

A SHORT HISTORY OF
RECONSTRUCTION
1863-1877

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Illustrated



HARPER PERENNIAL

HARPER & ROW, PUBLISHERS, NEW YORK
Grand Rapids, Philadelphia, St. Louis, San Francisco, London, Singapore,
Sydney, Tokyo, Toronto

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bankrupted in unsuccessful cotton planting, saw in politics a means of earning a living. Henry Warren, a Massachusetts-born Yale graduate, and Albert T. Morgan, a young army veteran from Ohio, had both failed in the Mississippi cotton fields. In 1867 Warren accepted the invitation of military authorities to serve as voter registrar, while local blacks pressured Morgan to run for the constitutional convention, beginning careers that led both men to the legislature. And some carpetbaggers were idealists who, like future Mississippi Gov. Adelbert Ames, became convinced that they "had a Mission with a large M" to assist the former slaves. Most carpetbaggers probably combined the desire for personal gain with a commitment to reforming the "unprogressive" South by "establishing free institutions, free schools, and the system of free labor."

Generally representing black belt constituencies, carpetbaggers garnered a major share of Reconstruction offices, especially in Florida, South Carolina, and Louisiana, states with relatively few native-born white Republicans. Northerners, however, could hardly provide a voting base for Southern Republicanism, for in no state did they comprise even two percent of the total population. Far more numerous were Southern-born white Republicans, or "scalawags." In no Southern state did Republicans attract a majority of the white vote. But given the twin legacies of slavery and defeat, and the opprobrium attached to those who attended "Negro conventions" and took unorthodox political positions, what is remarkable is not how few whites supported the party but, in some states, how many. "It costs nothing for a Northern man to be a Union man," wrote one Georgia Republican, "but the rebuff and persecution received here . . . tells a horrible tale." Yet for a time, scalawags dominated the governments of Alabama, Georgia, Tennessee, Texas, and North Carolina, and played a major role in Mississippi.

Castigated as "white negroes" who had betrayed their region in the quest for office, scalawags had even more diverse backgrounds and motivations than Northern-born Republicans. They included men of prominence and rank outsiders, wartime Unionists and advocates of secession, entrepreneurs advocating a modernized New South and yeomen seeking to preserve semisubsistence agriculture. Their common characteristic was the conviction that they stood a greater chance of advancing their interests in a Republican South than by joining with Reconstruction's opponents.

Many scalawags possessed considerable political experience; their

rank included prewar Congressmen, judges, and local officials. Most were former Whigs who viewed the Republican party as the "legitimate successor" to Whiggery. James L. Alcorn, owner of the largest plantation in the Yazoo-Mississippi delta, was probably the most prominent Old Whig scalawag. In 1867, Alcorn addressed some "blunt speaking" to Mississippi's whites. The black electoral majority was here to stay, and only if men like himself took the lead in Reconstruction could "a harnessed revolution" take place in which the freedmen's civil and political rights were guaranteed, but whites retained control of state government. Moreover, only the Republican Congress could provide the capital essential for the state's economic recovery. So long as blacks were content to be junior partners in a white-dominated coalition, these Old Whig scalawags remained, but when blacks refused to submit to white dictation, Alcorn and his followers abandoned the Republican party.

Yet another group of scalawags were modernizers who saw in Republicanism a "progressive party" that could bring a long-overdue social and economic revolution to the South. Prewar "ideas and feelings," declared Thomas Settle of North Carolina, must be buried "a thousand fathoms deep. . . . Yankees and Yankee notions are just what we want in this country. We want their capital to build factories and workshops. We want their intelligence, their energy and enterprise." Republicans also attracted a number of urban and small-town artisans and some support among the South's foreign-born urban workmen. The Germans of southwestern Texas comprised the largest bloc of immigrant Southern Republicans, helping to send to Congress Edward Degener, a San Antonio grocer and refugee from the failed revolution of 1848.

