Carpetbagger's Crusade
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For two years following the conclusion of the Civil War the terms of reunion remained undecided. During these years the bold restoration to power of recent Confederate leaders and the persecution of Negroes and unionists in the South caused increasing concern in the North. Many northerners apparently feared that a coalition between northern and southern Democrats might capture control of the Federal government and negate the moral, economic, and political results of the war. To prevent this, several groups—including Republican officeholders, economic interests fearful of the agrarian West and South, sympathetic allies of southern Negroes and unionists, and intense anti-Confederates—were prepared to unite in support of stronger Federal policies. The South's rejection of the Fourteenth Amendment strengthened this tendency and helped promote the Reconstruction Acts of 1867, which temporarily restored Federal military supremacy in the South and summoned conventions to revise the constitutions of the southern states. Those Confederates proscribed by the terms of the rejected Fourteenth Amendment were barred from participating in this procedure, delegates were to be elected by all males over twenty-one without distinction of race, and the states were instructed to enfranchise the same electorate in their new constitutions. Negro suffrage had arrived and could obviously control the balance of power in North Carolina.

Many Conservatives reluctantly accepted these acts as law, but Tourgée discovered that to others “the humiliation that came through the enfranchisement of the Negro was a new aggression, an inconceivable insult and degradation.”¹ The lawyer and planter David

¹ Tourgée, An Appeal to Caesar, 46.
Schenck, who would publicly debate against Tourgee during the year, confided prophetic words to his journal. This great evil of Negro suffrage will not be tolerated, wrote Schenck, “for the white race will not suffer this outrage without bloody resentment and if it cannot be done by force it will be done by assassinations [sic] and secret means of revenge.” Why, Schenck wondered, was he thus debased beneath his former slaves, when he had always discharged his duty to society and family and had “eaten no man’s bread, or taken ought unjustly from anyone.”

The reaction to Negro suffrage was actually less rigid than the words of Tourgee and Schenck suggested. Some Conservatives had earlier endorsed qualified Negro suffrage, and for several months the Conservative party seriously wooed the Negro vote. Negro leaders were lauded, Negro meetings were described as “quiet, orderly and attentive” with a “uniform appearance of order and decorum,” the sentiments of these meetings were approved, and even Negro laborers were accorded new respect. According to a northern reporter, an optimistic hallucination prevailed among the landowners of the state regarding their ability to win Negro votes. Their illusions were soon to disappear.

The Union party had endorsed qualified Negro suffrage before the Reconstruction Acts were passed, and, consistent with its policy of “unconditional submission,” it readily accepted the new Reconstruction program. Although Conservatives had hopefully predicted that many men would desert Holden over the issue of Negro suffrage, most of his followers accepted the new radical measure as the necessary result of Conservative recalcitrance or continued to endorse submission as the wisest policy. Others were more jubilant, welcoming the Reconstruction Acts “with feelings of Joy” and seeing in the Negro voter a possible means of political victory, and for a number of reasons, Holden’s following would seek Negro support with greater success than the Con-

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2 Journal of David Schenck, V, 84–85, David Schenck Papers, Southern Historical Collection.

3 Greensboro Patriot, March 29, April 26, May 11, 31, 1867; Raleigh Sentinel, March 1, July 15, 1867; Wilmington Daily Journal, May 23, 1867; Plymouth Report, September 16, 1867, NCFBR, Box 423.


5 William F. Henderson and others to Thaddeus Stevens, March 4, 1867, Padgett (ed.), “Reconstruction Letters,” NCHR, XXI (1944), 242–44. But for the increasing importance of caste and racist beliefs in alienating other unionists, see especially the Benjamin S. Hedrick Papers, Duke University Library.
servatives. Union party leaders accepted the Negro with greater grace and unanimity, their past record was better, they were in closer harmony with northern Republicans, and, as reformers, they could promise the Negro more. Above all, perhaps, was their participation in a new party, the North Carolina Republican party, whose name alone had almost irresistible allure.

Tourgée was perplexed by these developments. He was reluctant to ally himself with the Holdenites, and he was not enthusiastic about the Reconstruction program. Believing that Congress had finally endorsed the correct principles, but fondly harking back to the territorial plan, he doubted the possibility of success. Despite his skepticism, there was little choice for Tourgée. The Holdenites now endorsed all his principles, and a new and powerful union was being forged between Negroes, unionists, reformers, and Union party men. He could join and help direct this coalition, or remain in a political wilderness. There was a fighting chance of victory, and since Tourgée’s major objection to the Reconstruction program was that it might fail, he could hardly let it go by default. Reluctantly accepting his new allies, Tourgée entered the fray with vigor.

