But There Was No Peace: the Role of Violence in the Politics of Reconstruction

ISSN 0003-4827
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Recommended Citation
Available at: http://ir.uiowa.edu/annals-of-iowa/vol49/iss1/10

Hosted by Iowa Research Online

But There Was No Peace: The Role of Violence in the Politics of Reconstruction is a well-written and equally well-researched book by George C. Rable, an assistant professor of history and director of American studies at Anderson College in Indiana. It is a significant exploration, and, at the same time, a controversial interpretation of the politics of Reconstruction. It is an important addition to earlier examinations of violence in the South, such as Wilbur J. Cash, The Mind of the South; John Hope Franklin, The Militant South, 1800-1861; John Dollard, Caste and Class in a Southern Town; Otis A. Singletary, Negro Militia and Reconstruction; Allen W. Trelease, White Terror: The Ku Klux Klan Conspiracy and Southern Reconstruction; and Michael Perman, Reunion Without Compromise. The last three books deal with the period which Rable's account covers; the first three with southern violence before, during, and after Reconstruction. They all are analytical treatments. Rable attempts to synthesize these interpretations, along with others, in order to show how the latent southern propensity for violence transformed from isolated incidents of brutal behavior into an organized conspiracy to drive the Radical Republicans from power. Although his effort will not convince many modern historians who stress the moderate nature of radical reconstruction, it will force them to take a harder look at their interpretations.

The major thrust of the book is to show that the "counterrevolutionary" tide which swept the South in the early 1870s was most important in returning state after state to the control of Bourbon Democrats. Playing upon factional disputes and fears within the Republican party, internal weaknesses and shortcomings in the state governments, and an inconsistent policy of support by the federal government, the Redeemers, or Reactionaries, eventually succeeded, following earlier failures, in driving the "Jacobins" or Radicals from power. The "counterrevolution" was triumphant by 1877 with the withdrawal of the last federal troops from Louisiana, South Carolina, and Florida. To Rable, it was the use of fear, violence, and intimidation, that contributed most to the collapse of the Radical Republicans.

In the evolution of his thesis, Rable follows the pattern of interpretation of universal revolutionary development as pioneered by Crane Brinton in his work, The Anatomy of Revolution. After an introduction which analyzes violence in America, the author discusses the short period (1865-1866) of moderate control under the aegis of President Andrew Johnson, and how the reactionaries could not accept
even limited power on the part of blacks and unionists, as exemplified
by the Memphis and New Orleans race riots, which form two of the
better chapters in Rable's book. These events ushered in the radical
phase marked by Congressional or Military Reconstruction which rep-
yresented "the triumph of Jacobinism" in the aftermath of Johnson's
crushing defeat in the congressional elections of 1866. In the remain-
der of the work Rable analyzes the strategy of the redeemer counter-
revolution that led finally to victory for the reactionaries.

One might question Rable's employment of such terms as
"Jacobinism" and "Counterrevolutionary" as applied to events in
American history, from a historian-observer perspective. To the tradi-
tional Southerners who were the actor-participants in the tragic
drama, however, the Republicans were indeed radicals intent on de-
stroying the last vestiges of the "Southern way of life." Conversely, to
the Radicals, the intransigent Southerners were intent on turning back
the clock to antebellum days. There will be those historians who chal-
lene Rable’s bold view of Reconstruction, which is at odds for a num-
ber of reasons with the Dunning, revisionist, and post-revisionist in-
terpretations of Reconstruction. The Dunningites will object to Rable’s
casting the Bourbon Democrats as reactionaries while the revision-
ists and post-revisionists will take umbrage at his suggestion that the
reconstructionists, whom they regard as conservative, were actually
radical reformers. Nevertheless, the book deserves the careful atten-
tion of all scholars concerned both with Reconstruction and the subject
of violence in America, past and present.

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Chicago Divided: The Making of a Black Mayor, by Paul Kleppner.
Dekalb: Northern Illinois Press, 1985. xviii, 313 pp. Notes, illustra-
tions, tables, index. $26.00 cloth, $9.50 paper.

Professional historians tend to be skeptical of instant history. Chroni-
cles of very recent events are usually journalistic in nature, relying
more on anecdotes than analysis, and frequently written under the
pressure of deadlines. Most historians would rather let the dust settle,
wait for archives to open, and allow for that decent interval that is sup-
posed to give us perspective. Chicago Divided is not the usual kind of in-
stant history, however. Its author, Paul Kleppner, is an experienced po-
itical historian, well-versed in quantitative methodology, and particu-
larly interested in the relationship between politics and culture. This
account of the election of the late Harold Washington as Chicago’s first
black mayor in 1983 is a serious analytical study that began as a