H-Net Reviews
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Edward O. Frantz. *The Door of Hope: Republican Presidents and the First Southern Strategy, 1877-1933.* Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2011. 244 pp. $69.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8130-3653-3.

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Published on H-SHGAPE (November, 2011)

Commissioned by K. Stephen Prince (University of South Florida)

Republican Presidents Woo the South, 1877-1933

From 1867 to 1877, Republicans had tried to reconstruct southern society on the basis of equal rights for whites and African Americans. Not only did this comport with the views of a shaky majority of northerners, but it also promised political support from newly enfranchised black southerners and those southern whites attracted by Republican promises of economic development. By 1877 most Republican leaders had concluded that the program was a failure. Moreover, it was no longer politically viable. It appeared to have lost the support of a majority of voters in the North. In the South, the national depression that began in 1873 wrecked the Republican economic program, eliminating the basis for the partyâs appeal to whites, who united to drive Republicans from office and nullify African American political power.[1]

The events of 1873-77 left the two political parties evenly matched, with Republicans holding much of the North and Democrats dominating what was coming to be known as the Solid South. A few northern swing states held the balance of power. In these circumstances, Republicans were desperate to establish viable parties in the South. The last major descriptions of their efforts to do so were published some fifty years ago.[2]

Now, Edward O. Frantz, associate professor of history at the University of Indianapolis, approaches the subject from the perspective of the tours of the South undertaken by Republican presidents from Rutherford B. Hayes to Herbert Hoover. The book seems most appropriate for the scholarly community, although it is certainly accessible enough for a general readership. Frantzâs prose is clear and straightforward, but his editors have failed him. His important scholarly contribution is marred by occasional misspellings, poor word choices, clichÃ©s, and awkward constructions.

Although the subtitle implies a broader study, Frantz concentrates on the trips themselves and the reaction to them. An introduction introduces the themes, and then a chapter is devoted to each presidential excursion, except in the case of President William Howard Taft, whose many southern excursions are covered in a single chapter. Frantz devotes most attention to the political as-

pects of the tours, but he also places them within the development of presidential campaigning, the growing importance of the presidency in the political system, and changes in newspaper reporting.

Each chapter begins with a summary, which is followed by a detailed account. Frantz provides the political context of each tour, based mainly on secondary sources; a discussion of each presidentâs racial attitudes, based on both primary and secondary sources; a description of the presidential entourage, where it traveled, and what the presidents said, based mostly on newspaper accounts; and finally the political reaction, based mainly on editorials from a judicious selection of northern, southern, and African American newspapers. Frantz also provides some inside perspectives gleaned from the papers of the presidents and their associates.

Frantzâs introduction promises a nuanced discussion of how southern Democrats, white southern Republicans, and African Americans presented themselves to the presidents and the American public during the excursions–both in words and in the symbolism of the venues, ceremonies, and audiences. But the analysis of this aspect of the presidential trips is thin and often seems superficial. What, for example, was the significance of flying the Confederate flag as military companies accompanied Hayes through the streets of Atlanta? Frantz acknowledges that the flag âstood for a whole host of meanings,â but he mentions only ârecalcitrance and resistanceâ (p. 43). But displaying the Confederate flag may rather have been a manifestation of regional pride as well as a test of whether white southerners could manifest that pride without offending the president. White southerners may have flown the flag as a symbol of reconciliation rather than resistance–meant to symbolize a reconciliation based on respect rather than submission. It may have been meant to demonstrate to Hayes and the North that regional pride could be reconciled with loyalty and even patriotism. Displaying the Confederate flag to the president probably was a celebration of his repudiation of sectional politics as well as a graphic representation of his position to the nation. It may also have signaled that regional pride was consistent with respect for a Republican president, and perhaps even political support. Investigating these and other possibilities would require a deeper analysis of southern attitudes during Reconstruction and after than Frantz is prepared to offer.

Frantz attends closely to what the presidents said to white and mixed audiences and to what they said before primarily African American audiences. Like David Blight (in *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* [2001]), whose influential interpretation he follows, Frantz places the presidentsâ rhetoric in the context of the national movement toward sectional reconciliation at the expense of racial justice. Presidents Hayes, Benjamin Harrison, and William McKinley all sought to win support for the Republican Party in what were ostensibly nonpolitical visits to the South. They attempted to woo white southerners while still exhibiting sympathy for black southerners. Hayesâs trip was a manifestation and test of his program to win white support by reaching out to former Whigs, repudiating the âcorruptâ elements in the southern Republican Party, and acknowledging white political primacy. Harrison toured the South in the wake of the disastrous failure of the Lodge Federal Elections bill, dubbed the âForce Actâ by its opponents. McKinley first traveled South to join Atlantaâs celebration of victory in the Spanish-American War. He did so as southern whites were moving to disfranchise African American voters and mandate racial segregation. Each president carefully limited his exposure to African Americans, implicitly acknowledged white social and political supremacy, and paternalistically encouraged African Americans to be patient as they developed the skills and character that would entitle them to full citizenship. In 1898 McKinley naturally linked this advice to Booker T. Washingtonâs program of African American self-improvement. By the time McKinley returned to the South in 1901, white supremacy was firmly established and he made no effort to camouflage a program to advance southern Republicanism with its context.

