “divide upon other issues, with no regard to race distinctions.” National unity, reconciliation, and the end of color-line politics—these were goals which they associated with a successful Reconstruction, but they required a party influential enough to cross the Mason-Dixon line. Republicans had failed; perhaps, they hoped, the Democrats would do better.

John Pool, formerly a Republican Senator from North Carolina and the lead signatory of the address, made many of the same arguments in a campaign document. Though he was not running for office himself, he endorsed the Democratic presidential nominee, Winfield Scott Hancock. Pool covered much of the same ground as the joint address, but this time he provided more commentary on race relations. In a complete reversal of earlier pronouncements about African Americans, he described “the colored race in the South” as “ignorant, unthrifty, docile and submissive, and altogether unfit to play the part of a governing power.” Taking up the argument of unreconstructed rebels, he implied that the Reconstruction Acts had sought to make whites inferior to Blacks. Nevertheless, he assured readers that “the Southern people feel as humanely and kindly towards the colored race among them as the Northern people possibly can.” This view—that white paternalism proved that southerners *were* reconstructed in their attitudes toward Blacks—would soon become a staple of New South ideology and sectional reconciliation.⁶⁸

⁶⁸ Pool, *The Cherry Letter*, 4. On how white southerners redefined southern identity in the 1880s through literature and other cultural outlets, see K. Stephen Prince, *Stories of the South: Race and the Reconstruction of Southern Identity, 1865-1915* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014).

African Americans were not to blame for the situation, Pool assured. Rather, he blamed northern Republicans who inflamed white prejudices “by making the negro a central object of political discord.” It was “cruelty” and a “crime” against Black people, he said, to do this to them. “Indolent and peaceful, patient and forgiving, they are unconscious of the terrible part they have been made to play in the fierce and bitter contentions of the Anglo-Saxon element around them.” Pool believed that Democratic home rule would mean the safe division of African Americans between parties and the erosion of their ability to control governance. Like his paternalist rhetoric, this prophesy foreshadowed how African Americans would eventually work sometimes with white Democrats to obtain necessary resources for their communities. Moreover, Pool’s logic led naturally to the argument of white supremacists in the 1890s that Blacks should be disfranchised altogether because it would prevent white men from using the Black vote against each other.⁶⁹

It would be easy to dismiss Pool’s bolting movement as the work of disgruntled patronage-seekers who now sought to curry favor with the other party. Certainly, given the centrality of patronage to their arguments, self-interest was a driving motivation. However, the arguments of these Republicans had greater significance. First, their work reshaping the memory of Reconstruction attests to the combability of white southern Republicanism, Democratic home rule, and New South ideology. Second, their indictment of “carpetbaggers” and Republican management of the South legitimized home rule by native white elites. Finally, their words signaled the separation of postwar American citizenship from Republican ideology. When reconstructed rebels joined the Republican Party, they considered the two inseparable. Now,

⁶⁹ Pool, *The Cherry Letter*, 4.

however, the Democratic Party was less clearly the party of disunion—if Pool and other defectors were to be believed, it might even be the more national party.⁷⁰

Well-Nigh Reconstructed

In 1879, Albion Tourgée published *A Fool's Errand*, a semi-autobiographical novel diagnosing the failure of Reconstruction. Originally from Ohio, Tourgée served the Union cause in a New York regiment before relocating to Greensboro, North Carolina. From his experiences as a Republican leader in his adopted state, Tourgée concluded that Reconstruction “was a failure so far as it attempted to unify the nation, to make one people in fact of what had been one only in name before the convulsion of civil war. It was a failure, too, so far as it attempted to fix and secure the position and rights of the colored race.” He blamed southern racism and national policy, but also indicted his own cultural arrogance. “The North and the South,” he reflected:

are simply convenient names for two distinct, hostile, and irreconcilable ideas,—two civilizations they are sometimes called, especially at the South. At the North there is somewhat more of intellectual arrogance; and we are apt to speak of the one as civilization, and of the other as a species of barbarism. . . . We tried to superimpose the civilization, the idea of the North, upon the South at a moment's warning. We presumed that, by the suppression of rebellion, the Southern white man had become identical with the Caucasian of the north in thought and sentiment; and that the slave, by emancipation, had become a saint and a Solomon at once. So we tried to build up communities there which should be identical in thought, sentiment, growth, and development, with those of the North. It was A FOOL'S ERRAND.

⁷⁰ On shifting northern interpretations of northern-born southerners and the “carpetbagger” as a symbol for a particular kind of federal intervention in the South, see K. Stephen Prince, “Legitimacy and Interventionism: Northern Republicans, the ‘Terrible Carpetbagger,’ and the Retreat from Reconstruction,” *The Journal of the Civil War Era* 2, no. 4 (Dec 2012), 538-563.

Tourgée faulted Reconstruction on strategy, but not on its mission. He had come to believe that only national support for education could, over the course of several generations, transform the South.⁷¹

Three years later, a native Southern Republican published *Monon Ou or Well-Nigh Reconstructed: A Political Novel*, in direct response to Tourgée. Its author, William S. Pearson, had been too young to serve in the Civil War, but his family was among the elite of western North Carolina. His father was a merchant and a banker who had owned 57 slaves.⁷² Despite this upbringing, when he graduated from the University of North Carolina in 1868, he gave a valedictory address that took effusive joy in Confederate defeat. “The Calhoun school of politics is dead forever,” he declared, “and happily so. Slavery and State Sovereignty have sunk together into the same grave.” Slavery was “unnatural,” “unchristianlike,” and “unprofitable.” He hoped that unlike their elders, the young men of the South would “throw [their] whole energy into the task of reconstruction,—reconstruction in our finances, in our society, in our politics.”

Pearson’s speech led to a career in Republican politics, but by the time Tourgée published his novel, he had begun to consider his early ideas naïve. After returning from a diplomatic post in Italy, Pearson lost a patronage appointment and then a race for the state senate. The first defeat he blamed on “a long sneaking Yankee from Maine.” He complained to a political ally, “I assure you for seven years I have worked up our party among the good and respectable people of the county & at every hand the wretched aliens and low lived native followers of our great party have preferred men like themselves over me for every place in the

⁷¹ Albion Winegar Tourgée, *A Fool's Errand. By One of the Fools* (New York: Fords, Howard, & Hulbert, 1879), 337, 340-341.