The most extensive concentration of white Republicans, however, lay in the upcountry bastions of wartime Unionism. East Tennessee, southwestern Missouri, western North Carolina, northwestern Arkansas, and northern Alabama became party strongholds, and some counties, like Winston in Alabama, with only seventeen black residents in 1880, remained so into the twentieth century. In Rutherford County, North Carolina, in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains, Republicans included "a large majority of the small farmers, tenants, laborers," and small-town artisans.

To upcountry Republicans the party represented, first and foremost, the inheritor of wartime loyalism. Bitter memories of persecution cemented their attachment, and more than other Republicans,

upcountry scalwags supported the sweeping proscription of "rebels." But if wartime Unionism was the seedbed of yeoman Republicanism, 1867 was a year of political and ideological mobilization. In meetings of Union Leagues and the Heroes of America, longstanding class antagonisms and intrastate sectional rivalries were transmuted into the coin of nineteenth-century radicalism. Traditional regional demands, like an end to property qualifications for members of the North Carolina legislature, now merged with a retrospective denunciation of slavery as the foundation of a social order that had held "poor whites . . . as much under bondage" as blacks. "Now is the time," wrote a resident of the Georgia mountains, "for every man to come out and speak his principles publicly and vote for liberty as we have been in bondage long enough."

To some upcountry scalwags, Reconstruction promised an end to state policies favoring plantation counties at the expense of their own. Economic boosters like Tennessee Gov. William G. Brownlow had long looked to a statewide railroad system and infusions of Northern capital to bring East Tennessee the benefits of capitalist development. Many small farmers, however, had more immediate economic concerns, especially in upcountry communities where wartime devastation had been succeeded by disastrous crop failures. In the early days of Radical Reconstruction, many Georgia and South Carolina yeomen stood "on the eve of starvation," and "scenes of the Irish famine" were reported in hill country Alabama. Families burdened with prewar debts or obliged to mortgage their farms to replace livestock and implements destroyed during the war now confronted the possibility of losing their homes to creditors. Many looked to the Republicans to rescue "the poor . . . from this great privation" by providing debtor relief.

Here lay the seeds of future conflict over Republican economic policy. Debt-ridden yeomen viewed skeptically ambitious economic programs that would inevitably raise taxes and offer creditors security so as to attract outside capital. The platform of J. M. Wilhite, a Republican sent by Winston County to the Alabama constitutional convention, called for disenfranchising Confederates, the establishment of a public school system, and "low taxes." A few upcountry scalwags even joined blacks in demanding a redistribution of planter land, a program economic boosters viewed as certain to antagonize potential Northern investors.

Such genuine identification with blacks' aspirations remained rare

in the upcountry, where, as one local party leader put it, "our people are more radical against rebels than in favor of negroes." Certainly, scalwags almost unanimously rejected the idea that black political rights implied "social equality" between the races. Most scalwags agreed with the North Carolinian who wrote, "There is not the slightest reason why blacks and whites should sit in the same benches, in Churches, school houses, or Hotels. Each can have the equal protection and benefits of the law without these."

For most scalwags, the alliance with blacks remained a marriage of convenience. Yet whatever its origins, this partnership carried with it a further commitment, unprecedented for men reared in a slave society, to defend blacks' political and civil equality. Unionists, declared a North Carolina Republican newspaper, must choose "between salvation at the hand of the negro or destruction at the hand of the rebels." It would certainly be inaccurate to suggest that the heritage of racism had suddenly vanished. But the fact that so many upcountry whites stood ready "to affiliate . . . politically with the negro element" underscored the extent of the political revolution that swept across the South in 1867.

Thus, Southern Republicanism attracted a broad coalition of supporters with overlapping but distinct political agendas. Providing unity and inspiration were the party's commitment to civil and political equality and its self-image as a "party of progress, and civilization" that would infuse the region with new social ideas and open "the avenues to success and promotion" to black and white, rich and poor. The sense of living in a new era of progress animated the party as its first statewide conventions gathered in the spring and summer of 1867. Yet these meetings also revealed the inner tensions that would plague Southern Republicanism throughout its brief and stormy career. Virtually every party convention found itself divided between "confiscation radicals" (generally blacks) and moderates committed to white control of the party and a policy of economic development that offered more to outside investors and native promoters than to impoverished freedmen and upcountry yeomen.

