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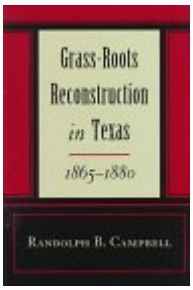

Randolph B. Campbell. *Grass-Roots Reconstruction in Texas, 1865-1880.* Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997. x + 280 pp. $35.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8071-2194-8.

Reviewed by Dale Baum (Texas A&M University)

Published on H-CivWar (May, 1998)

Randolph B. ("Mike") Campbell ranks among the best and most prolific Texas historians. He has demonstrated in many previously published articles and chapters in books that an insufficient scholarship by academic historians exists on the history of Reconstruction at the local level. One should note that there is no lack of older general histories that haphazardly present thoroughly discredited interpretations as well as basic misinformation on the impact of Reconstruction on southern communities. For this reason alone, Campbell's latest book, *Grass-Roots Reconstruction in Texas*, is an extremely important study. The author has moved boldly into difficult and unexplored territory by completing the first systematically organized survey of Reconstruction at the county level across an entire ex- Confederate state.

Campbell's goals are threefold: (1) to uncover what happened in six Texas counties spanning the period from 1865 to 1880, (2) to expose the degree of change that occurred within them, and, based on this information, (3) to arrive at some generalizations about the experience of Reconstruction at the grass-roots level. The reader is warned in the introduction that the counties selected, Colorado (Columbus), Dallas (Dallas), Harrison (Marshall), Jefferson (Beaumont), McLennan (Waco), and Nueces (Corpus Christi), although scattered geographically throughout prewar Texas, are not presented as "typical" or "representative," but serve as "case studies" (p. 4), which, in turn, allow comparisons to be made regarding how people living in these counties experienced this controversial era.

Because the author is aware of the failure of his study to show that Reconstruction (1) had a similar impact in all six counties, (2) ended in a clear-cut manner in every county for similar reasons, and (3) lasted in each county for a similar period of time, he worries that some readers might conclude that "all generalizations have disappeared in a welter of confusing and conflicting detail" (p. 6). This concern perhaps constitutes the overstatement of the year in the historical literature on Texas. The brilliance of this book is that it focuses the reader's attention precisely on those conditions most important in shaping the Reconstruction experience in each county, including not only vital roles played by the U.S. army, Freedmen's Bureau, and white unionists, but also on the equally critical impact of fundamental demographic, political, and economic factors. The book's coverage of the basic nature and impact of Reconstruction on these Texas communities is a major contribution to the history of the post-Civil War South and to the legacy of Reconstruction.

Chapter 1 provides a brief overview of Reconstruction in Texas. It contains but one trivial error of fact and arguably only one minor error of omission. The claim that statewide in 1868 "more than four-fifths (82 percent) of the newly enfranchised blacks" (p. 15) voted in

the referendum on calling a state constitutional convention, should read "more than three-fourths (76 percent)." More important, brief mention should have been made of the results of the referendum balloting on the ratification of the 1866 state constitution (held at the time of the lopsided victory of James W. Throckmorton over Elisha M. Pease for the governorship). Although conservatives stressed the dangers of defeating amendments to the constitution and thus having the antebellum state constitution remain in force, Texas voters nevertheless approved the newly drafted constitution by a surprisingly narrow majority. An abnormally high "no-vote" was cast in many counties where an anti-Richmond or "Texas First" sentiment during the final years of the war had prevailed, as well as an extreme bitterness at its end over defeat, and during Reconstruction the "most intense hatred" by white Texans toward the federal government, occupying soldiers, northerners, and the freedmen [quoted in William L. Richter, *Overreached on All Sides: Freedman's Bureau Administrators in Texas, 1865-1868* (1991)]. Failure to mention the referendum outcome and to make note subsequently of the varying degrees of support for the Constitution of 1866 within the six counties under examination squanders an additional piece of comparative information on the nature of the local white constituencies during Presidential Reconstruction.

Although Texans experienced Reconstruction differently in the six counties under study, neither former slaves nor carpetbaggers ever controlled any county's government brought into existence by Congressional Reconstruction. The leadership of white loyalists or scalawags always proved fundamental to Republican party resilience at the local level, and only the presence of federal troops and Freedmen's Bureau agents in all six counties guaranteed a semblance of fair play to ex-slaves, thereby making grass-roots Reconstruction a possibility. While issues of race and Reconstruction dominated the political landscape in Dallas, McLennan, Colorado, and Harrison counties, other concerns shaped events in Jefferson and Nueces, where blacks constituted a small minority of the population. Nueces County, with its significant Mexican-Texan population, was never "redeemed" by a clear-cut conservative victory, and Republicans at no time dominated Jefferson County politics. Both counties elected Republicans and Democrats to key positions, apparently on the basis of the personalities of candidates and the influence of local issues. However, in Dallas and McLennan, the partisan "radical versus redeemer" conflict predominated, and because demography favored the Democrats, the Republicans were eventually vanquished at the polling places and practically obliterated on the local level. In Colorado and Harrison counties, the Republicans managed to endure much longer due to a modifying influence of a German-Texan population in the former and a solid black majority in the latter. Less than fair play in 1878 by the Democrats "redeemed" Harrison County, but a Democratic county judge was not elected until 1890 in Colorado County.

