

Stephen B. Oates



P O R T R A I T  
*of* **A**merica

FIFTH EDITION

VOLUME II  
from 1865

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# PORTRAIT OF AMERICA

FIFTH EDITION

VOLUME II

*From Reconstruction  
to the Present*

STEPHEN B. OATES

UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS, AMHERST

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## PREFACE TO THE FIFTH EDITION

Like its predecessors, the Fifth Edition of this anthology stresses the human side of history, suggesting how the interaction of people and events shaped the course of the American past. As I compiled selections for *Portrait of America*, my primary criteria were that they be well written and suffused with human interest and insight. I chose essays, narratives, and biographical portraits that humanize American history, portraying it as the story of real people who actually lived, who struggled, enjoyed triumphs, suffered failures and anxieties, just like people in our own time. I hope that the anthology is an example of humanistic history at its best, the kind that combines scrupulous and engaging scholarship with a compelling narrative style. My feeling is that, since college survey audiences are not professional ones, they might enjoy reading history if it presents the past in exciting and readable form.

The Fifth Edition of Volume II has been considerably revised. Although it retains the best and most popular selections of the previous edition, I have rewritten the introductions to several of them. The Fifth Edition also features fifteen new selections, some of which — Robert M. Utley's treatment of post-Civil War white-Indian conflicts, Robert L. Heilbroner's portrait of Andrew Carnegie, Stephen E. Ambrose's analysis of the Ike Age, Marcia Cohen's account of Betty Friedan and the shattering of "the feminine mystique," and Robert J. Samuelson's assessment of Ronald Reagan — replace and improve upon earlier selections on similar topics. Other new selections focus on topics not previously covered — the conditions of workers (men, women, and children) in

the Gilded Age, the enemies of the American empire in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the exploits and cyclonic personality of Theodore Roosevelt, Woodrow Wilson and the League of Nations, The West Virginia coal-mine war of the 1920s, the women defense workers of the Second World War, the story of the Cold War as seen in the 1951 Truman-MacArthur confrontation, and the social and cultural trends of the 1980s.

In all, there is more social and women's history in this edition than in any previous one. This coverage reflects the growing scholarship and popularity of these relatively new fields of historical study. Yet plenty of political history is gathered here as well. As a result, I hope *Portrait of America* is now more balanced than ever, for it offers samplings of virtually every kind of history — men's and women's, black and white, social and cultural, political and military, urban and economic, national and local — so that students can appreciate the rich diversity of the American experience.

The anthology is intended for use largely in college survey courses. It could be utilized as a supplement to a textbook or to a list of paperback readings. Or it could serve as the basic text. The book is organized into thirteen parts according to periods or themes; each part contains two or three related selections. This organization allows readers to make comparisons and contrasts between different events or viewpoints. Introductions set the selections in proper context and tie them all together so that they can be read more or less as connected episodes.

Study questions following the selections are de-

signed to raise thought-provoking issues and to help students make comparisons and contrasts between the selections. The questions also help students review the readings and suggest points for class discussion.

In putting the Fifth Edition together, I drew on the expertise of congenial and enthusiastic colleagues across the country. I owe special thanks to Professor Charles J. Errico of Northern Virginia Community College, who provided generous critiques of both volumes, reported the response of his students to previous editions, and offered cogent critical suggestions. My gratitude, too, to Dr. Karen Smith, who wrote study questions for the new selections, composed captions for the illustrations, and offered constructive criticism. I am indebted to Professor Betty L. Mitchell of Southeastern Massachusetts University for contributing the original study questions and giving excellent advice about selections on women's history. Professor Joyce Berkman of the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, also counseled me on women's history. I am indebted to the following professors for reviewing one or both volumes:

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S.B.O

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# I

## THE POSTWAR YEARS



## Reconstruction: *The Revolution That Failed*

JAMES MACGREGOR BURNS

*In the closing days of the Civil War, the pace of momentous events was almost too much to comprehend. On April 2, 1865, Confederate President Jefferson Davis fled a blazing Richmond with his family and Cabinet members; three days later Union troops occupied the rebel capital. On April 9, Robert E. Lee surrendered the Army of Northern Virginia; five days later, on Good Friday, John Wilkes Booth shot Lincoln at Ford's Theater, and Lincoln joined the 360,000 Union dead he himself had immortalized. By then, the dream of an independent slaveowning South was dead as well.*

