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## WADE HAMPTON: CONFLICTED LEADER OF THE CONSERVATIVE DEMOCRACY?

*Fritz P. Hamer*

In April 1877, Wade Hampton III, Confederate military hero and now political “savior,” declared to a Columbia crowd on his return from Washington that they should “forget we are Democrats or Republicans, white or colored, and remember only that we are all South Carolinians.”<sup>1</sup> Although Hampton may have used some political hyperbole to soothe a fractious electorate, the now undisputed governor of the Palmetto State wanted to convince the white Democracy that blacks, most of them former slaves, should be allowed to participate in the political process. Of course, the litmus test for this to happen had to be that African Americans repudiate the Republican Party. This party, which in the minds of most South Carolina whites had corrupted and nearly ruined the state since 1866, had championed the rights of the former slaves. While white Democrats appeared united in their hatred of the Radical Republican regimes of Reconstruction, their rule had ended in 1877. Now Hampton offered an olive branch, of sorts, to those whom he had reviled for over a decade.

Most of Hampton’s Democratic allies supported the former general’s overtures since they expected that African Americans would have few alternatives. But some allies of Hampton in 1876 disagreed. Former Confederate officers Matthew C. Butler and Martin Gary, for example, had no patience for reconciliation with blacks. The battle for the state government—for the very integrity of a white South Carolina in their minds—was to eliminate all opponents, white and black. Foremost among these were the

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Walter Brian Cisco, *Wade Hampton, Confederate Warrior, Conservative Statesman* (Washington, DC: Brassey’s, 2004), 266. The author wishes to thank Jennifer Fitzgerald, a colleague at the South Carolina State Museum, for reading this paper and providing valuable comments and suggestions.

reviled Republicans, but more generally, they sought to squelch the political participation of all non-whites. Did Hampton believe his prestige and personal qualities to be strong enough that he could overcome such powerful hatreds, or was his Columbia rhetoric just that, something to offer the opposition until he and his lieutenants could eliminate them completely from the political arena? This paper will review Hampton's motives and relationships up to the election of 1876 and argue that perhaps there was a little of both. But in the final analysis, Hampton represented white resurgence and retrenchment, and while he may have believed that former slaves could be a part of the political process, it was only on the terms of Hampton and his white lieutenants. In their minds only whites had the ability, indeed the very right, to govern the state. But to find out what led Hampton to his Redeemer leadership role in the crucial election of 1876, one must first review his background.<sup>2</sup>

Until secession, Hampton had done little to suggest that he would be embroiled in contentious politics. Although his grandfather had held prestigious military posts, first in the Revolution and later in the War of 1812, and his father had also attained distinction in the latter war, the family's focus was to attain land, slaves and wealth. When Wade III was born in 1818, he became part of one of the most privileged families in the American South. The Hampton family already controlled vast acreage in the South Carolina midlands, owned hundreds of slaves, and made millions growing cotton. They had few social or economic peers. Wade Hampton III was not just a wealthy son of a prominent family, but well educated and traveled, having attained a degree from South Carolina College and toured extensively in Europe and the Northeast during his young adult life. Nonetheless, his most important station in life was to become a successful plantation manager who would direct a vast estate of cotton lands from which great wealth would continue to be derived. In 1843 he began to manage the family plantation in Mississippi that included twelve thousand acres and nearly one thousand enslaved

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<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 275-276.



workers. Between these holdings and those in the midlands of South Carolina, Hampton traveled regularly to manage both. His favorite activities, hunting and fishing, could also be acquitted in such endeavors. Like his father and grandfather, Wade III viewed politics as a secondary role in society that he reluctantly assumed. Richland District constituents elected him to the South Carolina House of Representatives for the first time in 1852, and six years later, the same voters elevated him to the state senate. In neither chamber did he distinguish himself, rarely speaking while serving on legislative committees on federal relations, agriculture, and redistricting. Not until his last years in the antebellum legislature did he even speak out on major issues. In short it seems that he served in the State House because his social position required it.<sup>3</sup>