Of course old hostilities between the straitest sect and the Holdenites lingered, and Conservatives continued to recall the previous Confederate and anti-Negro activities of Holden, Settle, and other Union party men. Conservative reminiscences contained more half- than whole truths, but Tourgée and others were anxious to take the bait. Having pioneered in the demand for a radical reconstruction, they were suspicious and resentful of the leading role seized by Holden’s political machine. But northern Republicans now viewed Holden as an ally and Tourgée as a disruptor, and a national Union League leader, James M. Edmunds, tactfully criticized Tourgée. Holden was greatly needed, advised Edmunds, as they were all in a common struggle and “the general good of the cause” demanded a “united front.” Apologizing for its past discord, Tourgée’s Union Register bowed in the desired direction: “Now is the time for Union among Unionists. A strong, hearty pull and a pull all together is what is needed now. Let the L.R.L., the U.L.A. and what-

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6 Rufus Y. McAden to Tourgée, [early 1867], Tourgée Papers.
7 Edmunds to Tourgée, March 3, 1867, Tourgée Papers.
soever else there may be, 'red strings' or 'hemp strings,' whose animating principle is loyalty to the Union, muster in force." 8

A month later Holden appointed Tourgée a deputy member of the Grand Council of the Union League, but embers still smoldered.

Meanwhile the state Republican party was in the process of formation. Immediately after the passage of the first Reconstruction Act, various Union party legislators summoned a convention to meet on March 27, 1867, to discuss the implementation of Reconstruction. One hundred white delegates representative of various factions were designated by name (they included Tourgée and his coeditor, A. B. Chapin), and Negro leaders were contacted to secure Negro representation. The interracial gathering that assembled on that date, under the slogan “Union, Liberty, Equality,” made a conspicuous display of the new equality between Negro and white, and against the tactical protests of some moderates, the convention proclaimed the creation of the North Carolina Republican party.9

The prominence of the Holdenites in this convention rekindled old suspicions. A. B. Chapin attended and complained that debate was suppressed. Tourgée was unable to attend, as he was then in Washington, D.C., seeking financial assistance for his tottering newspapers. However, a letter from him was read before the convention, which apologized for his absence and stated certain reasons why he did not approve “of the assembling of this Convention or transaction of business by it as constituted.” This marked a resurgence of animosities that again filled the columns of the Register. While approving the sentiments of the March 27 meeting, Tourgée denied the right of a minority of an “illegal” legislature to appoint the delegates to such a convention arbitrarily, considering it a far cry from democracy for a small group of politicians to arrange, control, and manipulate a purportedly representative political organization. According to Tourgée, the Reconstruction Acts had released a flood of opinion favoring “absolute political and civil equality,” and ante-bellum rulers were cleverly acquiescing in this sentiment in an endeavor to maintain the strength of “aristocracy and caste.” The Holdenites were merely more subtle and less reactionary than the Conservatives, and pointing to their past behavior, Tourgée

8 Quoted in Raleigh Standard, March 12, 1867.
9 Ibid., March 16, 28, 1867. The latter contains the convention proceedings.
cautioned the Negroes to "shrink from their caress." These criticisms were further stimulated by the fact that Holden's Standard had a Federal printing contract that Tourgée desired for the Register. Conservatives again enjoyed the wrangling among their rivals, and complimenting the Register's "bona-fide" union men for their "honest straightforward course," expressed a desire "to cooperate with them as far as possible in the work of Reconstruction." 11

While some Republicans endorsed Tourgée's course, others were again distressed. W. Dunn, Jr., of Kinston, wrote two persuasive letters complimenting the Union Register on its ability and principles but objecting to its bickering and discord. The Republicans were weak, warned Dunn, and if they were split they would be overridden. Conservatives viewed Holden as the tower of Republican strength, so why should he be attacked if he was now on the right side and against the aristocracy? Men such as Holden, Settle, Dick, John Pool, said Dunn, "and others in this state have stood up & stood out against them [the aristocrats] in this state in the face of heavy odds. It was worth something to stand against that party in this state during the war. It was different at the North. It was easy—easier than any other to be a Union man there. Opposing & endeavoring to thwart the secessionists here was about all we could do." 12

The convincing protests of Dunn were ineffective, and Tourgée remained more devoted to his own principles than to pragmatic politics. But by June the Register collapsed and moved to Raleigh, where under the control of Daniel R. Goodloe, A. B. Chapin, and H. H. Helper (brother of the famous author of The Impending Crisis), it represented conservative rather than radical opposition to Holden. The impact of Tourgée's attack was thus sharply curtailed, but the issues he raised continued to disrupt the Republicans.

