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MILITARY RECONSTRUCTION AND THE GROWTH OF ANTI-NEGRO SENTIMENT IN FLORIDA, 1867

by RALPH L. PEEK

AFTER MONTHS OF bitter controversy Congress passed, over the President's veto, the Reconstruction Acts of March 2 and March 23, 1867. The South was divided into five military districts, each ruled by a major general; Florida, Alabama, and Georgia comprised the third military district which was commanded by Major General John Pope.¹ He in turn appointed Colonel John T. Sprague to head the sub-district of Florida, with headquarters at Tallahassee and later at Jacksonville.² Sprague assumed command on April 1, 1867, with ten companies of the 7th United States Infantry and six companies of the 5th United States Artillery, comprising respectively 635 and 480 men, a total of 1,115 soldiers.³ The artillery companies garrisoned the coastal defense bastions of Pensacola, Key West, and Dry Tortugas; the infantry companies were scattered about the state in small detachments of twenty to thirty men each. They were charged with aiding the civil authorities in enforcing law and order, and they served as a restraining force on civil officials or private persons who might wrong any individual. These troops were also available to aid Freedmen's Bureau officials whenever the need arose.

Pope's orders provided that civil officers in the district were to function until their terms expired, as long as they dispensed impartial justice. Officials were also ordered to avoid any action inhibiting the people from taking an active part in reconstruct-

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1. George Sanger, ed., *Statutes at Large of the United States of America, 1789-1873*. 17 vols. (Boston 1850-1873), XIV, 428.
 2. *Report of the Secretary of War, 1867-1868*, Vol. II, 40th Cong., 2nd Sess., *House Document No. 1*, Serial No. 1324, p. 353. Hereinafter cited as *House Document No. 1*. Sprague, as brevet captain, 8th Regiment, U. S. Infantry, had served in Florida during the Second Seminole War. His *The Origin, Progress, and Conclusion of the Florida War* (New York, 1848) became the standard history of that conflict. See also facsimile edition with introduction by John K. Mahon (Gainesville, 1964).
 3. *Ibid.*, 354.

ing the state government. The commanding general could fill all civil vacancies existing at the time.⁴ On April 4, 1867, Pope ordered all post commanders to report acts of local or state officials or of tribunals which discriminated against any person because of race, color, or political opinion.⁵ Four days later Sprague was told to divide Florida into districts for the registration of voters as required by the Supplementary Reconstruction Act of March 23. The law provided that registrants must take the "iron-clad oath." The major general commanding would be in charge of registration and election procedures.⁶

The imposition of military rule created little excitement in Florida.⁷ Conditions remained reasonably quiet, according to General Pope, in vivid contrast to those in the northern sections of Georgia and Alabama where the depredations of mounted bands of robbers had gotten beyond the control of the civil authorities.⁸ Federal army units had been stationed in Florida since the close of the war, and the presence of additional troops was accepted with a minimum of excitement.

With the coming of martial law to Florida the Republican organization began the immediate implementation of policies designed to confer full citizenship upon the Negro and to insure his enlistment into their party ranks. Radical leaders, including Freedmen's Bureau agents, Negroes, and southern loyalists launched an intensive campaign to "educate" the freedmen.⁹ United States Senator Henry Wilson of Massachusetts was invited by the Union Republican Club of Jacksonville to speak at a meeting there. This organization, which had volunteered to

4. *Ibid.*

5. *Ibid.*

6. *Ibid.*

7. *Senate Executive Documents*, 40th Cong., 1st Sess., Serial No. 1308, No. 14, p. 95. Hereinafter cited as *Senate Document 14*.

8. *Ibid.*

9. For example, see: Reports of William Purman, June 7, 1867, and Charles Hamilton, May 31, 1867, and July 31, 1867. West Florida, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen and Abandoned Lands, Special Orders, Reports, Letters from Private Citizens, selected documents. Microfilm of original in P. K. Yonge Library of Florida History, University of Florida, Gainesville. Hereinafter cited as *Freedmen's Bureau Papers*. Report of Joseph Harvey Durkee, June 2, 1867, Gainesville, *ibid.*; Report of Lt. Julius Quentin, June 30, 1867, Madison, *ibid.*; Report of Frederick Grossman, October 31, 1867, Lake City, *ibid.*; Report of J. A. Remley, April 30, 1867, Ocala, *ibid.*

assist Colonel Sprague with voter registration, was the core of the Republican organization in Florida.¹⁰ One of the most effective devices in enlisting the freedmen was the organization of secret societies. The Union League and Lincoln Brotherhoods, using secret oaths and mysterious and awe-inspiring rituals, and eliciting the passionate religious and patriotic fervor of the Negroes, attracted a large following.¹¹

The proceedings of a meeting in Jacksonville to select candidates for mayor and alderman on March 14, 1867, revealed a new spirit among the Negroes. They noted that Negroes were now citizens of Florida and the United States, that they were politically equal to whites, that they were perfectly capable of selecting their own candidates for office, and that they would never vote for former Confederates. The Jacksonville *Florida Times* scorned these pronouncements and called the assemblage a device of demagogues "base enough to try to separate the freedmen" from their white friends.¹²

Negroes at St. Augustine formed the Union Club, and a few days after the imposition of military rule about fifty of them met to learn the provisions of the reconstruction laws. Resolutions adopted at the meeting were generally indicative of Negro sentiment in Florida at this time. The body resolved that it owed primary allegiance to the federal government for giving the Negroes freedom. The reconstruction laws were endorsed and the Negroes vowed not to support former rebels "who come to us with oily words of promise, and with faithless pledges of future friendship."¹³

White Conservatives tried to convince the Negroes that Radical attempts to alienate them from their "true" friends were inimical to the freedmen's best interests and that they

10. Proceedings of the Union Republican Club of Jacksonville, April 18, 1867. Transcript from the original mss. in the Florida Historical Society Library, University of South Florida Library, Tampa, is in the P. K. Yonge Library of Florida History. Hereinafter cited as Republican Club Proceedings.

