

Historians' Views of Radical Reconstruction

James Randall

Coming south after the war to make money and seize political power, the Northern "carpetbagger" became the dominant figure in Southern politics for a decade. In collusion with the carpetbaggers were the "scalawags," native whites in the South who took advantage of the chance for aggrandizement which the postwar regime offered . . . Aided by a system which gave the vote to the Negro while it disfranchised the more substantial element among the whites, these political adventurers improved upon the system and added extra-legal touches of their own.

Elections in the South became a byword and a travesty. Ignorant blacks by the thousands cast ballots without knowing even the names of men for whom they were voting. Southern communities in their political, social, and economic interests were subjected to the misguided action of these irresponsible creatures directed by white bosses . . .

As the process of carpetbag rule unfolded, honest men in the South felt increasing disgust. Conservative editors referred to the fancy state conventions as "black and tan" gatherings, "ring-streaked and speckled" conventions, or as assemblies of "baboons," "tagamuffins," or "jailbirds."

Supported by the Grant administration and

fortified by military power, the Radical Republican state machines plunged the Southern commonwealths into an abyss of misgovernment. A congressional committee reported that one of the leading carpetbag governors made over \$100,000 during his first year though his salary was \$8,000 . . . Another carpetbag governor was charged with stealing and selling the food of the freedmen's bureau intended for the relief of helpless and ragged ex-slaves . . . F. J. Moses, scalawag, stated that he received \$15,000 while governor of South Carolina for approving a large printing bill . . .

The concept which the Radicals sought to disseminate was that the problems of restoration had all been neatly solved, the country saved, and the South "reconstructed" by 1868 . . . The fact of the matter was that this "complete restoration" was merely the beginning of the corrupt and abusive era of carpetbag rule by the forcible imposition of Radical governments upon an unwilling and protesting people. Before this imposition took place the Southern states already had satisfactory governments.

James G. Randall, *The Civil War and Reconstruction*. Boston. D. C. Heath, 1937, 847, 849, 853.

W.E.B. DuBois

The whole history of Reconstruction has with few exceptions been written by passionate believers in the inferiority of the Negro. The whole body of facts concerning what the Negro

actually said and did, how he worked, what he wanted, for whom he voted, is masked in such a cloud of charges, exaggeration and biased testimony, that most students have given up all attempt at new material or new evaluation of the old, and simply repeated perfunctorily all the current legends of black buffoons in legislature, golden spittoons for fieldhands, bribery

nation rose in wrath and ended the ridiculous travesty . . . Little effort has been made to preserve the records of Negro effort, and speeches, actions, work and wages, homes and families. Nearly all this has gone down beneath a mass of ridicule and caricature, deliberate omission and misstatement. No institution of learning has made any effort to explore or probe Reconstruction from the point of view of the laborer and most men have written to explain and excuse the former slaveholder, . . . the landholder, and the capitalist . . .

The real basis of opposition to the new regime was economic. Nothing showed this clearer than one fact, and that is that the chief and repeated accusation against the [South Carolina Constitutional] Convention and succeeding legislatures was that they were composed of poor men, white and black . . .

Discrimination of race and color were abolished by the [new South Carolina] constitution, and practical application was attempted in the case of the public schools . . .

The convention framed the most liberal provisions for the right of suffrage that any of the Southern constitutions provided. They did not attempt . . . to restrict the voting of whites further than was provided by the Reconstruction acts. . . .

Of course, they made no distinction in race and color. The rights of women were enlarged. The property of married women could not be sold for their husbands' debts . . .

Education was discussed at length, and a free common school system voted for . . . Nothing that the convention did aroused more opposition among property-holding whites . . . the whites calculated that the school system would cost \$900,000 a year, and that the new taxation would fall upon them . . .

Among other things, the constitution abolished imprisonment for debt, and dueling, and did away with property qualifications, for voting or holding office . . .

W. E. B. DuBois, *Black Reconstruction*.

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What were the objectives of Radical Republicans in the South?		
How does the Historian portray the work of African-Americans in the South during this period?		
How does the Historian view the Reconstruction governments in the South? Did they bring harm or good to the South? Explain.		
Does the Historian offer evidence to support his position? Explain.		