Such modest political ambitions began to change, as the rift between North and South grew more intense at the end of the 1850s. Hampton spoke out against John Brown's raid on Harpers Ferry in the fall of 1859, warning that if the North did not condemn the radical abolitionist the Union could not survive. Although he did not lead the charge, when Lincoln became the Republican presidential nominee, the South Carolina planter supported plans for a secession convention if the Illinois lawyer were elected. He not only voiced his support for such a body but also joined the Minutemen, groups of men in communities around the state that supported secession prior to the elections. Throughout the fall campaign season, these groups held public demonstrations in their own regalia and wrote a manifesto supporting secession. In the wake of Lincoln's election victory, Hampton continued to support the calling of a convention although he was not elected to that body. When the state seceded, Hampton immediately offered his services to defend the newly independent "nation." But in the midst of the

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 10-12, 17, 23, 29, 31, 46; Wade Hampton III to E. Ham, 1 January 1877, in Hampton Family Papers, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina, hereafter noted as HFP; N. Louise Bailey, Mary L. Morgan, and Carolyn R. Taylor, *Biographical Directory of the South Carolina Senate, 1776-1985*, vol. 1 (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1986), 656-9.

crisis, as South Carolina faced off against the federal government over the status of Fort Sumter at the mouth of Charleston harbor, Hampton left the state in March 1861 to check his holdings in Mississippi. It was upon his return to the Palmetto State two weeks after Fort Sumter surrendered that Hampton began to organize his now famous legion. Not only its founder, the planter-turned-soldier became the legion's financier, using his vast wealth to pay for its soldiers' uniforms, equipment, and firearms. By late spring the Confederate high command ordered Hampton's Legion north to defend the newly anointed capital of Richmond, Virginia.<sup>4</sup>

Hampton's many exploits as a military leader, first of his legendary Hampton's Legion and then as cavalry commander, are well known. After the Confederate armies reorganized in the spring of 1862, the legion was split up and its commander became a subordinate under the renowned cavalry general, J. E. B. Stuart. Upon this legendary figure's death in May 1864, Hampton's distinguished service and abilities led to his promotion as Stuart's successor as commander of all Confederate cavalry in the Army of Northern Virginia. During his long and distinguished service, the South Carolinian received many wounds in daring attacks against Federal cavalry and infantry from Manassas to Gettysburg to Petersburg. In the last months of the war Hampton went home in a doomed attempt to stop William T. Sherman's march through the Carolinas. Loyal and determined to war's end, Hampton's resilience seems more tragic because of his own personal losses. First, his brother Frank fell mortally wounded at Brandy Station in June 1863. Then, more than a year later, his son Preston was killed in an engagement near Petersburg. To compound these tragic deaths, at the war's end Hampton's family home at Millwood, just outside Columbia, was burned to the ground by Sherman's troops. His holdings in Mississippi, including three steam cotton gins and 4,700 bales of cotton, were also lost. Perhaps Hampton's greatest capital loss, however, was the more than one thousand enslaved

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<sup>4</sup> Cisco, *Wade Hampton*, 51-52.



workers who now were free. The state's most distinguished Confederate military commander, in spite of all his dedication to the Southern cause, found himself virtually destitute financially, if not emotionally.<sup>5</sup> Despite his best efforts, Hampton could only recover a small portion of his holdings following his declared bankruptcy in 1868.

In the midst of such personal and capital losses Hampton was slow to accept the new social and political order dawning on post-war South Carolina. Although he rejected emigration to South America or Europe as some of his former Confederate comrades had done, he was slow to reconcile himself to the Confederacy's demise. In the summer of 1866, he told his former commander-in-chief, Robert E. Lee, that "*I am not reconstructed yet . . .*" and declared to him, "Time will prove that you have not fought in vain."<sup>6</sup> Clearly, Hampton would not easily concede that four years of bloodshed and personal loss had been a national and personal waste.

