HURRAH FOR HAMPTON!

BLACK RED SHIRTS IN SOUTH CAROLINA DURING RECONSTRUCTION

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TO HARRY AND ROSE CHOI

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PREFACE

When the Civil War ended, the relationship between white and black Southerners was redefined, especially during Congressional Reconstruction, beginning in 1867. In most states of the former Confederacy, the term "Republican" became synonymous with "black." Except for "Aristocrats of Color," the role of black conservatives in the South has been minimized by both traditional and revisionist historians. The collective memory of Southerners, white and black, at least in South Carolina, seems to support this stance. However, the involvement of black Red Shirts in the campaign of 1876 to elect the Redeemer candidate, Wade Hampton, governor of South Carolina makes the story of Radical Reconstruction more complex. This study of ex-slaves who abetted a movement that led to white supremacy suggests that even today white conservatives may become more successful in wooing black voters.

Post-Revisionism

This study is post-revisionist. Since the 1970s historians have stressed the centrality of class during Reconstruction/Still others have examined the role of gender. Perhaps the most serious criticism of revisionism has focused on its tendency toward romanticism. In a collection of hard-hitting and thoughtful essays, Clarence E. Walker counseled historians to "rise above the romantic and celebratory." Part of this challenge is to give serious attention to African Americans who did not fit the heroic-liberation mode, such as black Confederates and black Red Shirts.[2]

Community studies have not been free of romanticism either. As Walker suggested, for many American historians, especially scholars of black

history, the term "community" has become "a romantic construct that obscures more than it reveals and posits community as unproblematic." Unity is stressed, often at the expense of diversity within the community. The resulting studies of black communities, in positing a vibrant black subculture, sometimes ignore or downplay their pathological aspects. Finally, by focusing too narrowly, scholars run the risk of making these black communities too autonomous. They skew the picture by failing to examine links to the larger communal setting.[3]

To understand the black Red Shirts, it is necessary to remember that black and white South Carolinians, especially in the Upcountry, seldom lived isolated from each other in racially exclusive communities. By practicing Protestantism, they shared some common cultural values that transcended race. By living in an overwhelmingly agrarian world, both blacks and whites nurtured a devotion to place and land. Having been mistreated, even abused, by Yankees, black South Carolinians also perceived Northerners as outsiders. Building on such distrust and other shared perceptions, Wade Hampton and his lieutenants were able to recruit black Red Shirts. Exactly how the dynamics played out at the local level will be suggested by focusing on Abbeville County as a test case.[4]

Reconstruction in South Carolina: A Summary

On June 30, 1865, President Andrew Johnson announced the conditions for restoring civil government in South Carolina. To implement his policy, he named prewar Unionist Benjamin F. Perry provisional governor. In September a constitutional convention was held. The Ordinance of Secession was nullified, slavery was abolished, and James L. Orr was nominated candidate for governor. Like Perry, he had opposed extremism. Orr barely defeated Wade Hampton, the former Confederate general, who had declined the nomination.

Presidential Reconstruction ended when Congress took over in 1867. With the advent of black suffrage, South Carolina remained in Republican hands between 1868 and 1876. White Republicans held the office of governor throughout the period: Robert Scott (1868–72), Franklin Moses Jr. (1872–74), and Daniel H. Chamberlain (1874–76). The legislature had a

Republican majority. More than half of the men elected to state and Federal offices during this period were blacks. Blacks even sat on the state supreme court. In 1870 they composed a majority of the legislature.

As early as the summer of 1865, the state's nearly four hundred thousand ex–slaves had begun adjusting to the new situation, including a different labor system. They regularized their marriages, organized their own churches, and participated in parades that celebrated freedom. Given the franchise during Congressional Reconstruction, the black population consolidated its gains. A middle class emerged, consisting of artisans, landowners, lawyers, doctors, clergymen, politicians, businessmen, and educators. They welcomed a public school system that would provide education for all South Carolinians, regardless of race.

