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Ulysses S. Grant and the Failure of Reconciliation

BROOKS D. SIMPSON

When Ulysses S. Grant accepted the Republican party's nomination for the Presidency in 1868, he proclaimed, "Let us have peace." Recent historians have taken a renewed interest in the politics of Reconstruction, but they seem more concerned with the ultimate failure of Grant and his fellow Republicans to secure the rights of freed slaves than with efforts to establish sectional harmony.¹ For Grant, however, the central problem of Reconstruction was how to reconcile the necessity of truly reuniting the country with the desire to provide justice and protection for the freedmen. Before we criticize Grant for

what he failed to do, we should ask first what he planned to do. This question can be explored by looking at Grant's attitudes toward white Southerners and the role of reconciliation in Reconstruction from Appomattox to the end of his Presidency.

Grant's deceptively simple "Let us have peace" statement summarized his vision of Reconstruction: peace not only between blacks and whites, but between North and

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¹William S. McFeely in his prizewinning *Grant: A Biography* (New York: Norton, 1981) charges that the hero of Appomattox demonstrated little enthusiasm or determination to secure the rights of blacks: "Instead, he was willing to entrust the black people to the 'thinking people of the South'" (p. 238). For an analysis, see Brooks D. Simpson, "Butcher? Racist? An Examination of William S. McFeely's *Grant: A Biography*," *Civil War History*, 33 (1987), 63–83. William Gillette in his formidable study of Reconstruction during Grant's administration, *Retreat from Reconstruction, 1869–1879* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979), criticizes the President for his inability to formulate an overall policy to preserve and strengthen the Republican party in the South.



Ulysses S. Grant began his policy of leniency and reconciliation with the surrender terms offered to Confederate General Robert E. Lee at Appomattox. Afterwards, Grant stopped his troops' celebrations with the reminder, "The Rebels are our countrymen again."

South. Indeed, he saw the two as inseparable. He argued that social revolutions and the resulting readjustments of attitudes could not be accomplished overnight. Opposed to extremism, Grant believed that Radical Republican notions of immediate and widespread change were unrealistic and inevitably counterproductive, for the result would be a white backlash. Imposing harsh restrictions upon Southerners would increase sectional hostility. "The people who had been in rebellion must necessarily come back into the Union, and be incorporated as an integral part of the nation," he explained years later. "Naturally the nearer they were placed to an equality with the people who had not rebelled, the more reconciled they would feel with their old antagonists, and the better citizens they would be from the beginning. They surely would not make good citizens if they felt they had a yoke around their necks."²

Drawing on his long acquaintance with the South—after all, many of his closest associates in the prewar army were Southerners, he married a slaveholder's daughter, and for a while he had actually owned a slave—he knew that racial prejudice,

which he termed "senseless," would take a long time to eradicate and that the transition from slavery to freedom would also be lengthy.³ Furthermore, legislation alone could not change attitudes: "Social equality is not a subject to be legislated upon," he declared in 1873, "nor shall I ask that anything be done to advance the social status of the colored man, except to give him a fair chance to develop what there is good in him." On the last point, Grant remained inflexible. The war had resulted in making blacks citizens and eventually voters, and Grant stood committed to protecting those achievements.⁴ To him, the price of sectional reconciliation was the South's acceptance of the results.

At Appomattox, Grant—looking toward the restoration of harmony—established the foundation for a stable and lenient peace. The terms he offered Robert E. Lee spared his opponent unnecessary humiliation or punishment. Soldiers were allowed to keep their animals for farming; officers were allowed to keep their sidearms (thereby eliminating a large surrender ceremony featuring officers handing over their swords); and Lee's men were provided with rations. Most important was Grant's promise that "each officer and man will be allowed to return to their homes not to be disturbed by United States Authority so long as they observe their parole and the laws in force where they may reside."⁵ With one sentence, he struck down the notion of widespread treason trials. As news of the surrender spread, he found it necessary to order a halt to noisy victory celebrations by his troops, reminding them, "The Rebels are our countrymen again."⁶

Grant's generosity did not go unnoticed. According to Grant's staff officer, Horace Porter, a relieved Lee responded: "This will have the best possible effect on the men. It will be very gratifying and will do

²Ulysses S. Grant, *Personal Memoirs of U. S. Grant* (New York: Charles L. Webster & Co., 1885–1886), II, 511.