In South Carolina, radicalism was triumphant in 1867. In March, a Charleston Republican convention dominated by the city's free-born blacks adopted a program for sweeping change in nearly every aspect of the state's life. To a call for expanded internal improve-

with the freedmen's economic aspirations. Many Northern blacks, to be sure, carried south the ideology of free labor, with its respect for private property and individual initiative. Such views were echoed by the Southern free black elite, many of whom opposed confiscation and insisted that political equality did not imply the end of class distinctions: "We do not ask that the ignorant and degraded shall be put on a social equality with the refined and intelligent." 1867, however, was an inopportune moment to preach individual self-help to black belt freedmen, for successive crop failures had left those on share contracts with little or no income. Drawing on widespread dissatisfaction with a contract system that appeared to consign them permanently to poverty and dependence, rural blacks raised, once again, the demand for land.

The land issue animated grass-roots black politics in 1867. Talk of confiscation, reported an American Missionary Association official from North Carolina, "has much greater prominence . . . here than our friends at the North seem to be aware. The expectations of the poor have been very generally excited." In Alabama, freedmen delivered "inflammatory" speeches asserting that "all the wealth of the white man had been made by negro labor, and that the negroes were entitled to their fair share of all these accumulations." Yet land was only one among the many goals blacks sought to achieve through Reconstruction politics. In a society marked by vast economic disparities and a growing racial separation in social and religious life, politics became the only arena where black and white encountered each other on a basis of equality. And although elective office and the vote remained male preserves, black women shared in the mobilization. They took part in rallies and parades and, to the consternation of some men, voted on resolutions at mass meetings. During the 1868 campaign, Yazoo, Mississippi, whites found their black maids and cooks defiantly wearing buttons depicting General Grant.

Throughout Reconstruction, blacks remained "irrepressible democrats." And the Republican party became an institution as central to the black community as the church and school. Long after they had been stripped of the franchise, blacks would recall the act of voting as a defiance of white superiority and regard "the loss of suffrage as . . . the loss of freedom."

Early in 1868, a Northerner reporting on Alabama's election day captured the soaring expectations with which Radical Reconstruc-

tion began. "In defiance of fatigue, hardship, hunger, and threats of employers," blacks had come en masse to the polls. Not one in fifty wore an "unpatched garment," few possessed a pair of shoes, yet for hours they stood on line in a "pitiless storm." Why? "The hunger to have the same chances as the white men. . . . That is what brings them here." Rarely has a community invested so many hopes in politics as did blacks during Radical Reconstruction.

The Republican Coalition

Throughout Reconstruction, blacks comprised a large majority of Southern Republicanism. But, one Northerner had observed in 1866, "a party sustained only by black votes will not grow old." Of the eleven states of the old Confederacy, only South Carolina, Mississippi, and Louisiana contained a black majority; blacks comprised roughly one-quarter of the population of Texas, Tennessee, and Arkansas, forty percent in Virginia and North Carolina, and a bit less than half in Alabama, Florida, and Georgia. Even in states with black majorities, however, Southern Republicanism needed white support. They found it among "carpetbaggers" from the North and "scalawag" native white Southerners, who, in turn, were subjected to a torrent of abuse by their Democratic opponents.

Political, regional, and class prejudices combined to produce the image of the carpetbagger as a member of "the lowest class" of the Northern population. Able to pack "all his earthly belongings" in his carpetbag, he supposedly journeyed south after the passage of the Reconstruction Act "to fatten on our misfortunes." In fact, carpetbaggers tended to be well educated and middle class in origin. Not a few had been lawyers, businessmen, newspaper editors, and other pillars of Northern communities. The majority were veterans of the Union Army, and their ranks also included teachers, Freedmen's Bureau agents, and men who had invested tens of thousands of dollars in cotton plantations. Nearly all had come south before 1867, when blacks lacked the franchise and the prospect of office appeared remote.

