

Defeat and Occupation:

The Cold War Known as "Reconstruction"

By Dr. Clyde N. Wilson

Major General Matthew C. Butler, CSA, a paroled prisoner of war, rode home to South Carolina in the late spring of 1865, riding not being too easy for a man with one leg, even at the age of 28. When he arrived he found his wife, three children, and 78 newly-freed black people on his plantation. He had \$15,000 in debts and one dollar and forty cents cash in his pocket.

Butler's home was relatively intact, lying between the area devastated by Sherman and the area devastated by Stoneman's raiders. How much worse for people where the houses, barns, fences, livestock, work animals, tools, seed, and standing and stored crops had been destroyed or taken away. How do you avoid starvation and begin to rebuild a normal life under these conditions?

The South had lost perhaps a quarter of its white manpower. It has been estimated that 40 per cent of the value of its property was gone, not even counting the huge amount invested in slaves. A once-prosperous region was impoverished, with

little means to begin a recovery. The banks' reserves of hard money were the lowest they had ever been. Most of the railroads were worn out or wrecked. Immense amounts of the South's most valuable commodity, cotton, had been stolen or burned to escape the Yankee grasp. Everything that had in any way supported the Confederacy was gone with the wind — trusts, insurance funds, government debts, paper money. There was nothing with which to pay debts and little to borrow to live on and get started back to work.

In many areas law and order had disappeared and the criminal element, both white and black, was rampant, along with the disorder naturally left behind by a war which had spread destruction and made enemies on such a vast scale. Thousands of uprooted black people roamed the roads with no way to survive except by theft from those who already had little. This in a land where many widows lived in rural isolation. And to top off the sea of troubles, as might be expected after such disruption, 1866

brought the most devastating yellow fever epidemic in years. As with the Spanish flu after World War I, many people who had survived the war perished.

No large group of Americans has ever faced such daunting circumstances as Southerners, white and black, faced at the end of the war, circumstances forced upon them by a conquering government which had once been theirs but was now an alien and dangerous enemy, which might be planning, as far as anyone knew, still further diabolical oppressions.

"Reconstruction" generally refers to the period of American history from the end of war in 1865 to the withdrawal of the last occupation troops from the South in 1877. No part of American history has been more distorted by present-day ideological interpretations and is more in need of the restoration of an honest perspective.

Perhaps the first thing to note about "Reconstruction" is that the term does not refer to rebuilding. Far from it. After World War II, the US adopted the Marshall Plan, by

which we invested money to rebuild the infrastructure and living standards of European nations, including our defeated enemies. This was considered the decent and civilized thing to do, and it was also hoped it might prevent future wars and discourage the appeal of Communism. The official policy of "Reconstruction" in the South did not in any sense constitute rebuilding. To the contrary its main feature was to extract wealth from the already devastated Southern region. This was to be expected since the real reason for the war was to prevent the South from escaping from the control of the rich people of the North. "Reconstruction" in fact retarded the recovery of a good life in the South and prolonged the poverty of white and black Southerners for generations.

"Reconstruction" was a purely political term invented by the Republicans who controlled Congress at the end of the war. It refers to *reconstructing* the political being of the Southern states that had been destroyed by the war into something pleasing to the Republican politicians who had carried out the invasion and conquest. This was a rather peculiar thing because the war had been waged on the pretext of "preserving the Union." But how could the Union be preserved by making war on a large part of it? By destroying by force the legal gov-

ernments and the will of the people of eleven (really fifteen) States?

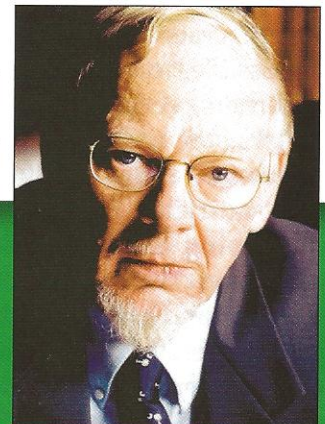
Calhoun had pointed out prophetically long before that a Union held together by force would not be the Union of the Founders but a dictatorship of part over the whole. And Lee, when secession seemed likely, wrote: "If the bond of the Union can only be maintained by the sword and the bayonet instead of brotherly love and friendship, and if strife and civil war are to take the place of mutual aid and commerce, its existence will lose all interest to me." Obviously the Union could not have been restored, much less preserved, under such circumstances. The ruling elements of the North had carried out a war which destroyed the Union and substituted something else. What that would be is the essential political struggle of Reconstruction.

How do you restore peace after a civil war? (I am aware that the War for Southern Independence was not a "civil war" since the Confederacy had no designs on the US government, but only wanted to be let alone. However, it was a civil war in the sense that it was between Americans who had had a connection before.) A victory in a long and exhausting war proffers a great challenge to statesmanship. You might, of course, exterminate the losing side, as some Republicans, especially New England cler-

gymen, advocated. But given that as impractical and unacceptable to people with any human decency, what is the proper course for the victorious power? Unfortunately, statesmanship was entirely absent from the leaders of the Republican party. As historians, almost all understood before the era of Political Correctness, their Reconstruction policy was motivated by greed and hatred. They never gave any attention to the moral question of establishing a just, lasting, and inclusive peace.

To preserve the Union meant to many that, secession having been defeated, the seceded States would resume their place in the Union. Congress had declared this restoration to be the sole purpose of the war and Lincoln had claimed the States had not seceded but were only temporarily under the control of "rebels." Many Northern Democrats had supported the war on the basis of "the Constitution as it is and the Union as it was." The Emancipation Proclamation implicitly reflected this position since it freed the slaves only in areas which were still in "rebellion" and not where they were under Union control. This view explains why General McClellan tried

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Dr. Clyde N. Wilson is Emeritus Distinguished Professor of History at the University of South Carolina. He was the editor of the 28-volume edition of *The Papers of John C. Calhoun*. He is the author or editor of a dozen other books and more than 600 articles, essays and reviews in a variety of books and journals. Among his most recent works are *From Union to Empire: Essays in the Jeffersonian Tradition* and *Defending Dixie: Essays in Southern History and Culture*. Dr. Wilson is M.E. Bradford Distinguished Professor of the Abbeville Institute, a contributing editor of *Chronicles Magazine*, and winner of the Bostick Prize in South Carolina Letters and the first John Randolph Club Lifetime Achievement Award. He is the founding Dean of the Stephen D. Lee Institute and a compatriot in the Colonel Olan M. Dantzler Camp 73, Orangeburg, South Carolina.

ians in hope that Southern fellow citizens would not become permanently alienated. (And why he was cashiered by the Republicans in favor of a series of much inferior generals who wanted to alienate and destroy their Southern fellow citizens.) This version of restoration was evidently in General Sherman's mind as late as 1865 during the negotiations for the surrender of Joe Johnston's army after Bentonville. Sherman agreed if they stopped fighting and accepted the failure of secession, the existing governments of North Carolina and Virginia could continue as they were. Secretary of War Edwin Stanton repudiated Sherman's agreement as soon as the "rebels" were safely dispersed. After Lincoln's death, Stanton, the closest thing to a Heinrich Himmler ever in power in America, was running the government as a virtual dictator.