³Ulysses S. Grant, "Reasons Why Santo Domingo Should Be Annexed to the United States," MS, 1869, Ulysses S. Grant Papers, Manuscripts Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

⁴James D. Richardson, ed., *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 1789–1897* (Washington, D.C.: Pub. by Authority of Congress, 1898), VII, 221 (hereafter cited as Richardson, ed., *Messages and Papers*).

⁵Grant to Lee, April 9, 1865, in John Y. Simon, ed., *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1967–), XIV, 373–74 (hereafter cited as Simon, ed., *Grant Papers*).

⁶Bruce Catton, *Grant Takes Command* (Boston: Little, 1969), p. 468.

much toward conciliating our people.”⁷ Lee’s artillery chief, Edward Porter Alexander, commented that “the exceedingly liberal treatment . . . could only be ascribed to a policy of conciliation deliberately entered upon.”⁸ One New York correspondent noted that many Confederates, who expected something far different from the man known as “Unconditional Surrender” Grant, were pleasantly surprised by the terms: “Judging from their hearty confessions of generous and liberal treatment by us one would conclude they expected to have been chained together as felons to grace the triumphal march of our victorious general.”⁹ Similar considerations marked Grant’s demeanor in the days following the surrender. He refused to pass through Richmond on his return to Washington, suggesting that his presence “might lead to demonstrations which would only wound the feelings of the residents, and we ought not to do anything at such a time which would add to their sorrow.”¹⁰ Such behavior confirmed the judgment of the *New York Herald*, which declared that the terms at Appomattox “opened a way, broad and plain, for the reconstruction of the Union. Great as is Grant the general, he is equally matched by Grant the statesman and the diplomatist.”¹¹

Lincoln was assassinated five days after Appomattox. Grant mourned the President’s death as “an irreparable loss to the South, which now needs so much both his tenderness and magnanimity.” Moreover, Lincoln’s successor, Andrew Johnson, seemed determined to punish at least some Southerners for their part in the war. The new President’s vehement denunciations of treason and traitors, according to Grant, seemed to presage a repressive policy toward Southerners that “would be such as to repel, and make them unwilling citizens.” Traveling to North Carolina at the

end of April to supervise surrender negotiations between William T. Sherman and Joseph E. Johnston, Grant observed: “The suffering that must exist in the South the next year, even with the war ending now, will be beyond conception. People who talk now of further retaliation and punishment, except of the political leaders, either do not conceive of the suffering endured already or they are heartless and unfeeling.” He told a reporter that Southerners should be treated “with kindness and humanity.”¹²

Grant, convinced that the majority of Southerners were anxious for peace, concluded, “Management is all that is now wanted to secure complete peace.” For a short time he believed that Johnson would take advantage of that sentiment in formulating his policy, but in June the new President advocated bringing Lee to trial for treason, a measure that would most assuredly set back prospects for reconciliation. Grant protested, believing that if Lee were extended amnesty, “it would have the best possible effect towards restoring good feeling and peace in the South.” Lee was protected from such actions by the terms at Appomattox, Grant argued: “Good faith as well as true policy dictates that we should observe the conditions of that convention.” Not only would a trial threaten

⁷Porter, *Campaigning with Grant* (New York: Century, 1897), pp. 479–80.

⁸Frank P. Cauble, *The Surrender Proceedings, April 9, 1865, Appomattox Court House*, rev. 2nd ed. (Lynchburg, Va.: H. E. Howard, Inc., 1987), pp. 103–4.

⁹*New York Herald*, April 15, 1865, p. 8, col. 1.

¹⁰Porter, p. 493. See also Simon, ed., *The Personal Memoirs of Julia Dent Grant* (New York: Putnam’s, 1975), p. 153.

¹¹April 11, 1865, p. 4, col. 5. See also April 12, 1865, p. 4, col. 3.

¹²Simon, ed., *Memoirs of Julia Dent Grant*, p. 156; Ulysses S. Grant, *Personal Memoirs*, II, 509; Grant to Julia Dent Grant, April 25, 1865, in Simon, ed., *Grant Papers*, XIV, 433; *New-York Tribune*, May 3, 1865.

the restoration of sectional harmony, it also might spark renewed armed resistance in the form of guerrilla warfare. The persistent President Johnson relented only after Grant threatened to resign his commission, indicating that he would take his case to the people.¹³