⁷² Paul D. Yandle, “Introduction: William S. Pearson, Mountain North Carolina, and the Solid South,” in Brinsley Matthews [pseud. for William S. Pearson], *Well-Nigh Reconstructed: A Political Novel* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2010), xvii.

gift of the government.”⁷³ Pearson remained a Republican in-name-only, repeatedly supporting Democratic candidates and at one point describing himself as “a Zeb Vance Republican.” The Redeemer governor had, in fact, financed Pearson’s novel.⁷⁴

Pearson started the book a year after Tourgée’s came out. *Monon Ou or Well-Nigh Reconstructed*—the first words being Greek for “All But”— follows the political development of a young white southerner, Archie Moran, who, like the author, rises to prominence in Republican circles because of a patriotic speech. Gratification from Republicans and vilification by Democrats sets him onto a course continually reinforced by pride. With time, the corruption of his associates and military overreach by the federal government causes him to realize his mistake. Alluding to Tourgée’s work, Pearson wrote that Archie awoke “from a long fool’s dream of Yankeeizing his country in order to prove himself a good Union man.”⁷⁵

The novel does not begin with Archie, however, but with an authorial aside about James Longstreet. The general, Pearson opined, was “the highest in rank of the Southern men who have ‘gone over’ to the Northern side since the war,” and asserted by contrast that “the South was made solid mainly by her women.” Longstreet was despised, while southern poetesses were loved and known in every household. With this comparison, Pearson implied that because women were ostensibly outside partisan politics, they had stayed true to the South. Men, by contrast, compromised their honor for office, monetary gain, or as in Archie’s case, youthful arrogance. Late in the story, the author writes that Archie had feared an attack of conscience “whenever he allowed himself to discuss politics, even casually, with a Southern woman.” To

⁷³ William S. Pearson to Thomas Settle, Jr., 5 Sep 1874, Settle Papers, SHC.

⁷⁴ Pearson quoted in Yandle, “Introduction,” lii. See also the *Charlotte Observer*, 18 Jul 1876 and the *Raleigh News and Observer*, 20 Oct 1880 for notices of Pearson’s fusion with the Democrats.

⁷⁵ Matthews, *Well-Nigh Reconstructed*, 252.

Pearson, white southern women represented the “good morals and the well-being of society,” and he offered the story of his protagonist as an answer to the question of whether southern men like Longstreet had offended against southern womanhood. They had indeed, Archie’s story suggests, but it was out of understandable male hubris, and they could redeem themselves.⁷⁶

Like other reconstructed rebels who abandoned the Republican Party, Pearson focused on the role of elites like himself in Reconstruction. In one of his many authorial assertions, Pearson wrote that “the carpet-baggers and Southern Republican” wanted “respectable men” like Archie to take control of their party in order to cover up their own crimes with a shroud of legitimacy.⁷⁷ Similarly, Pearson insisted that there was nothing African Americans “would not have done under the direction of that class—the reconstructed Republican ex-slaveholders.”⁷⁸ Pearson believed that southern birth, elite status, and whiteness combined to endow legitimacy; people like Archie were the natural leaders of their communities. Over time, though, Archie realizes that corrupt forces sought to use legitimate leaders like him as a front for their schemes.

Archie had been drawn in by “the generously expressed sympathy of entire strangers,” especially after they helped him out of legal trouble “on account of the party,” but “self-preservation” would bring him back to “his people.”⁷⁹ En route to a diplomatic post abroad—significantly, both the author and Longstreet held one—Archie ponders Reconstruction in the context of world history. Germany had taken Alsace from France in 1871, but France would never stop trying to retake it. Austria quashed the Hungarian Rebellion in 1848, but by the 1870s one of Hungary’s own was the Austrian government’s foreign minister. “There was the Scotch

⁷⁶ Matthews, *Well-Nigh Reconstructed*, 7-8, 253.

⁷⁷ Matthews, *Well-Nigh Reconstructed*, 75.

⁷⁸ Matthews, *Well-Nigh Reconstructed*, 100.

⁷⁹ Matthews, *Well-Nigh Reconstructed*, 75.

Union, it was true,” Archie muses, “and the Highlanders had been coaxed and legislated into wearing breeches; but had they yielded anything worth keeping, and had they not gained much from the richer English which they people were obliged to yield[?]” The subjugation of Poland and Ireland could never happen in America. If United States was not a similar exception, home rule in the South would be inevitable in time.⁸⁰

Pearson concludes with a political audit of Reconstruction. Forces working in favor of Reconstruction’s success included “home strength, political selfishness, rival ambitions, ante-bellum prejudices, railroad and bank interests, immigration and in some cases positive patriotism.” These, Pearson argues, could have overcome the failings of its “ignorant and timid agents,” but what really tipped the scales against Reconstruction was the meddling from Washington.⁸¹ The breaking point for Archie is when Grant allows the military to intervene in Democrats’ attempts to control the Louisiana legislature in 1875. Pearson concludes that Reconstruction might have worked if Washington had not been so heavy handed, but the Bourbon Democrat “is at last vindicated by the results.”⁸² Archie “came to think the people of his State right in certain extreme views.”⁸³ He was compelled to give up northern ideas about human equality and “fall back on *inequality*, as the rule of God speaking through nature everywhere.”⁸⁴

What was the lesson for those like Longstreet, Pearson, and the fictional Archie Moran, who had “gone over” to the northern side? White southerners universally “professed a love for

⁸⁰ Matthews, *Well-Nigh Reconstructed*, 198.

⁸¹ Matthews, *Well-Nigh Reconstructed*, 259.

⁸² Matthews, *Well-Nigh Reconstructed*, 253.

⁸³ Matthews, *Well-Nigh Reconstructed*, 101.

⁸⁴ Matthews, *Well-Nigh Reconstructed*, 103.

the Union, and was glad that the slaves were free, and had learned to respect the memory of Mr. Lincoln.” This was true patriotism according to Pearson. Those who took it to mean collaborating with northern colonizers, on the other hand, offended against good morals and civilization. In response to Tourgée, who had concluded that the South was still in a state of barbarism and needed to be reformed with programs of national education, Pearson said that the white South did not need to be educated. Embracing home rule, he concluded that white southerners were right about inequality and who should rule at home.⁸⁵

“Pig-Iron” Kelley’s Southern Tour

Perhaps no Northern Republican better exemplified the idea that Southern Democratic home rule was not a threat to the Republican political economy than William D. Kelley. In 1867, he had gone on a speaking tour of the South to drum up white support for Congressional Reconstruction. He had supported the amnesty of reconstructed rebels like Joe Brown and fervently believed that high tariffs and a growing money supply were the key to industrial development in the South. By winning the support of white southerners, he hoped he could convert southerners to the high tariff position and Northern Republicans to monetary inflation.

By 1875, Kelley’s hopes for economic development in a Republican South were still unfulfilled. In that year, he went on another tour down the eastern seaboard states and spent over a month in Florida. The trip was a personal one for leisure and health, but he could not help drawing conclusions about the impact of national policy on the South in the eight years since his last visit. On the one hand, he told reporters that monetary contraction was “rapidly driving the

⁸⁵ Matthews, *Well-Nigh Reconstructed*, 8.