There was some justification for Tourgée's criticism, and as a result of his attacks upon the March convention the formal organization of the Republican party was credited to a more representative meeting

10 Manuscript editorial, Tourgée Papers; Union Register, quoted in Raleigh Sentinel, April 12, 1867; Raleigh Sentinel, April 27, 1867.
11 Ibid., May 8, 1867.
12 W. Dunn, Jr., to A. B. Chapin, April 20, 25, 1867, Tourgée Papers.
A Maverick Republican

held in September. But in certain respects Tourgée's course appears unwise. With little recognition of the difficulties involved, he relied excessively upon allegiance to the Confederacy as a postwar criterion, and he failed to appreciate the wisdom and effectiveness of subtle opposition to the Confederacy. In any event, secession and war were dead issues in 1867, and it is surprising that Tourgée, who appreciated Republican weaknesses, did not readily welcome able allies. Because of his distrust of the Holdenites, he seriously misjudged their sincerity. Thomas Settle, Robert P. Dick, William P. Bynum, Ralph P. Buxton, Edwin G. Reade, and other native Republicans were able, educated, and unusually enlightened men who displayed an effective and persistent attachment to democracy and reform. Without such leaders the Republicans would have been in worse straits than they were, and Tourgée eventually did develop an admiration for his once mistrusted allies.

Although such intelligent native Republicans were a constant refutation to the scalawag myth, they had little success in modifying the Reconstruction stereotype. The comments of the Greensboro Patriot about Robert P. Dick were indicative: "Personally we did have, and still have a high regard for him; in the social and private relations of life he is unexceptionable, but as a politician he is as deep in the dregs and as low in the mire as any of them." 13

Carpetbaggers, too, were considered as "low in the mire" as any, and by 1867 Tourgée was experiencing many adverse effects of his political prominence. Exasperated over the results of Tourgée's activities, his business associates terminated the partnership and sold out to him. Tourgée then attempted to continue the nursery with a new partner, George L. Anthony, but harassed by political enmity, poor general conditions, and a legacy of trouble left by his previous partners, the business did poorly. One partner, R. T. Pettingill, had secretly given his uncle a mortgage on the nursery as security for a private loan, and in the name of the partnership, Pettingill had also collected, but never paid, a claim for a Union veteran. This veteran attempted, without success, to collect the claim from Tourgée in 1867, and the matter was used politically to discredit Tourgée during that year. In the spring Pettingill's uncle foreclosed the mortgage, and whether for that or other

13 Greensboro Patriot, July 6, 1872. See also ibid., August 31, 1871, May 30, 1872.
reasons, Tourgée was forced to surrender the business, losing his investment and remaining several thousand dollars in debt.14

From Ohio, Emma's sister offered the distressed Tourgée family consolation—they all knew Albion had tried to do right by everyone, but with his business, his newspapers, and his politics, perhaps he had "too many irons in the fire." 15 This was true, and business was the iron Albion tended least. Further intensifying his plight was a sense of honor; in imitation of his literary idol, Sir Walter Scott, Albion refused bankruptcy and vowed to pay off all his debts. Fortunately, the rewards of Republican success would enable him to do so in the near future.

Tourgée's newspapers had also experienced persistent economic difficulties. "Opposed in sentiment by nearly all the public business men," both Conservative and Holdenite, Tourgée found it "impossible to get advertising patronage," and early in 1867 he desperately sought congressional aid.16 Although the Register received a favorable recommendation from the Federal district judge, George W. Brooks, two Union party papers, Holden's Standard and the Hendersonville Pioneer, were preferred over the radical Greensboro weekly for the two available Federal printing contracts. "God only knows what will become of everything," the distressed Albion complained to Emma in March as he left for the national capital to seek aid. There he conferred with George W. Julian and with the Congressional Executive Committee, and in April he was enthusiastically endorsed as a "thoroughly Radical and Union" editor by the prominent Republican Benjamin F. Wade. Despite the influential Wade's solicitations, there is no evidence that assistance was secured for either the Register or the Red String, probably because the political situation in North Carolina had by now all but eliminated Tourgée's previous importance to northern Republicans. The last number of the Register appeared on June 14, its demise coinciding with the collapse of Tourgée's nursery. Sadly, Tourgée bade goodbye to his readers—"the forlorn hope of true Republicanism in the state." 17