A variety of motives and experiences propelled these Northerners into Southern Republican politics in 1867. Some were typical nineteenth-century men on the make for whom politics offered the opportunity for a quick profit. Others entered politics because they had earned the freedmen's good will as Bureau agents. Still others,

ments (with blacks and whites enjoying "an equal and fair share" in the awarding of contracts), the platform wedded demands for an integrated common school system, the abolition of corporal punishment and imprisonment for debt, protection of the "poor man's homestead" against seizure for debt, government responsibility for "the aged, infirm and helpless poor," and heavy taxation of uncultivated land to weaken "large land monopolies" and promote "the division and sale of unoccupied lands among the poorer classes." In July, the state convention adopted essentially the same platform.

Radicalism was also in the ascendancy among Virginia Republicans in 1867, as well as in Louisiana, although here a group of carpetbaggers seized control of the party, to the dismay of New Orleans's free black leaders. Georgia Republicans, by contrast, downplayed blacks' demands, in an attempt to appeal to upcountry yeomen on the issue of debtor relief. In Texas, moderate Republicans interested in reconciliation with former Confederates pushed a vigorous program of railroad building and a secondary role for blacks, but were challenged by Radicals demanding the proscription of rebels, an aggressive defense of black rights, and an "antimonopoly" system of internal improvements, with safeguards against abuses by government-aided railroads. Such factionalism was hardly unusual in American politics. Some contemporaries, however, wondered whether a new party confronted by opponents far superior in finances, education, and political experience could afford such conflict. More than the struggle for personal advantage explains these divisions. At stake were competing visions of the party's social composition and of the extent of change that would result from Reconstruction.

Even as Southern Republicans debated the character of their region's new social order, however, outside forces attempted to turn Reconstruction in a moderate direction. From the opening of the Fortieth Congress in March 1867, mainstream Republicans, while determined to defend what had been accomplished, showed no inclination for further change. When Charles Sumner introduced resolutions to broaden the scope of Reconstruction by immediately abolishing existing Southern governments, requiring the establishment of integrated public school systems, and providing the freedmen with homesteads, even Radical Henry Wilson objected, declaring "the terms we have made are hard enough." "That is more than we do for white men," declared William Pitt Fessenden in

opposing the land proposal. (To which Sumner responded, "White men have never been in slavery.") In the House, Thaddeus Stevens moved a bill providing forty acres to freedmen from confiscated land.

Moderate Northern leaders had no intention of being "run over by the car of Revolution." A party consensus now existed in favor of civil and political rights for Southern blacks, but not on the land question, and a barrage of criticism greeted Stevens's proposal. The Springfield *Republican* insisted that for the government to give blacks land would be an act of "mistaken kindness" that would prevent them from learning "the habits of free workingmen." Even more threatening, in the view of the *New York Times*, was the prospect that the precedent set by confiscation "would not be confined to the South." The *Times* lambasted the Radicals for desiring "a war on property . . . to succeed the war on Slavery."

Clearly, whatever Southern Republicans desired, the party in the North remained unwilling to embrace the land question. And one reason was that Northern Republicans in 1867 faced problems of their own at home. For the first time, the party went before the voters united in support of black suffrage, at least for the South. And Democrats seized upon racial prejudice with a vengeance. In Ohio, where a measure enfranchising blacks was on the fall ballot, Democratic gubernatorial candidate Allan G. Thurman pledged to save the state from "the thralldom of niggerism." On the West Coast, Democrats added anti-Chinese appeals, arguing that the Republican doctrine of "universal equality for all races" would lead to an "Asiatic" influx and control of the state by an alliance of "the Mongolian and Indian and African."