The Northern Democratic supporters of the war held an untenable position, as their more principled and less opportunistic anti-war wing had told them repeatedly, but their stance provided the best hope for a return to peace and a normal state of society. President Andrew Johnson (after a brief period of post-war vindictiveness) and the Northern Democrats attempted, as far as was possible, to restore the Union. Southerners cooperated willingly with Johnson, accepting the defeat of secession and quickly, without regret, ratifying the 13th Amendment freeing the slaves. Southern leaders knew the Republicans were not honest and would not abide by earlier understandings when they had the upper hand, but they could rightfully and sincerely declare that secession had failed and they were ready to restore the Union.

The Republican war-makers were trapped by their own previous disingenuous statement of war aims. They could in no way tolerate

the restoration of the Union. They had never been completely secure in their control of the North, and Southern States sending representatives once more to Congress threatened them with potential loss of power. With the return of normal antebellum politics (without the slavery issue), the power and patronage of the federal government, which had enriched and gratified the leaders, and the tariff, banking, and other corporate welfare laws that they had put in place for their benefit might be lost.

As a Massachusetts colonel wrote to his radical Governor John Andrew:

The thing we seek is permanent dominion: and what instance is there of permanent dominion without changing, revolutionizing and absorbing the institutions, life and manners of the conquered peoples? They think we mean to take their slaves. Bah! We must take their ports, their mines, their water power, the very soil they plow.

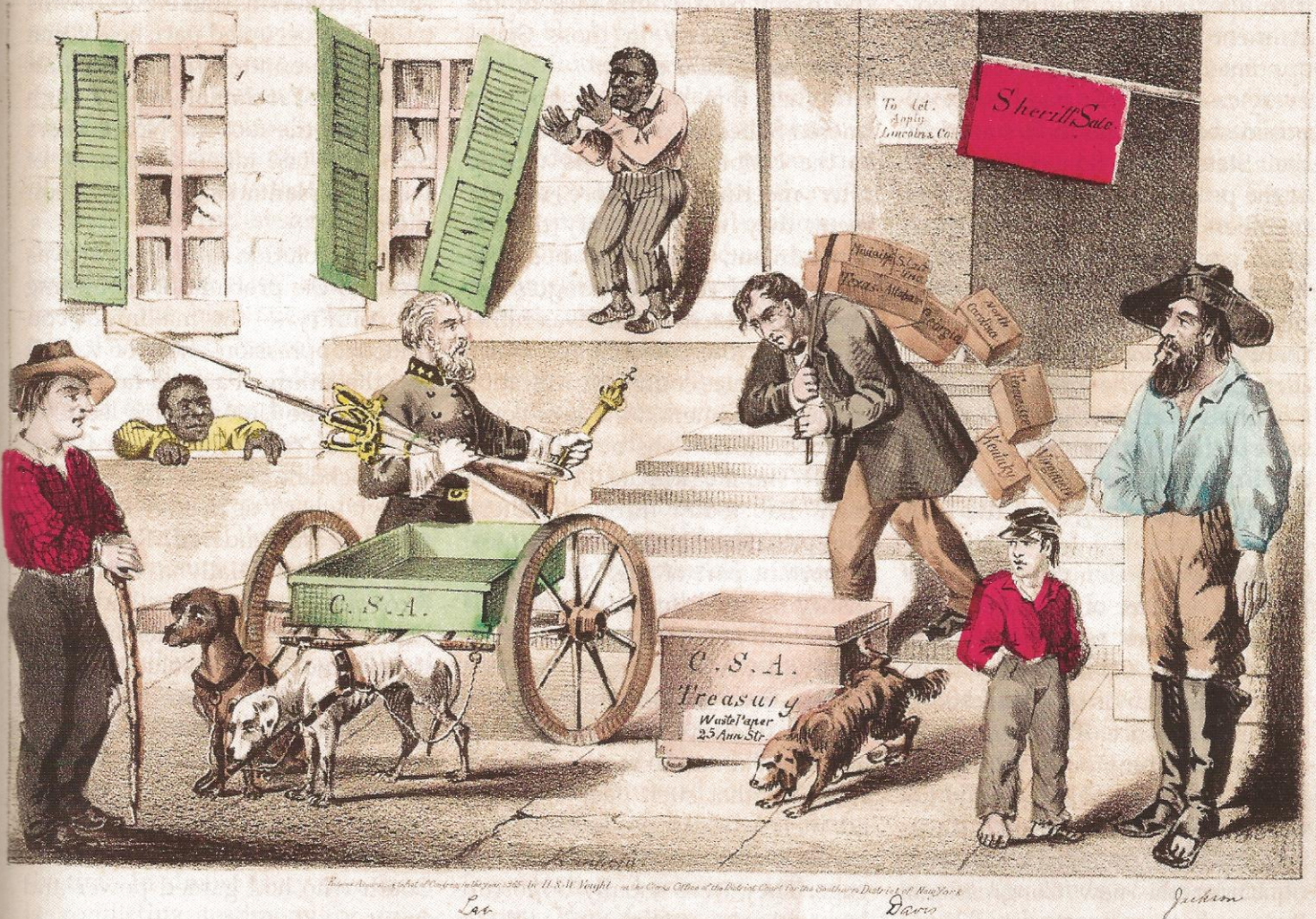
This Union officer gives us the right place to begin understanding the history of "Reconstruction."

Facing the threat of a restored Union, Republican leaders had to come up with new theories (completely foreign to the Constitution and all American tradition, of course). The States were no longer States. According to Thaddeus Stevens, they were merely territory inhabited by a conquered people who could be disposed of as the conqueror pleased. According to Charles Sumner, who fancied himself a great intellectual, the Southern States had committed "suicide" (certainly an assisted suicide if that were the case). The States were dead and they could only be resurrected when they had been repopulated by superior New Englanders.

There were attempts by Lincoln and, later, Johnson to forward a supposedly more lenient plan of Reconstruction, resulting in a struggle between the president and the Republican majority in Congress which was unresolved when Lincoln died. Under the Lincoln plan States would be "restored" when a number of voters equal to 10 percent of the 1860 electorate took an oath of future "loyalty" to the federal government. This plan of the great advocate of democracy, Lincoln was worse than it sounds because the 10 percent included carpetbaggers and Union soldiers and was not viable without the backing of the army. However, it did allow Southerners who took the oath to vote, except for Confederate leaders who were in prison or required to seek a personal pardon from the president.

A major scenario in American folklore is that there would have been no harsh Reconstruction if Lincoln had lived. His superhuman humanity and mercy would have brought peace and reconciliation. Perhaps, but Lincoln was nothing if not a consummate politician. When he spoke in his Second Inaugural address about "binding up the nation's wounds" and "with malice toward none," it was not at all clear whether the "rebels" were included in the "nation." Like most of his statements, it was cagey and could be read more than one way. For generations, Southerners have co-operated in propping up the portrayal of a just and merciful Lincoln because it provides a useful contrast to the Radicals.