14 Tourgée to U.S. Treasury Department, January, no day, and July 9, 1867, and biographical manuscript, Tourgée Papers; sketch of Tourgée, no author, no date, Greensboro Public Library; B. S. Hedrick to E. R. S. Canby, January 10, 1868, Letters Received, Second Military District, War Department Records.
15 Angie Kilbourne to Mrs. Tourgée, June 21, 1867, Tourgée Papers.
16 Benjamin F. Wade to Union Executive Committee, April 1, 1867, Tourgée Papers. The succeeding quotation is also from this letter.
17 Quoted in Dibble, Tourgée, 37.
Hitherto, Reconstruction had brought the carpetbagger Tourgee little benefit. Radicalism had contributed to economic failure and debt, editing had provided little, if any, remuneration, and politics had secured neither important office nor leadership. The Tourgées would recall 1867 as a year of poverty, cold, and hunger amidst the spartan surroundings of an old log cabin, and other North Carolinians would recall a shabbily dressed Yankee who rode about to political meetings on an old and skinny white nag, blind in one eye like its master. There was some income from real estate and law, but the principled Tourgee could practice only in Federal cases because he refused to apply for a state law license to a provisional government whose authority he did not recognize. He also held an insignificant post as a Federal deputy collector, apparently a political gratuity from some local officeholder. 18

Tourgee’s poverty failed to cool his ardor, and during these troubled months, he added to his understanding of the problems of Reconstruction. Through his political and legal activities, he remained ever aware of the race problem, and in one revealing case, he fought the continuing effects of the burdensome apprenticeship laws that had been pressed upon ante-bellum free Negroes. For some reason, a free Negro, Washington Watkins, had been obliged to keep his son in apprenticeship before the war, but in return for a loan, one Jason Thompson, a white man, secretly agreed to execute an indenture over the boy but to leave him in Watkins’ care. There were witnesses to this illegal agreement. In 1867, because of some dispute between the parties, Thompson sought to force Watkins’ son to work for him under the indenture, while Tourgee fought to abrogate the contract of indenture by securing recognition of an agreement that had been illegal under ante-bellum law. Another irritating expression of race prejudice was the ostracism of northern white women who taught in Negro schools, a form of hostility which came from as high as the governor of the state. 19 The discomfort suffered by the Tourgées did not stem only from their close association with such teachers, but from the entire family’s direct involvement in Negro

18 Ibid., 36; Mrs. Tourgee to Tourgee, December 18, 1875, Tourgee Papers; Tourgee to Nathan H. Hill, June 7, 1867, Nathan H. Hill Papers, Duke University Library; interview with Katherine Hoskins, local historian, Summerfield, N.C.

affairs. Emma’s parents, whose presence sometimes compounded the personal problems of Reconstruction for Tourgée, were “socially, mentally and religiously” educating the recent slaves, and in Pennsylvania Emma’s sister was collecting relief money for their benefit. Tourgée encouraged greater Negro participation and leadership in the Republican party, and the Register paid unusual attention to happenings in Warnersville, the Negro suburb of Greensboro. One of the builders of Warnersville, Harmon Unthank, a well-respected ex-slave and local Republican leader, became a friend of the family and was the model for Tourgée’s fictional character Unthank in the novel Hot Plowshares. Tourgée also reputedly taught in the Warnersville school, wrote parts of his first novels in one of the schoolrooms of what later became Bennett College for Women, and assisted Negroes in the purchasing of land.