Throughout the remainder of 1865 Grant followed a course of generosity and understanding toward the conquered. He advocated the reduction of occupation forces in hopes of hurrying the restoration of civil rule, supported the amnesty applications of several Confederate generals (including James Longstreet), and intervened on behalf of the imprisoned Confederate Vice-President Alexander Hamilton Stephens and Clement Claiborne Clay, a Confederate diplomat from Alabama.¹⁴ Aware of white sensitivities, Grant pushed for the withdrawal of black troops from the South and directed the removal of Freedmen's Bureau officials who demonstrated a "prejudice in favor of color." He also resisted the movement for immediate (as opposed to eventual) enfranchisement of blacks, arguing that it was "unwise," created friction, and, if

imposed, "would undoubtedly produce war between the two races there." Endorsing relief efforts for Southerners, Grant pledged himself to support whatever "is calculated to increase the brotherly feeling between the two sections of the country."¹⁵

Grant did not overlook the evidence of southern hostility toward federal authority or the persistence of racism and violence against blacks and white Unionists. He believed, however, that it was unrealistic to assume that the revolutionary changes wrought by the war could be absorbed immediately, an attitude manifested in his comments during his tour of the South in late November and early December of 1865. Ever the optimist, he came away from Charleston, South Carolina, expressing "great pleasure and satisfaction at the general good feeling, spirit and disposition" of the former Confederates, especially their "cheerful adaptation to the new order of affairs." When a reporter inquired about what the General thought of the signs of continued intransigence, Grant shrugged it off: "The close of the war being so recent, a natural soreness is to be expected on the part of certain individuals but it will soon pass away." In contrast, Cyrus B. Comstock, a staff officer who accompanied Grant, saw evidence of continuing interracial friction.¹⁶

Willing to go more than halfway to conciliate Southerners, Grant hoped that Northerners would follow his example and "devote themselves unselfishly to the restoration of friendly relations." In his report to President Johnson, Grant asserted that "the mass of thinking men of the south accept the present situation . . . in good faith," but he noted that after four years of war, Southerners were not yet prepared "to yield . . . ready obedience to civil authority." Continued racial friction was also understandable: "It cannot be

¹³Grant to Julia Dent Grant, May 9, 1865, Grant to Henry W. Halleck, May 6, 1865, and Grant to Edwin M. Stanton, June 16, 1865, in Simon, ed., *Grant Papers*, XV, 30, 11, 149 (Grant's letter to Stanton was to be forwarded to the President, see *ibid.*, XV, 150n); Adam Badeau, *Grant in Peace from Appomattox to Mount McGregor, a Personal Memoir* (Hartford, Conn.: S. S. Scranton & Co., 1887), p. 26.

¹⁴Grant to Andrew Johnson, Nov. 7, 1865, Stephens to Grant, Sept. 16, 1865, and Grant to Johnson, Nov. 26, 1865, in Simon, ed., *Grant Papers*, XV, 401, 588, 419–20; Badeau, pp. 27–29.

¹⁵Grant to Stanton, Aug. 30, 1865, *ibid.*, XV, 310; *Republican Banner* (Nashville, Tenn.), Oct. 5, Oct. 7, 1865; *Army and Navy Journal*, Oct. 14, 1865, p. 126; *Constitutionalist* (Augusta, Ga.), Dec. 6, 1865, p. 2, cols. 1–2.

¹⁶Brooks D. Simpson, LeRoy P. Graf, and John Muldowny, eds., *Advice After Appomattox: Letters to Andrew Johnson, 1865–1866* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1987), pp. 208, 209.



After his election to the Presidency in 1868, Grant continued his policy of reconciliation toward the former Confederates. This photograph, taken in 1869, is said to be one of his favorites.

expected,” he warned, “that the opinions held by men at the south for years can be changed in a day.”

But Grant’s fervent desire for compromise should not be mistaken for a willingness to extend unconditional clemency. Historians often cite his trip through the South as evidence of his wholehearted support of Johnson’s lenient policy. Actually the tour marked the emergence of a counterpoise in Grant’s thinking, in which justice for freedmen became an essential condition of the peace settlement: “The freedmen require, for a few years, not only laws to protect them, but the fostering care of those who will give them good counsel, and on whom they rely.” In pursuit of that goal, Grant advocated the continuation of the Freedmen’s Bureau as “an absolute necessity until civil law is established and enforced, securing to the freedmen their rights and full protection.” White prejudices would not change overnight. Since Southerners *were not* ready “to yield . . . ready obedience to civil authority,” Grant concluded that “the presence of small garrisons” was “necessary” until complete stability was restored.¹⁷

