

Political Coalitions, State Capacity, and the Political Economy of Reconstruction in the Carolinas

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Presented at the Annual Meetings of the American Political Science Association

Los Angeles, CA

September 1, 2023

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Vignettes of Reconstruction, Carolina-Style

In 1868, North Carolina's Republican Party assembled a biracial, majority coalition of freedmen and white smallholders. It drafted a progressive state constitution, secured its statewide ratification, and won control of state government. But just three years later, the coalition teetered on the brink of collapse. The Klan had swept across the state, murdering prominent Republicans, and calling into question Republicans' ability to keep the peace and protect its supporters. The federal government responded tepidly, sending only a trickle of military aid.

Many white farmers, resentful of the unsettled racial order and chafing at the tax bill they footed to provide a new raft of public goods, began to desert the party. The Democrats, benefiting from electoral violence, disorder, and the unpopular and botched suppression of the Klan, retook the state legislature in 1870 and quickly impeached the Republican governor. They then called a statewide referendum for a convention to rewrite the constitution and 'redeem' their state. But the Republican coalition rallied. Party leaders, a skillful media campaign, and party offices crafted effective appeals to whites and Blacks to mobilize in defense of the constitution. In 1871, voters overwhelmingly rejected the referendum and in 1872 returned a Republican to the governor's mansion. The state's pro-democracy coalition had held, and the party would be a viable, interracial force for another quarter century.

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In 1868, a majority-Black convention drafted a highly progressive constitution for South Carolina. Providing for democratic institutions, equal rights for white and Black men, a public education system, and extensive internal improvements, it was consistent with the state's Republican party program. Giving voice to freedpeoples' hunger for land of their own, delegates prepared to petition Congress to authorize additional money to the Freedmen's Bureau to facilitate Black land purchases, but pulled back when it became clear Congress would reject it. The 1866 federal Southern Homestead Act was meant to help freedmen purchase federally-owned land in 5 states, but South Carolina, having no such land, was not among them. South Carolina Republicans were on their own, and so they got to work.

The state sold bonds and used the proceeds to fund a Land Commission that would buy land -- largely from cash-poor planters -- and sell small plots to freedmen and poorer white farmers. However, stymied by centuries of weak state capacity, the Commission had to rely on inaccurate surveys and faulty title records. Worse: it was led by a corrupt Brooklyn carpetbagger straight out of Dunning School Central Casting. Attacked at every turn by gleeful conservative Democrats, the Commission was failing.

And then biracial Secretary of State Francis Cardozo grabbed the reins, improving its performance and developing high-quality bureaucratic oversight. New laws reduced corruption. The Commission, designed both to generate material benefits for Republican coalition members and to promote the Radical Republican vision of a post-emancipation economy for smallholders, began to make progress. By the time Democrats used widespread election violence to oust Republicans from power in 1876, the Commission had "landed" over 70,000 people (about 15,000 families)¹—the vast majority of them Black (compared to the Homestead Act's 4,000 families across five states).

¹ The 1870 Census (1872, vol. 1: 595, table 20) reported the state's average family size at 4.67 persons..

These vignettes illustrate nascent, biracial, pro-democracy coalitions facing off against powerful (and violent) opponents, and reckoning with the implications of their own states' fiscal and administrative shortcomings. They also capture moments when these state-level Republicans found ways to persuade voters to back their reforms and build state capacity in order to deliver for their members--even, or especially, when Washington would not provide much help. More important, these vignettes suggest why extant accounts of Reconstruction are inadequate.

Below, we first outline what we think is wrong with current explanations of the fate of Reconstruction. Second, we suggest why we think that a better explanation must highlight the variable interplay of partisan coalitions² and state capacity, both at the subnational level. Third, we illustrate this approach in case studies of North Carolina and South Carolina.

The modern literature on Reconstruction is strikingly ambivalent. In part as a response to the Dunning School that viewed Reconstruction as an unmitigated failure (Smith and Lowery 2013), scholars (almost all of them historians) have energetically cataloged a long string of accomplishments, from movements towards social and cultural autonomy for African Americans (Foner 1988; Rodrigue 2006; Davis 2022) to their rapid civic and political mobilization (Foner 1988; Fitzgerald 1989; Hahn 2005), and from a massive expansion of Black voting (Walton et al 2012) to an equally impressive growth of effective Black elected representatives (e.g., Cobb and Jenkins 2001) at every level (Foner 1993; Valelly 2004). Yet even as our appreciation of these accomplishments has grown, there has been a stubborn adherence to the belief that failure was inevitable due to whites' commitment to racist ideologies (Richardson 2001; Suryanarayan and White 2021), or the unleashing of violence against the emerging, Republican-led democratic

² As Bateman (2018) demonstrates, an emphasis on coalitions provides one way for developmental accounts of U.S. politics to restore Black agency – a central explanatory of African Americans as subjects of history (or “the self-willed activity of choice-making subjects” (Brown 2005: 1244)) – rather than merely those subjected to its structural forces – to their accounts. This has been more of an issue in political science/APD (Johnson 2016) than history (Foner 1988; Brown 1994; Johnson 2003; Hahn 2005).

transition (Egerton 2014; Byman 2021), or the failure of national-level Republicans to fully support their southern partners (Du Bois 1998 [1935]; Bensel 1990), or even corruption (Summers 1984, 2014), etc.

We agree that, despite many impressive achievements, Reconstruction -- cased as a single outcome -- did fail. Its supporters, in the South or beyond, did not consolidate democratic governance or transform the labor-repressive political economies of the former member states of the Confederacy. By around 1880, the disfranchisement of millions of newly enfranchised freedmen and many poorer whites had begun. Moreover, the region's political economy was settling into an unjust and highly unequal equilibrium that would persist for decades (Wright 1986: ch. 4). By 1900, the American South was home to the violent repression and political extrusion of African Americans and many poorer whites; to Jim Crow, a cradle-to-grave repressive regulation of interracial contact; and to a return of highly secure arrangements of labor-repressive agriculture (Mickey 2015: chs. 2-3).

But we argue that existing explanations are inadequate on at least three grounds. First, they are not sufficiently calibrated to the mixture of success and failure that marks Reconstruction and its eventual replacement by one-party, authoritarian rule. If they explain the ultimate failure, they do so only by obscuring the origins and dynamics of the long list of successes. Second, they fail to distinguish causal dynamics at the national level from causal dynamics at the state level, and it is at the state level where Reconstruction ultimately failed, albeit with very different pace and duration. Reconstruction demands that we reckon with *eleven outcomes*. Third, and most importantly, existing explanations treat their candidate causes -- racism, violence, or insufficient effort in Washington -- as constants across time and space, when each of these causes varied considerably from year to year, decade to decade, and state to state.

For example, whites' accommodations to planters in an effort to secure a better "racial status" (Suryanarayan and White (2021) does not help much in explaining why state-level Republican coalitions *ever* got off the ground, much less why whites would still back such coalitions three decades later in Virginia and North Carolina. As David Bateman puts it, "a consensus on white supremacy . . . was insufficient to sustain white political solidarity[,] raising the question of how causally significant white attitudes were in defining the parameters of southern regime politics in the first place" (2023: 334-335). Moreover, and most problematic for existing accounts, these causal factors varied because they were endogenous to state-level, political-economic dynamics that we depict as the interplay of *political coalitions* and *state capacity*.

Begin with the successes. Every element of Reconstruction judged as a success traces back to the construction of a social and political coalition that brought together, in different mixtures at different times and places, freedpeoples; white farmers spanning families of modest means to poor families living in economically marginal regions; and white businessmen and professionals of more substantial means who had envisioned the South as an economically diverse region of progress and prosperity (Doyle 1990) rather than a restoration of the antebellum order (Robinson 1981). Call this the pro-democratic or "nation-building" coalition.³ Reconstruction succeeded when the *subnational* nation-building coalition included the state-level median voter, who was almost everywhere a white farmer of modest means (although three southern states--Louisiana, Mississippi, and South Carolina--were majority-Black during Reconstruction and for decades after).

³ We prefer the term "nation-building coalition" because our work on Reconstruction is part of a larger, comparative project evaluating cases of American efforts to (re-)build effective states and to construct democratic polities and diverse economies in post-conflict contexts. These cases include Reconstruction, Germany and Japan after World War II, Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan.

And building and maintaining a durable, nation-building coalition required the participation of an administratively capable and institutionally impartial *subnational* state. By administratively capable, we mean a state with the logistical and infrastructural capacity (Mann 1984, 2008) to raise revenue and regulate the economy (Dincecco 2017; Dincecco and Wang 2022). By “institutionally impartial,” we mean a state whose officeholders and institutions are not captured by *local power structures*, or concentrations of economic and military power, sometimes reinforced by ideological or administrative power (Mann 1986). In particular, highly unequal agrarian societies often feature “fused” political and economic power of the kind discussed by Huntington (1968).⁴ Institutional impartiality meant that the policies selected by the nation-building coalition could be funded and implemented effectively by the state.

The weakness of Reconstruction was not an indifferent national government, white supremacy, or racist violence; the weakness of Reconstruction was that the viability of each nation-building coalition required a state to possess characteristics that, given prior decades (or in some cases, such as South Carolina and Virginia, even centuries) of planter-dominated politics, were strikingly absent. The state could not fund the ambitious projects whose success would keep the nation-building coalition, nor could it regulate private capital whose investments were supposed to substitute for public spending.

⁴ Large landowners involved in the export of staples have long been viewed as the economic actors most hostile to democracy, usually because of their fear of the confiscation that democracy might bring. To the extent that they participate electorally, they use their power over local political, economic, and social arrangements to undermine electoral competitiveness by shaping institutions and controlling patron-client relations (Baland and Robinson 2008; Ziblatt 2009). Additionally, democracy promises to make it more difficult for large landowners, either with the help of the state or in opposition to it, to deploy violence and other coercion to secure a regular supply of cheap agricultural labor (Moore 1966; Rueschemeyer, Stephens, and Stephens 1992). Local power structures dominated by large landowners are usually opposed to the centralization of political authority (though, as in the case of antebellum Whigs, planters’ preferences over state-building and taxation can be complex (Jensen, Pardelli, and Timmons 2023)).

This was a toxic combination of state weakness and coalitional frailty. A white farmer of modest means, the median voter was highly volatile in his political preferences. A state that could not supply public goods with visible benefits, could not regulate private and public investment without creating an environment mistakenly attributed to venality, was also a state so constrained that it was forced to raise taxes on the members of the nation-building coalition. The political economy of Reconstruction was therefore not aligned with the politics of Reconstruction, and the nation-building coalition ultimately fractured everywhere.

Yet despite the uniformity of this outcome by, say, 1898 (the year of the “Wilmington Coup” in North Carolina), it did not happen at the same rate everywhere. The nation-building coalition was relatively ephemeral in some places, relatively longer-lasting in others, and in some states even able to recompose itself after an early failure. This variation in the viability of the nation-building coalition is both an outcome to be explained but also a methodological boon. It allows us to demonstrate in the case studies below that *every contending explanation of Reconstruction’s failure was at least partially endogenous to the strength of the Republican coalition*. When the coalition was strong, violence was lower and more effectively combatted at the local level; the coalition’s Democratic Party adversary was more likely to adapt strategically, acting as a Downsian utility maximizer by reaching out to Black freedmen and modest white farmers; and even local variants of white supremacist ideologies were flexible and accommodating. If the adage is true that all politics is local, then it may also be true that national-level political dynamics like racism, violence, or indifference are endogenous to those same local politics.

Trevon Logan (2023) illustrates the endogeneity bias in extant explanations of Reconstruction. Exploring the partisan violence that crippled Republican parties across the South

he shows that, all else equal, anti-Black, anti-Republican political violence occurred more often in areas with higher per capita tax burden. Stated differently, in areas where nation-building coalitions, relying on greater fiscal and state capacity, could generate material benefits for their members without crippling levels of taxation, violence was lower.

Below, we offer case studies of Reconstruction in the Carolinas. These case studies do not narrate every important moment in these states; in particular, we spend little time on the first 2-3 years before “congressional Reconstruction” commenced. We also only sketch out an argument we hope to sustain fully at a later date: that southern states’ differed importantly in the ways in which their histories, from the colonial period through to their experiences as members of the Confederacy (McCurry 2012; Rable 1994; Robinson 2005; Edwards 2015; Bensel 1987; Jenkins 1999), shaped state capacity by the onset of Reconstruction. Rather, we try to keep our attention focused on the relationship between subnational state capacity and the construction and maintenance of Republican coalitions supporting nation building.