The Republicans did well in the 1868 Northern elections, in large part because of false, concocted propaganda about Southern atrocities committed against "Union men" and the freed slaves. This propaganda was contradicted by General Grant, who had not yet been ab-



THE FIRST OF MAY 1865 OR GEN'L MOVING DAY IN RICHMOND VA

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sorbed by the Republicans, and by numerous other Northerners who had actually visited the South and declared that it was as peaceful as could be hoped for, given the disruptions of the war, and that no further armed resistance was contemplated. Most people had enough to do keeping body and soul together and were following Lee's and Forrest's advice to go to work and live quietly. According to the Republican press, however, the South was still seething with violence and rebellion. What really bothered many Northerners was that Southerners, although they accepted defeat,

would not admit that they were wrong and grovel for forgiveness. People with a puritan cast of mind demand punishment for sinners.

The Radicals gained control. So Johnson was impeached on trumped-up charges, his vetoes over-ridden, and in 1868 the relatively constructive period of Presidential Reconstruction came to an end. For the next decade the country was governed by the Joint Congressional Committee on Reconstruction, which had even less regard for the Constitution "as it was" than had Lincoln. This ruling cabal was headed by men like Rep-

resentative Thaddeus Stevens of Pennsylvania (who was wealthy because of the tariff on iron imports) and Senator Charles Sumner of Massachusetts. Almost everybody has noticed and it can hardly be denied that both these men suffered from very warped personalities. Another key figure in what was to be portrayed later as a heroic battle for "civil rights" was Senator Ben Wade of Ohio. Wade wrote his wife that he hated Washington because there were so many black people. Except he used another word for the people referred to.

Elections had been held in

which "rebels" who promised future allegiance to the federal government could vote. Johnson had appointed temporary governors, in every case men who had openly opposed secession but had stayed by their States and retained the respect of the people. These men and other members of the restored Southern state governments were now removed from their offices by soldiers. (Don't let anyone tell you that there has never been an American dictatorship.) The men elected to Congress from the Southern States were refused their seats, including Unionists from Tennessee who would not go along with the Radicals.

The great Commonwealth of Virginia, mother of presidents and mother of states, was now Military District No. 1. Civil power was entirely in the hands of army officers in time of peace. The relatives of George Washington, Thomas Jefferson and Patrick Henry could not vote, unlike the newly freed slaves and any immigrant just off the boat.

Under the new Congressional Reconstruction, an estimated 85 per cent of white men were barred from the polls. Only those who could swear never to have supported the "rebellion" in any way could vote, along with the newly freed black men who were now declared to be "loyal citizens." (Even though most Northern States did not allow their small number of blacks to vote.) In practice, ex-rebels who were willing to support radical Reconstruction were acceptable, whereas ex-Unionists who refused to go along with the party were expelled, which shows that expediency rather than principle was governing. The new electorate was to call conventions to write new State constitutions which were pleasing to the wise men of New England. The black voters were to be organized by carpetbaggers to make new safely-Republican

State governments and guarantee the permanent dominance of the Republican party in those States and thus in the country.

When that was done, the conquered States might be re-admitted to the Union if Congress wished, after meeting one more requirement: they were to ratify the 14th Amendment, which had been illegally forced through Congress by strong-arm tactics. This was rather peculiar. How could States which were not States count for ratification of the amendment? And how could coerced ratifications be considered valid? The illegitimate 14th Amendment has today through judicial interpretation become the most important part of the Constitution, justifying any number of violations of the will of the majority.

The term *carpetbagger* has been widely used to identify Northerners who flocked South to control the government and to make money. It was said that such people carried all their worldly possessions in a carpet bag — a cheap form of luggage. They were usually opportunists without scruples and without respectability in the Northern communities from which they came. Not every Northerner who came South was a carpetbagger, but the carpetbagger type was abundant enough to make for a valid generalization. It is a fact that people who left the North under a cloud or even under indictment became wealthy and governors and US Senators in the Reconstruction South. When they no longer had the support of the US army to keep them in office, they generally caught the first train North and sought minor patronage jobs in Washington.

Actually, "Reconstruction" had really begun in 1862 when carpetbaggers swarmed into the occupied parts of the South to steal private property and usurp local governments. There were especially fat

pickings in Louisiana with its rich sugar plantations and New Orleans trade. The occupied parishes of that State were omitted from the Emancipation Proclamation, though doubtless the fact the Northerners owned or had taken over many of the sugar plantations was not a consideration.

So, a solution — of sorts — was given to the problem of rebuilding the country — the maximum continued oppression short of war. It was the failure of a good-faith restoration of the Union which led General Lee to remark to former Governor Stockdale of Texas that if he had known what was in store he would not have surrendered. Reconstruction was essentially a regime of force such as Americans had never before seen or lived under. It is hard to imagine a worse solution to the problem of the peace. The Southern States lived under this regime until it was overcome by various combinations of circumstances and actions. In the end, everyone lost except the Republicans North and South who had gained power and profit.

It should be kept in mind that the South is an immense area and that "Reconstruction" lasted in some states for a decade. Every state and locality had a different experience and the states followed different paths and timetables toward escaping military rule. Obviously, the course of events was different in South Carolina and Mississippi, which had black majorities, than it was on the Texas frontier, or in Missouri and East Tennessee where white Republicans as well as carpetbaggers and ex-slaves were a factor. You can find an incident or an example to support almost any case you want to make. But not every example which is presented is representative of a fair and truthful generalization.

Violence is a big subject in Re-

construction. There was certainly violence, ranging from personal assaults to riots to pitched battles in which people were killed. However, I doubt it was as prevalent or as decisive as is now the accepted idea. The current official version of Reconstruction is that there was a reign of terror, systematic murder and intimidation by the "white Southern ruling class" determined to keep the black people in virtual slavery and control the "poor whites." This is the Marxist class-conflict formula for history. In the South, as in every other human society which has ever existed, some people had more power and influence than others. But to see Reconstruction in such a way is so silly that it can only be believed by an "intellectual."

The real picture is a good deal more complicated. One can find plenty of material about conflict, intimidation and killing, which is what the PC school make use of, but they take for granted as fact what is clearly partisan propaganda from the time. In almost every case there is conflicting testimony or inadequate sources so that judgment becomes a matter of who you believe are the good guys and who are the bad guys. For the PC historians it is axiomatic that all violence is caused by reactionaries who are resisting the revolution. This is standard Marxist doctrine which justified the elimination of whole classes of people in Communist countries.

Our present-day savants never ask the essential factual and moral question: Who initiated violence? Certainly the white people of the South resisted as they could living in a society dominated by their ex-slaves and outsiders, a society in which they had no real law and order, and in which their cherished individual liberty was at the mercy of any army officer. Northerners would have done exactly the same in

the same situation. Yet Reconstruction began with no overt hostility to the black people. In fact, the general attitude right after the war was gratitude to the blacks who, after all, had for the most part remained loyal despite ample provocation and opportunity to do otherwise. Many prominent and influential Southerners urged the necessity of helping the black people to advance in their condition as a matter of decency and the long-range health of society, even founding schools like the Tuskegee Institute.