The advent of a biracial Republican majority rule provoked a white backlash. White planters feared losing control over their workers. A number of black and white Republican leaders were assassinated. In 1869 the legislature responded by authorizing a state militia, composed largely of blacks. The specter of armed blacks, white South Carolina's worst nightmare, led to the state's branch of paramilitary organization, the Ku Klux Klan. With President Ulysses S. Grant's declaration of martial law in nine counties, nearly all in the Upcountry, the Klan was broken. Some of its leaders fled the state to avoid arrest and prosecution.

Congressional Reconstruction in South Carolina, weakened by economic recession, was further undermined by widespread corruption, which especially plagued the Republican administration under Franklin Moses, a South Carolinian. Attempts by reform Republicans and moderate Democrats to back independent candidates failed. The last Republican governor, Daniel Chamberlain, a New Englander, made real attempts to end corruption. Elected in 1874, he tried to hold together the party for one more gubernatorial election.

By 1876 the Republican Party in South Carolina was in disarray. An increasing number of black Republicans had grown disillusioned with a party that had become corrupt and unresponsive to their needs. In the summer of 1876, members of both parties attempted to field a fusionist ticket with Chamberlain heading it. When this failed, the state was turned into a political battleground, as Wade Hampton challenged Chamberlain for the governorship. For nearly all white South Carolinians, the issue was home

rule. Hampton held out the possibility of peace with honor. In turn, many blacks, fed up with corruption, violence, and economic hard times, saw Hampton as representing the best of postwar paternalism. Throughout the state Hampton processions waved such slogans as "Peace and Prosperity to all Classes," "Honest and Good Government for All!" His campaign with its military paraphernalia became for many South Carolinians a crusade for redemption and reform.fi

The election of 1876 was an especially important one. Nationally it decided who would sit in the White House: Republican Rutherford B. Hayes or Democrat Samuel J. Tilden. Hayes's election hinged on winning the electoral votes of several states such as South Carolina where the results were contested. A national bipartisan election committee supported Hayes, thereby insuring his victory. In the White House, Hayes ordered the withdrawal of the last troops from South Carolina.fl

Organization of the Book

Hurrah for Hampton is among a rising genre that combines in-depth analysis with primary sources. It is divided into three chapters. "Wade Hampton's Black Red Shirts," the first chapter, proves that hundreds of ex-slaves, mostly from the Upcountry, participated in the Redemption campaign of 1876. Using a chart and a profile of twenty black Red Shirts (table 1), plus a voting table (table 2), this chapter examines these ex-slaves' mindset by placing them in the context of the times. Their war experiences as well as their slave experiences shaped their political responses as freedmen. Some, who had suffered from the war, resented Yankees as outsiders. They viewed Hampton as a real alternative to Republican corruption and continued violence. Their marching in Hampton processions blunted Republican charges that the Democrats were racists. In order to understand their significance, this study analyzed the role of women in the campaign. For their political beliefs, black Red Shirts endured physical and verbal abuse from black Republican women, who recognized that such men made a difference. Black Republican leaders and preachers encouraged the women. By attempting to stigmatize, even ostracize, the black Red Shirts, black

Republicans in general acknowledged that these men were indeed part of their community.

The second chapter, "South Carolina in 1876," contains the testimonies of seven black Red Shirts before a Congressional committee, composed of three United States senators who were investigating the election. These testimonies are arranged chronologically. They demonstrate how competent and forceful some of the black Red Shirt leaders were. The final chapter, "South Carolina Slave Narratives," includes the interviews, sixty years after the election, of ten black Red Shirts and the widow of an eleventh. It is organized alphabetically by their surnames. This chapter shows how the slave experience of some of the black Red Shirts predisposed them to join the Democrats. It proves that paternalism remained a powerful force that continued to shape the Southern experience.

The documents are an important part of the book, since they present in chorus a seldom-heard conservative voice. They offer the reader a glimpse into the motivations of black Red Shirts in their own words. To assist the reader, brief descriptions of the individuals are inserted in brackets at the beginning of their testimonies or narratives. Minor corrections and changes are also in brackets. These interviews offer the reader an opportunity to examine the relationship between black initiative and Southern paternalism.[7]

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