North Carolina: A Long Reconstruction

The window for effective state and democracy building in North Carolina lasted longer than in other southern states. Pro-democracy actors, with the Republican Party as their chosen vehicle, assembled a majority coalition composed of Blacks and poorer whites, particularly from the west of the state. This coalition drafted and ratified a new state constitution in 1868, controlled the state legislature until 1870, and maintained control of the governor’s office until 1876. In 1876, that coalition fractured. However, more than 15 years later, and in an even more trying political climate, grassroots activists and local elites assembled a new coalition, anchored

by cotton-growing yeomen from the piedmont region in the center of the state. This new coalition won a legislative majority in 1894 and elected a governor, Daniel Russel Jr., in 1896.

Moreover, the 1870s and 1880s featured important continuities that rendered them much more similar to life during these “early” and “late” coalitions than during the Jim Crow period that began with the new century (Redding 2003: 31-34). During these two decades, African Americans – about 37 percent of the state’s population – continued to vote in large numbers, and multiple viable political parties, including the Republican Party, courted their votes (Valelly 2004: 56; Kousser 1974). African Americans also remained largely free of some of the legal proscriptions that would later come to define Jim Crow, such as segregated railroad cars. Mixed race waiting rooms also remained legal. Schools were officially segregated via constitutional amendment in 1875, but the funding of Black and white schools remained roughly equal as late as 1891. This was in spite of efforts by the Democratic Party. During the 1880s, elite Democrats in the state legislature passed legislation to allow localities, if authorized by a referendum, to separate their school tax revenues by race. Doing so threatened to destroy Black public education in the state, which would be reliant on the meager tax revenues from a community with little taxable wealth (Escott 1985: 185). Somewhat surprisingly, this effort was beaten back. Black voters in Tarboro, a town in Edgecombe county, actually defeated a referendum to segregate tax revenue, and in 1886 the North Carolina Supreme Court declared the scheme unconstitutional (Escott 1985: 184). Continued Black voting along with some respect for the neutral application of the rule of law reveals a period with plenty of continuities with traditional Reconstruction. Thus, North Carolina, relative to other states, featured an unusually long period during which successful nation building was possible. Moreover, the fact that the coalitions that emerged in the early and late periods differed gives us more reason to think the failure of North Carolina was not

inevitable. The longevity and relative success of the state's democratic nation-building make understanding the roots and circumstances of its ultimate failure all the more vital.

Antecedent Conditions and Political Economy

The roots of North Carolina's Long Reconstruction, and its eventual collapse, can be found, in part, in the state's political economy. The large landowners who remained steadfastly opposed to both democracy and the extension of central state authority, dominated North Carolina's eastern plain. Newly freed African Americans labored on their plantations, making up an average of about one-half of the population in the region (Redding 2003: 13). Their strong interest in exercising their new rights was matched by a paucity of social and physical capital that would be needed to sustainably fuel the creation and preservation of a democratic state. The center of the state, the Piedmont, was dominated by white yeomen who owned and operated smaller cotton farms. These voters had little love for the agrarian oligarchs of the east, but as we detail below, their white supremacy and opposition to the higher property taxes necessary to fund a crash course of state building sharply limited the appeal of biracial political cooperation until the economic situation changed in the late 1880s.

Unlike the other two regions, North Carolina's mountainous western was only about 12% Black in 1860 (Nash 2016: 14). Enslaved people enjoyed more mobility in this region, with some acting as guides for travelers and tourists. Cotton was less dominant, since the region's climate favored livestock and food production (Nash 2016: 11-12). In the antebellum period, hogs were the main livestock. White farmers often sold these agricultural goods to cotton growing regions in the state and region, cementing a strong, if indirect, interest in the success of the cotton crop. White yeomen in this region, isolated from the rest of the state and dependent on the export of

perishable commodities, pushed the hardest for railroad development and other internal improvements, making them potentially sympathetic to the pitch Republicans would soon make to the state's white voters. The economic consequence of North Carolina's regional makeup was a state somewhat less dependent on cotton production and plantation agriculture than many of its southern peers. As a result, there was a larger population of whites in the state less tightly bound to the fortunes of the labor repressive cotton economy and, their *racism* notwithstanding, less inclined to center the continued domination of the state's enslaved Black population in their politics (Nash 2016; Escott 1985: 9, 15, 139; Butts 1978).

Paradoxically, North Carolina's economic deviation from the southern norm did not result in more egalitarian antebellum political institutions. Rather, North Carolina maintained one of the most elitist, anti-democratic governments in the South (Butts 1978). Only North and South Carolina refused to allow the popular election of judges at any level (*Ibid*; 3). As late as the 1850s, in order to cast a ballot for state senator (property qualifications to vote for the lower house were abolished in 1835), a voter needed to own at least fifty acres of property (Heron 2017). There were even more extensive property requirements for office holding, and the apportionment of both houses of the legislature was weighted towards eastern slaveholders via the "federal ratio" of counting enslaved people as "three-fifths" of a person.

This state of affairs ignited a broader political conflict in North Carolina over the scope of (white) democracy that intensified in the years before the Civil War. The issue of "free suffrage" for whites, dormant in the aftermath of the 1835 constitutional convention, was again injected into statewide politics by the Democratic nominee for governor in 1848. The issue continued to increase in salience even as it muddied traditional partisan cleavages (Escott 1985: 27-31). Initially, the Democratic Party positioned itself to lead the campaign for universal white male

suffrage, but both the Whig and Democratic Parties in North Carolina began to fissure as the issue moved to the center of state politics. Both parties had pro-reform factions, rooted in their constituencies from the western part of the state, and more conservative wings dominated by eastern planters. An appeal in 1851 for suffrage expansion was signed by 37 state legislators, all from western North Carolina and 36 of them Whigs (Escott 1985: 27-31; Beckel 2011: 18-19). Six years later, universal white male overwhelmingly carried the day in a referendum.

Conflicts over the extent of (white) democracy in North Carolina were tied to battles over taxation, public goods provision and economic development that mirrored those in the rest of the South. These battles, and the socio-economic topography that structured them, would create a challenging environment for agents and sympathizers of the federal government, newly victorious in the Civil War, to undertake state building. In the antebellum era, land taxes were quite low. J. Mills Thornton III explained the situation in this way: “The principal source of tax revenue in all of the Lower South states during most of the antebellum period was the tax on slaves. The slave tax constituted some 60% of the total receipts in South Carolina and 30-40% in the others. The substantial revenues from this source allowed the states to hold land taxes at quite low levels. (Thornton 1982: 351). Thornton restricted his study to a comparison of taxes on enslaved people in the lower south. North Carolina is absent from his study because it is not part of that subregion. Similar dynamics around taxes on enslaved people prevailed in North Carolina, but there were critical differences. North Carolina also derived a significant amount of its revenue from taxes on enslaved people (Sylla 1986: 841). However, thanks to its undemocratic political structure, slaveowners escaped the levels of taxation faced by their peers in many other southern states. By 1852, nine of fourteen southern states leveled an ad valorem

tax on enslaved people. By contrast, the 1835 constitution subjected enslaved people in North Carolina to the same capitation tax that free white men paid.

A concession to the practice of taxing what slaveholders insisted was “property” as people was that the head tax was assessed on both men and women, whereas only free men paid the head tax (Woolfolk 1960; Orth and Newby 2013). North Carolina thus became the only southern state where slave taxes were pegged to the taxes paid by white men, a measure to lower taxes on property (Butts 1978). This was sustainable as long as public expenditures remained negligible, held in check by the fiscal limits of a poor agricultural economy and a Jacksonian suspicion of an active government (Thornton 1982: 354).

However, in the late 1850s, increased outlays for railroad construction and other internal improvements destabilized this compromise (Watson 2000; Butts 1978). North Carolina had a long (though contested) tradition of state support for internal improvements, including roads and river navigation improvements. The higher capital requirements of railroad construction required from the state a more consistent and considerably higher intensity of fiscal commitment (Watson 2000: 202). Another policy initiative that began to consume more revenue was increased support for public education. The (near) universal enfranchisement of white men during the Jacksonian age increased poor white’s demand for education, as did the higher wages that even a rudimentary education provided in a commercializing economy (Kaestle 1983; Hyde 2017). While Reconstruction governments dramatically expanded the state’s guarantee of a public education, antebellum state governments throughout the South (including North Carolina) had already taken increased state support for public schools (Thornton 1982: 378). However, these funds were not distributed fairly. Counties with a high population of enslaved people and slave owners tended to receive more school funds per capita (funds that were of course restricted to

whites). North Carolina, mirroring the inequalities found elsewhere in its political system, utilized a particularly unequal funding formula (Lawrimore 2023: 10). As a consequence, small farmers and laborers began to resent the low taxes guaranteed to wealthy, eastern slaveowners and to organize to shield themselves from carrying a disproportionate share of the state's fiscal burden. Their chosen policy reform was an ad valorem (property) tax on enslaved people.

The conflict over whether to impose this tax intensified once reformers won the fight for universal white male suffrage in 1857. The Democratic Party opposed the new tax. In the place of the nearly defunct Whig Party, torn apart by national conflicts over the extension of slavery, a new political formation arose to oppose the Democratic Party and advocate for ad valorem taxation of slave property. Combining former Whigs, disaffected Democrats, supporters of the Know-Nothings and newly mobilized poor workers and farmers the party—which dubbed themselves the “Opposition”—made the ad valorem issue the center of their campaign. They came close to winning control of the state in 1860, losing the governor's race by only six thousand votes (much closer than the previous election, when the Democrats had won by sixteen-thousand). The Democrats also lost thirty seats in the lower house of the legislature (Butts 1978: 99). The election was close enough that many conservative, eastern planters felt that giving ground on the tax issue was necessary for white unity. Reform, wrote one planter serving in North Carolina's secession convention, was necessary “as it will have a tendency to unite our people—the non-slaveholders—more closely with us in this contest with the North” (Escott 1985: 30). North Carolina's secession convention approved a (limited) version of the ad valorem tax as a prelude to their vote to join the Confederacy (Butts 1978).

The onset of the Civil War short circuited this burgeoning class inflected political confrontation, with the war suppressing political competition and sublimating and subsuming

other issues (Woolfolk 1960). From a certain perspective, the decision to go to war at all is evidence for more than the suppression of class conflict but its misdirection and even absence. After all, thousands of poor white farmers and farmworkers gave their assent, offered their taxes and volunteered their lives for a war fought to preserve the property of the oligarchic class in their state (Nash 2016: 18; Escott 1985: 35-36). However, the weight of the burden borne by ordinary white North Carolinians during the Civil War obscures just how shallow inter-white unity was and how potent class politics remained. In a February, 1861 referendum a majority of voters opposed the calling of a convention that would consider secession (Beckel 2011: 24; Escott 1985: 35). The attack on Fort Sumter and Lincoln's call for volunteers to suppress the insurrection temporarily generated enthusiasm and unity, but even the rush to war was interwoven by sadness and dread by a wide range of elite North Carolinians (Escott 1985: 34-35). By 1862, barely a year after secession, newly elected Governor Zebulon Vance, who before the war was a member of the Whig Party, informed the Confederate government that "advocates of secession no longer hold the ear of the people," and it would be exceedingly difficult" for him to carry out the new conscription law (Escott 1985: 39).

Indeed, while the Civil War halted many varieties of ordinary politics, class and regional cleavages did not disappear. Instead, they fed a powerful unionist movement in the central and western regions of the state, a movement likely stronger than in any Confederacy member-state other than Tennessee and one that generated successful Unionist candidates in CSA congressional elections (Hume and Gough 2008: 116; Bensel 1999; Kruman 1983: 249, 256). These divisions appeared in state-level politics as well, as enthusiastic secessionists coalesced into one party while those who had remained unionists up until the moment of secession, including many former whigs, formed an opposition (Escott 1985: 36). Unionists in North

Carolina endured ostracism, repression and physical violence for their beliefs, and engaged in a variety of activities ranging from peaceful dissent to sabotage of the Confederate war effort and cooperation with Union forces (Myers 2014). Escott estimates that the Heroes of America, one underground pro-Union group, may have had as many as ten thousand members (1985: 45). Notably, Confederate leaders were unable to rekindle the loyalty of anti-confederates by outlining potential, allegedly calamitous consequences of a Union victory—such as racial equality. One North Carolina unionist dismissed these diversionary tactics by saying that “the time has gone by...that people can be maddened by such newspaper and pulpit slang as Yankee Confiscation.” (Escott 1985: 76).