South towards insolvency.”⁸⁶ On the other hand, his trip turned him against Grant’s intervention in the South and caused him to regret voting for a “force bill” that would post military troops at election sites. Kelley reported that he observed good feeling among southern whites. He told on one occasion of a Confederate memorial ceremony where the United States infantry band played, drawing from it the conclusion that he could not credit reports of violence in the cities he visited.⁸⁷ Southern boosters made sure that when northerners like Kelley toured the South they did not see evidence of Black subjugation. White southerners carefully guided their guests through the growing cities and kept them away from rural areas.⁸⁸ Nevertheless, such heavily curated impressions of the South were especially sound currency in northern industrial and financial circles. The editor of New York City’s *The Iron Age* wrote to congratulate Kelly on his views on “conditions and needs of the South, and your regrets at having voted for the force bill.”

Kelley’s observations convinced him that military intervention would not bring about the kind of New South that would reflect America’s political and economic greatness. In late 1876, Kelley wrote to President-elect Hayes, “Your policy in the South, will, I am sure, not be that of the present administration. You will not maintain a non-resident Collector of the Port at New Orleans, or a gentleman who, having gone from Maryland to Idaho, and served one term in Congress a delegate from that Territory and then visited South Carolina, in the Collectorship of Charleston.” He also identified Grant’s “most fatal blunder” as his support of the northern-born Ames over the native Alcorn in Mississippi. Still, Kelley hoped that Hayes would not favor Southern Democrats like L.Q.C. Lamar with patronage, as he had heard rumors would be the

⁸⁶ *Chicago Tribune*, 30 Apr 1875.

⁸⁷ *The Norfolk Virginian*, 1 May 1875.

⁸⁸ Prince, *Stories of the South*, 110-112, 116.

case. Hayes would disappoint Kelley on that last account—Hayes made the offer first to Lamar, then Key—but they shared a common faith in southern home rule.⁸⁹

Kelley's final tour of the South in 1886 and 1887 gave him another opportunity to contrast "The Old South and the New," as he titled a compilation of letters to the *Manufacturer's Record*. Kelley attributed southern lag in economic growth to its prewar resistance to industry, but comparing the South of 1887 to that of 1867, he concluded that the South was a new frontier. He called it "the coming El Dorado of American adventure."⁹⁰

Kelley's reflections were targeted at an audience of northern investors, but he also had clear recommendations for southerners. Comparing Anniston, Alabama and South Pittsburg, Tennessee, he called the former town "a romance of the New South," but lamented that the latter town, despite having great industrial potential, remained undeveloped. The reason, according to Kelley, was a matter of local governance. Anniston had a municipal charter that allowed its leaders to keep out whiskey and stop crime, and since obtaining this, Anniston's iron furnaces began capitalizing their property and selling stock in New York.⁹¹ In contrast, South Pittsburg lacked a municipal charter. "What is required," Kelley wrote, "is the organization of a municipal government under a charter that, in addition to authorizing a local magistracy and police, will permit the making of a loan of limited amount, and applicable exclusively to certain defined purposes." However, "in the absence of any local government, discontent prevails," and Kelley warned that "lawlessness will be provoked when hundreds of wage-earners, for whom no adequate accommodations will have been provided, shall be suddenly gathered together." In the only reference to racial violence in the letters—and this one oblique—he commented that "the

⁸⁹ William D. Kelley to Rutherford B. Hayes, 17 Dec 1876, Hayes Presidential Library, Fremont, Ohio.

⁹⁰ William D. Kelley, *The Old South and the New* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1888), 162.

⁹¹ Kelley, *The Old South and the New*, 47-65.

conditions are such as frequently invoke application of lynch law in improvised towns in the Far West.” In Kelley’s analysis, the problem of the undeveloped industrial potential was not the lack of resources; nor was it due to southern racism. Rather, he faulted the lack of schools, street lighting, water supplies, and means for extinguishing fires—in short, Kelley concluded, “the demand for local home rule is as urgent in South Pittsburg as it is in Ireland.”⁹²

The invocation of “home rule” is telling, as is the comparison to Ireland. Democrats had argued that military intervention and corrupt northern-born officeholders had prevented the southern states from creating the government institutions necessary to attract investment. Kelley did not indict northern settlers now, though he had in the earlier letter to Hayes. Nevertheless, he suggested that the South’s problems were similar to the lag of Irish development and institutions under British rule. Kelley implied that white elites could be trusted with local governance, and indeed, that this was the only way forward for a New South characterized by stability and economic growth. Rather than looking toward the national center to transform the southern periphery, he saw local initiative as the best way to create order and attract investment.

Just as was the case twenty years prior when Kelley toured the South, he could come off as preachy in his speeches. According to his account, some of the southerners he met objected to the suggestion that money could be made in any way other than growing cotton. Nevertheless, he was pleased with how he was received. In Talladega, Alabama, he spoke to an audience of “partisan Democrats.” The only Republican, according to Kelley, was the Black janitor of the building. “I never expressed myself with more freedom,” the Pennsylvanian wrote, and recalled the Republican janitor telling him afterward, that “he didn’t know whether Judge Kelley had got

⁹² Kelley, *The Old South and the New*, 85-86.

the Democrats or the Democrats had got the Judge; but there was no difference between them when he was done speaking.”⁹³

Kelley obviously included this statement because he took it as a compliment on his ability to reach across the aisle. Perhaps, though, it was actually a Black man’s indictment of Republicans for abandoning civil rights, embracing the New South, and devolving power from national to subnational sources of authority. Republicans like Kelley had once suggested that equal rights would lead to peace and prosperity. Now they held to a different formula: stability and growth came from the wise leadership of white elites in their states and local communities.

Reconstructed Rebels on the Success of Reconstruction

Reconstructed rebels often blamed northerners for the failure of Reconstruction in the late 1870s, but others—usually from a later vantage point—concluded that they had contributed something positive and lasting. Positing that the goals of Reconstruction were ratification of the constitutional amendments and the restoration of the southern states to statehood, they decided that they had achieved what they set out to do. This was substantially less than had been intended by the more progressive members of Congress in 1867. The constitutional amendments, furthermore, were frequently violated in practice. Nevertheless, Democrats’ lip service regarding the amendments’ legitimacy provided some grounds for thinking that the constitutional revolution was complete. Though historians have shown that there was plenty of violence and fraud to contradict these claims, taking them seriously can help explain how the reconstructed rebels constructed their self-delusions.

⁹³ Kelley, *The Old South and the New*, 143.