I believe it can be shown that violence of the political sort was begun by the Republicans. The Union League was a vigilante organization which suppressed dissent in the North during the war. It moved its operations to the South. The operations consisted of secret meetings at night where black people were given promises of rewards at the expense of the white population and encouraged to aggression. Armed black mobs led by carpetbaggers roamed around intimidating, stealing, harassing and murdering. They deliberately provoked violent response. And remember, their coercion was directed not only at whites but to any black people who refused to join. In other words, the Union League used the methods of the Ku Klux Klan before the Klan came into existence.

Southerners found themselves in a situation in which the courts, local and state government, and the militia were under the control of aliens, in most cases having seized power illegitimately and subject to no control except by the occupying army.

Much depended on the character of the army officers in charge. One of the worst was General Phil Sheridan, military governor of the District of Texas. He showed as much contempt for the people of Texas as he had for the civilians

of the Valley of Virginia. Sheridan discontinued the long-established policy of recovering white women and children who had been captured by Indians. There is evidence he connived in the planned sinking of a boatload of Confederate families leaving Galveston for South America. The crew was to desert and leave the vessel sinking. Fortunately, the intended victims discovered and prevented the plot.

Sheridan had gained military fame by commanding large forces of freshly mounted cavalry with repeating carbines which had been able to hold their own with, though not defeat, greatly outnumbered and exhausted Confederate horsemen. And by boastfully burning out civilians. He was so popular with Republicans that many wanted him for president, although this would have required falsification of his birthplace. Sheridan might have become the first, if not the only, foreign-born president.

In this situation, where the law was a travesty and government was in the hands of the unscrupulous, Southerners reacted as free Americans had always done. They took matters into their own hands to restore genuine law and order. Sympathetic Northerners and visiting Europeans mostly agreed that the kind of resistance represented by the Ku Klux Klan and similar groups was necessary and right, at least in the beginning. Southern actions, so viciously indicted by today's historians, were mostly defensive.

The carpetbaggers in power conducted elections under army protection, and when they did not turn out right, they simply threw out the results and reported what they wanted. One of the common historians' indictments of Southern whites is that in defeating Reconstruction they sometimes turned to intimidation at the polls. It is not

mentioned that the Republicans had already totally discredited the electoral process by fraud and intimidation.

We can evaluate the evidence of bad behavior in Reconstruction accurately when we understand that the Republican party propaganda machine was pervasive and unscrupulous. Throughout Reconstruction they portrayed Southerners as barbarians and unrepentant traitors who regularly murdered honest, peaceful Northern men and blacks. This was the beginning of the age of that Northern invention: "yellow journalism." Examples: in 1866 there were serious race riots in New Orleans and Memphis. This was widely publicized as evidence of the violent, unrepentant South. But actually, the riots did not involve white Southerners at all. They were between blacks and the city police who were almost all former Union soldiers. At the trial of Captain Wirtz for Andersonville, numerous witnesses, some of whom had never even been there, testified they had seen Wirtz flogging prisoners mercilessly with a lash. In fact, wounds had left Wirtz barely able to lift his arms. That was why he was assigned to prison duty.

Congress took three thick volumes of testimony about alleged atrocities in the South. It has been shown that much of this was simply fiction and much of the rest exaggerated, distorted or misinterpreted. There were even cases of blacks and carpetbaggers disguising themselves as Klansmen to commit criminal acts.

So, it becomes often a matter of who you believe. I have been studying the character of the people involved for most of a lifetime, and I have no doubt which people are more likely to be telling the truth.

It should be clear by now that Reconstruction is a very complicated segment of American history.

To discuss it puts one somewhat in the position of the blind men trying to describe the elephant — it all depends on where you take hold. The period is bloody ground in historiography. Understanding has been dominated by the interpretations created by various succeeding schools of historians.

At first, Reconstruction was viewed as no more than deserved punishment for Southern sinners who had defied Northern will. Towards the end of the 19th century, the view changed somewhat. The major national historians of the period were agreed that preserving the Union had been righteous. But there had appeared among them the first generation of professionally trained historians, who believed they should strive for objectivity and investigate primary documents before judging the truth. These soon recognized that Reconstruction had been an evil — because it involved immense corruption, because it based government on ex-slaves who were unqualified and badly misled, because the country had been controlled by a cabal of bad men who for a time constituted a revolutionary tribunal not responsible to the people or the law, and because restoration of good feelings had been retarded.

In the early 20th century there came the much slandered "Dunning School" of historians who are now dismissed unread as biased, racist Southerners. William A. Dunning was actually a Northerner and a professor at Columbia University who wanted to establish a history of Reconstruction based on primary research in documents. Many of his students were Southerners. They were not the first to portray Reconstruction as a carnival of graft and ignorance. What they added were exhaustively researched studies of each State which documented chapter and verse the ugliness of what

had been imposed on the South in the name of "Reconstruction."

For the first half of the 20th century, Reconstruction was seen by most historians and the public as "the Tragic Era" which should not have happened, a vindictive and counter-productive orgy of corruption and oppression. Such standard American history texts as that by the impeccably Bostonian Samuel Eliot Morison of Harvard gave this account. Even liberals who were highly critical of the South admitted that the evils of Reconstruction were partly responsible for the backward conditions that they deplored.

Since the 1960s, coinciding with the Civil Rights movement and the dominance of extreme leftists in academia, we have had a new interpretation of Reconstruction which is now almost universally accepted and unchallenged. According to this fantasy, which nowhere touches the real lives of black and white Southerners, Reconstruction was a great revolutionary mission in which black people strove, with the support of benevolent egalitarian Northerners, for the realization of a complete (and socialist) equality in American society. Great progress was made, but, alas, before the revolutionary agenda was complete, the North gave in to a terrorist reign of violence by Southern whites and abandoned its holy mission of racial equality, which had to be revived in the civil rights' struggles of the 20th century. This tells the story of Reconstruction in a frame of Marxist revolutionary romanticism. The problem is there never was any such a dedicated egalitarian mission on the part of those who decreed Reconstruction. Some Radical Republicans talked that way, perhaps even a few sincerely, but it was never their primary concern.

What previous generations

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most noticed about the Reconstruction period was its massive stealing, corruption, and abuse of the taxpayers. The current PC historians ignore this or play it down. As self-appointed revolutionaries they care about their agenda, not about the facts. Corruption is of no interest to them. They automatically assume the South is naturally corrupt and so that for them corruption does not count against Reconstruction. Sometimes they point out that there was corruption in the North in that period also, as if it were something in the atmosphere and is not to be held against the Republicans who were responsible for it in both places.

The new historiography also stresses that besides civil rights, the carpetbagger/black governments in the South made many forward progressive moves which the evil South had previously resisted, like the establishment of public school systems. It is true the Reconstruction constitutions called for such things and that money was sometimes appropriated. Not mentioned is the fact that most of the money was stolen. Viable public schools came to the South after Reconstruction when Southerners paid taxes to support both white and black schools despite their impoverished condition.