The trajectory of North Carolina’s antebellum political development showcases both the opportunities and challenges the postbellum, pro-democracy movement would encounter. On the one hand, large swaths of the state’s white population were accustomed to a competitive two-party political system. The campaigns for free suffrage and a more progressive tax system produced an embryonic, whites-only version of the biracial, pro-democracy, state building coalition Republicans would try to build during Reconstruction. Moreover, the instability of the party system in North Carolina helped establish a precedent that switching to third parties, as Zebulon Vance did when he joined the “Know-Nothing” Party, was a legitimate tool to advance personal ambition and policy aims (Beck 2011: 19). The campaign for ad valorem taxation instigated the formation of a workingman’s association in Wake County, and roll call votes on the issue in the legislature in the late 1850s reveal that wealth (in the form of land and slaves) was a better proxy for support or opposition to ad valorem taxation than region or party. One conservative elite in North Carolina wrote a friend to confide his fears that the opposition party would unite poor men in the west and east of the state (Butts 1978; 74). As a consequence,

Republicans encountered significant constituencies in the state's white population amenable to their economic appeals, tenuously willing to cooperate with freedmen, and alienated from the existing political order. Some of the leaders of the opposition movement, including their nominee for governor in 1860, later became prominent Republicans during Reconstruction (Butts 1978).

A full appreciation of the linkages between North Carolina's antebellum political development and its path through Reconstruction should also raise more doubts about the potency of white supremacy as a tool to produce white unity. In the conventional periodization of Reconstruction, the old planter elite of North Carolina needed barely eight years to hit upon the organizational, ideological and rhetorical formula to unite the state's white residents against biracial democracy. As we suggest above and detail below, that periodization should be extended to include the successful Populist-Republican coalition of the 1890s. Suddenly, the elites of North Carolina required thirty years (and a significant pullback in federal support for pro-democracy coalitions in the south) to achieve their final victory. If we extend our periodization yet further, as the continuities between the factions that developed around the conflict over ad valorem taxation and Reconstruction suggest we should, our period extends over forty years. An outcome that arises after forty years of intermittent effort, interspersed with several sweeping defeats, that comes about due to (and in spite of) a confluence of political and economic changes few foresaw in advance, is not easily explained as inevitable.

In addition, North Carolina's generally lower levels of taxation on enslaved people meant that, relative to its southern peers, the need to shift the burden of taxation from enslaved people to land was less. White North Carolinians would experience the same types of tax hikes during Reconstruction that enraged their peers across the South, but it would be smaller in scale, potentially affording the new Republican Party more fiscal room to maneuver (Sylla 1986: 841).

On the other hand, the planter elite of North Carolina had already weathered significant political challenges and had proved politically adept at defusing and splintering class—based appeals by introducing cross-cutting concerns into the political arena. Republican elites would also encounter a white yeomanry that, for all their antebellum radicalism, was on guard against higher taxes and already somewhat accustomed to state support for education. The question of taxes would haunt Republicans in North Carolina, as it would throughout the South, because the state's biggest stock of capital (enslaved people) was now free and untaxable as property. Emancipation rendered the belated victory of the antebellum forces of reform moot. Moreover, they were no longer sustained by the private provision of their owners, but rather entitled by their new status as free and equal citizens to a share of public services. This increased the burden on the state. Republican elites would need to find a way to build a majority coalition that could usher in democratic rule in North Carolina while generating more revenue from a population either unwilling or unable to pay.

In addition, it is worth noting, too, an ironic legacy of anti-Confederate sentiment for the prospects of Republican-sponsored state-building. Throughout the state, but especially in the mountain west, anger at the centralization of state authority *both* at the level of the Richmond-based federation *and* in what mountain whites considered illegitimate uses of gubernatorial vetoes by wartime governors produced greater hostility toward state-building during Reconstruction. This contributed to the decision, in the ensuing Reconstruction constitution of 1868, to weaken the governorship by removing his veto—a move that would complicate Republican state leadership, especially as Democrats became more successful in state legislative elections during the 1870s (Hume and Gough 2008: 136; Edwards 2015).

Nation-builders at both the national and subnational levels benefited from overreach by conservative white elites who had never reconciled themselves fully to equal political rights for whites, let alone biracial democracy. The latter's resistance to changes preferred by Radical Republicans in Congress—and in particular the conservatives' passage of draconian “Black Codes” that attempted to reintroduce physical and economic coercion of Blacks that differed little from slavery—backfired. In response, Radical Republicans passed much more stringent civil rights legislation, and required the ratification of state constitutions providing for much greater popular influence in politics as the prerequisite for readmission to the Union and the halls of Congress (Jenkins and Peck 2021: ch. 3).

State constitutions were the most important institution in shaping the prospects for building subnational democracies, impartial states, and fostering a transformation of the political economy. The constitutions mandated by Congress differed markedly from those written immediately after the South's surrender. Indeed, they were quite modern in their endorsement of individual rights, their requirements for voting and office-holding, their provision of public education and social welfare, and so on (Herron 2017; Benedict 1989).

North Carolina's 1868 Constitution was revolutionary in many respects (Thorpe 1909, 5: 2,800-2,822). At its constitutional convention, about three-quarters of delegates – elected from across the state – were southern whites; about 13% were Black, and about 15% were non-southern whites (almost all from New England (Hume and Gough 2008: 24-25). As was typical throughout the region (except in South Carolina), no Black delegates chaired standing committees. Republicans won majorities of 80 percent of votes taken at the convention; these included defeating provisions limiting Black suffrage and reenfranchising all of the state's whites, as well as defeating a provision mandating racial segregation in schooling and the militia.

The new constitution also included crucial provisions democratizing local governments, replacing the old, un-elected county courts with five-man commissions elected by the people of the county. This gave Black voters a chance to control the local governments in the eastern counties in which they were concentrated, and offered white yeomen in the west and center of the state greatly expanded democratic rights (Escott 1985: 143-146). Property requirements to run for office, a source of inter-white conflict in the antebellum era, were also abolished. The new constitution also guaranteed new, if limited, property rights for married women. Petitions from several dozen women for divorce seeded these debates on women's rights when they were presented to the convention. Zipf notes that the Black delegates at the convention generally evinced more sympathy both for the individual petitions and the general cause of women's rights (Zipf 2008). This was one more area where the convention delegates attempted to interpose a neutral, rights-protecting state government into formerly private, hierarchical relationships.

More than two-thirds of southern whites at the convention voted as radical Republicans. While mountain North Carolina whites were strongly Republican, Republicans held majorities of delegates from all of the state's regions. This held for cities, too; the wealthiest delegates hailed from Raleigh, and also voted reliably as Republicans (Hume and Gough 2008: 130, 133). Ultimately, 52% of registered voters statewide voted on the constitution's ratification, and did so by a vote of "almost three to one" (Hume and Gough 2008: 118).

Unlike the national constitution, state constitutions – then and now – are much more vulnerable to revision (Dinan 2018). Thus, in almost all southern states, the Reconstruction constitutions – ratified by native whites, freedmen, and an assortment of carpetbaggers -- became a target for Democrats in the 1870s and after. They set out to dynamite a range of state constitutional provisions that they expected would weaken their electoral prospects, enhance the

development of a more robust and impartial state apparatus, or otherwise harm their efforts to restore local power structures led by Democrats' main clients, large landowners. Democrats often reversed constitutionally-provided legislative apportionments and districting that might fairly result in Republican control of the state legislature. On the expectation of riding gerrymandering to state legislative control, they restored to the legislature substantial power that Reconstruction constitutions had given to new and existing popularly elected statewide officials (a tactic Republicans are replicating today (Mickey 2022)). And they sought to limit the authority of states to fund internal improvements – critical for plans to diversify economies away from plantation-produced export commodities – through constitutional limits on borrowing.

Thus, when the Conservative Party (later the Democratic Party) won a majority of the state's General Assembly in 1870, it immediately attempted to scrap the 1868 Constitution by asking voters to approve a new constitutional convention. Roundly defeated, Conservatives in the General Assembly modified the constitution via amendment in 1873 and 1876 (the latter via a convention). These amendments removed power lost by the General Assembly in 1868 to a new slate of popularly elected officials. The Conservative-controlled Assembly not only sought to blunt the ability of Republicans to wield power statewide by heavily gerrymandering the legislature, but also took a number of steps to protect large landowners in more heavily Black areas, such as by making many once locally elected officials now appointed by the legislature.

The importance of Democratic victories in North Carolina's constitutional politics was clear in the state's cities. As is true today with majority-Black cities set against Republican-controlled suburbs and exurbs in a fierce battle over preemption, Redeemers relied on state legislatures to battle Republicans in cities. Given the many ways in which legislatures could shape county- and municipal-level political competition, Democratic control of state

legislatures became “the single most important factor in the triumph of urban Redeemers” (Rabinowitz 1994 [1976]: 122). In Democratic hands, legislatures removed local officeholders, altered election rules for city officials, changed elected positions in cities under Republican control to Democratic-dominated institutions, gerrymandered cities, and tightened voting rules.

While only twelve percent of African Americans in North Carolina lived in cities by 1900, they comprised more than forty percent of all urban residents (Rabinowitz 1978). In Raleigh, the state’s capital, they comprised a slim majority of the city’s population. They helped the Republican Party win and hold the mayoralty and a majority of the city council from 1868 to 1875, and continued to win city council seats into the 1890s. After Republicans were victorious in 1872, with a majority-white electorate, the *Raleigh Daily Sentinel* concluded that “the white people are satisfied with things as they are” (Rabinowitz 1994 [1976]: 126). Besides winning elective offices, Blacks in Raleigh converted their electoral power into public sector employment (including police officers and all-Black fire companies), jobs with firms contracting with the city, and other patronage appointments. Thus, far from the confines of local power structures, which offered fewer material benefits for electoral coalitions, Republicans in Raleigh were able to forge and maintain a biracial coalition for some three decades. Indeed, the city’s control by Radicals would have lasted longer were it not for Democratic control of the legislature, whose gerrymandering of the city council helped defeat Republicans. The fact that both Hayes and Garfield carried the city in 1876 and 1880, respectively, provides evidence of the importance of the state legislature’s anti-democratic moves (Rabinowitz 1994 [1976]:119-20, 126-128).

Coalition-Building Strategy

Pro-democracy forces twice assembled majority coalitions that allowed them to govern North Carolina and attempt to implement their policy program. In this section, we review the

origins of both coalitions, with an analysis of their functioning and dissolution to follow in later sections. These two coalitions came together as a result of different coalition-building strategies, and consequently differed in their makeup and policy output. They shared a narrow path to their successful creation and operation. As we discuss in greater detail below, in neither instance did elites or rank-and-file coalition members have much room for error.

The end of the Civil War saw an explosion of Black political activity, reflected in the foundation, growth, and ongoing activity of groups such as the Equal Rights League (Fitzgerald 1988). This and other civil society groups were nourished by Black churches. By 1867, when Republicans in Congress enfranchised Black men in the southern states, Black North Carolinians had already built a lively civil society ecosystem capable of facilitating their entrance into the political system. White Republican leaders utilized these organizations as the base of a new partisan infrastructure, bringing in the state's Black voters as the largest component of their new majority coalition (Redding 2003: 63; Vallely 2004). To these voters, the Republican Party promised civil rights, voting rights, free public education, and physical security. Blacks secured more seats on county-level party executive committees and positions as delegates at state party conventions, as well as more party nominations for elective office, in heavily-Black plantation areas. In whiter areas, where the party relied more on white support, Blacks had much less influence within the party and state (Hahn 2005: 260-261).

What distinguished North Carolina from most other southern states was that many whites from the west of the state joined Black voters in the new Republican Party. In western North Carolina, loyalty (or lack thereof) to the Union became an important cleavage in the region's politics. Western North Carolina voted narrowly against the state's ordinance of secession and nurtured a significant constituency of white unionism. Local unionist organizations flourished in

the region, mostly organized under the umbrella of the Heroes of America (HOA). The group's activities ranged from recruiting soldiers to fight in the Union army to organizing to peacefully resist the policies of the Confederate and North Carolina governments. One of the group's identifiers, a red string on the lapel, gave rise to the other name for unionists in the region—the Red Strings. While many members of the HOA joined to express general discontent with the ways the war harmed themselves and their communities, some former Red Strings remained organized after the war and joined the Republican Party. Red Strings became the name of a group that reorganized after the war to defend Unionists in northwestern North Carolina (Nash 2016: 68; Escott 1985: 64; Myers 2014). Once, when citizens gathered in Hendersonville to take the amnesty oath, the accusation that a spectator was a “reb” sparked a general melee between unionists and former confederates (Nash 2016: 59). These voters were by no means racial egalitarians—many continued to speak of a “white man’s country”, but they accepted help from the national Republican Party in order to win this factional struggle against local conservatives. In so doing, many proved willing to participate in a biracial coalition (Nash 2016: 56, 90).