In 1895, John H. Caldwell wrote his reminiscences about Reconstruction. Caldwell had been a Methodist minister, an educator, a detective for the Justice Department, and a Republican in the Georgia legislature, but he had also fiercely criticized the administration of Governor Rufus Bullock. In his reminiscences, he argued that the collapse of Bullock's administration actually meant the triumph of Reconstruction. Bullock fled the state in 1871 to avoid impeachment by a Democratic legislature that Republicans would never control again until the twentieth century. Nevertheless, Caldwell saw in the event a consummation of Reconstruction, writing that "all that I had labored for during nearly six years of strife and turmoil was now happily achieved." Caldwell saw "an era of good feeling and cheering hopes set in," and to hear him tell it twenty-five years later, peace still reigned in 1895. Caldwell admitted that occasionally there were lynchings, but he saw no difference between racial violence in the South and that in other regions.⁹⁴

Caldwell remained a Republican. Nevertheless, by defining Reconstruction as a success, he diluted the project's aims and absolved Democratic Redeemers from blame for the collapse. Negating the distinction that historians usually draw between Reconstruction and "home rule," Caldwell argued that by restoring Georgia to the Union, Republicans saved the state from "protracted military rule and a condition of anarchy." Republican success, according to Caldwell, created a "New South"—a term he claimed to have coined in the early days of Reconstruction—and produced twenty-five years of "peace and prosperity" under the Democrats.⁹⁵ Had Caldwell changed or had the Democrats? Caldwell claimed that it was Democrats. Additionally, Caldwell's appropriation of the term "New South" in his 1895 reminiscences would have had

⁹⁴ John H. Caldwell, *Reminiscences of the Reconstruction of Church and State in Georgia* (Wilmington, DE: J.M. Thomas, 1895), 17, 21.

⁹⁵ Caldwell, *Reminiscences*, 11, 19, 21-22.

little purchase if it were not for the “New South” movement of Henry Grady and other boosters in the Democratic Party. Since Caldwell defended the Redeemers along with himself and the Republican Party, it is less surprising that he also dismissed the significance of lynching.

Even Rufus Bullock came to see his role in Reconstruction as a conservative triumph. Five years after fleeing the state, the Republican governor returned. Though the Georgia legislature repudiated the state bonds that his administration had issued, juries found Bullock not guilty of financial wrongdoing. After being acquitted, and distancing himself from the state’s Republican organization, he became president of Atlanta’s first cotton mill and the city’s chamber of commerce. With Reconstruction over, he had an easier time in achieving the reputation he had desired since he joined the Republican Party—that of a New South booster.⁹⁶

Bullock played a leading role in planning Atlanta Cotton States and International Exposition of 1895, and on the opening day, he was the master of ceremonies. Newspaper commentators do not seem to have noted any incongruity in the former Republican Governor taking his part. To Bullock, it was “the greatest hour in the history of Atlanta and the South.”⁹⁷ One by one, he introduced each of the day’s speakers. One cannot be sure what he was thinking as he listened to Booker T. Washington, whom he praised as “the representative of negro enterprise and negro civilization.” Washington was critical of the role that men of his race had played in Reconstruction. The recently emancipated, out of ignorance and inexperience, “began at the top instead of at the bottom,” he said. To them, Washington claimed, “a seat in Congress or the State Legislature was more sought than real estate or industrial skill.” Washington urged

⁹⁶ Russell Duncan, *Entrepreneur for Equality: Governor Rufus Bullock, Commerce, and Race in Post-Civil War Georgia* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1994), pages. Duncan finds stronger egalitarian commitments in Bullock’s biography than I do.

⁹⁷ Walter G. Cooper, *The Cotton States and International Exposition and South, Illustrated* (Atlanta: The Illustrator Company, 1896), 94.

African Americans to “dignify and glorify common labor.” For white listeners, he had different but complimentary advice: that they help and encourage Black industrial education. Washington made labor and capital into racial as well as economic categories, but he thought they could be harmonious and mutually beneficial. African Americans would unite their “industrial, commercial, civil and religious life with yours in a way that shall make the interests of both races one.” Though “in all things that are purely social, we can be as separate as the fingers,” Washington argued, they would be “one as the hand in all things essential to mutual progress.”⁹⁸

Nearby on the stage, Bullock sat listening. He had been a key mover of Reconstruction in Georgia; he helped to write and implement a state constitution, which he praised for guaranteeing “equal, political and social rights.”⁹⁹ When the state legislature denied the right of African Americans to hold political office in 1868, he asked for congressional intervention. Since then, though, he had either soured on Black participation in governance, or more likely, he had never intended his support for Congressional Reconstruction to lead to Black political power. When a New York paper asked why the interest in material affairs exhibited in Atlanta had not manifested in a growing Republican Party, Bullock responded by blaming the leadership of the state organization. As an illustration, he pointed to the selection of delegates to the most recent National Republican Convention; the state party had chosen a Black hack driver. Bullock thought him “a very worthy colored man in his line of business but not well fitted to choose a president.”¹⁰⁰ Bullock repeatedly interpreted the Atlanta Exposition in northern newspapers as proof of the economic opportunities for African Americans in the South, while simultaneously dismissing their political capability.

⁹⁸ Cooper, *The Cotton States and International Exposition and South*, 98-99.

⁹⁹ *New York Times*, 27 Jul 1868.

¹⁰⁰ *Atlanta Constitution*, 27 Oct 1895.

At a time when southern whites were increasingly condemning Reconstruction as a time of misrule, Bullock both assented to white supremacist memory of Reconstruction and made an emendation. In a view that he refined throughout the 1890s and shared publicly, he argued that white southern elites had successfully steered the South through the dangers of Reconstruction. While the North was focused on the Atlanta Exposition, he instructed New Yorkers on the history of Reconstruction. The congressional policy was “illogical,” he said, but the “personnel of the organization which decided to accept” that policy were “almost entirely...southern men—many of whom had been prominent in the confederate service,” such as himself. They were “men of the highest personal character and financial strength”—he might have said, such men as now put on the Atlanta Exposition. In choosing Reconstruction, “they made this acceptance only a choice of evils,” the alternative being a continuation of military government that would have crippled “all financial, agricultural and industrial enterprises.”¹⁰¹ Repeating and refining this memory of Reconstruction several years later, he concluded, “The prosperous conditions of our State to-day, far beyond our reasonable hope or expectation, are chiefly due to the foundations wisely and conservatively laid by the brave men who in 1868 accepted a situation they could not change and made the best of it.”¹⁰²

Bullock simultaneously defended the role of native white elites in the Reconstruction-era Republican Party and praised the return of home rule. “Now that we are happily relieved from outside interference with our domestic affairs,” Bullock predicted that “our people [will] divide according to their interests and their judgement upon practical issues, as presented in this great object lesson [the Cotton States Exposition].” He hoped that the “mingling of business men” at

¹⁰¹ *Atlanta Constitution*, 27 Oct 1895.