The evidence that Reconstruction was primarily a matter of illegal profiteering is overwhelming and unchallengeable. Literally hundreds of examples might be cited of local and State offices which were grossly abused to enrich officeholders. President Grant's vice president, his secretary of war, his brother-in-law and several of his close friends

were involved in huge scandals of graft and corruption in regard to federal funds. Also involved were leading Republican politicians like James A. Garfield and James G. Blaine. Such was the atmosphere that both got the Republican presidential nomination despite the black marks against their names.

In the South of course it was much worse because there was a complete lack of accountability for those in power. Henry Clay Warmoth was from Wisconsin. He was cashiered from the Union army under a cloud. He became the Reconstruction governor of Louisiana. The governor's salary was \$8,000 per year. Every year that he was governor, Warmoth banked more than \$100,000 in income. The Reconstruction legislature of South Carolina quadrupled taxes on the devastated people and spent more on cigars and whiskey for itself than the entire state budget had been in 1860. They also repealed a law passed just after the war for providing thousands of Confederate veterans with artificial legs. All of the Southern legislatures gave immense sums to private corporations for railroads which were never built. Federal courts refused to allow the related debts to be repudiated and South Carolina did not finish paying off the fraudulent bonds until 1955.

As an added insult, Northern denominations were empowered to take over Southern churches, expel the ministers, and replace them with Yankee missionaries. The Methodists did not recover their property until 1876.

In 1862 Congress authorized the Treasury Department to send

agents with the armies to collect taxes and seize property where they were not paid. Since many people moved out of the way of the invading Yankee armies, this was a neat trick. The next year there was an Enemy and Abandoned Property Act which allowed the seizure of any Southern property left in the wake of the Northern armies. A lot of land was acquired by Northerners who took over the operation of plantations, expecting to make a fortune. There is abundant testimony that they treated the black workers much worse than their old Southern masters. The US Army often returned runaways to these new-style plantations. One such plantation was acquired in Florida by the great abolitionist Harriet Beecher Stowe.

But the main purpose of the law was to steal cotton, an immensely valuable commodity for which the North and indeed the world had an insatiable demand. This continued for years after the war. The confiscated cotton was supposed to be turned over to the government. It is estimated that \$100,000,000 was seized, but only about \$2 million ever reached the treasury. This indicates the general level of honesty of the federal officials during the war and Reconstruction. A secretary of the treasury commented he must have sent a few honest agents to the South, but none remained that way very long. Indeed, during the war, operations of the Union forces, as in the Red River campaign, had sometimes been designed for stealing cotton rather than for any military objective, and numerous prominent

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Northern generals became rich men as a result.

There seems to be a general assumption that all this corruption mysteriously took hold after the noble Lincoln was out of the way. But it began under Lincoln's war with unprecedented expenditures and bureaucracy and officials chosen by Lincoln. Indeed, the president irritated Secretary Stanton by giving to cronies certificates which exempted them from illegal trade with the enemy. Thus many wealthy Republican industrialists acquired cotton on the coast of Texas in exchange for goods badly needed by the Confederacy.

Early in the "Reconstruction" period a Mississippi Unionist remarked that he believed half the black population of the State had perished in the war. Solid statistics will never be established, but certainly the death toll among the slaves from disease and want was high (as it was for Southern white women and children).

Here an up-to-date and upwardly mobile young historian or journalist will jump in to declare that the black death toll was, of course, as all learned and good people know, due to Southern violence and oppression. As usual he is wrong. Those who celebrate the Union armies' glorious forays through the South, when more aggression usually was displayed against helpless civilians than armed enemies, overlook something: when an area is devastated, the black people as well as the white are left without food, shelter and the means of living.

One suspects that most Americans imagine the slaves and the boys in blue rushing into each oth-

er's arms to celebrate the glorious coming of emancipation. In fact, it is not at all clear what percentage of black people liberated themselves and left of their own will to seek refuge with the Union forces and what percentage were literally forced away from home. In either case they ended up in unhealthy camps from which they were recruited by the Northern army as labor and cannon fodder. And many simply left devastated homes and took to the roads seeking sustenance or the testing of freedom of movement, quite often leaving their children and old folks to be taken care of by others. (William Faulkner has a vivid portrayal of this wandering in his War Between the States novel, *The Unvanquished*.) Sudden freedom could be a scary and puzzling as well as a liberating thing. A new life became possible, but what that life might be and how to obtain it was not at all clear.

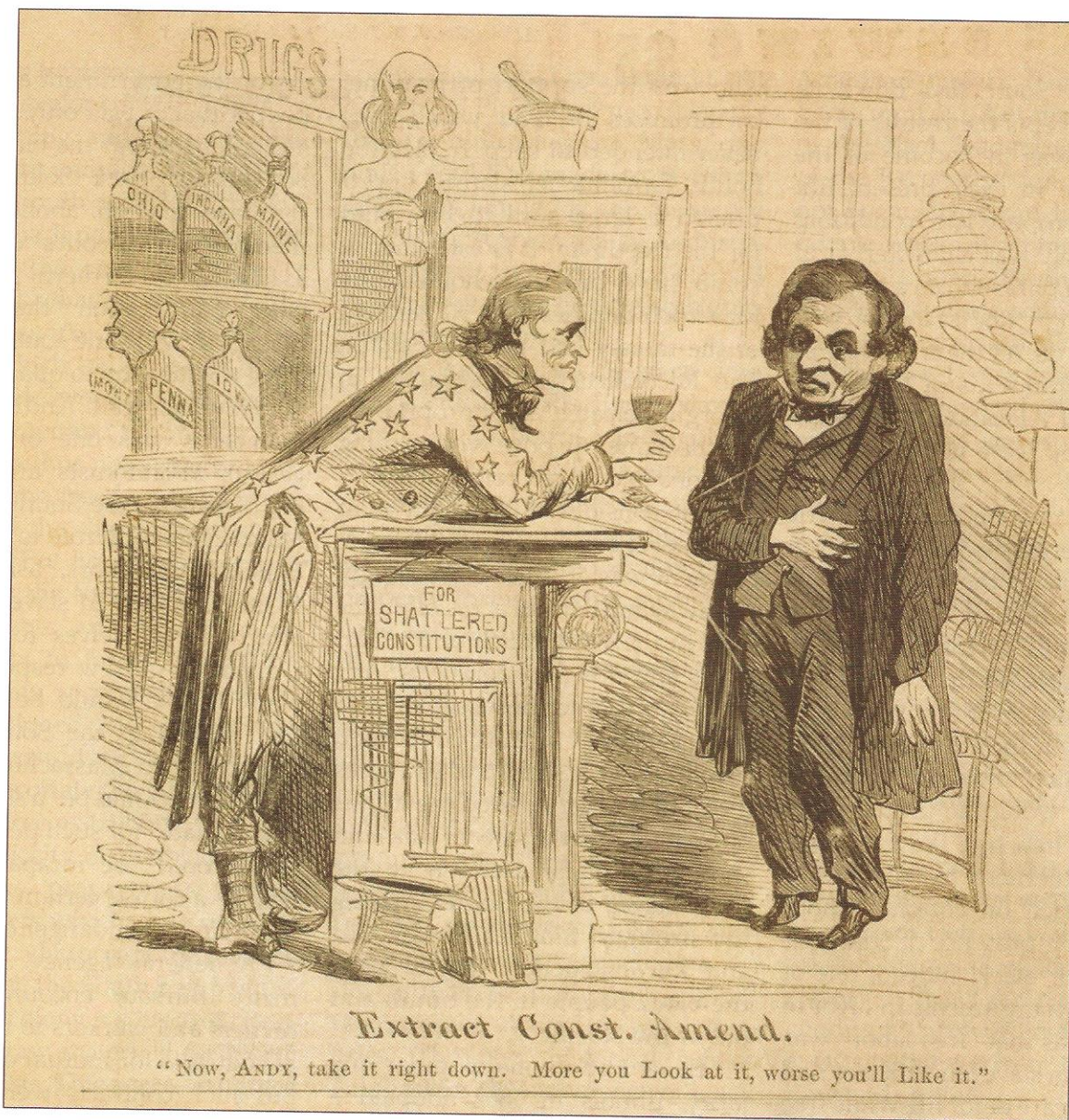
Certainly the black people of the South suffered an immense amount of abuse from Northern soldiers, probably more than the whites, and Union commanders considered the freed people following their armies to be a major nuisance. Clearly, most Northern soldiers had no sympathy for black people. They found them alien and contemptible. Nor were they fighting for emancipation — the Emancipation Proclamation in fact precipitated a wave of desertions. The Proclamation itself, adopted well into the war, really had little to do with the slaves. It was issued as a sop to European opinion, to bolster Lincoln's shaky standing with the more extreme element of his party, and in the hope (a failure) that the