11. Tallahassee *Semi-Weekly Floridian*, April 16, 1867; Report of Lt. (illegible), 7th U.S. Infantry, September 29, 1867, on tour of inspection in Florida in Freedmen's Bureau Papers. See also John Wallace, *Carpetbag Rule in Florida* (Jacksonville, 1888). 42-45, for a description of a ceremony used to awe the Negroes.

12. Tallahassee *Semi-Weekly Floridian*, March 26, 1867, quoting the Jacksonville *Florida Times*, March 21, 1867.

13. *St. Augustine Examiner*, April 20, 1867, quoting the Jacksonville *Florida Times*, April 11, 1867.

were being used as political pawns.¹⁴ Even with their Negro allies the Radicals were still in the minority in Florida and whites were warned that the Radicals would try to “seduce a sufficient number of thoughtless whites” into a union to create a political majority in Florida. The contest between Radicals and Conservatives was intense, and at many meetings a Conservative would be followed by a Radical speaker, usually a freedman, who sought to refute the former’s speech. At a meeting at the Tallahassee courthouse in early April 1867, Florida Supreme Court Justice Samuel Douglas spoke at length, advising the freedmen to register but not to vote for bad men. He also cautioned them not to join any party or party organization. God, the judge declared, not the North, gave Negroes their freedom.¹⁵ After Douglas concluded his talk, Joseph Oats, a mulatto who lived in Tallahassee, spoke. Citing the loyalty of Negroes when their masters were away fighting to preserve slavery, he urged the freedmen to vote for Northerners who had been the agents for their emancipation. There is little doubt that the Negroes were more impressed by Oats than by Douglas.

Benjamin Harvey Hill, senator from Georgia in both the Confederate and the United States Congress, was one of the foremost critics of Reconstruction, and carried on the fight in numerous articles and speeches.¹⁶ In a speech in Atlanta to a mixed audience on July 16, 1867, Hill insisted that the Radicals were not friends of the Negroes but were using them as pawns; their promises of land for freedmen were false. “Are you foolish enough,” he asked, “to believe that you can get another man’s land for nothing?” Negroes, according to Hill, should reject those who possessed “white skins but black hearts.”¹⁷

Hill’s activities had a marked effect in the third military district, both on General Pope and upon the general population. Pope wrote General Grant on July 24, 1867, enclosing a copy of Hill’s speech and calling him the “representative of a large class” whose attitudes illustrated the “hopelessness of any satisfactory reconstruction of the Southern States while such men

14. Tallahassee *Semi-Weekly Floridian*, July 26, 1867.

15. *Ibid.*, April 30, 1867.

16. See Benjamin Harvey Hill, Jr., *Senator Benjamin H. Hill of Georgia: His Life, Speeches, and Writings* (Atlanta, 1893), 730-813, for his articles on Reconstruction.

17. Tallahassee *Semi-Weekly Floridian*, July 26, 1867.

retain influence.”¹⁸ Charles Hamilton, Freedmen’s Bureau head in Marianna, reported that the “rebels” were exasperated by their failure to seize control of the state government and were using “that treacherous enemy to peace and good order . . . [that] last standard-bearer of treason, B. H. Hill” to deter freedmen from registering, voting, or taking any part in the Reconstruction program.¹⁹ Pope regarded leaders such as Hill, Wilkinson Call of Florida, and other Conservatives as a powerful reactionary force against Reconstruction and a dangerous threat to the operations of government. If they obtained power, Pope asserted, Union men and southern loyalists would be driven from the South, and the status of the freedmen would be worse than ever. He deplored their tendencies toward violence, intimidation, and the suppression of free speech, and he argued that such men should be banished from the United States so that real peace could be secured. Needless to say, the Conservative press condemned Pope for his proposal “to banish . . . every honorable, high-toned patriot” and accused the general of being an ardent Radical.²⁰

The Radical campaign for Negro allegiance was so much more successful than that of the Conservatives that the newspapers complained of a “Radical tyranny over the freedmen” which kept them from attending Conservative meetings and prevented Conservatives from instructing them.²¹ According to Freedmen’s Bureau reports, Negro members of the secret leagues demanded total allegiance by all members; defections were met with “persecution and intolerance.”²² As an example of Radical tyranny, the Tallahassee *Floridian* cited a recent incident in which a Negro delegate to a Conservative meeting in Tallahassee was threatened with death by Negro Radicals if he attended. The editor asked, “Are we not fast coming to a war of the races?”²³

18. *House Document No. 1*, 349.