¹⁰² Rufus Bullock, “Reconstruction in Georgia, 1865-1870,” *The Independent*, 55 (March 19, 1903): 674.

the exposition would teach non-southerners about the South's opportunities and that "there is no 'problem' about the race question."¹⁰³ The race question, Bullock said, was a "humbug" which politicians used to keep the South solidly Democratic and the North solidly Republican. Now, perhaps the Republican Party could spring into action in the South, offering an alternative to the Democrats on industrial and financial policy.¹⁰⁴ He did not, however, want help from the party's national organization: "Safe growth must be from within. Outside help will be regarded as an intrusive interference. This is our affair, and we will work it out right. Politically speaking, let us alone."¹⁰⁵ To this reconstructed rebel, the exposition confirmed the rightness of his course in the 1860s, while also justifying Reconstruction's political outcome—home rule.

The Reconstructed Nation and Black Disfranchisement

In the last decade of the nineteenth century and the first decade of the twentieth, southern states enacted literacy tests and grandfather clauses to remove African Americans from formal politics. When subjected to criticism, white southerners responded that these were not peculiarly southern institutions. Indeed, many northeastern states passed laws during the last decades of the nineteenth century to restrict the voting rights of working-class immigrants and the poor. For example, in 1881, Massachusetts lawmakers barred paupers from the polls, and in 1892, they instituted a literacy requirement. The Supreme Court also upheld a Mississippi literacy test in *Williams v Mississippi* (1898).¹⁰⁶ With these conservative readings, even reconstructed rebels

¹⁰³ *Atlanta Constitution*, 5 Sep 1895.

¹⁰⁴ *Atlanta Constitution*, 29 Dec 1895.

¹⁰⁵ *Atlanta Constitution*, 25 Aug 1895.

¹⁰⁶ Keyssar, *The Right to Vote*, 115, appendix A-6 and A-13.

were able to convince themselves that their states were in compliance with the Constitution and that despite variations between the states, they were fully national.

Unlike those reconstructed rebels who joined the Democrats, Daniel Lindsay Russell continued to play a role in opposition politics despite his disdain for “carpetbaggers.” In 1878, he won office as a Greenback Party congressman. In a speech on the House floor, he called for “unqualified loyalty to the flag, universal obedience to and absolute equality before the law, complete toleration, entire freedom of speech, of thought, and of action.” Painting his enemies as unreconstructed, he argued that the goals he listed could not be achieved “until the last vestige of Bourbonism is trampled out; until the white South shall cease to whine and weep over the lost cause, and shall frankly and sincerely confess that the God of battles was right and we were wrong.”¹⁰⁷ Nearly two decades later, in 1897, he was elected governor of North Carolina by a coalition of Republicans and Populists.¹⁰⁸

For Russell, “the most important mission of the Republican party” was “to enforce the principles of broad Nationality, as taught by John Marshall and Washington and Hamilton.”¹⁰⁹ This did not mean African American control of local or state government. In the late 1880s, he proclaimed that white men would never “submit to negro rule.” Though he considered the transatlantic slave trade a “monstrous wrong,” he concluded that slavery had “degraded them so that they are no more fit to govern than are their brethren in African swamps.” According to Russell, “misrule” in heavily Black counties could be corrected by Republican as well as Democratic administrations.¹¹⁰ Though he thought Blacks should be “treated with liberality and

¹⁰⁷ *Congressional Record*, 46th Cong., 1st Sess., Appendix, 20.

¹⁰⁸ For a full biography of Russell, see Jeffrey J. Crow and Robert Franklin Durden, *Maverick Republican in the Old North State: A Political Biography of Daniel L. Russell* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977).

¹⁰⁹ *The Raleigh Signal*, 4 Aug 1892.

¹¹⁰ *The Wilmington Messenger*, 14 Jul 1888.

justice,” he doubted this could be achieved “so long as the negro indicates by his political conduct that he only wants power to enact in the South the scenes which have demonstrated his incapacity for self-government in Hayti, Jamaica, and San Domingo.”¹¹¹ When Russell became the Republican-Populist “Fusion” candidate for governor, he walked back some of this rhetoric, perhaps to encourage African American voters, or maybe to palliate the fears of whites. Adopting the white supremacist memory of Reconstruction, he denied that he supported “anything like we had in reconstruction days” and assured skeptical whites that “the negro does not want on top.”¹¹² William Pearson, the author of *Well-Nigh Reconstructed*, considered Russell “a blessed alternative” to the Democrats.¹¹³

Russell’s understanding of American nationalism made him a persistent opponent of states’ rights, and he denied the constitutionality of disfranchising schemes at the end of the century. At the same time, he continually urged African Americans to follow white leadership, or even abandon politics entirely. Like earlier reconstructed rebels, he hoped to move politics away from racial issues, including both disfranchisement and civil rights. Despite his conservative use of state patronage, white supremacists destroyed the Republican-Populist majority in 1898 and overthrew Wilmington’s city government in a violent coup. The General Assembly proposed a disfranchising amendment a year later. Russell, still governor, called the amendment unconstitutional and said he would not vote for it. He also, however, urged Republicans not to make the amendment a party issue. When party leaders did anyway, he called the state-level candidates a “machine ticket” and urged substituting businessmen who would be more likely to carry the state for the Republican presidential nominee. Moreover, he advised Black people not

¹¹¹ *The Raleigh Signal*, 4 Aug 1892.

¹¹² *The Charlotte Observer*, 16 Oct 1896.

¹¹³ Pearson to Marion Butler, 20 Jun 1896, Butler papers, quoted in Crow and Durden, *Maverick*, 68.

to vote in the referendum, saying that doing so would exacerbate prejudice. “Let them leave it to the white people,” he counseled.¹¹⁴ The difference between Russell and his opponents was that he believed Black suffrage and white control were entirely compatible, while his opponents believed that the best way to solidify white supremacy was to eliminate the possibility of interracial political coalitions based on class.

Rufus Bullock agreed that white control was already secure without disfranchisement. Ten years after serving as master of ceremonies at the Atlanta Exposition, white Georgians were considering following the lead of other states in disfranchising African Americans. Bullock offered a variety of responses to this wave of suffrage restriction. He claimed that rabid proponents of racial hatred like Benjamin Tillman of South Carolina were not representative of “the south.” On the other hand, he added, each state would decide the suffrage issue for itself within constitutional bounds. He argued that the nation should enforce the 14th and 15th Amendments, and in one case suggested that disfranchising measures were unconstitutional. However, he then suggested that if the nation did not enforce the amendments, the South could not be blamed for failing to do what the nation would not.¹¹⁵ On another occasion, he suggested that laws which restricted the vote to “the hands of intelligence and virtue” would “apply uniformly to black and white” and might not violate the constitution after all.¹¹⁶

Of the original reconstructed rebels, James Lusk Alcorn of Mississippi may have gone the furthest toward embracing Black disfranchisement. After Reconstruction, he continued to identify as a Republican, but made it publicly known that he voted for Democratic candidates

¹¹⁴ *The Morning Post* (Raleigh, North Carolina), 20 Jul 1900.