Confederacy would be weakened by slave uprisings. As Frederick Douglass, the leading black figure of the time, was later to remark: everything that Lincoln did was designed for the benefit of white people and anything beneficial to the black people was incidental.

Of course, there was a good deal of conflict and violence in the uprooting and changed social conditions which occurred in the later stages of the war and afterward. The first Reconstruction state governments under Johnson played into Republican hands by adopting laws to control the large rootless population and get people back to work. The laws provided those without a residence and a visible means of support could be held to work by local officials for a stated period of time. These laws were a desperate necessity and were simply traditional vagrancy law copied almost verbatim from Northern state statutes, but they were denounced as "Black Codes" designed to reinstitute slavery.

Hard as it is for people today to believe, it appears that a great many of the slaves simply stayed home. They were not liberated by the boys in blue, but by their former master, often just returned from the Confederate army — ragged, destitute, and disabled like General Butler. He assembled them in the yard of the big house and told them they were free. They could go whenever and wherever they wished. If they stayed, they would all try to work together to plow and plant and survive.

Those who had supported Southern independence came out of the war with a favorable attitude



toward the black people, most of whom had, after all, worked peacefully during the war. They were not to blame for the depredations of the Yankees. The feeling was reciprocal — emancipation did not necessarily turn into hostility toward a good master. Of course, our young historian or journalist cannot grasp this, because he knows nothing of the real life of real people, and his mind is filled with abstractions about class and race which he mistakes for knowledge.

Antagonism between black and white was generated later, when the carpetbaggers, for their own purposes, began to organize and arm black men at secret night meetings. The Union League’s modus

operandi was to promise an easy life and rewards at the expense of white men in exchange for Republican votes. Racial antagonism was a product of Reconstruction, not of antebellum slavery or the war, and, alas, it was to persist for a long time. The alienation between black and white Southerners reached a strong level in the late 19th and early 20th centuries when the antebellum generation of both races had passed away. Fortunately, good faith between members of both races has never entirely disappeared.

The most extraordinary thing about emancipation is the lack of attention by the ruling Republicans to the immense and unprecedented situation it created. Millions of

members of an illiterate, dependent laboring class, who were considered by nearly all white Americans North and South to be an inferior race, were declared free with never a moment’s thought or planning given by their emancipators as to how the vast social change was to work. The only real interest in the black people was how they could be used as shock troops to maintain Republican control of the South and thus of the country.

Near the end of the war, an abortive peace conference was held at Hampton Roads. Alexander Stephens, vice president of the Confederacy, who was genuinely concerned about the welfare of the black people, posed a question to Lincoln.

Suppose the South lays down its arms and accepts the results of the war. What was to become of the black people in their present illiterate and propertyless condition? Lincoln's reply was characteristically flippant, a phrase from a popular minstrel song: "Root, Hog, or Die." In other words, let them survive as they can. (Hundreds of black people attended Alexander Stephens's funeral. They were not allowed at Lincoln's.)

An economic historian has written: "Northerners expected that the emancipation of the slaves would turn the plantation South into a land of small farms and shops similar to the North.... The abolition of slavery would create a free economy with the expected results. Cotton which was the nation's chief staple would be produced as always but in a free labor system." Many Northerners expected they could get rich on cotton without the annoying presence of Southerners, white or black. Indeed, one of the Northern arguments in favor of abolition was that "free labor" was cheaper than slave labor. Slaves had to be taken care of for life while free labor competition brought wages down and allowed troublesome workers to be fired.

Such a simple transformation did not happen for many easily foreseeable reasons, among which was the fact there was no money in the South to pay wages.

One of the tactics of Reconstruction was to promise the black people land. Sometimes it was to be their late master's land, sometimes it was to be 40 acres and a mule for free, although 40 acres hardly made for a viable homestead. The Republican operatives herding black voters in the South knew when they said this that it was a lie, that it would never happen. How low can you get? This was a standard tactic of Communists around the world

who won the support of peasants by promises of land which they never intended to keep. In fact, the South Carolina legislature appropriated a large sum to buy land for the freedmen. It is estimated it could have provided homesteads for 80,000 families — if 90 per cent of the money had not been stolen. The Reconstruction legislature in Georgia defeated an appropriation for the same purpose while voting millions to crooked corporations.

But consider this, which is almost never brought up. The US government was at that very time giving away millions of acres of public land in the West, much of it to railroads and other corporations. Any white Northerner or foreigner who made a show of settling on the land could receive a section of 640 acres free. But it never entered the minds of Northerners that any of this land should be made available to the freed slaves of the South. **Among the strongest motives for the war and Reconstruction was to keep the black people in the South and out of the North.**

By a two-to-one popular majority, Illinois in 1862 adopted a new constitution which forbade black people to enter the State. Lincoln's friend and supporter Senator Trumbull remarked: "There is a very great aversion ... against having free negroes come among us. Our people want nothing to do with the negro." Shortly after, Secretary of War Stanton took note of the large number of ex-slaves who had gathered around the army at Cairo, Illinois, who were in a very sick and impoverished condition. He ordered them dispersed through Illinois, and in fact some rich Chicagoans had requested that choice blacks be sent to them as servants. Public meetings of protest were held all over Illinois and leaders, both Republican and Democrat, criticized the move. Defend-

ers of the government assured the people that it was only temporary and after the war the blacks would be shipped back South. Salmon P. Chase of Ohio, abolitionist and member of Lincoln's cabinet, reassured the Northern public that with emancipation "the blacks of the North will slide southward and leave no question to quarrel about."