Grant’s actions in early 1866 reinforced impressions that there were no indications that civil government should be restored in the immediate future. Because recent legislation by former states of the Confederacy did not provide blacks with equal

protection under the law, he called upon subordinates to submit reports of “all known outrages” between whites and blacks, and he authorized military courts to intervene and provide color-blind justice. When Johnson inquired about the possibility of withdrawing troops from Alabama, Grant advised against it “until there is full security for equitably maintaining the right[s] and safety of all classes of citizens in the states lately in rebellion.” He also endorsed the Freedmen’s Bureau Bill and the Civil Rights Act, measures opposed by Johnson.¹⁸

Such actions represented a change in emphasis, if not of heart. More than willing to extend forgiveness to his former opponents, Grant was angered by evidence of unabated hostility, particularly in the press. Bombastic editorials and exaggerated reports, he believed, did “more to hinder the work of reconstruction, by keeping alive the spirit of hatred between the sections, than all the politicians in the land put together.” In February, 1866, exasperated with “the dangerously inflammatory course” of the *Richmond Examiner*, Grant ordered it shut down, explaining that the newspaper’s editorials served only “to foster and increase the ill-feeling toward the Government of the United States by the discontented portion of the Southern people.” President Johnson overruled the order, and the General relented on the condition that the *Examiner* would assist “the cultivation of friendly relations between the people of these States.”¹⁹

Grant was also shocked by the extent to which white Southerners would go to suppress blacks—especially when those means included violence and murder. Bloody riots in Memphis and New Orleans were only the most visible signs of stubbornness. Grant described the riot at Memphis as a “massacre . . . a scene of murder, arson, rape, and robbery [*sic*] in which the victims

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 210, 212–14.

¹⁸ Grant to George H. Thomas, Thomas H. Ruger, Alfred H. Terry, and Daniel E. Sickles, Dec. 25, 1865, General Orders No. 3, Jan. 12, 1866, and Grant endorsement, Jan. 9, 1866, in Simon, ed., *Grant Papers*, XVI, 69n–70n, 7, 54n.

¹⁹ Simpson, Graf, and Muldowny, eds., p. 223; Theodore S. Bowers to Terry, Feb. 19, 1866, in Simon, ed., *Grant Papers*, XVI, 71n–72n; see also Albert D. Richardson, *A Personal History of Ulysses S. Grant* (Hartford, Conn.: American Pub. Co., 1868), pp. 521–22, and *Dispatch* (Richmond, Va.), Feb. 21 (p. 3, col. 2), Feb. 23 (p. 3, col. 1), 1866.

were all helpless and unresisting negroes.” Those outbreaks, along with more subtle forms of intimidation and discrimination, frustrated Grant’s wish for a rapid reconciliation. “The difference of sentiment engendered by the great war,” he told Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton, “will make the presence of a Military force necessary to give a feeling of security to the people.” Peace seemed as far off as ever, in part because Johnson appeared to repudiate his earlier declarations about treason and traitors by condoning or excusing such incidents. However harsh the measures proposed by Congress seemed in retrospect, Grant reflected later, “It became an absolute necessity . . . because of the foolhardiness of the President and the blindness of the Southern people to their own interest.”²⁰

The Republican triumph in the elections of 1866 convinced Grant that unless the South accepted the Fourteenth Amendment, the incoming Republican-controlled Congress would impose far harsher conditions. Once more he appealed to Southerners. Adam Badeau, an aide to Grant, recalled, “He argued and pleaded with them . . . for the sake of the South, for the sake of the entire country, for their own individual sakes, to conform to the situation.” The General urged a delegation from Arkansas “to go home and adopt the Constitutional Amendment immediately, and after they had done that to pass a bill giving suffrage to all persons without regard to color.” He could not understand how Southerners could think otherwise. “The South ought to see that these amendments have been ratified by the people who sustained the Government in its hour of trial,” he told Edward O. C. Ord, who was commanding occupation troops in the Mississippi Valley. “Delay may cause further demands but it is scarcely within the range of possibility that less will be

accepted.” Normally believing that army officers should stay out of partisan politics, Grant made advocacy of ratification an exception, because the issue “is hardly to be classed as a party matter. It is one of National importance.” Badeau recalled that Grant “never in his career appeared more anxious or ardent in any task.” The effort was in vain, for Southern state legislatures voted overwhelmingly to reject the amendment. As Grant predicted, congressional Republicans—consulting the General at every step—responded with a harsher plan that featured continued military supervision and mandatory black suffrage.²¹