19. Report of Charles Hamilton, July 31, 1867, West Florida, Freedmen’s Bureau Papers.

20. Tallahassee *Sentinel*, August 22, 1867.

21. Tallahassee *Semi-Weekly Floridian*, September 17, 1867.

22. Report of William Purman, October 1, 1867: Annual Report of Bureau Operations, 1867, West Florida, Freedmen’s Bureau Papers. See also Report of Joseph Durkee, June 2, 1867, Gainesville, *ibid.*

23. Tallahassee *Semi-Weekly Floridian*, September 27, 1867.

The freedmen believed the Radical orators, and so rapid was the growth of secret organizations that Conservatives became greatly alarmed. The proliferation of leagues and brotherhoods increased the fear of imminent Negro domination in Florida, resulted in a growing bitterness, and increased the Conservative determination to defeat the Radical purposes whatever the cost. The *Floridian* on June 28, 1867, called on the white people to organize "for safety," what with Radical leagues being organized in every county to vote for the freedmen and insisting that they support only Radicals. According to an army officer reporting on a tour of inspection in Florida for the Freedmen's Bureau, the secret leagues possessed almost total unity, and the freedmen received advice and counsel that resulted in a growing antagonism between the races.²⁴ The officer claimed that in some sections of the state Negroes were being told that the President and his advisors were traitors who planned to return them to slavery; the total effect was evil, and many freedmen in the towns were becoming "idle, loud-spoken, impudent, and disolute" as a result of such teachings. According to a report appearing in the Tallahassee *Floridian*, highly incendiary statements were being made at secret meetings. At a Jacksonville meeting, Colonel Horatio Bisbee alleged that his desire was to command a brigade of freedmen in a charge upon a Conservative camp. Bisbee, according to a report in the Tallahassee *Floridian*, "endeavored to excite and fire the minds of his audience with allusions to military discipline, united ranks, and powder and bullets."²⁵

Conservatives failed in their effort to win Negro support and in their campaign to get whites to take the loyalty oath and to register. Only 11,180 whites registered as against 15,357 Negroes.²⁶ In eleven Florida counties - Escambia, Jackson, Gadsden, Leon, Jefferson, Madison, Alachua, Columbia, Nassau, Duval, and Marion - Negro registrants outnumbered the whites. The Conservatives charged wholesale fraud in the registration process as they compared registration figures with returns from

24. Special Report of Lt. (illegible), 7th United States Infantry, September 29, 1867, in Freedmen's Bureau Papers, Box 85-Q.

25. Tallahassee *Weekly Floridian*, November 12, 1867, quoting the *Charleston Mercury* (Beginning November 8, 1867, the Tallahassee *Floridian* was issued once weekly instead of twice.)

26. *House Document No. 1*, 363.

a special census of each county that were published occasionally by the *Floridian*.²⁷ A comparison of the two sets of returns reveals several paradoxes. In Escambia County, according to census figures, there were only 438 eligible Negro males, yet 619 Negroes were registered to vote. In Jackson County there were 857, but 1,169 were registered to vote. Gadsden County had 929 Negroes of suffrage age; 1,138 were registered. The greatest discrepancy was in Jefferson County where 965 eligible Negroes were counted and 1,747 Negroes were registered to vote. The *Floridian* cited a case in Jefferson County as typical of how registration returns were inflated illegally. A Negro male, nineteen years of age and exhibiting a registration certificate, was asked how he obtained registration. He replied that "we were told that all over eighteen could register and that we must do so." Joseph Nelson, nineteen-year-old Negro of Marianna, was told by Republican friends that he was old enough to vote, and he was immediately registered.²⁸

General Pope divided Florida into electoral districts and ordered an election to select delegates to a constitutional convention.²⁹ The extreme Radical Republicans elected thirteen delegates, the Conservative Republicans elected thirty-one delegates, and the Democrats elected two. The election generated new allegations of fraud, and the *Floridian* printed affidavits from persons specifying illegal acts in several counties.³⁰ The belief of Conservatives that still another victory had been denied them by what seemed to be outright fraud increased their bitterness and resentment, and intensified a disappointment that bordered on despair. Despite their spirited opposition they had seen the Negro enfranchised, enlisted in the ranks of the Radicals, arrayed in secret political organizations of almost monolithic

27. The legislature ordered a special census by counties in 1867, to be conducted in each county by the tax assessor. See the Tallahassee *Semi-Weekly Floridian*, July 9, 1867. Census returns in full, with the exception of one county, are carried in the Tallahassee *Floridian*, June 30, 1868. Registration returns are in *House Document No. 1*, 363.

28. Tallahassee *Semi-Weekly Floridian*, October 8, 1867; Joint Select Committee on Condition of Affairs in the Late Insurrectionary States, 42nd Cong., 2nd Sess., *House Report* 22, Series No. 1541, 13 vols. (Washington, 1872), XIII, 144.

29. *House Document No. 1*, 363.

30. Tallahassee *Weekly Floridian*, December 10, 1867 (frauds in Hillsboro County are cited). The issue of December 24, 1867, specifies frauds in Hernando, Lafayette, and Jackson counties.

unity, and given political dominance by gerrymandering operations with the support of a military ruler. The Conservatives also claimed that Negroes were being taught to hate and scorn southern whites. The virulent racial antipathy harbored by the whites since 1865 was further aggravated, and by the end of 1867 the infection had begun to flare up and to manifest itself in violent collisions between whites and Negroes.

Conservatives never acknowledged that the Negro deserved freedom, or that he might be motivated by a desire for freedom, however vague and undefined, and never surrendered their concept that the Negro was an inferior being and must always be in subordination to the white man. Any factor that might serve to reinforce these ideas was seized upon and emphasized. And the Negroes in Florida never believed the protestations of their former masters that Negro welfare was identified with an alliance with white Southerners.