For their part, many Republicans tried to sidestep the race issue. Yet the crisis that shifted national politics leftward had also affected grass-roots Republicans. A remarkable number of non-Radicals now endorsed political equality for Northern blacks. Even in conservative New Jersey, the party committed itself to black voting, and California gubernatorial candidate George C. Gorham repudiated the "anticoolie" movement, insisting "the same God created both Europeans and Asiatics."

Two sets of elections occurred in the fall of 1867, producing sharply divergent outcomes. In the South, where voters passed on calls for constitutional conventions and selected delegates, the result was a Republican triumph. "The negroes," declared a white

Republican in Alabama's Tennessee Valley, "voted their entire walking strength—no one staying at home that was able to come to the polls." Among whites, apathy and the hope that abstention would deny conventions the necessary majority of registered voters kept turnout far lower, and the Republican campaign to attract white voters achieved only partial success. In North Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, and Arkansas, more than one white voter in five voted for the calling of a convention, but in others, white Republicans remained a tiny minority. The party made encouraging inroads in the upcountry, but elsewhere the electorate remained polarized along racial lines.

Counterbalancing victory in the South was a serious setback in the North. From Maine to California, Democrats gained dramatically, sweeping New York by more than 50,000 votes, coming within 3,000 of electing Ohio's governor, carrying California, and, according to *The Nation's* calculation, reducing by three-quarters the massive Republican majorities of 1866. "It would be vain to deny," declared *The Nation*, "that the fidelity of the Republican party to the cause of equal rights . . . has been one of the chief causes of its heavy losses."

The results shifted the balance of power within the party. Even in Massachusetts, reported one Republican editor, "extreme radical measures are becoming more and more unpopular." Although few Republicans considered abandoning Reconstruction, many agreed with the Ohio politico who observed, "the Negro will be less prominent for some time to come." Certainly, the election results marked the end of any hope that Northern Republicans would embrace a program of land distribution. Henceforth, it appeared certain, the party would strive to bring Reconstruction to a successful conclusion rather than press it forward.

The Constitutional Conventions

With most antebellum officials barred from membership and blacks and carpetbaggers representing the plantation belt, the Southern constitutional conventions of 1867-69, as a British visitor remarked, mirrored "the mighty revolution that had taken place in America." As the first large group of elected Southern Republicans, the delegates epitomized the party's social composition. About one-sixth were carpetbaggers. Generally veterans of the Union Army,

they were the best-educated Republican delegates, numbering many lawyers, physicians, and other professionals. Talented, ambitious, and youthful, carpetbaggers usually chaired the key committees and drafted the most important provisions of the new constitutions. Southern white Republicans formed the largest group of delegates; they were especially numerous in North Carolina, Georgia, Arkansas, Alabama, and Texas. Those of established standing, like Benjamin F. Saffold, son of Alabama's former chief justice, were far outnumbered by upcountry farmers and small-town merchants, artisans, and professionals, few of whom had ever held political office. Nearly all had opposed secession, and many had served in the federal army or been imprisoned for Unionist sentiments.

Although accounting for a total of 265 delegates, blacks remained substantially underrepresented in most states. They formed a majority of the Louisiana and South Carolina conventions and nearly 40 percent in Florida, but only about one-fifth in Alabama, Georgia, Mississippi, and Virginia, and 10 percent in Arkansas, North Carolina, and Texas. Of those for whom biographical information is available, 107 had been born into slavery (of whom 19 had become free before the Civil War) and 81 free. Twenty-eight had spent all or most of their lives in the North or, in the case of two South Carolina delegates, the West Indies. At least 40 black delegates had served in the Union Army, and the largest occupational groups were ministers, artisans, farmers, and teachers. Only a handful were field hands or common laborers. A few black delegates owned substantial amounts of property, but most paid almost no state taxes. Nearly all subsequently held other Reconstruction offices, including 147 elected to state legislatures and nine to Congress.