¹¹⁵ Bullock to the editors of *Frank Leslie's Weekly*, reprinted in *Atlanta Constitution*, 7 Jul 1900. See also *Atlanta Constitution*, 29 Dec 1895.

¹¹⁶ *Democrat and Chronicle* (Rochester, New York), 31 Oct 1902.

like President Grover Cleveland. In 1889, in an interview with the *Washington Post*, he re-aired his grievance that the Republican Party could have been established in Mississippi if Grant had favored him over Ames. That chance was gone, he said, and “the Southern people will not have negro rule.” Deploying a biological racism that he had not used before, Alcorn continued, “The negro is not a white man with a black skin. He is a different race. He is a barbarian, and barbarians cannot rule civilized people. His head is covered with wool; he is a sheep. The white man has straight hair like a lion. The negro is an infant. He has the flat nose, the retreating chin, the protruding lips of an infant. It will take centuries of development to thoroughly fit him for civilization.”¹¹⁷ The following year, Mississippians in the heavily Black Delta county of Coahoma elected the seventy-four-year-old planter to the state constitutional convention. The convention register listed his political preference as “Conservative.” Alcorn maintained he was not afraid of Black supremacy, but ultimately, he supported the proposed literacy test. The fact that he opposed a loophole for ignorant white voters also suggests that he was more interested in preserving elite rule than making white supremacy work for all whites.¹¹⁸

While others like Russell and Bullock did not actively advocate Black disfranchisement, their overall diffidence on the issue is striking. During Reconstruction, they had insisted on obedience to national law and defied their white neighbors by supporting Black citizenship. They had believed that white control was still possible in the new political framework, and Redemption seemed to prove them right. Disfranchisement was a step too far, a needless assertion of state power at variance with national supremacy. Though, if the Supreme Court decided otherwise, as it did in *Williams v. Mississippi* (1898), then perhaps disfranchisement was

¹¹⁷ *The Washington Post*, 30 Apr 1889.

¹¹⁸ Lillian A. Pereyra, *James Lusk Alcorn: Persistent Whig* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1966), 199-200.

a valid expression of home rule. True, some reconstructed rebels like Russell still relied on Black votes to obtain office, but Democrats used Russell's Black support against him, and now younger generations of white southerners were confronting the question of what the best way was to preserve white supremacy. The old answers were no longer needed.

The Reconciliation of James Longstreet

Like Rufus Bullock, James Longstreet also found forgiveness and vindication at the Atlanta Exposition of 1895. After the opening exercise on the 18th of September, Union and Confederate veterans assembled the next day at nearby Chickamauga for the battlefield's dedication as a national park, and then returned to Atlanta for "Blue and Gray Day" on the 21st. Longstreet was present on stage at both events. When he came forward the second time, "there was a dramatic scene."¹¹⁹ The resounding applause that greeted him made it, according to the *Atlanta Constitution*, one of the most notable moments of the day.¹²⁰

The path for Longstreet's welcome at the Exposition had been set by another event in Atlanta nine years earlier. At the unveiling of a statue of recently deceased Senator Benjamin Hill, Jefferson Davis was the keynote speaker; Longstreet had not been invited. During Reconstruction, Davis had reportedly compared Longstreet unfavorably to Judas Iscariot. When Longstreet showed up uninvited during Davis's speech at the Hill statue, a hush fell over the crowd. Then, unexpectedly, the two men embraced. The crowd exploded in cheers and applause. Though the shapers of Lost Cause remembrance worked ceaselessly to make Longstreet a villain,

¹¹⁹ Walter G. Cooper, *The Cotton States and International Exposition and South, Illustrated* (Atlanta: The Illustrator Company, 1896), 112.

¹²⁰ *Atlanta Constitution*, 20 Sep 1895.

that view was not universal in the 1880s and 1890s, when he was continually cheered at veterans' reunions.¹²¹

This was a curious turn from the furor that had met Longstreet when he joined the Republican party in 1867. Since then, much had changed. After the collapse of Republican control in Louisiana, Longstreet moved to Gainesville, Georgia. He held positions as postmaster, minister to Turkey, and U.S. Marshal in Atlanta. Longstreet continued to be active in Republican organizing, though as a member of the "syndicate," which was largely composed of native whites. When African American leaders from an opposing faction tried to break into one of his meetings, he had local authorities arrest them.¹²² Unable to counteract the influence of northern settlers and African American leaders, he continued to support the party's presidential candidates, but repudiated the state organization. "There is no Republican Party in this state," he told a reporter for *The New York Times*. "I don't recognize their organization and don't care anything about them."¹²³ In another interview, Longstreet reflected on his momentous decision to support Reconstruction:

I stopped fighting...at Appomattox Courthouse, while my comrades, defeated in war, transferred the conflict from the arena of battle to the arena of politics, with the result that they have antagonized the party having possession of the National Government for years, without gaining a thing for their section and its people. I believed that it was the true policy of the South to accept reconstruction and go in and control their own State Governments by acting in harmony with the Republican party, instead of being controlled by carpetbaggers and negroes, which resulted from their alliance with Democracy.¹²⁴

¹²¹ *New York Times*, 4 Jun 1893. On Longstreet as a villain of white southern historical memory, see William G. Piston, *Lee's Tarnished Lieutenant: James Longstreet and his Place in Southern History* (Athens: University of Georgia Press) and Jeffrey D. Wert, *General James Longstreet: The Confederacy's Most Controversial Soldier* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993).

¹²² Thomas R. Hay and Donald B. Sanger, *James Longstreet* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1952), 389.

¹²³ *New York Times*, 19 Dec 1882.

¹²⁴ *Chicago Tribune*, 13 Sep 1883.

Longstreet had not stated this intention publicly in 1867, but he did write privately about it. He had said that “since the negro has been given the privilege of voting, it is all important that we should exercise such influence over that vote, as to prevent its being injurious to us, & we can only do that as Republicans.”¹²⁵ He went on to lead Louisiana’s biracial militia against white insurgents in 1873, and again in 1874. They all swore to “accept the civil and political equality of all men.”¹²⁶ Still, a year later, in 1875, he told a friend that his ultimate goal was “the restoration of the Southern people to their natural and proper influence.”¹²⁷ Nearly a decade later, now living in Georgia, he wrote to a northern correspondent, “The whites or democrats, for nearly all of the whites are democrats, seem to have a horror of the idea of negro rule; particularly the white women. If republicanism involves negro rule, they are not so far wrong, and all whites must sooner or later, become anti-Republican. I presume that argument is hardly necessary to convince you that the white people of America will not be ruled by the blacks.”¹²⁸ Northern settlers, Longstreet averred, would be treated graciously by white southerners, so long as they are not “engaged in trying to establish colored rulers over the whites.”