The Conservative press emphasized the lawless acts of freedmen. Early in 1867 the *Ocala Banner*, in commenting on several shooting affrays in Alachua and Marion counties, denounced society as "bad."³¹ Reportedly armed Negroes were meeting in isolated places in Marion County for drill and instruction in military tactics.³² Although the Freedmen's Bureau agent sought to dispel the rumors, they persisted. Freedmen were involved in a property controversy in Fernandina, and, according to bureau reports, many were armed with guns which they were "ready to use."³³ William Johnson, a citizen of Fernandina, wrote United States Attorney General James Speed on March 27, 1867, that his house in Fernandina, which had been sold for taxes by United States commissioners, was being destroyed by Negroes who were using doors and other parts of the house for firewood.³⁴

Although the imposition of martial law under the reconstruction acts caused little excitement in Florida, the state of society was turbulent because of other factors. Early in March,

31. Tallahassee *Semi-Weekly Floridian*, January 29, 1867, quoting the *Ocala Banner*, January 23, 1867.

32. Report of J. A. Remley, February 28, 1867, Ocala, Freedmen's Bureau Papers.

33. Report of Alonzo A. Cole, February 1, 1867, Fernandina, *ibid.*

34. William Johnson, Fernandina, to the attorney general, March 27, 1867; National Archives, Record Group 60, Department of Justice; Attorney General's Papers, Letters from Private Citizens: Florida. Hereinafter cited as Attorney General's Papers.

a Mrs. Rushing, the wife of a minister, was murdered in Gainesville by a freedman who sought revenge for a fancied injury. He was captured, confessed to the murder, and was shot and killed "while trying to escape."³⁵ Troops were dispatched occasionally to quell disorders and to protect those favoring Reconstruction.³⁶ Although reassured by bureau agents and others, people continued to fear a Negro insurrection and reports persisted in many localities that Negroes had formed secret military organizations and were meeting for drill.³⁷ The tendency of freedmen to leave their work to attend political and religious meetings exasperated the planters, and the press condemned Radical leaders for using these meetings to excite and mislead the Negroes, stating that "the road to ruin lies so plain" before the Negro.³⁸

Colonel Francis Flint, commanding in middle and east Florida, received persistent reports of the meetings of armed Negroes, and on June 27, 1867, he issued an order embracing Calhoun, Gadsden, Jackson, Leon, Liberty, Franklin, Wakulla, Jefferson, Taylor, and Madison counties, in which he noted that, "many colored people are in the habit of meeting at night, armed, in various portions of the above-named counties, and holding their secret night sessions under the protection of armed guards around the premises in which they are assembled. This practice must be discontinued at once. . . ."³⁹

The summer and fall of 1867 saw an increasing amount of violence and conflict. The bureau agent at Ocala reported several such occurrences in May 1867. Two white men shot and killed a Negro who had broken a labor contract. James Denton, a white man, was tried at Ocala for the murder of a freedman in 1866 and was convicted of manslaughter; he was sentenced to pay a fine of \$225 and to serve one minute in jail. The

35. Tallahassee *Semi-Weekly Floridian*, March 19, 1867, quoting the Gainesville *New Era*, March 9, 1867. See Tallahassee *Semi-Weekly Floridian*, March 22, 1867, for account of the murderer's capture, confession, and death.

36. Report of Joseph Durkee, June 2, 1867, Gainesville, Freedmen's Bureau Papers.

37. Report of J. A. Remley, May 31, 1867, Ocala, *ibid.*

38. *Tallahassee Sentinel*, May 10, 1867.

39. Tallahassee *Semi-Weekly Floridian*, June 28, 1867; *American Cyclopaedia and Annual Register of Important Events for the Year 1867* (New York, 1868), 313. Hereinafter cited as *American Annual Cyclopaedia*.

Radicals reacted angrily against this verdict, and the Union Republican Club of Jacksonville requested Colonel Sprague to launch an investigation.⁴⁰ Benjamin Ryan, a white resident of Ocala, was involved in a drunken altercation and fired on a group of Negroes because they were "noisy." No one was seriously injured, but the affair caused great excitement.⁴¹ Drunkenness was a persistent problem among freedmen as well as whites, but the problem that seemed least capable of amelioration was promiscuity and adultery among the freedmen; their conduct, perhaps conditioned by their previous condition of servitude, appeared more amoral than immoral.⁴²

Fernandina was in an almost constant state of turmoil. In April, a Negro living with a white woman was riddled with buckshot as he lay in bed.⁴³ Continuing controversy over the property question also plagued authorities there.⁴⁴ The engrossment of land in the vicinity of the Florida Railroad Company added further complications, preventing homesteading by many Negroes and whites and causing bad feelings. The bureau agent in Fernandina reported that the tax sale monopoly and railroad monopoly "rested like a nightmare" on the community, that one firm alone held over 700 lots to be sold when prices advanced, and that the railroad was building its depot a mile from town to improve the value of their lands in that locality.⁴⁵ The same report cited several shooting affrays in which freedmen came off second best to white men.

Freedmen had few if any open friends among Conservatives. Many southern whites who would have befriended the Negro were afraid to do so because of the fear of ostracism, "that terrible inquisition of Southern society."⁴⁶ Southerners withdrew their benevolent influences from the Negro and he suffered accordingly. Many whites opposed the education of the freed-

40. Report of J. A. Remley, May 31, 1867, Ocala, Freedmen's Bureau Papers; Republican Club Proceedings, meeting of May 30, 1867.