These figures, however, obscure local patterns that reflected the nature of black politics and the structure of black society in different parts of the South. In Louisiana, the freeborn enjoyed a virtual monopoly of black positions. Georgia, with a small prewar free population and few black veterans, saw ministers account for seventeen of the twenty-two black delegates. In Virginia, reflecting the greater opportunity for manumission and escape enjoyed by Upper South slaves, over one-third of the delegates born as slaves had gained their freedom before 1860. Outside Louisiana and South Carolina, most black delegates, lacking formal education, found

"agricultural degrees and brick yard diplomas" poor preparation for the complex proceedings of a constitutional convention. Yet while generally remaining silent, black delegates proved perfectly capable of judging political and constitutional questions and promoting the interests of their constituents. On issues of civil rights and access to education, blacks in every state formed a unified bloc; on disenfranchisement and economic policy, black delegates, like whites, divided, reflecting diverse interests within the black community.

Most of the conventions produced modern, democratic documents, "magnificent," wrote New Orleans *Tribune* editor Houzeau, for their "liberal principles." The constitutions established the South's first state-funded systems of free public education overseen by central commissioners of education, and in South Carolina and Texas made school attendance compulsory, a provision strongly supported by black delegates. Clauses mandating the establishment of penitentiaries, orphan asylums, homes for the insane, and, in some cases, the provision of poor relief further expanded public responsibilities.

All the constitutions guaranteed blacks' civil and political rights, completing, as a Texas newspaper put it, the "equal rights revolution." They abolished whipping as a punishment for crime, property qualifications for office and jury service, viva voce voting, and imprisonment for debt. The constitutions reduced the number of capital crimes and in three cases reorganized local government along the lines of the New England township, to overthrow local oligarchies centered in unelected county courts. Nine of the ten states recognized the right of married women to separate property. And South Carolina for the first time in its history authorized the granting of divorces. Antebellum bills of rights were rewritten to include language from the Declaration of Independence declaring all men created equal, and recognizing a citizen's paramount loyalty to the federal government.

Although the conventions clearly embodied Republicans' commitment to equal rights and a New South, they also revealed the party's inner divisions. Republicans achieved far greater agreement on general principles than their actual implementation: on public education but not on racially integrated schools; civil and political rights for blacks but not "social equality"; the expansion of democracy but not black domination of local or state governments; loyal rule but not the disenfranchisement of rebels; economic modern-

ization but not how to balance the need for outside capital with white farmers' demands for debtor relief and blacks' for land. The outcome of these debates illuminated the balance of power within individual states and differing perceptions of whether the party should try to forge a political majority by striving to serve the interests of blacks and poorer whites or by making its main concerns the attraction of "respectable" whites to its ranks and outside capital to the South.

Among the issues that came before the conventions, none was more highly charged than integration in education. No state actually required separate schools, but only Louisiana and South Carolina explicitly forbade them. Most blacks appeared more concerned with educational opportunities for their children and employment for black teachers than with the remote prospect of racially mixed schools. Even in South Carolina, the same black delegates who praised the school integration clause as "laying the foundation of a new structure" of society acknowledged that both races preferred separate education. But in every state, blacks objected to constitutional language *requiring* racial segregation. James W. Hood, later North Carolina's assistant superintendent of education, favored separate schools because nearly all white teachers viewed black children as "naturally inferior." But he adamantly opposed writing segregation into the constitution: "Make this distinction in your organic law and in many places the white children will have good schools . . . while the colored people will have none." Only the threat of integration would force states to provide blacks with "good schools" of their own.

Republicans also differed among themselves over the extent, and implications, of democratizing Southern politics. Demands by black delegates and reform-minded whites for popular election of state and local officials were countered by fears of Democratic majorities in white counties and concern among Whiggish scalawags who hoped they, not blacks, would control local affairs in the plantation belt. Torn between the desire to expand popular control of government and uncertainty about the breadth of their white support, the conventions adopted contradictory policies, in some cases greatly enhancing democracy, in others actually limiting it.