Grant believed that blacks would be able to accomplish the transition from slavery to freedom, but he also thought that the transition would take time and require patience. In August, 1866, he told a reporter that “time will bring with it the full fruition of their newly acquired liberty.” While he was “anxious they should obtain all their rights as freemen,” he thought that a prolonged military presence “would not only tend to embitter the whites against the Government, but delay the consummation of that harmony between the races so much to be desired.” The rejection of the Fourteenth Amendment, however, was yet another sign that the South was failing to cooperate, failing to play its role in what he mistakenly thought would be the final act of reunion. Reports of severe cases of Southern intransigence astounded Grant. He told a visitor of a North Carolina judge who, upon discover-

²⁰Grant to Stanton, May 16, July 7, 1866, in Simon, ed., *Grant Papers*, XVI, 199, 233; Ulysses S. Grant, *Personal Memoirs*, II, 512.

²¹Badeau, pp. 43–57; *New-York Tribune*, Jan. 8, 1867; Grant to Ord, Dec. 6, 1866, in Simon, ed., *Grant Papers*, XVI, 405–6.

ing that state law barred men who had been flogged from full citizenship, had taken to convicting and flogging as many blacks as possible in order to disqualify them from future citizenship.²²

Such behavior disappointed Grant. "I know that immediately after the close of the rebellion there was a very fine feeling manifested in the South, and I thought we ought to take advantage of it as soon as possible," he told the House Committee on the Judiciary on July 18, 1867. "But since [then] there has been an evident change there." Badeau recalled, "Believing as he now did that the clemency extended to the conquered had been abused, he approved of restraining those who had shown themselves unworthy of milder treatment." Disillusioned by Southerners' inability to understand their best interests and realizing that blacks had to protect themselves from continued violence and intimidation, Grant endorsed the immediate enfranchisement of blacks, overcoming his belief that they needed more time to prepare for such a responsibility. Gradualism had crumbled in the face of necessity.²³

The legislation collectively known as the Military Reconstruction Acts entrusted Grant with a large share of the responsibility for overseeing the administration of

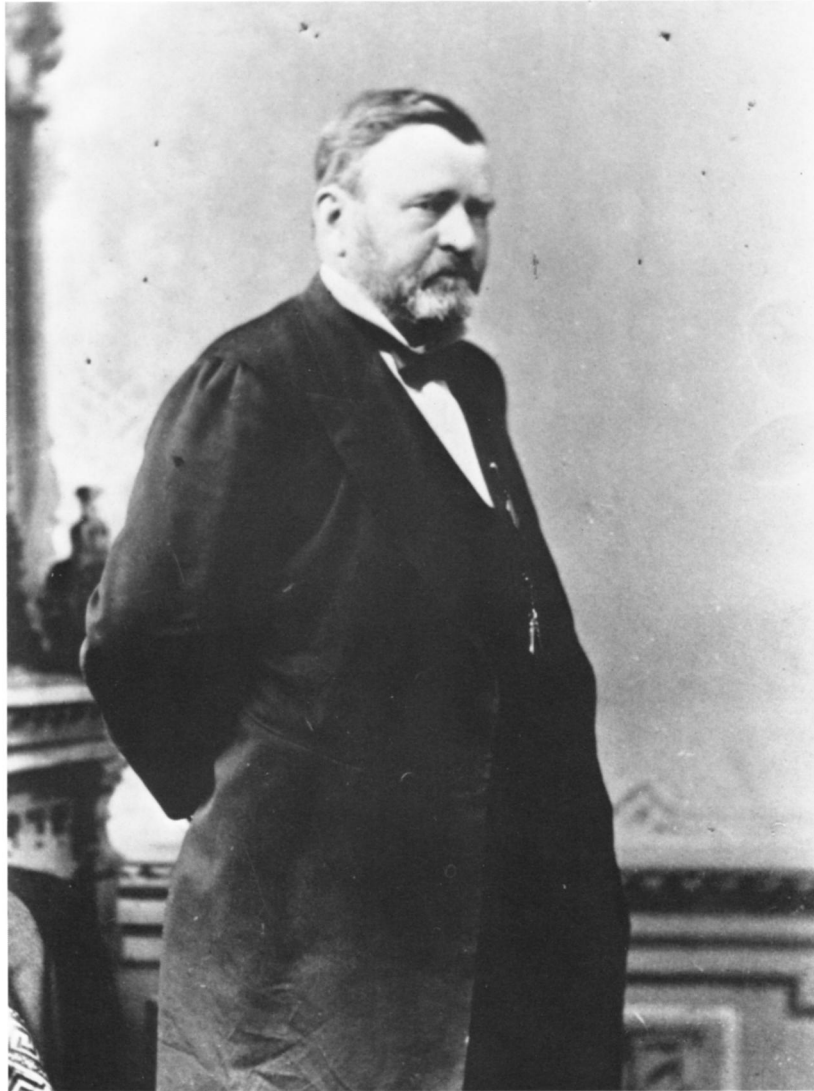
justice and the reestablishment of civil government in the South. At least some Southerners welcomed that news. "Repeated acts of generosity and kindness adorn his intercourse with us," noted one newspaper. "In the midst of troubles and anxieties and menaces he has been just." William T. Sherman reported that his comrade "is not an extremist at all, but his many good officers at the South force him to the conclusion that there is necessary there some strong power to protect the negroes and union men against legal oppression, or the acts of badly disposed ex-rebels. He is frank and friendly to all well disposed men [of the] South." Indeed, throughout the rest of 1867 and 1868 Grant's main concern was the behavior not of white Southerners but of Andrew Johnson. Suffice it to say that his feud with Johnson erased all his doubts about running for President in 1868, for, as he told Sherman upon accepting the nomination, "I could not back down without . . . leaving the contest for power for the next four years between mere trading politicians," a struggle that would wreck any remaining chance of achieving a just and lasting peace.²⁴