41. Report of J. A. Remley, May 31, 1867, Ocala, Freedmen's Bureau Papers.

42. Reports of sub-assistant commissioners, *passim*, Freedmen's Bureau Papers.

43. Report of Alonzo A. Cole, May 1, 1867, Fernandina, *ibid*.

44. Reports from Fernandina Bureau, 1867, *passim*, Freedmen's Bureau Papers.

45. Report of D. M. Hammond, October 7, 1867, Fernandina, *ibid*.

46. Report of William Purman, June 7, 1867, West Florida, *ibid*.

men and/or the freedmen's children, and efforts to educate Negro children caused trouble. The Misses Harriet Barnet and Catherine Bent, northern white teachers in the colored school at Gainesville, reported early in 1866 that the bitter hatred of whites for Negroes often manifested itself in cruel treatment of freedmen. They cited incidents in which a drunken white man gouged out the eye of a Negro who happened to get in his way and the stabbing of two Negroes at Archer because they had served in the Union Army.⁴⁷ The young teachers reported that their greatest trouble came from assaults of white boys who often harassed them by throwing missiles into the schoolroom, sometimes hitting the teachers.

The Conservative press highlighted cases involving outrages upon whites, but other sources reveal that Negroes were also being harassed by whites. Bureau agents reports and newspaper stories reveal that the great majority of both races in every section of Florida carried weapons.⁴⁸ The bureau agent at Ocala, J. A. Remley, on May 31, 1867, called for a detachment of troops for use at Orange Springs, a few miles away, which had become a "hang-out for desperadoes," three of whom had brutally beaten a freedman a few days before. Remley reported ten cases of white assaults on Negroes during August 1867.⁴⁹ Attacks on Negroes were common in West Florida, according to bureau officials Charles Hamilton and William Purman, and summary military measures were recommended to "make an example of some of the chivalry" and to achieve harmony in that part of the state.⁵⁰

With voter registration completed there was a rising tide of defiance. "The rebels are exasperated," reported Charles Hamilton from Marianna. Hamilton, who lay wounded for five days and nights on the battlefield at Fredericksburg and subse-

47. Samuel Proctor, "Yankee Schoolmarms in Postwar Florida," *Journal of Negro History*, XLIV (July 1959), 275-77.

48. Report of J. A. Remley, May 31, 1867, Ocala, Freedmen's Bureau Papers; Report of Charles Hamilton, December 31, 1867, West Florida, *ibid.*; Gainesville *New Era*, May 4, 1867, noted the prevalence of the practice in Columbia and Alachua counties; the *New Era* of July 27, 1867, carried an order of clarification from the adjutant general's office, stating that even though shotguns and pistols were carried openly the practice was still forbidden.

49. Reports of J. A. Remley, May 31 and August 31, 1867, Ocala, Freedmen's Bureau Papers.

50. Report of Charles Hamilton, July 31, 1867, West Florida, *ibid.*

quently spent about a year in Libby Prison in Richmond, felt unable to deal with the problems in West Florida with the small detachment of federal troops available to the bureau in Marianna. He reported that the lives and property of loyal men were inadequately protected, and he asked for a "considerable" cavalry force to aid in enforcing the laws and to protect officials.⁵¹ Southern loyalists in Jackson County, he said, were often greeted on the streets by such remarks as "I smell a Radical and he stinks like a nigger," or "there's a Republican - he's no better than a dog." Hamilton claimed that the spirit of intolerance was so strong in West Florida that "rebels are free to defy the government" and that loyal men dared not support the government openly.

Hostility toward the government and toward northern men was freely expressed in central Florida during the latter part of 1867. The bureau agent at Ocala complained of the "overbearing and intolerant spirit" of many of the white people there, most of whom had come into the area before the war from South Carolina. These people, Agent Remley reported, were the most violent secessionists and exercised an almost absolute control on society and government through their incumbency in all the civil offices. Remley believed that "no Union man or freedman can ever get justice."⁵² On the other hand, the people of Ocala were alarmed at the prospect of Negro political domination, according to John Taylor, Sr., a citizen of Ocala, who wrote the United States Attorney General on September 28, 1867. Taylor asked the attorney general if there was any way for the men of the South to be re-enfranchised so that they might vote against Negro rule, a prospect "too appalling to contemplate."⁵³ He stated that Negroes in Ocala were drilling every night and that his neighborhood was "made hideous by their shrieks and screams."

51. *Ibid.*; Tallahassee *Weekly Floridian*, March 10, 1868. This biographical sketch in the *Floridian* brought out some favorable facts about Hamilton; e.g., he was shot down a few feet from the enemy at Fredericksburg while snatching the colors from a falling sergeant; so favorable was the article that a critic accused the *Floridian* of supporting Hamilton in his race for Congress - an accusation categorically denied in the next issue.

52. Report of J. A. Remley, October 31, 1867, Ocala, Freedmen's Bureau Papers.

53. John Taylor, Sr., Ocala, to attorney general, September 28, 1867, Attorney General's Papers.

The political controversy in Florida during 1867 had a profound effect on the actions of those who felt submerged by the opposition. The bureau agent at Madison reported on November 30, 1867, that politics had revived the "spirit of rebellion" and that loyal men needed protection from intimidation by threats and violence. He stated that "the Civil Rights Bill, the orders from the District Commander, and the Reconstruction laws are little heeded or obeyed."⁵⁴ Sentiment in Alachua and Levy counties was overwhelmingly hostile to Reconstruction, according to the local press and reports of the Freedmen's Bureau agent. The people of Gainesville and Alachua County had been convinced by certain northern newspapers, said Joseph Harvey Durkee, that they ought to resist Reconstruction a little longer because the sentiment of the North was changing in their favor and southern ideas would yet prevail.⁵⁵ The Gainesville *New Era* echoed these sentiments; on September 14, 1867, an editorial proclaimed that the state suffered under the "dominion of a military despotism," and that the *New Era* would continue undauntedly to espouse the right of white men to be governed by themselves and "not by mulatoes [*sic*], Radicals, or any other class of idiots - General Pope, or any other Negro-loving Judas Iscariot to the contrary notwithstanding."