As the defeated former Confederate tried to cope with his own personal loss, the political and economic changes occurring within his state became more alarming. For a brief period it appeared that former Confederates would be able to resume the reigns of power with the blessings of President Andrew Johnson. But a Republican Congress soon refused to accept Johnson's lenient terms for the former Confederacy and reversed Presidential Reconstruction with a series of laws in 1866. Instead, they imposed severe restrictions on most of the old leadership and required the Southern states to accept former slaves as equals in political and social arenas for the first time. This was an affront, if not worse, to most whites and they soon showed their opposition.

Hampton expressed this bitterness to President Andrew Johnson in detail. He denounced what he perceived as a vindictive

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 55-163; Charles E. Cauthen, ed., *Family Letters of the Three Wade Hamptons, 1782-1901* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1953), 113-4; Wade Hampton III to E. Ham, 1 January 1877, HFP.

<sup>6</sup> Wade Hampton III to R.E. Lee, typescript, 21 July 1866, HFP.

Congress that was led by Radical Republicans who usurped their authority and ignored the Constitution by forcing the Southern states to adopt the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Amendments without due deliberation of their respective leaders. To Hampton, the amendments were forced upon the South illegally. Somehow he could not accept that Congress responded to thwart the South Carolina legislature who had passed a series of "Black Codes" the previous year that severely restricted the movement of freedmen and essentially returned them to the life of servitude that they had recently left. Nor could Hampton see the purpose of what he viewed as a corrupt Freedmen's Bureau and "a horde of barbarians—your brutal negro troops" that imposed law and order in the South. Such organizations were an affront to whites, especially to former slaveholders who were accustomed to virtual life and death mastery over blacks. Such a response was natural for men like Hampton who had been raised to believe that only they had the ability and the right to govern the affairs of their state. That former slaves were now free men to whom Congress had given political rights was unfathomable to Hampton. Such a monolithic shift in social structure was incomprehensible, even if his beloved South was defeated.<sup>7</sup>

His bitterness slowly waned in the following months but Hampton remained true to his upbringing as a planter and former slaveholder. Even though he advocated limited political rights for freedmen he advised his white friends that they could still control the state legislature by controlling the black vote. As in the antebellum era, Hampton and most of his class could not conceive that former slaves had the ability to behave rationally in the political arena. Former slaveholders believed that freedmen were still imbued with the traits relegating them to subservience, just as they had been in slavery. African Americans needed people like Hampton to instruct and prevent them from harming themselves. Such a conclusion came from the paternalistic, racist view that blacks were unable to think

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<sup>7</sup> Cauthen, *Family Letters*, 126-141.



for themselves or recognize their own best interests. By 1867 he told John Conner, a fellow South Carolinian and Confederate veteran, that it was the duty of "every Southern man" to secure the "good will and confidence of the negro." It was even acceptable to send blacks to Congress since Hampton considered them more trustworthy than "renegades or Yankees," provided that "respectable negroes" were recruited. Presumably this meant freedmen whom whites knew could be relied upon, whether by bribery or intimidation, to accept and serve Southern whites in a loyal—i.e., subordinate—manner.<sup>8</sup>

The assumptions of Hampton and his associates were sorely tested during the following decade as the battle with Republican rule in the state ebbed and flowed. First, most white voters tried to forestall the election of delegates to a new state Constitutional Convention mandated by Congress. Since a majority of the state's registered electorate had to ratify the call of such a convention, a large number of white voters registered their protest by not casting their ballots on election day in November 1867. Despite this unity, the vast majority of registered black voters—eighty-five percent—who voted for such a body were enough to validate the elections for the Constitutional Convention that met two months later. Not surprisingly its majority of black delegates drafted a new constitution that ushered in tax and land reform, the first formal public education system and more.