In North Carolina, where upcountry resentment at the undemocratic structure of state and local politics had a long history and the Republican party's biracial coalition appeared secure, the conven-

tion produced what Henry Wilson called "the most republican constitution in the land." The delegates dismantled the old state Executive Council and replaced county courts appointed by the General Assembly with state and local officials chosen by popular vote. And they made all judges elective. At the other end of the political spectrum stood Georgia and Florida, whose conventions, dominated by moderate scalawags, contrived to make Reconstruction palatable to white voters by minimizing what Georgia's first Republican governor called "the danger of negro suffrage." Both based legislative representation on counties, not population, limiting the influence of geographically concentrated black voters, and made numerous local offices appointive rather than elective.

Another issue pitting commitment to democracy against party survival was the disenfranchisement of former Confederates. Many Republicans could not reconcile their party's democratic rhetoric with proposals to strip large numbers of "rebels" of the vote. Although upcountry scalawags, especially those who had suffered for their Unionist beliefs or hailed from areas devastated by the South's internal civil war, vehemently supported disenfranchisement, the issue followed no simple pattern, for it reflected Republican divisions on how to attract white voters. Five states disenfranchised few or no Confederates: Georgia, Florida, and Texas, where moderates committed to luring white Conservatives into the party controlled the proceedings; South Carolina, with its overwhelming black voting majority; and North Carolina, where the party's white base appeared firm. Alabama, Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Virginia all barred considerable numbers of "rebels" from voting (although the disenfranchisement provisions in the last two states were subsequently defeated in popular referenda and never went into effect). A hallmark of upcountry Republicanism, disenfranchisement generated less interest among black delegates, many of whom seemed uncomfortable with a policy that appeared to undermine the party's commitment to manhood suffrage. "I have no desire to take away the rights of the white man," declared former slave Thomas Lee, an Alabama delegate. "All I want is equal rights in the court house and equal rights when I go to vote."

On economic matters, the developmental spirit prevailed. With a modern constitution, declared Mississippi Union League president Allston Mygatt, "large landed estates shall melt away into small divisions, . . . agriculture become scientific, internal improvements

be pushed on." The constitutions allowed extensive public aid to railroads and other ventures, and some for the first time established limited liability for corporate stockholders. Many voided usury laws entirely or dramatically increased the legal ceiling on interest rates. In every state, carpetbaggers emerged as the strongest proponents of economic modernization; upcountry scalawags and blacks, especially former slaves, were more cautious.

When the constitutional conventions assembled, many Conservatives, in the words of a New Orleans newspaper, feared "unadulterated agrarianism"—that is, attacks on private property. In one form or another, the interrelated questions of land and labor came before a majority of the conventions, but the results hardly justified either the hopes or fears kindled in 1867. Several conventions awarded mechanics and laborers liens for wages on the property of their employers, and Texas outlawed the establishment of "any system of peonage," but free labor assumptions doomed other attempts to enhance the position of black workers.

Both black and white Radicals spoke of the need to provide freedmen with land and encourage the breakup of the plantation system. "I have gone through the country," reported Richard H. Cain in South Carolina, "and on every side I was besieged with questions: How are we to get homesteads?" A few constitutions took modest steps toward meeting this demand. Texas offered free homesteads to settlers on the state's vast public domain, and Mississippi provided that land seized by the state to satisfy tax claims would be sold in tracts of no more than 160 acres. The most substantial action was taken by South Carolina's convention, which authorized the legislature to establish a state commission to purchase land for resale on long-term credit.

With each state producing its own mixture of radical and moderate elements, the new constitutions, taken together, failed to satisfy the economic aspirations that had animated much of the grass-roots organizing of 1867. But they introduced changes in the region's political structure that appeared dangerously radical to those wedded to the traditions of the Old South and Presidential Reconstruction. Democrat and Whig alike, most established Southern leaders now mobilized in opposition. Other issues were "trivial" compared to one overriding question: "Shall this country be ruled by the whites or the niggers?" Racial appeals, however, often went hand in hand with revulsion at the prospect of governments controlled

by what North Carolina Governor Jonathan Worth called "the dregs of society." Government by "mere numbers [universal suffrage]," Worth wrote, "I regard as undermining civilization." Civilization he defined as "the possession and protection of property." It was clear that such remarks did not apply to blacks alone.