Although the great majority of the white people in Florida were hostile to Reconstruction and were growing more defiant, there were more than 2,000 white Republicans in the state.⁵⁶ The majority of whites in Taylor County belonged to their own Union League chapters, organized separately from those incorporating the freedmen.⁵⁷ The sentiment in Clay County was decidedly pro-Union, according to Ambrose Hart, who was engaged in lumbering and farming in Clay County. Hart, a former Union soldier who had migrated to Florida in 1866, wrote his father in Poughkeepsie that Clay County was the strongest Union county in the state and that expressions of

54. Report of Lt. Julius Quentin, November 30, 1867, Madison, Freedmen's Bureau Papers.

55. Annual Report for 1867, Joseph Durkee, October 1, 1867, Gainesville, *ibid.*

56. Tallahassee *Weekly Floridian*, December 3, 1867, quoting the Savannah *Republican*.

57. Report of Lt. Julius Quentin, June 30, 1867, Madison, Freedmen's Bureau Papers.

rebel sentiments were dangerous there. More than two-thirds of the natives who had been drafted by the Confederacy had deserted, he claimed, "and a rebel might as well go out and shoot himself as to say anything against deserters."⁵⁸ Hart might have erred in his estimate of the situation in Clay County, however, for the district, including Clay and Bradford counties, had an overwhelming white majority of registered voters⁵⁹ who elected a Democrat to the Florida senate in May 1868.⁶⁰ Wakulla, Jackson, and the other West Florida counties were said to have strong Union elements.⁶¹ Delegates from Jackson County to the Florida Secession Convention in 1861 were instructed to vote against secession,⁶² and, according to a local historian, West Florida was a wartime haven for deserters, draftdodgers, and Union sympathizers who posed a threat to Confederate control of the area all during the war.⁶³

As the apparent frauds of Radical electoral procedures became known an added note of defiance became evident in the actions and utterances of the people and the press in Florida. In many areas tax collectors met violent resistance as they tried to collect revenues. On October 19, 1867, General Pope ordered Florida post and detachment commanders to furnish military aid to civil authorities to enable them to collect the taxes.⁶⁴ Default in tax payments was due, at least in part, to the failure of the cotton crop because of the depredations of the caterpillar.⁶⁵ The depressed economic situation certainly added to resentment against the Reconstruction program, which manifested itself in rebellious actions and words directed against the

58. Ambrose Hart to father, February 24, 1867, in Ambrose Hart Letters, 1866-1872 (transcript from the original), P. K. Yonge Library of Florida History, miscellaneous collections, Box 5. Hereinafter cited as Ambrose Hart Letters.

59. *House Document No. 1*, 363. Tallahassee *Weekly Floridian*, April 14, 1868, also published an official list of the number of registered voters in each county.

60. Tallahassee *Weekly Floridian*, June 9, 1868.

61. *Ibid.*, December 17, 1867.

62. J. Randall Stanley, *The History of Jackson County* (Jackson County Historical Society, 1957), foreword.

63. *Ibid.*, 179.

64. Tallahassee *Semi-Weekly Floridian*, November 5, 1867.

65. See reports of the various sub-assistant commissioners, July-November 1867, *passim*, in Freedmen's Bureau Papers, for reports of losses due to the caterpillar.

Freedmen's Bureau, the military, and the United States government in general.

A squad of federal troops met with armed resistance in December 1867, at Campbellton in Jackson County when they sought to enforce a contract agreement imposed by a bureau agent. Planters in West Florida threatened bloody opposition if the bureau tried to interfere in settlements with Negroes.⁶⁶ The spirit of defiance was such, an agent reported, that unmounted soldiers were not safe in Calhoun County. The contempt of the whites in Jackson County for the bureau and its policies was expressed by acts of vandalism, taunts, and open threats. The Marianna *Courier* called bureau personnel in Marianna "fanatical emissaries" and claimed that unless some protection were afforded the whites the bureau's work would bring material ruin and destroy the county.⁶⁷ Citing recent cases of arson, robbery, and the threatening display of firearms by Negroes, the *Courier* stated that outrages were frequent and ought to be prevented, either by law or by force.

The Tallahassee *Floridian* on December 30, 1867, described the Freedmen's Bureau as "an army of malignant Southern haters, Negro fanatics, and needy adventurers," backed in their power by the army of the United States. Moreover, continued the paper, their agents had made the freedmen enemies of the white race, their purpose was to "Africanize the South and put the white man under the Negro," and they had indoctrinated the Negro with the idea that the white man's land rightfully belonged to the Negro. All these incendiary teachings had generated numerous Negro assaults against whites, according to the *Floridian*.⁶⁸

Major General George Gordon Meade succeeded General Pope as commander of the third military district on January 6, 1868, and on January 15, he issued an order designed to curb the growing tide of incidents. Noting that frequent outrages were reported throughout the district and that reports indicated that civil authorities were lax in administering justice, Meade

66. Report of Charles Hamilton, December 31, 1867, West Florida, Freedmen's Bureau Papers.

67. *St. Augustine Examiner*, December 28, 1867, quoting the Marianna *Courier*, December 5, 1867.