*In the mansion of a Virginia plantation, a young black woman found whites crying over a report that Yankee troops had captured Jefferson Davis. The young woman went down to a spring, alone, and there cried out, "Glory, glory, hallelujah to Jesus! I's free! I's free!" Suddenly afraid, she looked about, then fell to the ground and kissed it, thanking "Master Jesus" over and over. For her, freedom meant hope — hope that she could find her husband and four children who had been sold to a slave trader.*

*Other blacks celebrated their liberation in public. In Athens, Georgia, they danced around a liberty pole; in Charleston, they paraded through the streets. Many blacks, however, were wary and uncertain. "You're joking me," a black man said when his master told him he was free. He asked some neighbors if they were free also. "I couldn't believe we was all free alike," he said. Some blacks, out of feelings of obligation or compassion, remained on the home place to help their former masters.*

But others were hostile. Through generations of one black family comes the story of Caddy, who had been badly treated as a slave. When she heard that the war was over, she threw her hoe down, marched up to the big house, found the mistress, and flipped her dress up. She told the white woman, "kiss my ass!"

Southern whites, by turns, were angry, helpless, vindictive, resigned, and heartsick. Their cherished South was not just defeated; it was annihilated. Some 260,000 rebel soldiers, the flower of southern manhood, were dead and thousands more were maimed and crippled for life. The South's major cities were in ruins, her railroads and industry desolated, her commerce paralyzed, and two-thirds of her assessed wealth, including billions of dollars in slaves, destroyed. As James MacGregor Burns says in *The Workshop of Democracy* (1985), from which the following selection is excerpted, "Many [white Southerners] were already grieving over sons, plantations, and fortunes taken by war; losing their blacks was the final blow." Some masters shot or hanged blacks who proclaimed their freedom. That was a harbinger of what was to follow in the years of Reconstruction, for most white southerners were certain that their cause had been just and were entirely unrepentant about fighting against the Union. A popular ballad captured the current mood in conquered Dixie:

Oh, I'm a good ole Rebel, now that's just what I am  
For this fair land of freedom I do not care a damn,  
I'm glad I fit against it, I only wish't we'd won  
And I don't want no pardon for nothin' what I done. . . .

I hates the Yankee nation and everything they do  
I hates the Declaration of Independence too  
I hates the glorious Union, 'tis dripping with our blood  
And I hate the striped banner, I fit it all I could. . . .

I can't take up my musket and fight 'em now no mo'  
But I ain't gonna love 'em and that is certain sho'  
And I don't want no pardon for what I was and am  
And I won't be reconstructed and I don't care a damn.

In Washington, Republican leaders were jubilant in victory and determined to deal firmly with southern whites in order to preserve the fruits of the war. But what about the new president, Andrew Johnson? A profane, hard-drinking Tennessee Democrat who bragged about his plebeian origins, Johnson had been the only southern senator to oppose secession openly. He had sided with the Union, served as war governor of Tennessee, and become Lincoln's running mate in 1864, on a Union ticket comprising both Republicans and War Democrats. Thanks to Booth's pistol shot, Johnson was

now president, and he faced one of the most difficult tasks ever to confront an American chief executive: how to bind the nation's wounds, preserve black freedom, and restore the southern states to their proper places in the Union.

Lincoln had contemplated an army of occupation for the South, thinking that military force might be necessary to protect the former slaves and prevent the old southern leadership from returning to power. Now there was such an army in the South: some 200,000 Union troops had moved in to restore order there and to perform whatever reconstruction duties Johnson might ask of them.

Initially, Republican leaders were hopeful about Johnson, for in talking about his native region he seemed tough, even uncompromising. But as he set about restoring defeated Dixie, Johnson alarmed and then enraged congressional Republicans by adopting a soft, conciliatory reconstruction policy. The president not only opposed granting blacks the right to vote, but allowed former Confederates to return to power in the southern states. He stood by as they adopted black codes that reduced blacks to a virtual condition of peonage, and he hotly opposed congressional interference in the reconstruction process. He even urged southern states to reject the Fourteenth Amendment, pushed through Congress by the Republicans, which would protect southern blacks. The projected amendment would prevent the states from enacting laws that abridged "the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States." It would also bar the states from depriving "any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law," or from denying any person the "equal protection of the law." Johnson did more than just oppose the amendment; he damned Republican leaders like Charles Sumner of Massachusetts and Thaddeus Stevens of Pennsylvania, calling them tyrants and traitors. He even campaigned against the Republican party in the 1866 off-year elections. As a consequence, he alienated moderate as well as radical Republicans, who soon united against him. When the 1866 elections gave the Republicans huge majorities in both houses of Congress, they set out to take control of Reconstruction and to reform the South themselves.