The petulant Theodore Roosevelt was decidedly vexed at the hostile southern reaction to his appointment of a few African Americans to significant federal offices in the South and to his association with Washington. Nonetheless he too downplayed racial justice in his swing through the South in 1905, offering African Americans the same paternalistic advice as his predecessors, foreshadowing the hostile position he would take in the Brownsville affair. Taftâs frequent southern excursions were aimed solely at winning white support and âmade possible the final erosion of African American issues and rights on the national sceneâ (p. 229). Hooverâs speech at Elizabethton, Tennessee, after he had carried five Deep South states in the election of 1928, represented âa final coda in the long sagaâ of Republican presidential tours. Although his hope to win long-term southern support for the Republican Party collapsed along with the American economy, it was âa watershed momentâ that foretold the partyâs Southern Strategy later in the twentieth century

(p. 231).

Frantz describes the mixed response of the northern press to the different presidential tours. He makes a special effort to detail the response of African American newspaper editors, beginning with Harrisonâs tour. (Not much of a black press existed until the 1880s, and Frantz does not investigate other sources to discern the African American response to Hayesâs trip.) With only occasional exceptions, black editors criticized the presidentsâ temporizing over racial justice and their overtures to southern racists. They were particularly concerned when Republican presidents failed to appoint African Americans to patronage positions traditionally reserved to them, rightly seeing the connection between such decisions and the courtship of white southerners during the southern excursions.

Frantz provides a lot of information about the Republican presidential tours of the South that will be new even to specialists in the history of American race relations. But his analysis is not deep and rarely goes beyond a few suggestive sentences. For example, he recognizes the implications of Harrisonâs encomiums to the supremacy of law in 1891, in the wake of the defeat of the Lodge Federal Elections bill. He notes the old soldierâs âfondness for the flanking movement over the frontal assaultâ on matters of racial justice (p. 71). But rather than assessing the politics of Harrisonâs approach, he criticizes him for failing to attack racial injustice directly. Like most historians of race and reconciliation after Reconstruction, Frantz is morally offended by such temporizing. Frantz asks how forthright the presidents were in condemning racial injustice, how far they went in conciliating white southern racism. The answer, of course, is not far enough. In his view, reconciliation came at the expense of racial justice and deserves historical condemnation.

The problem with this approach is that it may obscure the way that Republicans sought support in the South and understate the significance of the differences they perceived among white southernersâ racial attitudes. Although Frantz lists Charles W. Calhounâs *Conceiving a New Republic: The Republican Party and the Southern Question, 1869-1900* (2008) in his bibliography, there is no indication that he perceives the challenge it poses to the simple abandonment-of-racial-justice thesis that characterizes the present historiography of race relations after Reconstruction. Frantz does not appear to see much difference between southern paternalists like Wade Hampton and bitter racists like Ben Tillman. A hundred years of history between the first and second Reconstructions has made clear that southern moderate paternalists were unable and unwilling to stand up to racial extremists. However, Republicans did not know that in the decades immediately following Reconstruction.

Frantzâs description of the southern tours makes clear that the Republican presidents consistently encouraged the paternalists, even when speaking to African American audiences. Like the gradualist Washington, they stressed that African Americans were in the process of becoming valuable citizens. They assured black audiences that this effort would be rewarded with the full rights of citizenship once they earned the respect of their white fellow citizens. These speeches, often publicized throughout the South and the nation, may have been aimed at white as well as black southerners. They implicitly posited a dividing line between white southerners who supported African American education and would endorse equal political rights once African Americans no longer presented a threat to the social and economic order, and those who opposed black education and any recognition of black citizenship.

Frantz demonstrates that much of the African American press seems to have regarded this effort as futile. Black editors knew that it meant the rejection of a more forceful alternative. But Republican paternalism may not have been merely a fig leaf to cover the abandonment of black southerners to the merciless racists of the South. The presidents may have been offering a deal to white southern conservatives: come over to a conservative Republican Party that promotes the economic interests of men like yourselves, retain political control of your states but recognize the civil and political rights of black southerners when they are educated to responsible citizenship under the tutelage of their own conservative elites. Black votes would sustain rather than threaten such a conservative political order, providing a bulwark to agrarian radicalism. That was the same deal Washington seemed to offer the white South, and a good deal of the African American pressâs reaction to the presidential tours may have involved black editorsâ assessments of its justice, its relationship to African American interests, and its practicality.

Frantz never addresses this possibility, instead highlighting the presidentsâ failure to confront racial injustice and implicitly condemning their own racial paternalism. It is, I think, an opportunity lost. Nonetheless, Frantz has investigated an almost unstudied aspect of Republican sectional and racial politics in the fifty years or so after 1877. His conclusions fit well within the dom-

inant historiography and will be cited to bolster it. He makes an important contribution to our knowledge, and his assessment is important both for what it does say and what it does not say.

Notes

[1]. The starting point for any investigation of Reconstruction is Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: Americaâs Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877* (New York: Harper and Row, 1988). For the Republican politics of Reconstruction, see Michael Les Benedict, âThe Politics of Reconstruction,â in *Preserving the Constitution: Essays on Politics and the Constitution in the Reconstruction Era* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006), 93-128. For the significance of the economic depression beginning with the panic of 1873, both North and South, see Nicolas Barreyre, âThe Politics of Economic Crises: The Panic of 1873, the End of Reconstruction, and the Realignment of American Politics,â *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 10 (October 2011): 403-423.

[2]. Vincent P. De Santis, *Republicans Face the Southern Question: The New Departure Years, 1877-1897* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1959); and Stanley P. Hirshson, *Farewell to the Bloody Shirt: Northern Republicans and the Southern Negro, 1877-1893* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1962).

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Citation: Michael Les Benedict. Review of Frantz, Edward O., *The Door of Hope: Republican Presidents and the First Southern Strategy, 1877-1933.* H-SHGAPE, H-Net Reviews. November, 2011.

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