The economic agenda of the new Republican Party provided an additional inducement for mountain whites to support the new party. Many in the region had spent decades agitating for internal improvements, particularly railroads, that might spur economic development in the region. As the region continued to diversify its livestock production—the cultivation of sheep increased during the late 1870s and early 1880s, complimenting existing hog production—its need for a reliable way to ship goods out of the region only intensified. The Whig party's stance in favor of internal improvements contributed to its pre-war popularity in the region, and a prominent anti-Confederate regional leader named W.W. Rollins linked the repudiation of confederate war debt with the reallocation of money to railroad development (Nash 2016: 65).

Republicans were mindful of the priorities of these voters, seeing as they were crucial to achieving and maintaining a coalition capable of both electing statewide officials and holding majorities in the legislature. The platform of the North Carolina Republican Party pledged “vigorous aid” for railroad construction and the state’s new constitution included, for the first time, a statewide office of public works (Nash 2016: 107). It also exempted homesteads worth up to \$1,000 from being seized for the payment of debts, a popular measure designed to win the loyalty of white yeomen fearful of losing their lands to debtors (Escott 1985; 191). This coalition successfully ratified a new, democratic state constitution and swept Republican candidates to victory in the 1868 state elections in both statewide offices and the legislature. William Holden, a longtime political leader who had criticized the confederate government and helped lead the North Carolina peace movement during the war, was elected governor.

A decade and a half later, the insurgent People’s Party combined with major components of the Republican Party to assemble a second, pro-Democracy majority coalition.

Cotton-growing yeomen, straining under the weight of an agricultural depression and railroad monopolies, abandoned the Democratic Party in favor of the People’s Party—the political arm of the Farmers Alliance. Alone, these farmers did not comprise a majority faction in the state, so their political leaders went looking for allies. They found them in the smaller, but still vibrant, Republican Party. Unlike before, white yeomen from the piedmont desired positive protection, in the form of railroad regulation and antitrust laws, and not simply non-interference from the state.

Furthermore, their break with the Democratic Party and new “horizontal” identity as impoverished farmers opened the door to reluctant cooperation with Black voters and the Republican Party (Redding 2003: ch. 4). Horizontal political identities are created when a political movement connects a broadly shared identity with a collective set of interests pursued

through a common set of social relations (Redding 2003: 113). Poor farmers, in this framework, had a common identity and interests reinforced by the relational ties of the Farmers Alliance. Leaders of the People's Party secured the backing of key Republican leaders (both white and Black) by promising to support the repeal of laws passed by conservative Democrats limiting local democratic rule and making it harder to vote. This "fusion" coalition won control of the state legislature in 1894 and maintained it in 1896 while electing a governor, making North Carolina one of the only southern states to eject Democrats from power after 1877.

Building State Capacity and Institutionalizing the Party

In 1868, the freshly installed state government needed to generate the authority and material benefits necessary to keep itself in power. Beginning with the Reconstruction Acts of 1867, and continuing through the end of 1868, the central state lent support to local nation builders in the form of military backing and civilian aid via the Freedmen's Bureau. Bureau agents in western North Carolina enforced emancipation by voiding coercive apprenticeships in which young African-Americans were "bound" to white employers against the wishes of their parents (Nash 2016: 92). They also enforced contracts, and on at least one occasion threatened prosecution of a white landlord for failing to pay the portion of the crop his Black tenant was owed (Nash 2016: 91). The Bureau also intervened with local courts, often run by local conservative elites, to ensure white Republicans received fair treatment. Across the state, the Bureau and the Union army worked together on a successful voter drive that registered eligible Black men for the first time (Nash 2016: 112-113, ch. 4).

This support from the central state, while effective, was ultimately so transitory that local Republican leaders were soon forced into self-reliance. The Freedmen's Bureau was suddenly

directed by the federal government to cease operations in the state by January 1st, 1869. The Republican party now confronted the difficult task of filling the void left by the central state. They pursued a variety of initiatives to generate authority for the state and material benefits for their voters. Overall, they failed to do either. One of their initiatives was railroad development. Republican elites saw railroads as a ticket to economic growth, an alternative tax base to agricultural land, and a key priority of white Republicans from western North Carolina.

However, the Republican Party failed to implement their 1868 pledge of aggressive railroad development or to make effective use of the new, constitutionally created office of public works. Corruption halted work on the Western North Carolina Rail Road, and misrepresentations about the railroad's finances triggered the release of millions of dollars in public money that was then stolen. The Republican legislature, which had revised the company's charter to create two separate divisions responsible for development in different areas, was heavily implicated in the scandal. Frustration among mountain whites mounted, and a public meeting in Asheville in December of 1870 gave voice to this anger (Nash 2016: 152-153).

The creation of a new public school system, another major initiative of North Carolina Republicans, was considerably less afflicted with graft. The constitution of 1868 guaranteed a free, public education for all children regardless of race between the ages of six and twenty-one. It made provisions for state financial support of public schools (to be paired with funds raised at the county level) and created an elective office of Superintendent of Public Instruction. S.S. Ashley, a progressive, effective white northerner became the first superintendent. Republicans in the state legislature passed the necessary enabling legislation in 1869, but due to limited resources state support for the public schools that year was only about 50 cents per child (Du Bois 1998: 656). The state government simply did not have the capacity or funds during this

period to achieve the rapid build out of the public school system the Republican Party had promised. Localities had to take the lead, and while some attacked the problem with creative, progressive energy, differences in the quality of political leadership and available resources rendered the efforts uneven. The commissioners of Randolph County commissioned a census of the entire school age population, and then resolved to improve the existing schoolhouses and construct new ones. Even still, the county's resources could only support enough spots in the public schools for 60% of the students in the county—the commissioners soon petitioned the legislature for permission to levy a special tax to support the schools and retire county debt. Not all counties had such energetic, progressive leadership (Escott 1985; 146).

Corruption and unfulfilled promises angered poor white farmers all the more given the large tax hikes Republicans implemented to fund their program of railroad development and public goods provision. Republican fiscal policies in the late 1860s raised the property tax a landowner could expect to pay by 75%. The head tax, assessed on all adult males, rose more than 30%. White yeomen with small holdings and little cash could ill-afford these taxes and, as we discuss later, were persuaded by the appeals of Democratic officeseekers who promised to cut them (Redding 2003: 60).

The state was somewhat more successful in mobilizing coercive authority to defeat the Ku Klux Klan (KKK). In 1869, the KKK launched a wave of violence primarily targeted against Blacks, particularly those involved in any way with the Republican Party. One Black Republican leader was threatened with death until he took an oath to support the Democratic Party (Trelease 1971: 196). In one of the most shocking acts of political violence Wyatt Outlaw, the most prominent Black Republican leader in Alamance County, was murdered by a mob of Klansman (Trelease 1971: 205). While reserving their most intense violence for Blacks, the Klan did not

spare white Republicans. Klansman on horseback drove whites from their homes in Chapel Hill under cover of darkness, and a white man suspected of being a state detective was taken from his hotel and whipped. William Howle, a railroad contractor originally from Virginia, repeatedly had his work disrupted and life threatened by the Klan (Proctor 2009). The violence grew into an all-out assault on the state and Republican Party.

Here, we see how state- and party-building could be mutually reinforcing, as the popularity of the North Carolina state Republican Party provided a pool of white men in the state – (some with Union Army experience) – to staff a state militia that was deployed against the Klan. In all, Governor Holden and his associates assembled militia units totaling over six hundred men. Holden then, in March of 1870, declared a state of insurrection in Caswell and Alamance counties, allowing the militia to be deployed. Well led by competent officers they arrested over one hundred suspected Klansmen in Caswell and Alamance during July of 1870 (Trelease 1971: 217-220). However, turning these arrests into prosecutions proved challenging, as the state lacked the administrative capacity and legal expertise to navigate the complex procedural requirements of the resulting prosecutions. On several occasions, when judges asked state authorities to produce evidence of criminal activity, the state was forced to admit that it had collected none. This general failure was compounded by a severe mistake. The state militia arrested Josiah Turner, a prominent Democrat and Klan leader, at his home. Critically, he lived in Orange County, outside the area Holden had in a state of insurrection. His arrest was legally dubious and provoked both massive Democratic outrage about Holden's abuse of power and legal ammunition for their burgeoning effort to impeach the governor (Trelease 1971: 219-222).

National Republicans provided important help here by utilizing the executive branch to enforce the rights contained in the Reconstruction Amendments and enabling legislation.

Republicans founded the Department of Justice (DOJ) to serve as the institutional center for the enforcement of civil and voting rights in the south and across the country. The DOJ prosecuted members of the Klan and their allies—degrading the organization, safeguarding free elections and protecting local Republican Parties from violence that threatened to destroy their coalitional foundations (Trelease 1971; Kaczorowski 2005). On occasion, President Grant supplemented the legal assistance of the DOJ with military aid; the North and South Carolina militias received substantial armaments from the federal government and federal troops were deployed in South Carolina after Grant suspended Habeas Corpus (Trelease 1971: 384; Hahn 2003: 286).

As Kaczorowski details, 82% of prosecutions initiated by the Department of Justice in 1871 under the Enforcement Acts occurred in just five states: North Carolina, South Carolina, Alabama, Mississippi and Tennessee. Among this group, North Carolina and South Carolina had the greatest share of cases—20% and 36%, respectively. The DOJ was particularly effective at securing convictions under the enforcement act in North and South Carolina. 56% of all convictions secured in 1873 were secured in those two states. In North Carolina, Kaczorowski attributes this success to a particularly competent work by the prosecuting U.S. Attorney and presiding circuit judge (Kaczorowski 2005: 82-83).

Despite this assistance, corruption, disorder, rising taxes, and insufficient public services all contributed to a decline in the popularity of the Republican Party, most especially among its white constituents. Republicans lost control of the state legislature in the 1870 elections as Klan activity and dissatisfaction with Republican policy caused a decline in Republican support. This allowed Democrats to win the state legislature without winning appreciably more votes than they had in 1868 (Trelease 1971: 223). The new Democratic legislature promptly impeached Holden, and on March 22nd, 1871, he was convicted and expelled from office by the state senate (Trelease

1971: 225). However, the Republican Party proved surprisingly resilient. As described in our introduction, later in 1871, the party rallied to defeat a referendum called by conservative democrats that would have called a convention to frame a new constitution—potentially putting the egalitarian aspects of the 1868 document in danger (Beckel 2011). The party, attentive to its standing in the pivotal western region, nominated Tod Caldwell, a native of the mountain west and Holden’s lieutenant governor, as its gubernatorial nominee in 1872. While his support in the mountain west declined from 1868, he still captured over 45% of the vote in the region. His strong support for Black civil rights helped motivate and unify the party’s base of Black voters, allowing him and the party to recover and notch a narrow statewide victory (Nash 2016: 147).

Were it not for a gerrymander hastily enacted by Democrats, Republicans may have been able to recapture the state legislature as well (Olsen 1980: 184). Despite their subsequent defensive gerrymander, quite a few high-ranking Democratic Party leaders attributed the party’s success in the 1870 elections to the so-called “New Departure” strategy of accepting key tenants of Reconstruction such as Black political rights and the legitimacy of the southern Republican Party. The Democratic Party Executive Committee, in the aftermath of the election, issued an excited statement claiming that “the colored race...in very considerable numbers, broke away from the trammels in which they were bound.” The committee went on to state its belief that the interests of Blacks and whites were the same, and endeavored to prove it by pledging to protect the rights of Black citizens (Perman 1985: 61). This strategic adjustment by the Democratic Party, in North Carolina and across the South, owed to their perception of the strength of the Republican Party and the practical necessity of conceding core tenants of its program. In North Carolina, this was partly motivated by the continuing strength of the Republican organization.

Republicans owed this relative success, particularly in light of the mediocre performance of the state government, to successful party-building efforts as they sought to institutionalize and reproduce their majority coalitions. In the mountain west, Union and Loyalty Leagues helped cultivate a pro-Union, anti-Confederate identity that facilitated identification with the new Republican Party in the late 1860s. As we discussed above, successful mobilization efforts among Black voters in North Carolina also helped to create a new “horizontal” political identity to which Caldwell appealed with his strong support for Black civil rights.