This sets the scene for Burns's account of Republican Reconstruction. Burns believes that it was a revolutionary experiment that failed. He does not, of course, subscribe to the outmoded interpretation of Reconstruction as a misguided attempt to "put the colored people on top" in the South and turn the region over to hordes of beady-eyed carpetbaggers and roguish scalawags intent on "stealing the South blind." In the old view, Reconstruction was "a blackout of honest government," a time when the "Southern people were put to the torch," a period so rife with "political rancor, and social violence and disorder," that nothing good came out of it. Since the 1930s, modern scholarship has systematically rejected this interpretation and the antiblack prejudice that underlay it. Drawing on modern studies of the period, Burns argues that the Republican Congress did go too far in trying to centralize power in the legislative



*branch. But he is sympathetic to Republican efforts to bring southern blacks into the American mainstream, to grant them political, social, and educational opportunities for self-advancement. On this score, however, the Republicans did not go far enough, for they failed to provide blacks with the economic security they needed to be truly free in America. Alas, that failure was to plague black Americans for generations to come.*

FOR A BRIEF FLEETING MOMENT in history — from late 1866 to almost the end of the decade — radical senators and congressmen led the Republican party in an audacious venture in both the organization and the goals of political power. To a degree that would have astonished the constitution-makers of earlier years, they converted the eighty-year-old system of checks and balances into a highly centralized, majoritarian system that elevated the legislative branch, subordinated the executive and judicial branches, and suspended federalism and “states’ rights” in the South. They turned the Constitution on its head. The aims of these leaders were indeed revolutionary — to reverse age-old human and class relationships in the South and to raise millions of people to a much higher level of economic, political, social, and educational self-fulfillment. That such potent means could not in the end produce such humane and democratic ends was the ultimate tragedy of this revolutionary experiment.

This heroic effort was not conducted by men on white horses, but rather by quarrelsome parliamentarians — by a Congress that seemed to one of its members as never “more querulous, distracted, in-

coherent and ignoble.” In the Senate, [Charles] Sumner had good reason to be distracted, for he had married a woman half his age shortly before the [1866] election and was preoccupied first by marital bliss and very soon by marital distress as he and his wife found themselves hopelessly incompatible. His colleagues found him more remote and unpredictable than ever. In the House, [Thaddeus] Stevens worked closely with his Radical allies, but he was now desperately anxious to move swiftly ahead, for he knew that time was running out for him and perhaps for his cause. Rising on the House floor, he now presented the countenance of death, with his dourly twisted mouth, deeply sunken eyes, parchment skin, and a body so wasted that he often conducted business from a couch just outside the chamber. But the old man never lost his ferocious drive to dominate; as he spoke, his eyes lighted up in a fierce gleam and his croaking voice turned thunderous, while he stretched his bony arm out in a wide sweep and punctuated his arguments with sudden thrusts of his long yellow forefinger.

The strength of the Republican party lay in the advanced positions of these two men but even more in the quality and commitment of other party leaders in both houses. Some of these men — John Sherman, James A. Garfield, James G. Blaine — would gain fame in the decades ahead. Others . . . would fade into the mists of history. Occupying almost

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From *The Workshop of Democracy* by James MacGregor Burns. Copyright © 1981 by James MacGregor Burns. Reprinted by permission of Alfred A. Knopf, Inc.

every hue on the party rainbow, these men differed sharply and disputed mightily, but they felt they had a clear election mandate to establish civil and other rights in the South; they had a strong sense of party solidarity; and they had the backing of rank-and-file senators and representatives and of party organizations throughout the North.

They also had a common adversary in Andrew Johnson. The President stewed over his election defeat, but he would make no fundamental change in his political and legislative strategy. Setbacks seemed only to mire him more deeply in his own resentments. . . . He received little independent advice from his Cabinet, which appeared to believe that the beleaguered President needed above all their loyalty. [Secretary of War Edwin] Stanton dissented on occasion but, characteristically, Johnson did not wholly trust him. As the President stuck to the disintegrating political center and the Republicans moved toward a radical posture, the legislative stage was set for drama and conflict.