Negro ownership of land was a subject in which Tourgée displayed a unique interest in 1867. Although rejecting the confiscation advocated by many Negroes and radical Republicans, he was convinced of the advantages of Negro ownership and suggested a vast Federal program aiding Negroes to purchase land. Tourgée pointed out that most freed slaves were anxious to purchase land, and that over two hundred had done so in Greensboro and had proven to be reliable purchasers. He feared, however, that Negroes were so frequently handicapped by ignorance, prejudice, and distrust that they might be kept “hirelings” forever. Landowners had “little if any confidence in the Negro as a buyer and almost universally refuse to sell to him on time or at a reasonable price,” Tourgée reported, while Negroes displayed a reciprocal distrust and disliked the prevalent custom of having to pay money down while receiving in return only “a bond for a deed on payment of the remainder,” which threw “all the risk upon the purchaser.” Furthermore, Tourgée believed that if Negroes were “left to buy subject to the caprice or knavery of the landowners,” they would “be subject to the greatest imaginable fraud.” Federal intervention might solve the problem, and, pointing to the success of the Freedmen’s Bureau in providing mutually acceptable laboring contracts, Tourgée suggested a

20 Tourgée to Nathan H. Hill, July 17, 1867, Hill Papers. The following plan is in Tourgée to Mr. Armstrong, Bureau agent, n.d., Tourgée Papers, which includes the observation: “It is useless to think of locating the freedmen in communities by themselves. They prefer to live as now, interspersed with the whites, the business interests of the people demand it and there is no doubt it will be continued.”
similar Federal role designed to give confidence to the landowner in selling and the freedman in buying. He proposed that Federal land agencies negotiate contracts and execute titles and that a nine-year installment plan be provided to enable the freed slaves to purchase land. Federal endorsement of the contracts would offer needed security to both whites and Negroes. As a final inducement, Tourgée pointed out that such a plan would "bring clearly to the attention of Northern capitalists the astonishing opportunities which now exist for the profitable investment of capital in land at the South." Thousands of acres could be purchased, at "from $1.50 to $5.00 per acre cash" and resold at "from $6 to $10 upon the terms before given." It all seemed so clear—the indebted landowners needed money, the Negroes needed and wanted land, and the capitalists desired profits; but the Federal government failed to respond, and the vision came to naught.

Tourgée was also interested at this time in the development of water power, but the most curious enterprise that his economic enthusiasm led him into was of a public nature—the National Anti-Monopoly Cheap-Freight Railway League. Tourgée was a member of the national council of this League, whose president, the Texas Republican Judge Lorenzo Sherwood, he had met at the Philadelphia convention; and the League's vice-presidents included such notables as William G. Brownlow, Henry Carey, James Speed, Daniel E. Sickles, and William W. Holden.

Largely motivated by hostility toward the exploitive practices of private railroads, the Railway League advocated a publicly owned system of double-track railroads modeled somewhat after the earlier state canal systems. Cars on each track would proceed in one direction at a uniform speed, with shippers placing any desired number of cars upon the tracks and being charged according to tons per mile shipped. The League especially proposed to build up the railroads of the South with the aid of Federal subsidies accompanied by local or state investment, ownership, and control. It was urged that Federal aid for such a purpose would serve to regain the loyalty of the once rebellious section, and it was promised that such a system would avoid collisions, cut costs, increase carrying capacity, destroy monopolies, and provide "a thousand other good things." This scheme, too, drifted into oblivion, and two years later the Conservative press would comment that perhaps this
was all “a good idea, but we have looked in vain for government aid to any state enterprise.” 21

Tourgée's enthusiasm for economic projects was characteristic of Reconstruction Republicanism. Humanitarianism has rationalized more than it has characterized free enterprise, but the post-Civil War period in the South witnessed an unusual combination of faith in political democracy, free labor, and free enterprise. The Republican party issued ardent calls during 1867 for the development of the mines, mills, industries, railroads, schools, and even churches of the South, which helps to explain its popularity in urban centers. 22 Conservatives, who still dominated the private wealth and enterprise of the section, also encouraged progress, but they had less interest in the general welfare, feared higher taxes from increased public expenditures, and viewed with misgiving the faith that some southerners, including members of the Railway League, had in state and Federal government. Perhaps unduly influenced by their appreciation of postwar Federal intervention, southern Republicans had great expectations for democratic government, and in North Carolina they would soon undertake railroad and other projects that were accompanied by extensive state investment and control. The patronage that this provided to an indigent Republican party was also an important aid to power, whereas the taxation, interference, and political threat this represented to Conservatives became another basis for their hatred of Reconstruction.

21 Greensboro Patriot, December 23, 1869. A pamphlet and circulars of the Railway League may be found in the Tourgée Papers.
22 Raleigh Standard, July 9, August 8, 13, 17, September 7, October 19, 1867.