

Conditions Leading to: Wade Hampton's Campaign for Governor - Part 8



aminer

General Wade Hampton and his family, as did other South Carolinians following the war, found themselves economically worse off than the pre-war slaves.

“The people, both black and white, were left to starve,” wrote William Gilmore Simms, the well-known author who experienced the horror following the surrender of General Lee to Gen. Grant.

“The only means of subsistence to thousands but lately in affluence was the garbage left by the abandoned camps of the Federal Army and stray corn scraped up from the spots where army horses and mules had been fed.”

Simms concludes: “But no language can describe the suffering which prevailed... when pride compels them to starve in silence.”

A special correspondent for *The New York Times* captured the chaotic scene:

“South Carolina has indeed felt the oppressor’s heel. Sherman passed through the state, and made a track 40 miles wide, as plain as fire, plunder and other devastation could make it. In many places the only marks of former life are the chimneys left standing to tell where once gathered happy families.”

South Carolina and other Southern states were the victims of the opposing forces in the federal government and two different plans for reconstruction: The presidential plan and the Congressional

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Under the presidential plan, Benjamin F. Perry of Greenville was appointed provisional governor of South Carolina. His administration was hampered by jurisdictional conflicts caused by occupation of the state by federal troops, mostly black.
By Bob Dill - Publisher of The Times Examiner
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In his report to Congress, Gen. Grant said: "The presence of black troops, lately slaves, demoralizes labor. White troops generally excite no opposition... The late slaves seem to be imbued with the idea that the property of his late master should belong to him, or at least should have no protection from the Colored Soldiers...."

"There is danger of collision being on by such causes... My observation leads me to the conclusion that the citizens of the Southern States are anxious to return to the Union as soon as possible."

In addition to the civil and military governments in South Carolina, a third form of government was created that was independent and had jurisdiction over the others. It was the Freedmen's Bureau that was formed as part of the War Department to protect the freed slaves from whites, but it became a source of conflict and divisiveness between the races.

While the Freedman's Bureau had many honorable men at the top of the organization, and some good was produced for the "wards of the government," history records that:

"Subordinate officers and agents of the Bureau were of inferior calibre – fanatics from the North and hangers-on of the Army, and many of the latter possessed neither character or a sense of responsibility. These undesirable outsiders proceeded on the assumption that the newly freed slaves and their former masters were natural enemies, and often stirred up mischief by giving the wards of the nation' bad advice.... and arousing generally hatred between the races.

"The Bureau agents had authority to order the arrest and imprisonment of any citizen on the single statement of any former slave and if any resistance was made to the mandate, the bureau agent, the post commander, or military governor, was always ready to enforce it with a file of bayonets.

"The former slaves were led to believe that all the land belonged to them. Bureau agents were also responsible for the well-documented hoax that every Negro head of family who went to the polls and voted the Republican ticket would receive 'forty acres and a mule.'

"Swindlers from the North also did a thriving business selling red and blue pegs for \$1 each to the former slaves, telling them to use the pegs to stake-off their 40 acres."

In South Carolina, officers and agents of the freedman's Bureau formed a secret political society called the Loyal League and enlisted former slaves as members. The purpose of the League was "to keep the white man under foot."

Former slaves were initiated into the secret society and bound by a "solemn obligation," to go to the polls and vote the Republican ticket.

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The initiated League members were taught – even in printed literature – that their former masters were their worst enemies and would “put them back in slavery if the democratic Party came to power.”
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In his book: *Ousting the Carpetbagger From South Carolina*, Henry T. Thompson wrote, “A white person who incurred the enmity of the League was apt to have his house or barn burned and he was without redress.” Members of the League who incurred its displeasure were “persecuted, whipped, and in some cases put to death.”

“In South Carolina, the League, in course of time, came simply to mean the Negro militia,” armed with rifles and bayonets.

“During Reconstruction, Republicans were known as Radicals and democrats as Conservatives.”

With the restoration of South Carolina to the Union in 1868, “most of the officers of the Freedman’s Bureau became office holders under the Carpetbag government.”

About the same time the Freedman’s Bureau and the Loyal League closed operations. They had accomplished their purpose: “The permanent alienation of the two races by its gospel of hate.”

President Johnson became President after the death of Lincoln. He used the Constitution in an attempt to shield the people of South Carolina from the radicals of the North and secure their civil rights.

Wade Hampton was the leading citizen of the state and was urged to run for Governor, but declined, stating that someone less involved in the recent war would be more useful.

James L. Orr, from Anderson was the only candidate, but Hampton, not a candidate came in a close second in the election.

Radical Republicans in Congress insisted that it was the duty of Congress not the President to prescribe the conditions imposed on the Southern states. The Congress refused to recognize the elected members and denied seats to the elected Senators and Congressmen from the Southern states.

Thompson wrote, “In March 1867, Congress passed over President Johnson’s vetoes, and amidst derisive jeers and uproarious shouts of laughter on the part of Republicans, what were known as the Reconstruction Acts.”

Under the Reconstruction Acts, ten Southern states were placed under military rule.

Thompson explained: “The real purpose was to break the backbone of the Democratic Party by destroying it in the South and thus to perpetuate the Republican Party in the United States.”

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D. H. Chamberlain, a former New England Abolitionist and Carpetbagger Republican Governor of South Carolina during Reconstruction, wrote these words in the *Atlantic Monthly* for April 1901.

"But it may now be clear to all, as it was then clear to some, that underneath all the avowed motives and all the open arguments (of Radical Republicans), lay a deeper cause than all others – the will and determination to secure party ascendancy and control at the South and in the Nation through the Negro vote....

"Sentiment carried the day, sentiment of the lower kind – hate, revenge, greed, lust of power;.... minds never were more ruthlessly set upon a policy than were Stevens and Morton in putting the white South under the heel of the black South." (Chamberlain was referring to Congressman Thaddeus Stevens of Pennsylvania and Sen. Oliver P. Morton of Indiana, both Radical Republicans who led the fight to impose their will on the post-war South.)

In October 1867, General Sickles, the commander of troops occupying North and south Carolina (Second Military District) ordered a general registration of voters which recorded 78,982 Negroes as qualified voters and only 46,346 whites qualified to vote in South Carolina.

Thompson writes: "Thus, at the point of a bayonet, was evolved a condition which is without parallel in all history – some of the best and noblest citizens of the state put in a position of political inferiority to their recent slaves."

Wade Hampton, speaking at the 1868 Democratic Convention termed the Reconstruction acts Unconstitutional. He stated that it would be better to be under military occupation and rule than under the Carpetbag – Negro government that had been imposed by Congress at the point of a bayonet.

Hampton, however, never failed to point out emphatically his loyalty to all the citizens of South Carolina. He continually counseled friendliness and fair dealing toward the former slaves, "for the Negro is in no way responsible for the conditions which exist in the state."

Such were the conditions that led to the draft of Wade Hampton to lead the 1876 campaign for Governor of South Carolina that would oust the carpetbagger.

Next: Hampton's Campaign for Governor: The Revolution of 1876.