The success of Black Republicans in creating a durable and unified constituency provided a template for the Farmers Alliance when, in the late 1880s and early 1890s, it sought to overcome local, hierarchical political relations and replace them with a new horizontal identity—impoverished white farmers—that could transcend local loyalties. Farmers Alliance organizers first came to North Carolina in 1887. They sought to build a common identity among farmers by emphasizing the organization’s new, cooperative approach to commodity price declines, excluding non-farmers from the organization, and targeting merchants as a common enemy to all farmers (Redding 2003: 87). By enmeshing farmers in the social structure of the Alliance, they hoped to create the organizational basis for durable cooperative action by farmers.

They were initially very successful. In Chatham County, located in the central piedmont region, the Alliance claimed 1,500 members by July of 1888. In a sign of some initial success in building a farmer identity that provided a basis for biracial cooperation, 500 Black farmers by 1891 had joined a separate Colored Farmers Alliance nominally committed to the same goals. The explosive growth of the Alliance provided the raw material for the construction of the People’s Party, which provided a critical component of the second, majority coalition of North Carolina’s Long Reconstruction.

Challenges and Opportunities of the Racial Order

Racism was endemic among whites in North Carolina, but the pervasiveness of racist ideology in the Democratic Party, and in large swaths of the Republican Party, can obscure differences among racial ideologies—a heterogeneity that shaped how attitudes translated into political preferences and actions (Fields 1982). The specific variety of racism articulated by the Democratic Party, the “Best Men” ideology, left space for Black political participation into the 1890s (Beckel 2011). Space precludes a full discussion of this worldview, but it cast Blacks as poorly educated dupes of radical whites. It did not mark Blacks as categorically unfit for political participation, and sometimes bemoaned the elevation of what David Schenk, a North Carolina conservative (and Klan leader) termed in 1869 “the dirty, unwashed scum of society.” Schenk lamented that Republicans in Rutherford County were supported by “negro associates” and “grog shop bullies,” revealing a common (though not necessarily equivalent) opprobrium at the political empowerment of poor whites and poor Blacks.

Rather than privileging the white race as a whole, men like Schenk thought of themselves as privileging the “best men.” These sentiments were an extension of the prewar politics of men like Schenk who, as discussed above, fought tenaciously to preserve the privileges accorded to wealthy white slaveowners and against equal political rights for whites (Escott 1985: 47; Butts 1978). This long, if intermittent, tradition of disparagement of poor whites, before, during and after the Civil War, is one reason that many of them remained amenable, in the aftermath of the failure of the Republican-led coalition, to joining future biracial coalitions.

The “Best Men” ideology contributed to the decline and fracture of the Democratic Party in the 1880s because it created a mismatch between the rhetoric and actions of the party. The party’s rhetoric, particularly its opposition to social integration and Black political “domination,”

was designed to generate white solidarity. However, its policy agenda continued to favor the white elite and its political organization remained structured around hierarchical relations between local elites and their parochial community (Redding 2003: 44). In the 1880s, poor white farmers became angry as their property taxes rose to pay for roads and bridges while the price of key agricultural commodities fell. This infrastructure, in turn, helped break down local divisions by fostering mobility and allowing poor yeomen to begin to imagine themselves as part of a broader class of people with equivalent problems (Redding 2003: 80).

Conflicts over stock laws (in particular, whether crops or animal “stock” ought to be fenced) also inflamed division among white democrats. The prevailing practice of fencing crops allowed poor farmers to graze their animals on unimproved land that functioned as a de facto “commons.” Attempts by wealthy rural interests to reverse this practice, and fence stock, enraged small farmers across North Carolina. One petition from Caswell County demanded that legislators “look to the interest of the poor people,” and that the change to a fence law would mean the “destruction” of the poor man. Another petition from Gaston county labeled the new laws “oppressive on the poor class of people” (Escott 1985: 190). All of these actions by the Democratic Party alienated poor white farmers and increased the mismatch between their localist organization and the broad, horizontal issues farmers saw themselves as facing (Redding 2003: 75, 78-82, 117). Escott argues that these protests revealed “considerable class consciousness” (1985: 188-191). The Democrats’ failure to adapt to these changing circumstances helps to explain why, in the late 1870s and 1880s, they were unable to build a state or party strong enough to foreclose the assembly of a new nation-building coalition (Redding 2003).

Populists seized the opening and capitalized on the broad discontent among white farmers about changes in the agricultural economy and state and local policy. Populists and their

Republican coalition partners that took power in 1894 were able to counter the “best men” ideology by articulating a degree of common interest both among poor white farmers across the state and between poor Black and white farmers. There was ample room in the identity of “farmer” articulated by the Farmers Alliance for political rights for Blacks, and populists parried Democratic race-baiting in the mid-1890s by branding it a distraction from the common aim of improving the lot of poor farmers (Redding 2003: 92).

In response to the success of the Populist-Republican coalition, the Democratic Party discarded the “Best Men” ideology to construct a racial order that drew a much brighter line between whites and Blacks. King and Smith argue that the country’s political development is shaped by competition between two evolving racial orders, a white supremacist order and an egalitarian transformative order. This claim is useful, but the Reconstruction South demonstrates that “racial orders” exhibit more nuance than King and Smith’s (2005) binary of “white supremacist” vs. “egalitarian” allows. While the “Best Men” ideology left room for some interracial cooperation, neither Republicans nor Populists ever arrived at a governing agenda capable of durably diminishing the material and ideological sources of white supremacy that remained to be mobilized in new ways. In 1894 Democrats banned South Carolina’s Ben Tillman, a skilled white supremacist demagogue, from campaigning in the state. In 1898, the party adopted his tactics and welcomed him as a campaign surrogate (Redding 2003: 35, 121).

In order to win back the votes of white workers and yeomen farmers and incorporate them into the party, Democrats argued in favor of the inherent unsuitability of Blacks to participate in politics or wield political power. A key component of this ideology was a racialized populist appeal in which all white men, no matter how poor, were superior to Blacks and deserved some political power and protection from the state. This rhetoric was backed up by

concrete attempts to build civil society organizations that could inculcate, organize, and direct this new, politicized white identity. The Democratic Party formed White Government Unions and White Democratic Workingmen's Clubs that helped the party mobilize supporters. In 1860, laborers and mechanics in Wakefield county formed a workingmen's association to oppose what they saw as the elitist, anti-democratic policies of the state's largest landowners. Those elites, after four decades of struggle against various reforming, democratizing coalitions that saw them lose control of the state twice, finally, belatedly hit upon a reliably winning ideological and mobilizational strategy (Butts 1978; Redding 2003; Escott 1985: 254-260). That it took so long for elites to cobble together a durably effective strategy speaks to the high degree of contingency, under-appreciated if the scope of analysis is restricted to the conventional Reconstruction era of 1868-1876, of Reconstruction's failure. These organizations and the newly reorganized party also stood for new policy proposals—such as the idea that private employers should always employ white labor over Black, and that government jobs should go to whites. In the aftermath of their 1898 victory, Democrats would go on to institutionalize a Jim Crow system and reorganize state institutions to entrench the racial cleavage they exploited to win power. As Fields (1982) wrote, racial attitudes changed less than the party's racial ideology (Redding 2003: 122-124).

Sources of Coalition Failure

The path to success for the leaders of North Carolina's pro-democracy coalitions was exceedingly narrow. The economic and social power of large landowners, arrayed almost unanimously against Republicans and Populists, was very potent. Both coalitions had to constantly balance between a Black constituency that, quite fairly, demanded representation and civil rights, and a white constituency consistently reluctant to disrupt the racial hierarchy. Rising

taxes ate into Republicans' popular support before the benefits funded by those taxes could be broadly felt. This was a landscape where mistakes, such as the botched arrest of Josiah Turner during the state's campaign against the Klan in 1870, tended to have grievous consequences. All of these factors combined to produce the failure of North Carolina's nation-building coalitions by putting pressure on their weakest link: their biracial support base. White voters made the Republican majority in North Carolina possible. However, they also made it unstable due to their weariness of Black empowerment, tenuous loyalty to the Republican Party, and periodic interest in the material offer made to them by the Democrats. This instability short-circuited the institutionalization and implementation of policies that might have bonded white supporters more strongly within these coalitions and contributed to each coalition's eventual defeat.

One of the KKK's main accomplishments was to inhibit the ability of the Republican Party to build a base of white voters, and to convince those that chose to affiliate with the party to defect. William Campbell wrote letters to Governor Holden documenting how white Republicans abandoned the party due to threats and violence that the state could not protect them from (Trelease 1971: 195, 474). William Howle, another elite Republican, wrote that while there were in his estimation "a great many" Republicans still in North Carolina, they were "afraid to be known" and could not vote freely (Proctor 2009, 48). While North Carolina enjoyed considerably more success against the Klan than other southern states, particularly South Carolina, it was not enough. Black voters' determination to vote for political parties that would protect their rights, even in the face of violence and coercion, was noted throughout the south, particularly by Readjuster leaders in Virginia impressed with their courage in the face of intimidation (Dailey 2000: 151). The continued viability of the Republican Party in North Carolina in the aftermath of Klan violence (and in light of a decline of white support) speaks to

their resolve. However, many white voters preferred to shift their vote if it meant lower taxes and an end to harassment. Democrats also took a more permissive attitude towards alcohol distilling, which was both an important cultural activity and one that brought in much needed revenue during challenging times. Many white voters, in the western swing regions of the state and in the central piedmont, found it easy to defect from the Republican coalition over these issues (Nash 2016: 126-127). The KKK, for example, counted among its members non-elite whites who engaged in unlawful distilling, and sometimes targeted whites who helped the authorities enforce liquor laws (Proctor 2009).

The Republican coalition frayed before it could fully deliver broad benefits that might have drawn some of these voters back to the party. Free, public primary education proved popular in North Carolina and across the South. However, as we noted above, the actual amount of state support for public education in 1869 and 1870 was very low. Democrats utilized their 1870 election victory to do more than gerrymander the legislature to entrench themselves in power. They also reduced the salary of the superintendent of public instruction, and cut off funding entirely for clerks and travel. S.S. Ashley, the progressive and effective superintendent, soon resigned from his position (Du Bois 1998: 657). This made it much harder to build an effective educational system that subsequent Republican leaders, such as Governor Caldwell, could frame as a benefit of Republican governance. In addition, Republicans were unable to complete the Western North Carolina Railroad craved by white, western constituents.

Lastly, debates about civil rights degraded the biracial cooperation that was essential for the viability of the Republican Party. Paul Yandle documents how Republicans from the mountain region expressed a more intensive version of white supremacy in their public remarks in large part because, unlike their peers from the east of the state, they did not depend on Black

votes (Yandle 2008: 225). They backed up this talk with action. Edward Dudley, a Black state legislator from the coastal plain, expressed frustration that so many white Republicans in the legislature voted in support of a resolution condemning the national civil rights bill proposed by Charles Sumner. Republicans from the mountains responded to Dudley with contempt. One said that Dudley and other Black leaders had “better let well enough alone” and insisted that Blacks “could not control the west as they did the east.” While white legislators from the east, dependent on Black support, joined their Black peers in the legislature in opposing an official condemnation of Sumner’s bill, most Republicans from the mountains joined with Democrats in public opposition (Yandle 2008: 235). Here, a clear difference emerged between North and South Carolina. In South Carolina, with a much more homogenous (and Black dominated) coalition, Black leaders demanded Civil Rights legislation and saw it as crucial to incentivize their constituencies to brave the gauntlet of abuse and violence to cast ballots for the Republican Party. In North Carolina, by contrast, the legislation damaged the (far more biracial) pro-democracy coalition due to the delicate racial politics of Black-white political cooperation.

This regional cleavage was another factor in the failure of the Republican coalition. When Zebulon Vance defeated Thomas Settle in the 1876 gubernatorial race that ejected the Republican Party from power, he captured over 60% of the vote in the mountain region, up from the roughly 45% that conservative Democrats received in 1868 (Nash 2016: 113, 166).

The Populist-Republican coalition that came to power in 1894 faced many of the same challenges, this time amplified by the difficulty of managing a coalition that included two distinct political parties with different agendas and constituencies. They also faced a unique hurdle that arose out of the relationship between the People’s Party and the Farmers Alliance. The People’s Party originated out of the political agitation of, and shared identity cultivated by,

the Farmers Alliance. The alliance was its social base. However, as Redding and many others have documented, the move into politics in the early to mid-1890s weakened the Farmers Alliance as formerly dormant disputes were politicized (Redding 2003: 104-107). The decline of its organizational social base weakened the populists, making them less able to generate the ideological and organizational resources to remain viable.