68. Tallahassee *Weekly Floridian*, December 30, 1867.

warned that the military would assume such functions unless equal justice were afforded all men regardless of class or color.⁶⁹

One of the greatest problems plaguing the turbulent society of Florida in 1867 was dishonesty. Planters, bureau personnel, and farmers were faced by large-scale thefts of property by Negroes, especially of crops growing in the fields, livestock, and personal possessions in homes. The Madison agent reported on November 30, 1867, that "robbery and stealing are occurring at a fearful rate" and that friction and trouble was growing because white planters were offering attractive inducements for laborers and then defaulting at the time of payment. This practice by planters in Madison County was causing the freedmen "to grow more insolent, lazy, and unfaithful," reported the government agent. Stealing became so prevalent in some areas that people quit growing foodstuffs and raising livestock, and they bought meat and provisions at a much higher cost.⁷⁰ The Marianna *Courier* stated that all the hogs and most of the cattle, sheep, and goats in Jackson County had been destroyed by the depredations of the freedmen.⁷¹

In early November 1867, the captain of the *Dictator*, a steamboat plying between Charleston and Jacksonville, travelled from Jacksonville to Fernandina, Tallahassee, and Gainesville, and reported his observations in the Charleston *Mercury*, November 10, 1867. He stated that robbery and plunder were daily occurrences along these routes, and that the small portion of the cotton crop that escaped the caterpillar and grew to maturity was either stolen in the fields or from the ginhouses, scores of which had been broken into and robbed. Livestock, he claimed, was being slaughtered every night and carried off by the freedmen, and many owners had lost all their animals in this fashion.⁷²

Coincident with the realization by white Conservatives that the freedmen were aligning themselves with the Republicans was a growing belligerency of the press, and a large number of articles were published emphasizing the basic and hopeless

69. *American Annual Cyclopaedia*, VIII, 266.

70. Special Report of Lt. (illegible), 7th U. S. Infantry, September 29, 1867, tour of inspection in Florida, Freedmen's Bureau Papers.

71. *Tallahassee Sentinel*, December 5, 1867, quoting the Marianna *Courier*.

72. Tallahassee *Weekly Floridian*, November 26, 1867, quoting the Charleston *Mercury*, November 10, 1867.

inferiority of the Negro. Professor Louis Agassiz's doctrines were quoted to show fundamental physiological differences between the white and Negro races, especially in skeletal structure and in blood chemistry. Included in one such quotation was this simile: "The chimpanzee has not much further to progress to become a negro than a negro has to become a white man."⁷³ John W. Draper was also quoted to the effect that the Negro had fulfilled his mission in America and should be banished to Africa, his true home. Quoting Draper, one writer made a statement which, when considered against the background of later events, was indicative of the trend of thought among the leaders of the Conservatives. He stated: "Formerly the negro question was called the slavery question, which was political and social at the same time. Today the question is a purely social one. *The discussion is no longer whether the negro is to be free or enslaved, but whether he has a right to exist* [italics mine]. The discussion is still confined to books . . . [but] will reach the meetings."⁷⁴ In a comment a few weeks later, the Gainesville paper affirmed its belief that the major moral and social problem confronting Florida was the political suppression of the superior class, while the inferior class - only a degree above the gorilla and mere puppets of Radical demagogues - was destined to govern the state.⁷⁵ This paper also pointed hopefully to significant changes of sentiment in the North - the change in the tone of the press and the results of elections in the principal states - as indicative of the fact that government in the United States would always be a white man's government, and that the Negro must occupy the subordinate position assigned him by nature.

White Conservatives made sporadic efforts during July, August, and September 1867, to organize a Conservative Party. The movement was initiated in St. Augustine with a county convention of Conservatives on July 22, 1867. W. Howell Robinson, former officer in the Union Army, was chosen county chairman.⁷⁶ Similar meetings were held in other counties, and

73. Gainesville *New Era*, June 22, 1867.

74. Tallahassee *Semi-Weekly Floridian*, September 6, 1867.

75. Gainesville *New Era*, November 16, 1867.

76. Tallahassee *Semi-Weekly Floridian*, August 2, 1867, quoting the *St. Augustine Examiner*, July 27, 1867.

a statewide meeting was set for September 25-26, 1867, at Tallahassee. Only five counties sent delegates to the meeting, however, and no Conservative Party was formed during 1867.⁷⁷ The efforts of this abortive movement to enlist Negroes were illustrated by the emphasis placed by the *St. Augustine Examiner* upon the attendance of a former slave at the meeting of July 22. Citing the faithfulness of the slave, Anthony Huertas, to his master during the war, the *Examiner* lamented: "Would that more of our colored citizens would hearken to the voice of Tony," which warned them that heeding Radical promises could lead only to disaster.⁷⁸ At the Tallahassee meeting Robert Kent, a Negro from Leon County, presided along with Major Van Ness, former Union officer, and Colonel William Archer Cocke of Jefferson County.⁷⁹ Despite all efforts, however, very few Negroes entered the Conservative camp.

An open letter to Radicals in Florida, probably written by W. Howell Robinson, appeared in the *St. Augustine Examiner* in late December 1867. The writer urged the formation of a white man's party, and asked Radicals if they realized the consequences of Negro government in the South. He characterized Negroes as wholly ignorant, except in manual labor, and blamed slavery for coarsening them and lowering their already limited capacities. Formerly the Negroes were restrained by servitude and law, but they had now passed to a state of unlimited license. According to him, antagonism between the races had increased so much that an explosion of violence was imminent.⁸⁰

The military government took notice of the tense situation, and on December 27, 1867, prohibited all military organizations and decreed that there would be no parading of armed men except United States troops.⁸¹ Shortly after this decree, General Meade issued his order calling attention to the frequency of reported outrages, and warned that the military would impose strict sanctions unless these outrages ceased and unless the courts dispensed more impartial justice.⁸²

77. Tallahassee *Semi-Weekly Floridian*, September 27, 1867.

78. *St. Augustine Examiner*, September 21, 1867.