Governor John Andrew of Massachusetts was one of the strongest of abolitionists and supporters of war on the South. In 1862 a federal general wrote to three New England governors, asking them to take 2,000 freed slaves who had attached themselves to the army. Governor Andrew responded that black people would be happier if they stayed in the South than if they came to Massachusetts. Massachusetts would be "a strange land and climate" for such people where they would "be incapable of self-help — a course certain to demoralize them and endanger others."

A federal agency, the Freedmen's Bureau, encouraged landowners and workers to make annual contracts for mutual cooperation, but such contracts were not easy to enforce. The landowner and the workers must have food and shelter for the many months while the crop is planted, raised, harvested, and sold. And selling the crop was an iffy business since the grower had no control of the price received, which was decided by speculators and the international market. The return on the cotton crop varied greatly from year to year and often did not meet expenses. Life could only be sustained by borrowing and the only people with money to loan were Yankees who sometimes received interest of as much as 60 per cent. As late as 1880 there was less land under cultivation than there had been in 1860. As vast amount of land changed hands — going not to the former slaves but

to Northern investors.

Thus developed the system of share-cropping and its vast attendant poverty and debt which dominated the South well into the 20th century. The landowner borrowed to finance the year and advance the workers what they needed. The land was worked in an arrangement by which the proceeds of the crop for sale would be shared by the landowner and the worker. The worker was thus not a wage earner. He had some freedom over his activities and the chance to negotiate a contract. But he was perpetually in debt for the funds advanced by the landowner, and the landowner was in debt to forces beyond his control. This second point is seldom mentioned by writers who hold Southern life up to condemnation and excoriate the landowners.

When Reconstruction was over, a large majority of the black population were propertyless agricultural laborers who had no recourse except the sharecropping system. In plain fact, the South had been reduced to a colony, a source of cheap labor and raw materials for Northern capitalists. This was re-enforced by federal legislation — not only the tariff, but trade regulations. For instance, railroad rates were rigged

so that steel could be shipped to Atlanta from Pittsburgh more cheaply than from Birmingham. Margarine, which could be made from cotton seed, was banned at the insistence of the Wisconsin dairy industry. And poverty, as always, was blamed by wise outsiders on Southern ignorance and laziness.

The many black artisans who had acquired skills under slavery continued to flourish in Southern cities as free men for a long time, while they were barred from such occupations in the North. Some black people acquired land or other property through what must have been extraordinary effort. Among the true heroes of Reconstruction were that significant number of black people who advanced themselves without resort to political power, acquiring land, education and skills. The recipients of the vast resources that have been spent in recent years to subsidise research into African-American history have not bothered to investigate this, being uninterested in black people who are not victims or revolutionaries. The new historical school emphasizes the emergence of black leaders and the self-direction of black people toward achieving equality. This is indeed an aspect of

American history which needs to be recognized. But many, if not all, of the black leaders who emerged in the Reconstruction regimes had not been slaves, did little for their people while enriching themselves, and quite often, like their white colleagues, caught a train north at the end of Reconstruction.

The great losers in Reconstruction, when the final tally was made, were the freed slaves of the South. Reconstruction had given black people the right to vote, which was not what they most needed, and that was about all they were left with, and that only temporarily. You can show by statistics of social pathology the black population was in some ways worse off in 1900 than it had been in slavery. Health and life expectancy had declined, as had work skills and family integrity, and crime was rampant. According to official American truth, the pathologies we see today in the ghettos of Detroit, Watts and Newark are the result of the heritage of slavery. Is it not strange that these conditions grow worse the farther away one moves from the South in time and space?

It is all too easy to dismiss the suffering and oppression of our people under defeat and "Recon-

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struction," especially these days when the Southern past, which makes up the best and noblest part of American history, is being demonized and erased even in the Southern States. But the suffering and oppression were very real and beyond anything any other large group of Americans has ever faced. The only positive factor was in Texas, where large herds of wild cattle could be gathered and driven North to where people had money to spend. Thus Texans built the great American Cattle Kingdom on the Northern as well as on the Southern Plains.

Starvation and near-starvation were present in many areas, with the kinds of illnesses which flourish where diet is inadequate. The Georgia writer Ferroll Sams records his grandmother remembered subsisting on poke salad for long periods. The only way they could obtain essential salt was to cull it out of the dirt where the old smokehouse had been. And they were fairly prosperous people. General Richard H. Anderson, late commander of a division in the fabled Army of Northern Virginia, hired out as a railroad day laborer to feed his family. General Bryan Grimes rented out his land to a Yankee to raise some capital to get started again. Many returned soldiers went to work, living in poverty and taking up the plow without complaint. An old gentleman I used to know, who grew up around the turn of the 20th century, said that legless and armless Confederate veterans were still a common sight in Charlotte in 1900.

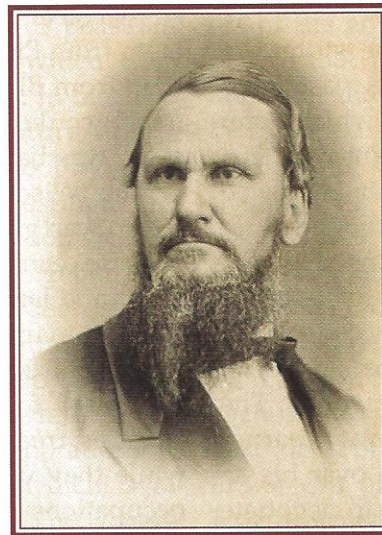
Some undefeated patriots left the country, headed south. Except for the *Confederados* in Brazil, most of these eventually returned. Others moved on to help in building the far Western States or to enrich the spirit of New York City which had always had many Southern sympathizers. A lot of talent was

forced to leave its Southern homeland in order to prosper, something which remained true well into the 20th century.

Petty oppressions and tyrannies were rampant in Reconstruction. Paroled Confederates were seized by squads of black soldiers who cut the buttons off their uniform coats — the only coats they had. There were numerous unjustified arrests and property seizures by crooked officials. In Raleigh the local federal Army commander decided he wanted a particular choice piece of land. That land had been used as a ready burial place for Confederates during the war. The commander told the mayor that he intended to throw the Southern bodies into the street if they were not removed. Citizens of Raleigh spent several sweltering summer days in the gruesome task of disinterring the bodies and moving them to another place.

There is no escaping the ugliness of Reconstruction. The only good point is the spirit of the Southern people during this period. Not only did they fight to secure a living and restore civilized institutions, but they refused to be broken in spirit and become a subjugated people.

The brilliant theologian Robert Lewis Dabney told young men, recently soldiers, that they had been deprived of the victory they deserved, but the enemy's success did not mean the enemy was right. God's purposes were not so obvious, and only atheists believed that might proved right. The Yankees, a people of "notoriously bad char-



Robert Lewis Dabney

acter," wanted to remake the South in their own image. But if the young men preserved their personal and family integrity, then they would not become conquered in spirit. Only weak peoples have their character remade by governments. Strong peoples remake governments.