The Populist-Republican coalition was never able to fully reconcile their differing economic platforms and stances on Black political and civil rights. Populists and Republicans coordinated a successful legislative session in 1895 by focusing on points of agreement. They implemented some democracy-enhancing reforms, such as restoring the popular election of local officials (Democrats in the 1870s had made such offices appointive as a way to curb county takeovers by anti-Democrats). They also allowed all parties a role in election administration at the local level. This second initiative was designed to counter fraud by the Democratic Party, which used its dominance of election machinery at the local level to make voting by non-democrats more difficult. It also helped Populists and Republicans build and rebuild their party infrastructure (Redding 2003: 91). These reforms bore fruit almost immediately. In the election of 1896, statewide voter turnout increased to an all-time high of 86%. The biracial fusionist municipal government of Wilmington, the target of the infamous white-supremacist coup in 1898 (Zucchini 2020), was elected in part thanks to these laws. In addition, the fusion coalition increased funding for public education and capped interest rates (Beeby 2012: ch. 5).

In 1897, despite defeating the Democrats again and winning the governor's office, the two parties were forced to confront the areas of policy on which they did not agree. Railroads, which had caused problems for Republicans when they were in power, now split Republicans and Populists. Rather than development, Populists wanted to regulate railroad rates and cancel

the lease of the North Carolina Railroad. Republicans, more solicitous of the interests of both capital and their supporters in the west of the state, were generally wary of both. Populist bills to cancel the lease and regulate rates went down to defeat at the hands of Republicans, breakaway populists, and conservative Democrats. Populists and Republicans also differed on the critical issue of monetary policy, with Populists favoring free silver and Republicans generally supportive of the gold standard. While mostly a national issue, a bill in the state legislature to prevent discrimination against silver as legal tender failed due to opposition from Republicans (Beeby 2008: ch. 7). The failure of the Populist-Republican coalition to produce durable benefits left it vulnerable to racial demagoguery. Failing to deliver promised benefits—economic development and corporate regulation—to their most reluctant members left them reliant on the contingent and shallow commitment of white voters to biracial democracy. Unable to cement the durable loyalty of these voters, pro-democracy elites saw their coalitions fracture.

South Carolina: A Swift Rise and a Rapid Fall

South Carolina, unlike North Carolina, very much hews to the standard periodization and trajectory of Reconstruction. Indeed, as W.E.B. Du Bois (1998: 383) pointed out in *Black Reconstruction*, “South Carolina has always been pointed to as the typical Reconstruction state.” Freedpeople, native whites, and carpetbaggers built a majority coalition through the state Republican Party that maintained uninterrupted political control in the state from 1868 to 1876. These Republicans surpassed those in most of the region in the size of their electoral majorities and duration of continuous governance. Indeed, the state elected more than 300 Black elected officials, more than two-thirds of them previously enslaved (Foner 2000).

However, after the Democratic Party’s violent takeover of the state in the 1876 elections, South Carolina’s Reconstruction was quickly overturned. The Republican Party declined as a

viable opposition party practically overnight, failing even to field a gubernatorial candidate in 1878 (Holt 1977: 213; Cooper 1991: 215). Meaningful party competition ended in 1876, leaving African-Americans without an organized vehicle to influence state politics, and drastically constricting the capacity of anti-Democratic whites to oppose the state's growing hegemonic party. The efforts of South Carolina's Republicans to remake the state's political system – and their more meager efforts to transform the state's economy – were quickly rolled back.

Antecedent Conditions and Political Economy

Given weaknesses in state capacity and difficulties forging an effective nation-building coalition at both the national and subnational levels, the odds were stacked against Reconstruction throughout the South. But the task its supporters confronted in South Carolina was unusually difficult. South Carolina politics was defined by conflict between wealthy, “lowcountry” majority Black counties dominated by large landowners, on the one hand, and poorer “upcountry” counties that were usually majority white and largely populated by white yeomen farmers and tenants. Lowcountry planters primarily produced cotton, though some also produced rice as well (the latter had made the low-country the United States' richest area in 1800 (Lindert and Williamson 2016; Coclanis 1988, 2016). Upcountry yeomen, after decades of primarily subsistence agriculture, began in the late antebellum period to concentrate more heavily on cotton production (Carlton 1982, 1988), especially as railroads and market connections began to spread through the interior southeast. While the upcountry would emerge by the early 20th century as an important center of textile manufacturing, at this point the region remained overwhelmingly dominated by agriculture (Carlton and Coclanis 1989; Simon 1998).

South Carolina's political-economic conflict was rooted in part in spatially unequal tax burdens. During the antebellum period, about 60 percent of total state receipts came from taxation on enslaved people. The state's relatively heavy taxation on enslaved people allowed land taxes to remain low. The land tax produced between 20 and 25 percent of state tax revenue, but only about 12 percent of this came from taxes levied on rural land. The rest came from urban property in places such as Charleston (Thornton 1982: 359). As Reconstruction got under way, newly elected Republican lawmakers confronted a state newly shorn of a major component of its tax base just as they planned to expand South Carolina's state. The challenge of revenue extraction was, as we detail below, greater in South Carolina than in most southern states. In addition, despite this regional cleavage many counties were racially mixed, with small majorities of either Blacks or whites. Given how closely political affiliation tracked race, this dynamic meant narrow majorities across the state, creating greater incentives for the use of violence and fraud (particularly from white Democrats) in order to swing local elections their way (Williams 2004: 19; Trelease 1971: 363).

Unlike North Carolina, South Carolina lacked a large region with greater economic separation from the slave and cotton economy and more skepticism of the Confederate project (that said, the northwestern area of the upcountry featured some counties, such as Greenville, with large shares of anti-Confederates (Baker 2013)). It was also the cradle of the Confederacy. It was the first to succeed, leading the rest of the Deep South out of the Union with a unanimous secession convention (Chacon 2000). Hosted in Charleston – since the late 17th century the lowcountry's unofficial capital -- the convention was stacked in favor of planters forming secession's radical vanguard (who had led the South in this regard for decades (Sinha 2000)). Had it been held in the upcountry, the state's secession would not appear to have been a matter of

consensus; still, compared with North Carolina, Republicans confronted a white population more opposed to Black rights and the extension of federal authority (Williamson 1965).

South Carolina's Reconstruction Constitution of 1868

South Carolina featured the region's most remarkable state constitution. The state was one of three southern states that were majority-Black as of the 1870 Census (the others were Louisiana and Mississippi). But in South Carolina, the native white share of delegates was the region's lowest (only 28%), and Black representation at the constitutional convention effectively matched their statewide population share. Of its 121 delegates, *sixty* percent were African American. More than one quarter of these Black delegates chaired standing committees. In tension with some of Holt's claims about the "middle class" nature of politically influential freedmen, 34 of these 72 delegates had been enslaved until the end of the war, and seven more were freed during the war (Hume and Gough 2008: table 6.7, 188). Moreover, the agenda at the convention closely mirrored the local meetings that helped produce the Republican Party's founding platform a few months earlier. This agenda included free public schools, state sale of unoccupied lands to the landless, and extensive internal improvements programs (Hume and Gough 2008: 167-178). In the words of African American delegate Alonzo Ransier, "Suffrage . . . is our chief means for self-defense" (Hume and Gough 2008: 177).

Voting at the convention featured few highly contested roll calls, but there were important points of disagreement, and some did confirm Holt's research, as wealth of delegates (among whites and Blacks) did strongly predict votes on issues such as suspending all forced property sales resulting from war indebtedness (a provision that Blacks prevailed in rejecting despite overwhelming white support. After it became clear Congress would not respond to a petition

requesting that Congress fund the Freedmen's Bureau to help freedpeople buy unoccupied land, South Carolina undertook one of the most impressive state-level efforts to remake a political economy. In a plan forged at the convention and then implemented by the legislature, South Carolina created a Land Commission to buy small tracts of land and sell it to buyers who committed to cultivate at least half of their purchase within three years. As we explain in more detail below, this initiative constitutes a prime example of the promise and the pitfalls of indigenous Reconstruction – and the role of state capacity and coalitional politics in this politics .

Coalition-Building Strategy

Republican nation-builders confronted an unusual demographic landscape that shaped the strategy they selected to assemble a majority coalition. As we noted above, South Carolina, unlike most other southern states, was majority Black during this era. Close to 60% of the state's eligible voters were Black (Williams 2004: 14). The median voter, assuming universal suffrage and reasonably free elections, was a poor, Black landless farmworker. It was possible for the Republican Party to build a comfortable majority on the votes of Black men alone. Indeed, it was probably the path of least resistance, given both the demographics and the fierce resistance of most white voters to the Republican Party. This choice had serious consequences. In the short term, it made their coalition more stable. They did not have to worry about defections from white swing voters with no special loyalty to the Republican Party who worried about corruption or changes to the racial hierarchy. Ultimately, the “pull” that was the enthusiasm of Black South Carolinians for the new Republican Party and the “push” of white skepticism determined the decision-making calculus of Republican elites.

However, these choices also made their coalition more brittle. Black voters by and large lacked formal education, land, or other property. All of this made them vulnerable to physical

and economic coercion from whites, and desperately in need of state services and public goods. To address this weakness, Republicans would attempt to generate and redistribute enough social and economic capital to Black voters to protect against a minoritarian attack on the new democratic regime. This was a tall order, and would necessitate levying much, much higher taxes on white property owners unaccustomed to these rates and fiercely resistant to transferring resources to the Black community. Ultimately, Republicans in the state would fail. They were not able to build a state or party organization strong enough to counter the ferocious resistance of white landowners to democratic nation-building.

Building State Capacity and Institutionalizing the Party

As in other southern states, the Union Army and Freedmen's Bureau worked relatively effectively in 1867 and 1868 to register voters for a state constitutional convention, a requirement by congressional Republicans for the state's reentry into the Union. These federal forces also provided order and nurtured the formation of the Republican Party and civic associations such as the Union League. As we described above, the state's new electorate sent a biracial, Republican-dominated group of delegates to Columbia in January, 1868 to draft the new constitution. Critically, the question of how to maintain public order received little consideration at the convention (Rubin 2006: 35). As we describe above, the document was ratified and a new Republican state government elected, both under the supervision of federal soldiers.

However, it soon became clear the state government did not have the capacity or credibility to meet its existing financial obligations, much less take on new ones. Despite the repudiation of the Confederate war debt, the state still carried a heavy debt burden from both the antebellum era and presidential reconstruction. In the later months of 1868, the state government

desperately needed cash to service the existing debt, but would not be able to collect the necessary taxes for months due to the timing of the collection and payment of land taxes. The new government quickly set up an apparatus to issue about one million dollars in state bonds in order to raise revenue. However, almost immediately, the state's Democrats threatened to repudiate these bonds as soon as they recaptured control over the state's government. The *Charleston Daily News* editorialized that no "bayonet bond" would ever be "recognized by the white people of the state," and dared northern financiers to buy bonds issued by the state's Black residents over the protest of the state's white population. These threats were initially credible—state agents found it impossible to sell the bonds. Several months passed before investors considered the state stable enough to loan it money (Rubin 2006: 63-64).

Even after successfully issuing bonds, corruption and weak institutions ate away at the state's borrowing capacity. State officials issued double the number and value of bonds authorized by the legislature. Despite attempts to hide this fact from investors, several eventually caught on and hundreds of thousands of now duplicate bonds were taken out of circulation, wiping out the investment made in them and damaging the state's credit. Eventually, the legislature empaneled a special committee to determine the number and quantity of outstanding state bonds. This proved extremely difficult because, in hearings that took place in 1874, it was revealed that the financial board charged with issuing the bonds had kept no records (Rubin 2006: 65). Weak state capacity dramatically constricted the state's fiscal capacity and provided opportunities for corruption just as the state needed every dollar it could tax or borrow.

The new Republican administration was unable to subdue the Ku Klux Klan or generate a self-sustaining monopoly in coercive authority. The Klan, according to state official and federal investigators, boasted a very large membership and a high degree of organization (though it was

much less active in the majority-Black lowcountry than in the upcountry (Kelly 2013: 205; Shapiro 1964; Stagg 1974). The Klan drew on a population of Confederate veterans with combat training. In some instances, units appeared under a unified, almost military command structure. Sophisticated gun-running operations ensured they were well-armed, and some observers even reported mounted units (Trelease 1971: 349-362; Zuczek 1996: 75-85). Initially, rank-and-file Black Republicans did not believe the state government was capable of suppressing the Klan and maintaining the rule of law. In response to the rise of the Klan and the inadequacy of the state government, many Black Republicans began to organize armed self-defense organizations to provide the security the state apparently could not. In the summer of 1868, hundreds of Black Union League members from the area around Darlington, fearing Klan violence, transformed their organization into an armed militia. They gathered guns and threatened a nearby town with violence should the Klan attack them (Zuczek 1996: 59). The Republican party faced a full-scale breakdown in law and order, prompting calls for more serious action.