In his first inaugural address President Grant advised his countrymen to approach political issues "calmly, without prejudice, hate, or sectional pride," and he acted in such a spirit. Virginia, Mississippi, and Texas remained out of the Union when he took office; in order to hasten their readmission, he suggested that clauses in the new state constitutions restricting officeholding and suffrage of certain classes of former Confederates be voted on separately. When Southerners were willing "to become peaceful and orderly communities" and act "in good faith . . . all causes of irritation should be removed as promptly as possible." He continued to wonder, however, whether former Confederates would act "in good faith" toward

²²*New-York Times*, Aug. 3, 1866, p. 4, cols. 6-7; Henry Latham, *Black and White: A Journal of a Three Months' Tour in the United States (1867)*; rpt. New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969), p. 65.

²³Edward McPherson, *The Political History of the United States of America during the Period of Reconstruction, April 15, 1865-July 15, 1870* (Washington, D.C.: Philip & Solomons, 1871), p. 304; Badeau, p. 58.

²⁴Hamlin Garland, *Ulysses S. Grant: His Life and Character* (New York: Macmillan, 1920), p. 361; Sherman to Thomas Ewing, Oct. 18, 1867, in M. A. DeWolfe Howe, ed., *Home Letters of General Sherman* (New York: Scribner's, 1909), p. 362; Grant to Sherman, June 12, 1868, in John A. Carpenter, *Ulysses S. Grant* (New York: Twayne, 1970), p. 75.



As President, Grant firmly believed that the key to total reunion rested with the South. Upon hearing of another outbreak of violence, he exclaimed, "Oh, if the South could only see!"

blacks. According to the *New York Herald*, when a Louisiana planter complained that blacks would not work, Grant snapped: "Won't work! They will if you pay them for it!"²⁵

Grant was also frustrated by continued

violence. He contemplated issuing a general amnesty in 1870 once the "entire pacification" of the South had been achieved,

²⁵ Richardson, ed., *Messages and Papers*, VII, 6, 11; *New York Herald*, Jan. 2, 1869.

but abandoned the idea in the face of continued disorders. Eventually he was forced to call for additional legislation to protect the civil and political rights of blacks. In a proclamation issued after the passage of the Ku Klux Klan Act in 1871, he called on whites "to suppress all such combinations by their own voluntary efforts" if they wished to avoid federal intervention. Grant concluded, "It is my earnest wish that peace and cheerful obedience to law may prevail throughout the land and that all traces of our late unhappy civil strife may be speedily removed."²⁶

President Grant continued to extend the hand of friendship, doing what he could to remove obstacles toward reunion. In December of 1871 he called on Congress to remove the disabilities regarding suffrage and enfranchisement imposed by the Fourteenth Amendment; the next year he supported the passage of a general amnesty act. Following his reelection in 1872, he expressed his willingness to pardon Southerners convicted under the Enforcement Acts to test the claims of those people who believed that "clemency . . . would tend to tranquilize the public mind." Once Southerners recognized blacks' civil and political rights, he wrote