Nonetheless the former cavalry leader continued to believe that whites could influence enough freedmen so that Democratic conservatives could control the legislature when the next round of fall elections occurred. But Hampton's assumptions proved false. The Radical Republicans won a significant majority and began to implement their reform agenda—including raising taxes, implementing land redistribution, and installing a grassroots public

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<sup>8</sup> Wade Hampton III to John Connor, typescript, 24 March 1868, HFP. For the general attitude towards blacks by most whites in the state after 1865, one of the best overviews is Stephen Kantrowitz, *Ben Tillman and the Reconstruction of White Supremacy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 41, 44.



education system. These bold moves threatened white conservatives who feared losing control of black labor and the political process, the latter to a Republican Party with majority black support. Most white leaders believed that they had to prevent this and take back the reigns of power to forestall political and social chaos. Although some whites, even Hampton for a time, advocated some form of peaceful accommodation with the Republicans, most believed that only intimidation and violence could prevail and resurrect white control. Martin Gary and Matthew C. Butler characterized the dire nature of this new struggle as an attempt by Republicans to place the "negro over the white man" a maneuver that demonstrated Republicans were "at war with the noblest instincts of our [white] race." Conservative radicals such as Butler believed that whites who tried to reach political accommodation with former slaves were badly misled, if not traitors to their race. Butler and his supporters, known as "straight outs," began a campaign of intimidation and violence to attain victory for conservative Democrats. Such violence ranged from beatings to murder, with one of the more extreme cases being the assassination of a black leader, Benjamin Randolph. In October 1868, while campaigning in Abbeville for a seat in the legislature, several shots rang out in the local train station, killing Randolph instantly. Yet even in this violent atmosphere blacks and their white allies went to the polls in November to elect a Radical ticket.<sup>9</sup>

Hampton could not legally run for political office because Congress barred high-ranking Confederate officers from public service, yet his work behind the scenes was not impeded by the Republican victory of November 1868. Since his prediction that whites could control the black vote had failed he seemed to discard his hopes in that arena. Instead, Hampton tacitly supported the Klan

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<sup>9</sup> For the failed effort to forestall the election of delegates to the state constitution in November 1867, see Walter Edgar, *South Carolina: A History* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1998), 385-86. For the division among whites in 1868 and the violent plan led by people like Gary, see Richard Zuczek, *State of Rebellion: Reconstruction in South Carolina* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1996), 51.

violence that accelerated in the wake of the 1868 elections. Primarily in the Upstate, bands of vigilantes, often clad in frightening regalia, intimidated and attacked Republican supporters, white and black, with impunity. Unable to end the violence, Republican Governor Robert K. Scott appealed to the president and Congress for Federal troops to help stem the carnage. After the president invoked the Third Enforcement Act, commonly known as the Ku Klux Klan Act, in April 1871, Federal troops soon arrested several hundred suspected Klansmen. Even though Hampton publicly spoke out against the violence, he nonetheless led a subscription effort on behalf of the accused for their legal defense. Although at least one historian has called the federal law timid and asserted that it should have been imposed earlier and more forcefully, the action ended most of the violence. Hundreds were incarcerated and trials were held. Unfortunately for the federal authorities, so many suspects turned themselves in, along with those captured, that the courts and jails could not process the huge backlog that was created in the legal system. This, coupled with the expert defenses that the accused received through the moral support and financial backing of people such as Hampton and Matthew C. Butler, meant that only a token number of accused Klansmen received convictions. Even those that did generally received light prison sentences. Although this spate of violence came to an end, the lull proved to be temporary. As the elections of the fall of 1876 began in earnest, white conservative elements re-ignited their campaign of intimidation and violence. And this time Hampton led the effort by running for governor.<sup>10</sup>

Although former Confederates at all levels were given amnesty by Congress in 1872, Hampton had remained too preoccupied with family issues and his poor finances to take a leadership role in the fight against the Radical Republicans. His

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<sup>10</sup> For the support Hampton gave the Klansmen indicted, see Zuczek, *State of Rebellion*, 100. For the violence perpetrated by the organization, see Zuczek, *State of Rebellion*, 94-100; and Cisco, *Wade Hampton*, 204-206. Also see Lou Falkner Williams, *The Great South Carolina Ku Klux Klan Trials, 1871-1872* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996), 53.



efforts to improve his financial condition collapsed when the insurance company he joined went into bankruptcy less than a year after his appointment to its board. Still, he maintained a keen interest in the political future of his home state. Thus, when ex-Confederate leaders approached him in June 1876 to be the Democratic Party's nominee for governor, he accepted.<sup>11</sup>

Hampton's social position and heroic role as a Confederate leader made him the best standard bearer for the conservative Democrats. Unanimously nominated in an August convention, the soldier-turned-politician began a campaign across the state, from the Upcountry to the Lowcountry, defending the virtues of his party and castigating the corrupt and spendthrift ways of the Radical Republicans. But Hampton's speeches and his obvious public appeal as a hero of the defeated Confederacy were possible largely because of the political army—mounted Red Shirts—that bolstered his appeal and protected him in every community to which he took his campaign.