Republican party leaders responded to this mounting crisis by creating an interracial state militia (as had been authorized by the new constitution). However, while the militia was intended to be interracial, few whites were willing to join an organization in which they would serve alongside Blacks in defense of a state government many of them loathed (Rubin 2006: 35). Governor Scott, initially hesitant to arm Blacks, changed his mind. After all, the militia was a potential source of patronage; the pay and social prestige of service might help make and solidify alliances between the state, the party, and important supporters (Zuczek 1996: 74). Officer positions could function as additional patronage jobs with which the state could reward supporters. Since even ordinary membership came with some pay, the militia could direct financial resources to the party's poor, Black base. Thus, either through the threat of its existence

or actual operation, it might also help curb the violence sweeping the state. The militia quickly swelled to around one hundred thousand; Black Carolinians joined in droves (Zuczek 1996: 74).

However, it was not successful. The state lacked the resources to arm most of those who joined, and lacked the capacity to train new members (Williams 2004: 25-26). Moreover, the Republican Party official in charge of procuring weapons for the militia arranged for a \$1 kickback per weapon procured. Corruption in South Carolina (soon labeled in the national press as “The Prostrate State”) was more than a political wedge issue with voters in swing regions; it ate away at the Republican Party’s ability to procure the materials it needed to defend itself. The raw recruits proved a poor match for the Confederate veterans who populated the KKK. The deployment of an armed, all-Black state militia was so inflammatory to the white population that the militia often produced more violence and disorder than it contained. The presence of a Black militia company in Chester County prompted a mass mobilization by the Klan, drawing hundreds from surrounding counties to respond to fears of a “Black uprising” (Trelease 1971: 355-356).

It was clear in the aftermath of these failures that Republican officials lacked confidence in the coercive capacity of the institutions they controlled. They hoped that rhetorical condemnation and negotiation could bring the terror under control; the state’s governing party was now in a very weak position. In March of 1871, Governor Scott held a five-hour conference with leading conservatives in the hope that he could enlist their support for a return to law and order (Trelease 1971: 378). During the 1872 gubernatorial campaign, John Cochran, a native white Republican leader from Anderson, floated a mutual amnesty, proposing that both crimes committed by the Klan and by organizations supportive of his own party be forgiven in exchange for an end to the disorder (Rubin 2006: 77).

The disadvantage of an almost entirely all-Black coalition is evident here. In North Carolina, when Governor Holden deployed an all-white state militia, the result was the largely peaceful arrest of around one hundred suspected Klan leaders and members (Trelease 1971: 217). While the North Carolina state government struggled to secure convictions after these arrests, there was no subsequent spasm of violence in response to the deployment of the militia equivalent to what occurred in Chester. This option was available to North Carolina Republicans because of their biracial coalition. In 1868, in the swing region of the mountain west where whites made up nearly 90% of the population, they obtained about 55% of the vote. In 1872, in the aftermath of the militia operation against the Klan, they still won more than 45% (Nash 2016). The South Carolina Republican Party never succeeded in making equivalent inroads with white voters. In no county and no election did the party ever exceed the 20 percent of the white vote it earned in Oconee County in 1870 (Rubin 2006: 136).

The Republican coalition delivered important benefits to the state's citizens but failed to alter the state's political economy in a way that could either enhance the political independence of Black farm laborers or win the loyalty of the state's whites. The state constitution authorized a universal, free public school system for both races, a vast expansion of a public good. Despite complaints from the state education superintendent of staffing shortages, dilapidated facilities, and insufficient funding, the system continued to grow and improve. In 1870, almost 16,000 Black students and over 11,000 white students attended public schools. By 1876, more than 123,000 students did so (Du Bois 1998: 650). The state constitution also charged the state with establishing facilities to care for the "insane, blind, deaf and poor" (Thorpe 1909, vol. 5: 2800-2822). These substantial expansions of the public sector required new sources of revenue (Williams 2004: 12-13; Thornton 1982: 365). A crash course in railroad expansion, much like in

North Carolina, resulted in extensive corruption without much new infrastructure or tax revenue to show for it. Governor Scott, in office from 1868 to 1872, was actually part of the “ring” of corrupt state officials who acquired the state’s shares in the Greenville and Columbia Railroad at a fraction of their true value (Foner 1988: 386).

To raise revenue for these programs, Republicans turned to the only stock of valuable, taxable wealth that remained after emancipation: agricultural land. In the postbellum context, property taxes were fiscally necessary, practically advantageous, and politically risky. In the antebellum period, such land in South Carolina and other Deep South states was generally taxed at under two mills on the dollar. By 1873, Republicans in South Carolina had raised the tax by as much as 600 percent (Thornton 1982: 387). This was a deeply unpopular move. As Thornton (1982) writes, the transition from taxes on slaveholding to property (especially real estate) taxes struck not only on large landowners but also the smallholding whites, many of whom were open to supporting Republican candidates (and often did). The state’s white yeomanry had been taxed very lightly in the antebellum period, intensifying the surprise and anger when the time came to pay newly elevated land taxes (Redding 2003: 60, Thornton 1982: 351-352). However, we should not lose sight of the fact that it was the large rural landowners (the main intended target of these tax policies) who, via funding and organization, channeled this anger into organized political opposition. Unlike the grassroots tax revolt that began in Massachusetts and California a century later (Martin 2008), protests of property taxes throughout the South were funded and organized by large landowners. These “Taxpayers’ Conventions” succeeded in strengthening opposition to Republican-controlled governments among poorer white farmers throughout the South (Kahrl 2016: 584; Foner 1988: 415-16; Woodward 1951: 59-60; Franklin 1961: 141-143).

Why did Republicans implement such a controversial tax program? From the start, Republicans viewed property taxes – especially on land – as both necessary for raising sufficient revenue (particularly in light of the failure of railroad-led economic diversification) and making possible the seizure of land when often-penniless large landowners failed to pay them. As Foner argues (1988: 375-376), they thus functioned as a double strike on local power structures: plantations and the economics and politics they engendered would be weakened and the collected taxes would be used for redistributive state-building, especially – but not only – in terms of public school systems and internal improvements. These public policies would, it was hoped, transform human capital in rural areas, diversify their economies, and weaken the political power of large landowners. This promise was quickly realized in many areas, especially those in which Republicans won control of county boards empowered with collecting and distributing tax revenue (Kahrl 2016: 583; Wharton 1947). On one estimate, one-fifth of Mississippi's total acreage fell into state hands due to non-payment (Harris 1979: 609-610).

As mentioned above, federal assistance in procuring land for freedpeoples -- and perhaps poorer white farmers -- was ultimately not forthcoming. Important members of the national Republican coalition – finance capitalists – required the resumption of cotton exports from the South as soon as possible (Bensel 1990). But this resumption would mean quickly restarting the South's plantation-based economy rather than transforming this economy into one of smallholders and nascent industrialization (Wright 1986). More generally, most Republicans feared that land confiscation, even from a defeated enemy, would weaken protections against property rights nationally. This risked empowering northern radicals and labor activists who were just beginning to cohere into an influential social and political force, and who the national Republican Party would soon prove very willing to violently suppress (Foner 1988; Montgomery

1981; Bensel 2000). Many Republicans also feared that this might upset the idea of a color-blind meritocracy that was at the heart of their free labor vision. Senator Ben Wade insisted that all needed to have “a perfectly fair chance,” implying that land redistribution would unfairly advantage the freemen.⁵ When Thaddeus Stevens, perhaps the greatest champion of land redistribution among elected Republicans (Levine 2021), forced a vote on an amendment to make the estates of “the enemy” available to freedmen, the House decisively defeated it (Jenkins and Peck 2021: 91). Thus, South Carolina’s nation-building coalition embarked on its own plan.

The South Carolina Land Commission was charged with carrying out the Republican Party’s agenda of diluting the power of the plantation system. The commission purchased plots of between 25-100 acres. The program was financed by the sale of public bonds, and the capital generated was used to purchase privately owned land. Much of the land came from purchases of lowcountry property owned by financially-strapped plantation owners, many of whom wrote the state requesting that it buy their land (Bleser 1969: 83; Almlie et al 2009: 20). The Commission faced serious political headwinds given opposition from large landowners and many poorer whites (who, though eligible to participate, refused to do so). Moreover, the Commission was hampered by the state’s weak antebellum state capacity and its inability to modernize quickly. Land sales to freedmen were stymied by the fact that many plots of land had not been surveyed for up to a century; unclear boundary lines and a small staff combined to slow land sales.

Worse still, the first years of the Commission were rife with corruption. South Carolina’s African American Secretary of State, Francis L. Cardozo – himself later unjustly convicted in a racist trial for corruption – fired the first Commissioner for bribery (Kinghan 2019, 2023; Burke

⁵ A Massachusetts industrialist put it more bluntly, arguing that confiscation would “ruin the freedmen” because they would acquire land without “working for it.” Foner (1988: 237) explains that “[b]eyond equality, in other words, lay questions of class relations crucial to the freedmen and glimpsed in debates over confiscation, but lying beyond the purview of Radical Republicanism.”

2001), and the Commission's performance had begun to improve substantially when Democrats seized control of the state in 1876. After they did so, Democrats effectively shut down the Commission by using land sales not to empower freedpeople but only to pay down the state debt via contributions to the state's Sinking Fund Commission. The Commission later evicted many freedpeople from their land who were late with their payments. Still, by 1890, it had sold land to some 70,000 African Americans (Bleser 1969; Almlie et al 2009: 16-19; Bethel 1981). That said, whites visited greater violence on landowning Blacks than any others. Thus, landownership in the context of a state apparatus too weak to acquiesce to private violence was not enough to guarantee Black freedmen, as they testified to in great detail (Simpson 2016: 96; Williams 2012).

To raise revenue, Republicans turned to the only stock of valuable, taxable wealth that remained after emancipation: agricultural land. In the antebellum period, such land in South Carolina and other Deep South states was generally taxed at under two mills on the dollar. By 1873, Republicans in South Carolina had raised the tax by as much as 600 percent. This was a deeply unpopular move, especially with the state's white yeomanry, who had been taxed very lightly in the antebellum period (Redding 2003: 60, Thornton 1982: 387, 351-352).

This taxation program had motives other than revenue generation; many Republican elites hoped that high taxes would force large landowners to sell their land to the state, which could then offer it at low prices to African Americans and other Republican loyalists. While large quantities of land passed into the public domain, and the policy achieved important results, it did not transform the state's economy. Many Black farmers who did acquire land eventually lost it because of the high tax burden (Williams 2004: 12-13). By 1876, about one-seventh of the state's Black population secured land from the state (Foner 1988: 375). Consequently, real

property remained the state's tax base, and the Republican coalition remained overwhelmingly composed of economically vulnerable sharecroppers and other landless laborers.

Divisions within the Black community, and Black political class that represented them, also imposed limits on the types of economic reforms the Republican Party could enact. In *Black over White*, Thomas Holt argues, contrary to Du Bois, that the state's Black leadership were not only -- or mainly -- the vanguard of a radical, agrarian working class. Instead, Holt draws on biographical data to make the case that, while Black leaders were poorer than their white counterparts, because they hailed disproportionately from the state's community of free Blacks, they were "middle class" in economic position and outlook (Holt 1977: 37). These men comprised just two percent of South Carolina's antebellum Black population, but more than one-quarter of all elected leaders between 1868 and 1876.

Holt argues that divisions within the Black political class tracked wealth and status, with wealthier, more educated freedmen espousing more moderate policy positions than poorer, recently freed slaves. As a result, the Republican Party, in part because of these divisions within its political leadership, failed to protect Black agricultural laborers and other workers during this period. While, as we noted above, roll call votes from the constitutional convention complicate aspects of Holt's argument, it does help explain many of the divisions among Black Republicans in the legislature that stymied economic reform. Several bills introduced to further this project were defeated by the state legislature (Holt 1977: 154-155). One that did become law punished planters for violating labor contracts with fines, but punished workers with imprisonment. James Henderson, a former enslaved farm worker from Newbury County, introduced legislation that would have provided for governor-appointed agents in each county to monitor and enforce contracts between planters and workers, including through arbitration (Holt 1977: 160). This bill

was defeated, in part because of the opposition of several more “middle-class” Black legislators (Holt, 1977: 162). Even South Carolina, home to the South’s largest share of Black state legislators, was not able to meaningfully and durably diminish the power and influence of the large landowners who held so much sway over economic and political life.