White southerners in the “New South” mold increasingly gave him credit for white supremacist motives. Henry Grady, after giving Longstreet an exculpatory interview, concluded, “he is restored to his old place in the hearts of his people, since the wisdom of his advice having been passed, he is allowed credit for purity of motive in giving it.”¹²⁹ In another interview,

¹²⁵ James Longstreet to R. H. Taliaferro, 4 Jul 1867, Boagni Collection, quoted in William Garrett Piston, *Lee’s Tarnished Lieutenant: James Longstreet and His Place in South History* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1990), 106.

¹²⁶ Hogue, *Uncivil War*, 70-74

¹²⁷ Longstreet to T. J. Goree, 12 May 1875, Goree Papers LSU, quoted from Thomas R. Hay and Donald B. Sanger, *James Longstreet* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1952), 376.

¹²⁸ Longstreet to C. S. March, 9 Apr 1884, Hayes Library, Misc collection, Longstreet.

¹²⁹ Philadelphia *Times*, 29 Jul 1879.

Longstreet spoke cheerfully about the economic progress of African Americans in the South. All they needed, Longstreet added, was “less politics and meddling from politicians.” The reporter responded, “You begun [sic] to talk like a Democrat, General.” “No,” Longstreet replied, “I talk as I always did, like a friend of the South.”¹³⁰

At Chickamauga, and then in Atlanta on the Exposition’s Blue and Gray Day, Longstreet played to the common theme of sectional reconciliation, while also adding his own twist. The seventy-four year old soldier asked both sides to unite in “extending, broadening, confirming and perpetuating a government of the people, by the people and for the people.” He did not mean that there was any need to perfect American government at home. Rather, he thought Americans needed to extend their democracy abroad. Referring to recent British interventions in Central and South America, he condemned the “steady purpose of Great Britain to nullify or encroach upon the Monroe doctrine.” Since the end of the war, Longstreet had been interested in the construction of transcontinental railroads into Mexico. If Americans would put aside sectional prejudice and increase the nation’s military power, he boasted, they would stop European encroachments on the western hemisphere and “the ‘yankee huzza’ and the ‘rebel yell’ will resound along the British seacoast.”¹³¹ In Longstreet’s mind, and perhaps in the minds of his audience, white southerners became agents of American power, rather than its subjects.

For Longstreet, Reconstruction meant white restoration as citizens and agents of American empire, no longer colonial subjects of the North. In 1898, Longstreet offered his services to the United States to fight in the Spanish-American War. He was too old, but when

¹³⁰ Interview with the *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, 3 Jun 1890.

¹³¹ *The Atlanta Constitution*, 20 Sep 1895.

Longstreet passed at the beginning of 1904, his son and namesake was serving in the Philippines as a captain in the Thirteenth Cavalry, fighting to secure a new territory for the United States.¹³²

Sectionalism was not dead. Southern leaders like Ben Tillman would continue to curse Yankees for some time to come. In the context of national white supremacy at the end of the century, though, the South did not look so peculiar anymore. White southerners and white northerners now seemed like suitable partners for a project of global reordering. For this tragic consensus, much is owed to reconstructed rebels like James Longstreet.

¹³² *The St. Louis Republic*, 3 Jan 1904; Hay and Sanger, *Longstreet*, 439.

CONCLUSION:
SHOULD THERE BE MORE MONUMENTS TO PEOPLE LIKE LONGSTREET?

On June 6, 2020, protestors in Richmond, Virginia toppled the statue of a slaveholder and Confederate general. Throughout the summer, activists responded to the police killing of George Floyd by demanding the removal of Confederate statues throughout the country.

Overwhelmingly, these statues had been erected in the early twentieth century, mostly in the South, when a new system of white supremacy was built through legal segregation, disfranchisement, lynching, and cultural symbols like these Confederate memorials. In the summer of 2020, over one hundred Confederate statues were removed, either by protestors or by local authorities in response to the protests. The one that came down on June 6, however, was unique. Williams C. Wickham had been a leader in Virginia's postwar Republican Party.

No major news outlet mentioned this detail. If protestors knew, it likely did not matter. What was important was that Wickham was a slaveholder and had fought in a war to preserve slavery. In 2017, after the white supremacist rally in Charlottesville, two of Wickham's descendants asked the Richmond mayor to remove the statue of their great-great-grandfather. "As a plantation owner, Confederate general and industrialist," they wrote, "General Wickham unapologetically accrued power and wealth through the exploitation of enslaved people."¹ A Black man, also descended from Wickham, said in a reporter's paraphrase, that the

¹ Mark Robinson, "Confederate descendants ask Richmond Mayor to remove statue from Monroe Park," *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, 30 Aug 2017, <https://richmond.com/news/local/confederate-descendants-ask-richmond-mayor-to-remove-statue-from-monroe-park/article_3b313c75-c6f9-5273-8842-00944669f305.html>.

statue was “a painful reminder of the abuse his family suffered and of America’s refusal to fully acknowledge its past.”²

Williams C. Wickham’s postwar Republicanism does not redeem him of his sins. Historians should question how much he and reconstructed rebels like him really changed after the war, and to what extent the alternative path that they offered would have benefited the South and its people. Could they have led the white South in a different direction? Could they have helped build a more authentic racial and sectional peace, instead of letting the white South follow the Bourbon Redeemers and the Jim Crow white supremacists who made the region even more sectional, racist, and violently oppressive at the turn of the century than it had been at the start of the Civil War? If the preceding analysis in the preceding chapters is correct, then the reconstructed rebels were too short-sighted, racist, and opportunistic to undertake such a colossal transformation. That being the case, are their actions even worth remembering?

Reconstructed rebels are not worth commemorating, but they should be remembered as key players in the abandonment of Reconstruction and the political restoration of the South’s prewar elite. Racial terrorism and white insurgency help explain the return of home rule, and so do changes in the North that made white northerners increasingly less willing to stay the course on Reconstruction and to become more sympathetic with white southern elites. Reconstruction, however, also meant reconstructing the white southern elite. White northerners wanted to see evidence of change. Reconstructed rebels presented themselves as having seen the light. At first this gave them an advantage over their rivals in the South, but it also rehabilitated the image of the southern elite more quickly and broadly.

² Lucy Tompkins and Nicholas Bogel-Burroughs, “When the Toppled Statue Is of Your Great-Great-Great-Grandfather,” *The New York Times*, 15 Jul 2020, <<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/25/us/historic-statues-monuments-descendants.html>>.