The palmetto tree and the gamecock are the symbols of South Carolina. On the courthouse wall at Newberry, someone carved a representation of Reconstruction. The palmetto tree was shattered, but a jaunty little gamecock still breathed defiance from the stump. The Virginia State seal shows the beautiful virgin Liberty triumphing over tyranny — *Sic Semper Tyrannis*. An unreconstructed Virginian created another version of the seal — Liberty prostrate under the heel of the tyrant who had the face of Abraham Lincoln.

The popular Georgia humorist and chronicler of rural life, Charles Henry Smith ("Bill Arp"), was asked by a publisher after the war to collect his wartime writings for Northern readers. He did so, but prefaced his book with words which spoke the sentiments of most of the defeated Confederacy:

For the sentiments that pervade these letters, I have no apology to make. At the time they appeared in the press of the South, these sentiments were silent echoes of our people's thoughts, and this accounts in the main for the popularity with which they were received. Of course they contain exaggerations, and prophecies which were never fulfilled; but both sections were playing "brag" as well as "battle," and though we

could not compete with our opponents in the former, yet some of us did try to hold our own. At both games we were whipped by overwhelming forces, and we have given it up. Conquered, but not convinced, we have accepted the situation, and have pledged ourselves to abide by it. We have sworn to do so. We have declared it most solemnly in convention. We have asserted it in every act and deed; and Southern honor, which our enemies cannot appreciate, but which is untarnished and imperishable, is the seal of our good faith. Whoever testifies to the existence among us of an association designed a renewal of the rebellion, is either the victim of his own cowardice, or else the author of a selfish and heartless lie. I say this with feeling and indignation, for we see in such testimony a willingness, nay, a desire on the part of our military rulers, to retain over us their power and their tyranny for malicious or avaricious ends. We have long felt, and we are still feeling, their insults, their blackmail, their robberies. Ours is the stranded ship, and the Federal officers among us are the wreckers; ours the carcass, and they the vultures who are picking our denuded bones. The little that was left our people is seized, and released on paying a part into private pockets. They get rich and resign, and a fresh corps of vampires take their places, to renew the operation. ... But still we abide all these sad results, and look upon it as part of the war, and in keeping with the character of those who have so long been our enemies. They but exhibit the animus of a people whose hate and avarice induced the rebellion. Such oppression has turned from them almost the last opponent of secession, and caused them to regret that they did not throw their lives and fortunes into the fight. ... Perhaps this is all for the best. We cannot tell. We have almost ceased to philosophize upon it, for we have no time to think. The work of actual reconstruction absorbs our time and energies. I mean the reconstruction of our individual fortunes, our houses, our fields

and farms, our railroads, manufactures, graveyards, schools, and churches. We have no time to stop and mourn over the loss of liberty. ... It may be said that the character of these letters has no tendency to soften the animosities engendered by the late unhappy strife. I can only answer, that it is not in rebel nature to be humble to those who would put the heel of tyranny upon us. Our people are a unit upon the moral of the fight they made. They sincerely feel that the provocation of the war was not of their begetting. ... While mourning the loss of thousands of the noblest of our race, while suffering the poverty and desolation with which our conquerors have visited us, while memory stings with the rape and arson which barbarians under arms enforced and heartless officers permitted, it is not in human nature to smother resentment against those who would still play the tyrant and grind us into dust. But to you, kind reader, who can speak gently to the erring (if we have erred), who would pour oil upon the troubled waters, and proffer the hand of kindred love, let me say that, though proudly defiant of our enemies, the noble manliness of our people will meet you cordially at the first sincere effort toward an honorable reconciliation.

Smith's fellow writer George Washington Harris of Tennessee was also unreconstructed. His readers read a discussion on the evil character of "The Puritan Yankee" by his notorious character "Sut Lovingood."

By 1876 all but three States (South Carolina, Florida and Louisiana), had achieved governments placed in power by elections which could be called legitimate, although neither the national or state governments have never fully recovered from the distortion and ethical decline imposed by the ruling party between 1861 and 1876.

Reconstruction came to an end as it had begun — in political fraud

and corruption. The occasion was the presidential election of 1876. The Democratic candidate, Samuel J. Tilden, governor New York, clearly had won the popular vote over the former Union general and governor of Ohio, Rutherford B. Hayes. But two different sets of Election College returns had been sent in by the three still unreconstructed states — one for Tilden from the legitimate governments of the people, which had established themselves by their own initiative, and the other from the corrupt Reconstruction governments still held up by the army.

There followed a deal in the smoke-filled rooms in Congress and other places which historians have written and speculated a lot about without really explaining it. By this deal, the Republican Hayes got the presidency and the troops were withdrawn from the three as yet unliberated States, allowing the Reconstruction governments to collapse of their own artificial existence. Historians have tended to leave the impression that this was all somehow, as usual, due to the inevitable evil Southern politicians who wanted to end Reconstruction. But they had not created the situation nor were they the primary beneficiary. That, as usual, was the Republican party, which by control of new Western States could expect to stay in national power indefinitely.

Reconstruction was not abandoned by the US government because of an imaginary ruling class campaign of terrorism to crush a glorious imaginary peoples' movement, although various forms of non-cooperation by Southerners contributed to it. Decent and thoughtful Northerners became more and more concerned by the corruption of Grant's administrations, a significant part of which was in the South. The hatred aroused by war naturally declined with the realization that all its re-

sults had not been for the best. When two different Republican factions in Louisiana, each claiming to be the legal government, were fighting one another and both telegraphing President Grant to send troops to support them, the corruption and unrepresentative nature of the carpetbag administrations became more and more transparent. And the black leaders most sincerely concerned for the welfare of their people began to realize they had been swindled by false friends and that the best hope of the future was collaboration with white Southern leaders of goodwill like General Wade Hampton of South Carolina.

Hampton's "Red Shirts" prevented Reconstruction domination of the polls in 1876. Only the corrupt state government was allowed to have a militia. Good men, however, organized sporting clubs attired in the traditional red hunting shirts. And an old South Carolin-

ian told me this story he had heard from his grandfather who as a lad had been a witness to that election at Edgefield. General Hampton received the votes of the Red Shirts. He also received the votes of a good many black men and also of the Union soldiers who were there, who had come to understand what Reconstruction had really been about. That was how Reconstruction ended.

Such was the spirit of national repentance that it only remained for Congress in 1878 to pass the Posse Comitatus Act, forbidding the use of the army against the civilian population, although this law has often been violated.

(For those interested in further reading, a good start can be had with *North Against South* by Ludwell H. Johnson, *The South During Reconstruction* by E. Merton Coulter, *The Story of Reconstruction* by Robert S.

Henry, *The Angry Scar* by Hodding Carter, *Bloodstains*, vol. 4, by Howard Ray White, *Dixie after the War* by Myrta Lockett Avery, the recommended readings for the period on www.southernhistorians.org, and Walter L. Fleming, editor, *Documentary History of Reconstruction*.)

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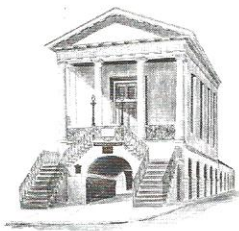
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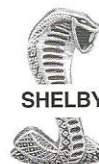
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