In Anderson, Sumter, Winnsboro and Yorkville during the fall campaign Hampton was met by an impressive entourage of local dignitaries, admiring young ladies and scores, sometimes hundreds, of mounted Red Shirts. For one campaign rally in Winnsboro on October 16, 1876, an elaborate itinerary was created and fliers posted throughout the community. It outlined where the local Democratic dignitaries were to stand, the place of "colored clubs" and how the "mounted men" should arrange themselves so that "colored people of both parties" could be admitted in front of them. In Yorkville a grand parade met Hampton at the train station

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<sup>11</sup> On Congressional amnesty for former Confederates, see Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877* (New York: Harper and Row, 1988), 504. For Hampton's tragic personal and financial problems in this period, see Cisco, *Wade Hampton*, 198-201, 210-11. And for Hampton's reluctant acceptance of the Democratic nomination for governor, see typescript narration, July 25, 1876, HFP; and Walter Allen, *Governor Chamberlain's Administration in South Carolina: A Chapter of Reconstruction in the Southern States* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1888), 400. For Hampton's reluctance to run in the 1876 gubernatorial race, see Cisco, 217, 223

and turned out for the Democratic nominee's stump speech where he appealed not only to whites but also to blacks. After castigating the corrupt Republicans in Columbia and their governor, Daniel Chamberlain, for the umpteenth time, he appealed for black support. Ironically Hampton claimed that blacks had become "slaves to your political masters" and that to be "freemen they must leave the Loyal League" and join with him to bring "free speech, free ballot, a free press." And yet just a decade before most blacks had been slaves for life to Hampton and his class, devoid of any rights whatsoever. Fear prevented many minority voters from asserting the courage to openly disagree with Red Shirts ready to pounce on any dissenters in the crowd. Except in the Lowcountry, where blacks outnumbered whites, few of these grand political rallies allowed the opposition to rebut Hampton's claims.<sup>12</sup>

In spite of Hampton's appeals on the stump and his professed opposition to campaign violence, his Red Shirt supporters ruthlessly used intimidation and violence throughout the Upstate to suppress Republican opposition. One Laurens County Republican group appealed to Governor Chamberlain for protection because no one "dares to speak nor act with respect of his franchise privileges without being in extreme danger." Individual acts of violence sometimes expanded into major battles that led to injury and death on a large scale. Just as the campaign began in earnest, the Ellenton riots of September 1876 saw black militia carry on a running battle with Red Shirt companies for almost two days before Federal troops intervened to end the carnage. At least fifty blacks and one white Red Shirt lay dead at its conclusion. Similarly at Cainhoy, in the Lowcountry, blacks and whites faced off again. Here the black militia got the better of the action but still whites inflicted nearly as many casualties on the Republicans before they fled. With such brutal violence going on all around him, Hampton seemed to

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<sup>12</sup> For details about the Hampton political rallies, see "Celebration in Honor of General Wade Hampton at Winnsboro," 16 October 1876, HFP; and *Yorkville Enquirer*, October 19, 1876. The author wishes to thank Debra Franklin, Museum researcher, for taking extensive notes of the latter for this study.



remain above the fray, arguing before black audiences why they should support his election. Through an alliance with the whites, "who owned the land . . . pay the taxes," blacks could help redeem the state. But, he warned, if they continued with their "carpet-bag friends [the Republicans]" they would lose aid or support when needed, presumably from whites.<sup>13</sup>