New York abolitionist-reformer Gerrit Smith, "there is no political offense that I would not advocate forgiveness and forgetfulness of, so far as the [South] is concerned."²⁷

In pursuit of reunion, Grant was willing to explore the possibility of forging new political alliances with moderates. He was not pleased with the performance of the Republican party in states of the old Confederacy, believing that many southern Republican leaders were weak and occasionally corrupt. Claiming that he was "tired of this nonsense," Grant thought that the national party's "nursing of monstrosities" had to come to an end. Some Virginia Democrats were willing to consider the possibility of realignment, and one such Democrat reported to incoming Governor James L. Kemper that Grant was receptive, but only after black rights were secured. "The point on which they hang is our sincerity. When convinced on that point all will go well. When they have got the whites of Virginia as allies they can let the negro go and will do it." Unfortunately, Petersburg whites gave evidence that such sincerity was not forthcoming when they assaulted blacks, causing Grant to dispatch troops and ending all chances of rapprochement.²⁸

The persistence of violence in Louisiana, Mississippi, and South Carolina continued to frustrate Grant. In two messages to Congress he expressed his horror and outrage at the Louisiana political murders and massacres. At Colfax in April of 1873 "a butchery of citizens was committed . . . which in bloodthirstiness and barbarity is hardly surpassed by any acts of savage warfare." In August, 1874, at Coushatta, six Republicans "were seized and carried away from their homes and murdered in cold blood. No one has been punished, and the conservative press of the State denounced all efforts to that end and boldly justified

²⁶Diary of Hamilton Fish, March 15, April 15, 1870, Hamilton Fish Papers, Manuscripts Division, Library of Congress (hereafter cited as Fish Diary); Richardson, ed., *Messages and Papers*, VII, 134–35.

²⁷Richardson, ed., *Messages and Papers*, VII, 153, 199–200; Grant to Smith, July 28, 1872, Ulysses S. Grant Papers, Morris Library, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale.

²⁸*New York Herald*, Jan. 18, 1874; John Scott to Kemper, Dec. 18, 1873, James L. Kemper Papers, Alderman Library, University of Virginia, Charlottesville; Jack P. Maddex, Jr., *The Virginia Conservatives, 1867–1879: A Study in Reconstruction Politics* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1970), pp. 136–37; Michael Perman, *The Road to Redemption: Southern Politics, 1869–1879* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), pp. 161–65.

the crime." Those responsible for the atrocity at Colfax escaped conviction. Grant was amazed that "no way can be found in this boasted land of civilization and Christianity to punish the perpetrators of this bloody and monstrous crime." It was evident that in Louisiana "the spirit of hatred and violence is stronger than law." Under such circumstances, federal intervention—denounced as "tyranny and despotism" by many Southerners (and some Northerners as well)—was necessary, or "the whole scheme of colored enfranchisement is worse than mockery and little better than a crime."²⁹

When Grant forwarded this information to Congress, he made explicit his willingness to conciliate white Southerners, and he reminded the nation of his reluctance to order federal intervention. "I have repeatedly and earnestly entreated the people of the South to live together in peace and obey the laws; and nothing would give me greater pleasure than to see reconciliation and tranquillity everywhere prevail," which would remove any pretext for intervention. He even conceded that he believed former Confederates were law abiding, and wished "to do no violence either to individuals or to the laws existing." But, he added, "Do they do right in ignoring the existence of violence and bloodshed in resistance to constituted authority?" Acknowledging that "in some instances" Southerners "have had the most trying governments to live under," Grant insisted that all nevertheless shared some of the responsibility for the present situation: "Violence has been rampant in some localities, and has either been justified or denied by those who could have prevented it."³⁰

The President called once more for fairness and moderation among Americans as they approached the problem of Reconstruction: "Is there not a disposition on one side to magnify wrongs and outrages,

and on the other side to belittle them or justify them?" If extremism and exaggeration could be abandoned, "a better state of feeling would be inculcated, and the sooner we would have that peace which would leave the States free indeed to regulate their own affairs. . . . Let there be fairness in the discussion of Southern questions" with everyone "condemning the wrong and upholding the right, and soon all will be well." Grant also reminded Americans that reconciliation meant not only fairness but justice: "Treat the negro as a citizen and a voter, as he is and must remain, and soon parties will be divided, not on the color line, but on principle. Then we shall have no complaint of sectional interference."³¹

In light of such sentiments, Grant could not understand Southerners who characterized him as a tyrant and despot. He reminded a delegation of South Carolinians "that after the war the North had been disposed to treat them with great kindness, but that their attitude of resistance had forced" the adoption of harsher measures. "There has never been a desire on the part of the North to humiliate the South," he asserted in 1876, a statement verified by William Lloyd Garrison, who believed that Grant and his followers "desire nothing so much as to 'let by-gones be by-gones' *in good faith*." Some Southerners agreed. "I think the fight made on him by the Southern white men has been the greatest blunder of our Southern politics," concluded Colonel John Singleton Mosby of Virginia. "I know that he was able and willing to do more for the Southern people

²⁹Richardson, ed., *Messages and Papers*, VII, 297, 307–9.