79. Tallahassee *Semi-Weekly Floridian*, September 27, 1867.

80. Tallahassee *Weekly Floridian*, December 24, 1867, quoting the *St. Augustine Examiner*.

81. Edward McPherson, *The Political History of the United States of America During the Period of Reconstruction* (Washington, 1875), 205.

82. *American Annual Cyclopaedia*, VII, 266.

Thus it is clear that the anti-Negro sentiment of most of the white people of Florida had crystallized by the end of 1867. Turning from serious attempts to win the Negro as an ally, the Conservatives openly rejected the Negro as a person, defiantly asserting their belief that he was fundamentally inferior and only a degree above an animal. Calling upon the doctrines of racist authorities for aid, they denied the Negro's intrinsic worth. Enraged by economic and social upheaval which continued as an aftermath of war and defeat, the Conservatives saw a fundamental threat to their futures in the ascendancy of the Negro. The political framework constructed by the Republican Party in 1867 had no place for white Conservative Democrats; moreover, the Negro vote was the keystone of the structure. These factors, plus the apparent registration frauds, General Pope's arbitrary redistricting of the state, and the complete Radical enlistment of the Negro, evidently convinced Florida Conservatives that violent counter-revolution was the only method by which the Radical grip could be broken.

Aversion to the Negro as a person and as a dominant political factor was not confined to southern Democrats. Various sources reveal that southern loyalists and other conservative Republicans also harbored the same sentiments. Alex Magruder, United States marshal at St. Augustine, wrote Attorney General Evarts on January 6, 1868, protesting General Pope's redistricting of Florida to allow the populous counties, all with Negro majorities, to dictate the constitution under which all would be governed. He asserted that loyal whites would keep away from the polls and allow a Negro triumph that would bring a reaction from Congress which would, "shield and protect . . . those men who are willing to do anything and accept everything except the doctrine of full and complete equality of the Negro with the white race."⁸³ D. M. Hammond, bureau agent at Fernandina, observed that the universal enfranchisement of the Negro was a great evil, and those that placed him in power were able to see at last that the Negro was "dishonest, untruthful, and ungrateful." Moreover, he stated, "I am satisfied that the Southern people had a more just estimate of the moral worth of this

83. Attorney General's Papers, Letters Received, Florida, 1862-1870, Northern District of Florida.

people than those of the North could have in an short period, and yet I am convinced that their average good will toward the Negro race is quite as much as that . . . [of Northerners].”⁸⁴ Hammond was a member of the Union Republican Club of Jacksonville.⁸⁵

Ambrose Hart, who was a faithful Republican for the first three or four years of his sojourn in Florida, wrote one of his sisters in New York that he rarely encountered a Negro that was a credit to his race. “Most of the Negroes,” he claimed, “are regular spendthrifts and never lay up anything, and in my opinion are not qualified to properly vote.”⁸⁶ In November 1868, Hart wrote another sister that on her forthcoming visit to Florida she would be able to study “Negro characteristics in all its [*sic*] hideousness,” and that “statements about Negro depravity are no exaggerations.”⁸⁷

Solon Robinson, correspondent for the *New York Tribune*, observed the opening sessions of the Florida Constitutional Convention, which began January 20, 1868, and talked with a large number of people along the route from Tallahassee to Jacksonville. His experiences convinced him, he stated, that the dominant sentiment of white Republicans in Florida at that time was hostility to the Negro both as a person and as a political equal, eligible to hold office.⁸⁸

The Negro, the major weight in the political scale and solidly arrayed in the Radical Republican camp, was caught in a crossfire among contending factions. The conservative Republicans needed his vote to effect their policies, but they apparently rejected the Negro as a person of worth, and, with one exception, they never did appoint a Negro to a major office.⁸⁹

84. Report of D. M. Hammond, April 30, 1868, Fernandina, Freedmen's Bureau Papers.

85. Republican Club Proceedings, 2-3.

86. Ambrose Hart to Mary Hart, March 20, 1867, Ambrose Hart Letters.

87. Ambrose Hart to Louisa Hart, November 17, 1868, *ibid.*

88. Tallahassee *Weekly Floridian*, February 25, 1868, quoting the *New York Tribune* (n.d.), letter from Solon Robinson, February 5, 1868.

89. Jonathan Gibbs, secretary of state under Harrison Reed, and later state superintendent of public instruction, was the only Negro to hold a major appointive office; several Negroes were elected to the state legislature, and Josiah T. Wall, a Negro of Gainesville, was elected to Congress. Negroes held the office of constable, the only elective office in county government, in several counties, and Robert Meacham served as superintendent of education in Jefferson County.

The Radicals, the Negro's greatest champion, and a definite minority, were soon to suffer a shattering defeat in the final organization of the constitutional convention, a blow that destroyed them as a cohesive force and sent many of them into the conservative Republican camp. The Southern Democrats - anti-Negro, anti-Republican, and anti-Reconstruction - perceived that counter-revolution had a definite chance of success, and they aimed their main blow at the keystone of Republican strength - the Negro. Subsequent events reveal that the white Southern Democrats began, in the winter and spring of 1868, to organize forces whose activities flared into open violence and resistance with the resumption of civil government on July 4, 1868.