Two weeks after Appomattox, Wickham told white Virginians that the Confederacy had deserved defeat. He was not alone in embracing Confederate defeat and arguing that white southerners should focus on rebuilding the southern economy. As chapter one demonstrated, reconstructed rebels often held such attitudes even when they supported Presidential Reconstruction under Andrew Johnson. Then, after Congress took control of Reconstruction in 1867, they began moving into the Republican Party. An especially important moment was when Frank Blair, the Democratic nominee for vice-president, threatened to disperse the reconstructed governments and return the South to a state of violent uncertainty. Wickham denounced Blair's threats and announced his view that electing Grant was the only path to peace and prosperity.

In 1869, Wickham's officeholding disabilities were removed by Congress. As chapter two showed, reconstructed rebels like him benefited from their opponents being kept under the ban while newly minted Republicans received amnesty. Northern Republicans in Congress understood the influence that such men had and saw them as the South's natural leaders. As long as they supported legal equality for African Americans, white southerners could be trusted with political power. Wickham did not run for office until the 1880s, but he and his business partner Collis Huntington nevertheless made their influence felt in Virginia.

By 1873, Wickham and Huntington had completed the Chesapeake and Ohio Railway from the Virginia coast to the coal mines of West Virginia. The C&O was privately-owned by then, but it benefited nonetheless from a bipartisan effort to attract outside investment from the North and Europe. Chapter three explored the multiple strategies that Republicans used to make the South safe for investment: compliance with Congress's demands, public aid for railroads, the leasing of convict labor to private corporations, and efforts to put down the Klan without making

state governors look like they were dependent on federal law enforcement. They were not wholly successful, but their Democratic successors adopted many of the same policies.

In 1883, Wickham was elected to the Virginia state senate by a coalition of conservative Republicans and Democrats who opposed readjusting the state debt. In his campaign speeches, Wickham emphasized the sanctity of public credit, a traditional Republican position that benefited bondholders—including some in the northeast—over taxpayers and public schools. This was not Wickham’s only message, however. He also objected to the popular mobilization of African Americans in the Readjuster Party. He accused Readjusters of “drawing the color line,” that is, playing the politics of racial solidarity, and ruining the good relations between Black and white. Nevertheless, he was a “friend” to Black voters, and he promised to defend their rights—they were already equal to those of whites, according to Wickham—so long as they voted for him. As chapter four argued, reconstructed rebels embraced Black political participation because they had long cultivated patron-client relationships with yeomen whites that did not undermine their power, but actually reinforced it.

In the 1860s and 1870s, reconstructed rebels were answering a question that younger Democratic elites would tackle again later in the century: what was the best way to preserve white supremacy? Wickham and others attempted to capture the Republican Party in the South to make it work for white elites. Black Republicans, however, fought back. Reconstructed rebels responded with the same indignation that Wickham later expressed toward the Readjusters. Some reconstructed rebels left the party, while others found vindication despite remaining Republican. Chapter five began with Southern Democrats like L.Q.C. Lamar and David Key, who argued that the white South had accepted the legitimacy of the Reconstruction amendment and had rejoined the nation. The racial terrorism and violent insurgency going at the same time

should have refuted the truth of their claims, but white northerners increasingly saw moderate Democrats as reconstructed.

Williams C. Wickham died in 1888 and three years later, veterans of his cavalry brigade commemorated him with a memorial in bronze. The seven-foot statue portrayed Wickham in his Confederate uniform. The base of the statue carried the inscription, “Soldier, Statesman, Patriot, Friend.” The nephew of Robert E. Lee, Fitzhugh Lee, gave the oration. Lee was Wickham’s former commander in the Confederate cavalry and Wickham enthusiastically supported Lee in 1885 when he ran a successful campaign to become Virginia’s Democratic Governor. Lee returned Wickham’s affection in full. After giving a historical defense of states’ rights and secession, Lee listed the recent statues that had been raised to Confederate heroes and then reviewed the military career of Wickham and his cavalry brigade. Lee did not ignore Wickham’s postwar politics. He mentioned that Wickham joined the Republican Party, a course which Lee attributed to Wickham’s habit of opposing Democrats as a former Whig, his desire for sectional reconciliation. Still, Lee insisted that the audience “forget dead political issues” and “bury bitter animosities engendered by party strife.” Instead, he said, “we recall the cavalry general.” He mentioned the lowly railroad employees who wept at Wickham’s passing and made small contributions to the monument fund. Lee credited Wickham for supporting Democratic measures as an independent in the state legislature, and finally returned to Wickham’s wartime valor.³

At roughly the same time that white Virginians were honoring Wickham for his service to the Confederacy, states across the South were passing laws to segregate society and disfranchise African Americans. Some reconstructed rebels raised muted concerns, while others participated

³ *Richmond Dispatch*, 25 Oct 1891 and 30 Oct 1891; on Wickham’s support for the Democratic candidate Fitzhugh Lee in the 1885 election, see *Richmond Dispatch*, 27 Aug 1885.

in the new method of preserving white supremacy. In this final decade of the nineteenth century, however, they could rest assured that they were part of a national trend to restrict democracy and protect the interests of capital. White supremacy in the South was never about the supremacy of all whites. It was a new way to preserve the power of a new generation of elite and middle-class whites.⁴ Disfranchisement was not the solution put forward by reconstructed rebels, but by restoring the reputation of southern elites, they had made it possible.

To fully understand the abandonment of Reconstruction it is necessary to ask who was reconstructed and how the answer to that question varied based on who was making the assessment. Ex-Confederates in the Republican Party were able to convince northerners that they were reconstructed, and northerners in turn admitted that it would be for the best if white southern elites ruled their own states. Even though Southern Democrats came out on top, they owed much to the reconstructed rebels: not only the chance to hold office, but also their economic policies and general approach to race relations. Reconstructed rebels set the South on a different course from the one it had followed before the Civil War, but they also set it on a course toward Redemption and Jim Crow.

Humanity's capacity for change is worth remembering. Change by itself, however, is not worth commemorating. Reconstructed rebels adapted in a unique way compared to their white contemporaries, and it is important to appreciate the complex ways that people adapt to new situations. Reconstructed rebels can teach us about the mutability of white supremacy and the vulnerability of institutions to capture by different elites. Commemorating reconstructed rebels would not help the fight for racial justice, but a more accurate understanding of them just might.

⁴ Barbara Jean Fields, "Ideology and Race in American History," in *Region, Race and Reconstruction: Essays in Honor of C. Vann Woodward*, ed. J. Morgan Kousser and James M. McPherson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 158; Stephen Kantrowitz, *Ben Tillman and the Reconstruction of White Supremacy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 242.

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