Antebellum economic elites in all six counties persisted at rates comparable elsewhere, and they maintained, for the most part, their wealthy status during Reconstruction. However, freedom's first generation of African Texans benefited "a good deal more than is often recognized" (p. 231) in making economic and social progress. Not surprisingly, socioeconomic developments helped to shape local reactions to Reconstruction. Colorado, Harrison, and Jefferson grew far less rapidly in the decade after the Civil War than did Dallas, McLennan, and Nueces. Acrimonious partisan rhetoric in Dallas and Nueces was restrained by community leaders who emphasized expanding economic opportunities, whereas the counties with the slowest growth rates, Colorado and Harrison, endured higher levels of Reconstruction-era maliciousness. However, the author points out that rapidly growing McLennan County, with its high levels of violence against the freedmen, did not follow this pattern.

While Campbell's use of primary sources, including local courthouse and district court records as well as material in the National Archives, is exemplary, some of his conclusions are questionable. Admittedly, a multiethnic, especially German, population in Colorado County diluted the impact of the pervasive mean-spiritedness of most native-born southern whites toward the freedmen. The local Democratic opposition constantly strove to win over moderate German voters from their Republican party moorings. However, German votes might not have been needed, as Campbell implies, to guarantee Republican control of the county's politics through the 1870s and beyond. A comparison of military registration and federal census data suggests that in no Texas county were blacks as severely underenumerated by 1870 census takers as in Colorado. Whites also were apparently undercounted in the 1870 census, but probably not to the same extent as blacks. If so, the importance of the German vote in holding the balance of power in Colorado County partisan politics during the 1870s would be greatly reduced.

The conclusion that McLennan County experienced

"a level of violence generally unmatched elsewhere in Texas" (p. 190) confuses reported with unreported occurrences of violence. Elsewhere, especially in isolated areas of northeastern Texas, where military authorities conceded that "emancipation [had] never reached," lynchings of freedmen were so commonplace that a local Freedmen's Bureau agent admitted "it would have been a waste of time" for him to investigate or even report them [quoted from James M. Smallwood, *Time of Hope, Time of Despair: Black Texans during Reconstruction* (1981), and Smallwood article in *Journal of the West*, October 1986, p. 6]. By contrast, in McLennan County the strength of local Republican party Union League organizations, the quality of scalawag leadership, and the presence in Waco of a regional army outpost supervised by a sympathetic commanding officer, arguably rendered local blacks relatively better able to voice their complaints, if not actually to protect their lives, property, and contractual rights to a greater degree than many of their counterparts elsewhere.

Although Campbell acknowledges that the threat of organized white violence against Texas blacks was always a real and present danger, some reviewers might be perplexed to find that the Ku Klux Klan is mentioned directly only three times. More disconcerting is the author's overly cautious claim that there "is no proof that the Klan organized in Dallas County, and no particular act of violence can be traced to it" (p. 81). Admittedly, scalawags often exaggerated to some extent the level of violence against them and the freedmen, but why discount the evidence of Klan activities contained in the complaints made by Judge A. B. Norton and other Dallas County unionists? While evidence in the correspondence of scalawags might not conclusively prove the Klan organized in and around Dallas, more than a few modern-day scholars would nevertheless be willing to bet their reputations that Klan-like organizations or gangs plagued this entire North Texas area during Reconstruction. On the other hand, given the backdrop of high levels of white terrorism, it may not matter much to zero in on "the Klan" because by any other designation white terrorism was equally disreputable and disgraceful.

Given the book's stated purpose, the above criticisms or reservations hardly constitute major weaknesses. The bottom line remains that Campbell has so successfully cut thought the potentially bewildering complexity of Reconstruction at the local level that future case studies, whether focussing on the Virginia tidewater region or on the Florida panhandle, will have to address the conclusions made in this book. *Grass-Roots Reconstruction in Texas* will thus be counted among the more significant studies of Reconstruction.

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Citation: Dale Baum. Review of Campbell, Randolph B., *Grass-Roots Reconstruction in Texas, 1865-1880.* H-CivWar, H-Net Reviews. May, 1998.

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