Sources of Coalition Failure

The Republican Party in South Carolina, like its southern counterparts, was beset by factionalism. All across the South, factional infighting was enabled and compounded by the newness of the party as an institution, the malleability and novelty of the electorate they appealed to, and, as Valelly has argued, its incomplete institutionalization (2004: 75-76). There were multiple rounds of factional conflict over a wide range of issues, but a relatively stable party machinery kept the party reasonably healthy.

The party derived its strength from three sources. First, it drew on state patronage that was largely under control of the party’s most powerful figure, the governor. Republican governors used their patronage powers to reward party supporters and ensure party control of critical state and local institutions. One local Republican functionary spoke of the importance of appointing people who knew the “party drill” (Rubin 2006: 96). Second, Republican governors and other leaders also allowed Black militias, despite their limitations and the anger they provoked among the white population, to continue operating. In 1870, Governor Scott utilized the militia to protect Republican candidates while they campaigned, a less demanding role for them than direct confrontation with the Klan (Holt 1977: 203). This helped maintain some limited degree of security. Third, the party continued to progress on its policy goals, such as

strengthening the education system and distributing state land to freedpeople; these policies served the interests of its constituents and translated into party loyalty and boosted turnout.

Some evidence suggests that efforts to foster Republican party-building in cities and towns was actually in tension with similar efforts in the surrounding countryside. Existing economic tensions between rural and urban areas could frustrate the incorporation of rural voters into the party. This dynamic occurred in a variety of ways. For instance, rural Black voters could be harder to mobilize when white urban voters were linked to merchants supportive of rural landowners. Tensions could flow in the opposite direction, too. As Baker (2013: 172) writes,

[I]n a perfect world, the Republicans would have pursued policies that won the support of landless whites and small farmers in the mountains, wage workers and modernizers in the city, and freedpeople in the plantation districts. [But in Greenville County,] the Republican Party found itself too oriented on the town of Greenville, partly because of that town's [rapid postwar growth.] The policies it pursued, while helpful to city dwellers, only reduced Republican support among mountain whites. A national policy on revenue enforcement served to further alienate would-be mountain Republicans and intensify intra-county factionalism As a result, the Republicans had little to offer whites in the mountains. And although these mountain people were never happy in a Democratic Party dominated by planters, they followed along as the path of least resistance.

Until 1874, those officeseekers who tried to split the party generally did so after having lost internal, factional battles. One Republican, Robert Brown Elliot, pointed out that the faction that bolted the party before the 1872 election was overwhelmingly composed of people who had lost campaigns to serve as party convention delegates. "Only ten of the 124 members of the regular convention," he claimed, "left it" (Rubin 2006: 80). Dissidents generally focused on attracting more white voters, both to steer the party away from radical policies sought by African Americans, such as stronger civil rights laws and higher land taxes to fund state services, and to buttress their own standing within it (Perman 1985: 50). The consistent failure of these factions either to secure greater influence within the party or defeat it in a general election helps explain the original decision by party elites to build almost exclusively around the state's Black majority.

For all of its disadvantages, it probably yielded a larger, more coherent, and more stable party than the alternative of attempting to bring in a significant number of the state's white voters.

The factional split engendered by Republican Governor (and carpetbagger) Daniel Chamberlain between 1874 and 1876 was different, and played a crucial role in the party's defeat. By the mid-1870s, the state's endemic corruption had become a political crisis for his party. In response, Chamberlain took a number of steps to reform his party and the state apparatus. These actions, concurrent with an effort to burnish his personal popularity with Democratic Party elites and institutions, inflicted tremendous harm on the party institution. Chamberlain spurned party loyalty and traditional patronage norms by seeking to appoint "competent" men to party and state office. All too often, however, this was code for the appointment of Democrats to key posts. These moves angered influential Republican leaders and weakened the party (Tindall 1966: 11; Simkins and Woody 1932: 477; Williamson 1965: 401-402). His tendency to appoint Democrats (and to allow their critiques to shape his choices of appointment) also weakened the party by placing important local offices in the hands of those who ranged from indifferent to actively hostile to the future health of the party (Current 1988).

For example, June Mobley, a Black Republican leader from Union County, wrote to Chamberlain to express surprise that "you have appointed that man John H. Williams [as] Trial Justice who has been arrested as a KKK and . . . was a bitter Democrat." Mobley went out to complain that he had previously controlled county-level appointments (Rubin 2006: 96). Corruption was undoubtedly a crisis for the Republican Party, and it is likely that any governor in Chamberlain's position would have felt pressure to introduce reforms that would have angered at least some stakeholders. However, it was not inevitable that someone like

Chamberlain—overly solicitous of the support of white Democrats and dismissive of the importance of a strong party organization—would become governor at this pivotal moment.

In keeping with his theme of curtailing corruption and excess, Chamberlain also sought to slash funding of key public institutions. In so doing, he threatened to degrade the material benefits that nurtured loyalty and generated enthusiasm among the party's support base. Chamberlain proposed to cut by one-quarter state support to the public school system. He wanted to halve state funding for the public penitentiary and pay for it by reinstating convict leasing (Holt 1977: 181). These were only some of the largest proposals. Few public institutions escaped the governor's desire to signal to the state's white taxpayers that he, as opposed to his Republican predecessors, would be a responsible steward of their money. Few of these proposals actually became law, thanks to the opposition of Republicans in the legislature. However, they damaged party unity. On several test votes on Chamberlain's proposals, Democrats voted unanimously in support while the Republican caucus split (Holt 1977: 182).

Chamberlain's policy of accommodation and compromise with the state's white voters and the Democratic Party also damaged the state militia at a particularly inopportune time. While, as we argued above, largely ineffective against the Klan, in earlier campaigns, the militia successfully protected many Republican candidates from organized abuse so they could freely campaign (Holt 1977: 203). Chamberlain, seeking accommodation and compromise, had further disarmed and disorganized the militia in order to curry favor with white voters. This weakened the Republican Party's campaign apparatus in 1876, and Chamberlain himself had to take a long hiatus from campaigning due to threats of violence and disruption. In the midst of chaos and factional infighting, weapons from the state armory may have even made their way into the hands of Democratic rifle clubs (Holt 1977: 202-204).

In contrast to North Carolina, Democrats in South Carolina won elections illegally. The election campaign of 1876 included no good-faith effort to persuade the state's Black voters, necessary for any fairly won majority, of the merits of the Democratic Party. Wade Hampton, the Democratic Party's candidate for governor in 1876, regularly promised during the campaign to respect the civil and political rights of Black voters. However, at the same time, his party utilized shocking violence (such as the Hamburg Massacre (Hahn 2005: 305-307)), voter suppression, and legal chicanery to win the election and "redeem" the state (King 2001; Zuczek 1996: chs. 8 and 9). The party's actions suggested that the campaign was not a contest of persuasive visions, but rather of competing capacities for violence and coercion. King (2001: 190) concludes, "Chamberlain, who lost the election according to the count of ballots actually cast, would probably have won had the election not been so corrupt."

Even after the election of 1876, the Republican Party remained, on paper, a formidable force. The party maintained control of the state senate, the judiciary and boasted a strong minority in the state house of representatives (Cooper 2005: 24). However, deprived of the patronage and coercive resources of the executive branch, the party quickly dissolved. Democrats used various procedural maneuvers to expel Republicans from the legislature, vacate the results of close elections to call new ones, and force the resignation of uncooperative judges (Cooper 1991: 24-25). Receiving weak support from the national Republican Party (Heersink and Jenkins 2020: chs. 3 and 4; De Santis 1982), and cut off from the coercive and patronage powers of the state government, the party had no social or material base that could sustain it. Black voters, the party's main support base, remained overwhelmingly impoverished and landless farmworkers at the mercy of their employers. The party and its voters lacked the

resources necessary to resist the Democratic Party and remain viable as an opposition force. The state's Republican party collapsed, and with it the hopes of Reconstruction in South Carolina.

Different Paths, Same End

This overview of the trajectory of Reconstruction in the Carolinas reveals that these states took very different paths through this tumultuous period. However, they both reached a common endpoint: the final collapse, after the withdrawal of substantial federal and national party support, of an “indigenous” nation-building project (Behrend 2015) and its replacement, by the late 1890s, of authoritarian regimes serving the interests of large landowners and a small but growing number of merchants (Cobb 1988). How should we understand how divergent paths through Reconstruction led these states and their citizenry to a common endpoint? Our analysis points to four common dynamics which, while allowing for contingency in the outcomes of subnational Reconstructions, also encouraged southern states towards a common endpoint.

The first such dynamic was the tension between the need for revenue to fuel an aggressive program of state-building and the economic and political limitations subnational nation-builders faced. Public schools, internal improvements and law enforcement all introduced new fiscal burdens on the coffers of the state and its counties, and the freedmen required resources and support to make a successful transition to citizenship. The unreliable and parsimonious nature of support from the central state meant that nation-builders would have to generate the necessary resources at home. In states like North and South Carolina, lacking at the time emergent non-agricultural sectors, this necessitated increased land taxes. Yet these taxes alienated white yeomen, the median voter in North Carolina. This limited the party's biracial appeal and weakened existing biracial coalitions sponsoring local state and democracy building.

In South Carolina, the median voter was Black, and generally did not own enough property to be affected. Land taxes thus provided large landowners with an issue they could use to mobilize white yeomen against the state's nation-building coalition.

The second dynamic relates to the attempt to use newly extracted revenue to engage in rapid state-building. The purpose of this program was to redistribute resources downward to freedpeople and other party supporters, as well as to establish an orderly democratic polity that provided a new and expanding range of public goods. In North Carolina the median voter was poor and white. These voters needed material incentives that could neutralize the economic and racial appeals of the Democratic Party. In South Carolina, a coalition entirely dependent on newly freed Black voters needed to alter the economic and institutional status quo enough to protect themselves from backlash. These coalitions struggled to build institutions capable of implementing this agenda. Public order in South Carolina was unreliable, and this often placed the state's median voter at the physical and economic mercy of large landowners (and, in the upcountry, of aggrieved white smallholders). In North Carolina, where the Reconstruction government had more success, patchy public order limited the appeal of the Republican Party among white voters. Both North and South Carolina failed to deliver on their promise of railroad development, angering and disappointing key parts of their constituency. No coalition was able to alter the agrarian labor relations that made Black voters so vulnerable to coercion and intimidation. Across these two states, public schools were probably the most successful state-building project. However, given that white yeomen had some experience with state-supported public education during the antebellum era, this success was not as likely to draw them into the Republican Party as might have been expected (Thornton 1982: 378).

The third dynamic was the instability of the coalitions that powered these nation-building projects. While the composition of these coalitions differed across space and time, they were all afflicted by instability and incomplete institutionalization. In North Carolina, the necessity of biracial coalition-building left these coalitions on unstable ground. Additional cleavages that arose from fusion arrangements between multiple parties, or between parties and social movements, further destabilized them. The Reconstruction coalition in South Carolina was more stable, but still prone to fracture as competing factions fought for power, degrading party infrastructure as a result. In North Carolina, instability meant that key voters abandoned the party. In South Carolina, the median voter stuck with the Republican Party until violent coercion meant they were physically unable to do so. Coalitional instability had especially dire consequences because the Democratic Party, and the planters who dominated it, remained opposed to the development of free and fair elections, much less guaranteed suffrage for freedmen. In the face of weak support from the federal bench (Valelly 2004) and the vulnerability of radical Reconstruction constitutions (Herron 2017), an electoral loss of a Republican majority in the state legislature risked a serious degradation of the state's democratic institutions. In the end, none was stable enough to pass and implement self-sustaining agendas; nor could they resist the backlash their rule engendered, leading to their collapse.

Finally, all nation-builders struggled with how to accommodate or overcome the white supremacist attitudes held by nearly all whites. No coalition was able to create a stable racial order capable of durably assuaging the anxieties of white voters in swing regions while also making space for Black civil and political rights. Democracy advocates and conservative elites in North Carolina engaged in a multi-decade duel for control of the state, neither side able to achieve durable institutional nor ideological hegemony. The fusion coalition in North Carolina,

already fracturing over issues such as railroad regulation, had no compelling answer when the Democratic Party finally, after decades of failure, found a winning strategy in their white supremacy campaign of 1898. In South Carolina, Republicans were initially shielded from the political consequences of white racism because Blacks dominated the Reconstruction electorate. But the enthusiasm with which white yeomen from the upcountry eventually joined in the campaign to overthrow Reconstruction points to a failure to create any countervailing ideology in support of local democracy. The rapid postbellum rebuilding of local power structures, which might have remained solely an elite project, benefited from a larger, racist movement that helped these structures overwhelm nascent democracy.

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