The upshot was a burst of legislative creativity in the "hundred days" of winter 1866-67:

*December 14, 1866:* Congress enacts black suffrage for the District of Columbia, later reenacts it over Johnson's veto. *January 7, 1867:* the House adopts [James M.] Ashley's resolution instructing the Judiciary Committee to "inquire into the conduct of Andrew Johnson." *January 22:* Congress grants itself authority to call itself into special session, a right recognized until now as belonging only to the President. *March 2:* all on the same day, Congress passes a basic act laying out its general plan of political reconstruction; in effect deprives the President of command of the army; and enacts the Tenure of Office Act barring the Chief Executive from removing officials appointed by and with the advice of the Senate, without Senate approval. *March 23:* Congress passes a supplementary Reconstruction Act requiring military commanders to start registering "loyal" voters.

The heart of congressional strategy to democra-

tize the South lay in the first Reconstruction Act of March 2, 1867, as clarified, strengthened, and implemented in later acts. With the ostensible purpose of restoring social order and republican government in the South, and on the premise that the existing "Johnson" state regimes there could not realize these ends or even protect life or property, the South was divided into five military districts subject to martial law. The commanders were empowered not only to govern — to suppress disorder, protect life and property, remove civil officeholders — but to initiate political reconstruction by enrolling qualified voters including blacks, and excluding the disloyal. To be restored to the Union, the Southern states must call new constitutional conventions that, elected under universal manhood suffrage, in turn must establish new state governments that would guarantee black suffrage and ratify the Fourteenth Amendment. These states would be eligible for representation in the national legislature only after Congress had approved their state constitutions and after the Fourteenth Amendment had become part of the Constitution.

It was a radical's dream, a centralist's heaven — and a states'-righter's nightmare. Congress held all the governmental strings in its hands. No more exquisite punishment could have been devised for secessionists than to make them conform to national standards in reconstructing their own state governments and gaining restoration to the Union. Congress did not stop with upsetting the division of powers between nation and states; it overturned the separation of powers [between the executive and legislative branches of the national government]. In 1868, congressional Republicans sought to remove Johnson by a method never before used against an American president. The Republican-controlled House impeached Johnson on various partisan charges, including his defiance of the Tenure of Office Act and his efforts to undermine the Reconstruction Act, but the Senate failed to convict him by just one vote short of the two-thirds required for



removal. Thus ended the first and last attempt to impeach an American president for political reasons. Even so, Johnson's presidency was irreparably damaged; he served out his last year in office, as truculent as ever. The Republicans, meanwhile, nominated war hero Ulysses S. Grant as their candidate in the 1868 presidential election. Since Grant had maintained ties with congressional Republicans and seemed genuinely militant in his stance on reconstruction, congressional Republicans were certain that he would cooperate with them. That November, Grant defeated Democratic candidate Horatio Seymour by winning all but three northern states and polling 52.7 percent of the popular vote.]

Some Radical Republicans now were more optimistic than ever. Grant's election, they felt, provided a supreme and perhaps final opportunity to reconstruct the South. Now the Republicans had their own men in the White House; they still controlled both houses of Congress; they had established their supremacy over the Supreme Court; they had considerable influence over the federal military and civilian bureaucracy in the South. They still had the power to discipline the Southern states, by admitting them to the Union or expelling them. The Republicans had pushed through the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Amendments. They still possessed the ablest, most experienced political leadership in the nation. Stevens had died during the campaign, but Sumner had been handsomely reelected in Massachusetts. "So at last I have conquered; after a life of struggle," the senator said.

Other Radicals were less sanguine. They knew that far more than Andrew Johnson had thwarted Reconstruction. The national commitment to black equality was weak, the mechanisms of government faulty, and even with the best of intentions and machinery, the connecting line between a decision in Washington and an actual outcome affecting a black family in Virginia or Mississippi was long and fragile. Time and again, voters had opposed black wrongs without favoring black rights. Before the

war, they had fought the extension of slavery but not slavery where it existed. During the war, they had come to approve emancipation only after Lincoln issued his proclamation. After the war, in a number of state elections—especially those of 1867—Northerners had shown that they favored black suffrage in the South but not at home.