³⁰*Ibid.*, pp. 299, 313.

³¹*Ibid.*, pp. 298–99.



Grant left the White House convinced that his policy of reconciliation had failed. This photograph was taken four days before his death on July 23, 1885.

than any man . . . if the Southern politicians would have permitted him." Once, upon receiving news of more violence in Louisiana, an exasperated Grant made manifest his frustration, exclaiming, "Oh, if the South could only see!"³²

After he left the White House, Grant reluctantly conceded that his policy of conciliation had failed "because it was all on

one side. . . . There has never been a moment since Lee surrendered that I would not have gone more than halfway to meet the Southern people in a spirit of conciliation. But they have never responded to it. . . . The pacification of the South rests entirely with the South. I do not see what the North can do that has not been done, unless we surrender the results of the war." Foremost among those results were the reestablishment of the Union, the vindication of national supremacy, and the emancipation and enfranchisement of southern blacks. There was no reason to apologize for those accomplishments in pursuing sectional harmony: "I think Republicans should go as far as possible in conciliation, but not far enough

³² Fish Diary, March 27, 1874; Grant to Daniel Chamberlain, July 26, 1876, Grant Papers, Library of Congress; Garrison to Charles Sumner, Aug. 3, 1872, in Walter M. Merrill and Louis Ruchames, eds., *The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1971–1981), VI, 246; *Chicago Times*, Dec. 29, 1876, p. 1, cols. 5–6; Jesse R. Grant, *In the Days of My Father General Grant* (New York: Harper, 1925), p. 194.

to lose self-respect.” Yet Grant also realized that the alternative of massive federal intervention ran against American fears of military rule, lacked public support, and was being handcuffed by restrictive judicial decisions. To pursue such a course would also mean the abandonment of reconciliation as a goal of policy, a concession Grant was unwilling to make. Weary, frustrated, but ultimately resigned to his failure to secure the civil and political rights of blacks, he concluded: “The South has been in many ways a disappointment to me. I hoped a great deal from the South, but these hopes have been wrecked.”³³

Ironically, Grant’s gallant struggle against throat cancer in 1885 provided many Southerners with an opportunity to exhibit the spirit of reconciliation. Former foes visited him; former Confederates sent messages of support; the southern press recalled his magnanimity at Appomattox. Pleased, Grant noted these signs of good will in his memoirs: “I feel that we are on the eve of a new era, when there is to be great harmony between the Federal and Confederate. . . . I hope the good feeling inaugurated may continue to that end.” In a pile of scribbled notes composed for a concluding chapter, however, Grant gave evidence that his satisfaction was not complete. Pencilled scrawls revealed that the

dying General was still perplexed about “how the two races will get along in the future,” concluding that it was “our duty to inflict no further wrong on the Negro.”³⁴ Those passages never made it into print. Perhaps Grant’s editors believed that such comments struck a discordant note in the chorus of reconciliation; perhaps it was a tacit recognition that the price of reconciliation was the sacrifice of justice toward blacks, a price Grant was not willing to pay. For when Grant said, “Let us have peace,” he meant peace not only between North and South but also between blacks and whites. His failure to realize both goals was his country’s failure as well.

³³ John Russell Young, *Around the World with General Grant* (New York: American News Co., 1879), II, 359–61. Amos T. Akerman, Grant’s Attorney General, responded differently in 1871: “It is my individual opinion that nothing is more idle than to attempt to conciliate by kindness that portion of the southern people who are still malcontent. They take all kindness on the part of the Government as evidence of timidity, and hence are emboldened to lawlessness by it” (Akerman to E. P. Jacobson, Aug. 18, 1870, Amos T. Akerman Papers, Alderman Library, University of Virginia).

³⁴ Ulysses S. Grant, *Personal Memoirs*, II, 553–54; draft of *Personal Memoirs*, Grant Papers, Library of Congress.