With blacks all but unanimous for the constitutions, Republicans no less than Conservatives focused their attention on the white vote. And fear of alienating white voters kept blacks off every state ticket except in South Carolina and Louisiana. Already, blacks found that their very unanimity as Republicans meant their ballots could be taken for granted by party leaders seeking the white vote.

The elections of winter and spring 1868 to ratify the constitutions and select state officials brought mixed results for Southern Republicans. The black vote again held firm, but white voters often proved unresponsive. The party's most remarkable success occurred in North Carolina, where the cry of racial unity failed to deter over 20,000 white voters, about a quarter of the white electorate, from supporting the new constitution. William W. Holden finally won election as governor, and Republicans swept to a commanding majority in the state legislature. "In North Carolina at least," wrote one observer, "it cannot be attributed to foreign influence that the Constitution was adopted." The new constitutions were approved in every state but Alabama and Mississippi. In the former, a white boycott prevented approval by a majority of registered voters (a requirement Congress quickly changed to a majority of those actually voting). In Mississippi, the disenfranchisement clause alienated nearly all white voters.

Thus, three years after the death of the Confederacy, Republicans came to power in most of the South. "These constitutions and governments," a Democratic newspaper vowed, "will last just as long as the bayonets which ushered them into being, shall keep them in existence, and not one day longer." The fate of Reconstruction still depended on the national political contest of 1868.

Impeachment and the Election of Grant

To the many dramatic innovations Reconstruction brought to American politics, the spring of 1868 added yet another: the unprecedented spectacle of a President on trial before the Senate for "high

crimes and misdemeanors." The roots of the impeachment of Andrew Johnson lay not only in the increasingly hostile relations between himself and Congress, but in a peculiar feature of Republican Reconstruction policy: Congress had enjoined the army to carry out a policy its commander in chief resolutely opposed. To shield its policy against Presidential interference, Congress in 1867 required that General Grant approve all orders to subordinate army commanders and, in the Tenure of Office Act, authorized officials appointed with the Senate's consent to remain in office until a successor had been approved. Intended primarily to protect lower-level patronage functionaries, the law also barred the removal, without Senate approval, of Cabinet members during the term of the President who had appointed them. It remained uncertain, however, whether this applied to Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton, who had been named to his post by Lincoln.

Determined to obstruct the implementation of Congressional policy, Johnson waited until midsummer of 1867 to exploit a provision of the Tenure of Office Act allowing him to suspend Stanton while Congress was not in session, pending a vote on his permanent removal once the Senate reconvened. A few months later, emboldened by the fall elections, he set about actively encouraging Southern opponents of Reconstruction and removed several military commanders in favor of more conservative replacements. And when the Senate refused to concur in Stanton's removal, Johnson, on February 21, 1868, ousted him from office.

Having failed to "play the part of Moses for the colored people," commented *The Nation*, Johnson had succeeded in doing so "for the impeachers." With unanimous Republican support, the House voted to impeach the President. Yet from the outset, the case against the President was beset with weaknesses. Of the eleven articles of impeachment, nine hinged on either the removal of Stanton or an alleged attempt to induce Gen. Lorenzo Thomas to accept orders not channeled through Grant. Two others charged the President with denying the authority of Congress and attempting to bring it "into disgrace." Nowhere were the real reasons Republicans wished to dispose of Johnson mentioned—his political outlook, the way he had administered the Reconstruction Acts, and his sheer incompetence. Taken together, the articles implicitly accepted what emerged as the central premise of Johnson's defense: that only a clear violation of the law warranted a President's removal.