Spurred by effective leaders, Americans were moving toward racial justice, but the journey was agonizingly slow and meandering. "It took America three-quarters of a century of agitation and four years of war to learn the meaning of the word 'Liberty,'" the *American Freedman* editorialized. "God grant to teach us by easier lessons the meaning of the words 'equal rights.'" How quickly and firmly Americans moved ahead on black rights could turn significantly on continuing moral and political leadership.

The crucial issue after Grant's election was the right of blacks to vote. Republican leaders in Congress quickly pushed ahead with the Fifteenth Amendment, which declared in its final form that the "right of the citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude." It was a noble sentiment that had emerged out of a set of highly mixed motives. Democrats charged, with some reason, that the majority party was far less interested in legalizing the freedman's vote in the South than in winning the black vote in the North. But the Republican leadership, knowing that countless whites in the North opposed black voting there, were responding to the demands of morality as well as practicality. Senator Henry Wilson reminded his colleagues that the "whole struggle in this country to give equal rights and equal privileges to all citizens of the United States has been an unpopular one; that we have been forced to struggle against passions and prejudices engendered by generations of wrong and oppression." He estimated that the struggle had cost his party a quarter of a million

votes. Another Republican senator, however, contended that in the long run adherence to “equality of rights among men” had been not a source of party weakness but of its strength and power. . . .

If political morality in the long run meant political practicality, the Fifteenth Amendment nevertheless bore all the markings of compromise. To gain the two-thirds support constitutionally required in each chamber, the sponsors were compelled to jettison clauses that would have outlawed property qualifications and literacy tests. The amendment provided only that Congress and the states could not deny the vote, rather than requiring them to take positive action to secure black suffrage; nor was there any provision against denial of vote by mobs or other private groups. And of course the amendment did not provide for female voting — and so the National Woman Suffrage Association opposed it.

Still, radicals in and out of Congress were elated when the Fifteenth cleared Congress, elated even more when the measure became part of the Constitution in March 1870, after Republican state parties helped drive it through the required number of legislatures. . . .

The legal right of blacks to vote soon produced a phenomenon in Southern politics — black legislators, judges, superintendents of education, lieutenant governors and other state officials, members of Congress, and even two United States senators. These, however, made up only a fraction of Southern officeholders: in none of the legislatures did blacks hold a majority, except briefly in South Carolina’s lower house. Usually black leaders shared power with “carpetbaggers” — white Northerners who came south and became active in politics as Republicans — and “scalawags” — white Southerners who cooperated with Republicans and blacks. While many black leaders were men of “ability and integrity,” in [historian] Kenneth Stampp’s view, the whites and blacks together comprised a mixed lot of the corrupt and the incorruptible, moderate

and extreme, opportunistic and principled, competent and ignorant. The quality of state government under such leadership also was mixed, but on the whole probably no worse than that of many state and local governments of the time. The state governments in the South bore unusually heavy burdens, moreover — demoralization and poverty in the wake of a devastating war, the need to build or rebuild public services throughout the region, the corrupting influence of contractors, speculators, and promoters seeking subsidies, grants, contracts, franchises, and land.

Far more important than the reality of black-and-white rule in the South was the perverted image of it refracted through the distorted lenses of Southern eyes. It was not easy for the white leadership to see newly freed men . . . occupy positions of prestige and power; and it was perhaps inevitable that they would caricature the new rulers to the world. A picture emerged of insolent boors indulging in legislative license, lording it over downtrodden whites, looting the public treasury, bankrupting the state, threatening white traditions, womanhood, and purity. . . .

The worse fear of the old white leadership — that black-and-white rule would produce a social revolution — turned out to be the least warranted of all. The mixed rule of blacks, scalawags, and carpetbaggers produced a few symbolic and actual changes: rhetoric drawn directly from the Declaration of Independence proclaiming liberty, “equality of all persons before the law,” various civil and political rights; a mild effort in two or three states to integrate certain educational institutions; a feeble effort at land reform. [Southern state] constitutions were made somewhat more democratic, legislative apportionment less discriminatory, more offices elective; “rights of women were enlarged, tax systems were made more equitable, penal codes were reformed, and the number of crimes punishable by death was reduced,” in Stampp’s summation. The constitution of South Carolina — the state that had served