Some former slaves seemed to take Hampton's words to heart because, as Edmund Drago shows in his recent study, the white Red Shirt clubs had black allies. According to this historian, there were at least eighteen black Democratic Clubs organized during the 1876 political campaign. How many of these clubs actually were formed by political coercion from whites or from genuine disillusionment by blacks with the Republican leadership is difficult to determine. Evidence gathered by Drago suggests that these black organizations had members that joined for a variety of reasons, some from conviction, others out of necessity. Some African Americans felt that even if the Democrats were not their best political allies they did not think that the Republican Party could protect them. Consequently in order to continue living and working in their communities some former slaves believed they needed to gain favors from white Democrats that would protect and sustain them during and after the elections.<sup>14</sup>

Although black Red Shirts did exist, it is clear that most African Americans remained loyal to the Republican Party despite the growing divisions within its ranks during the campaign. And for those minority voters that switched their allegiance, most faced severe rebuke from fellow blacks, including their wives. Within most black communities such betrayal often led to expulsion from the household and sometimes even physical assaults. Nonetheless,

<sup>13</sup> Zuczek, *State of Rebellion*, 176-78; Dewitt Grant Jones, "Wade Hampton and the Rhetoric of Race: A Study of the Speaking of Wade Hampton on the Race Issue in South Carolina, 1865-1878," (PhD diss., Louisiana State University, 1988), 144-45.

<sup>14</sup> Edmund L. Drago, *Hurrah for Hampton: Black Red Shirts in South Carolina During Reconstruction* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1998), 16, 22-34.

white intimidation by the Red Shirts and their allies was far greater. Even so, the results at the polls were very close when the November ballots were tallied. Although the conservative Democrats had a lead of just over one thousand votes across the state, this was initially nullified by the vote count in Laurens and Edgefield Counties. In these two districts, county commissioners reported voter fraud where Democrats received more votes than actual voters available. This began the long stalemate over who had won the election. For the next several months Republicans and Democrats both claimed victory.<sup>15</sup>

Hampton declared himself the winner and demanded that his Republican opponent step down. Backed by Federal troops, Chamberlain refused, almost leading to a bloody riot during the last days of November 1876 as both Republican and Democratic legislators declared victory for themselves and proceeded to occupy the same chamber in the South Carolina State House. Led by dual speakers, E. W. M. Mackey for the Republicans and William H. Wallace for the Democrats, a tense atmosphere continued for four days with both sides refusing to leave the chambers.

Surrounded by Federal troops, on the morning of the fourth day the Democrats reluctantly voted to leave voluntarily when the troops outside seemed poised to remove them by force. However, as this occurred, disgruntled whites had begun to arrive in Columbia from many areas of the state to gather around the still unfinished State House, seemingly bent on throwing out the Republican members regardless of the Federal troops. Before violence could break out, Hampton showed his true leadership. Appearing before

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<sup>15</sup> For a review of the vote tallies and the stalemate that ensued see Zuczek, *State of Rebellion*, 193. For black attempts to switch to the Democratic side and how insignificant this actually was see Joel Williamson, *After Slavery: The Negro in South Carolina During Reconstruction, 1861-1877* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1965), 408-412. Nevertheless, Cisco tries to claim that many blacks did switch to the Democrats: see Cisco, *Wade Hampton*, 232-34. Also see Richard M. Gergel, "Wade Hampton and the Rise of One Party Racial Orthodoxy in South Carolina," *The Proceedings of the South Carolina Historical Association* (1977), 6-9.



the mob, he requested that they disperse. As they did so, the authority of Hampton was obvious and the legitimacy of the Republican governor and his party was irrevocably compromised.<sup>16</sup>

Yet while Chamberlain tried to hang on with the aid of Federal troops and Congressional backing, Hampton had enough public support to have himself inaugurated governor even though he lacked the legal authority. In December 1876 Hampton declared in his acceptance speech that he owed much of his success to black voters who "rose above prejudice of race and [were] honest enough to throw off the shackles of party." Yet even though Hampton publicly claimed this support, others in his own party realized that it was the bands of Red Shirts, with their intimidation tactics and recourse to violence, who had really "won" the election for him. On election day in one Lexington precinct, a Democratic observer admitted that only ten blacks voted the conservative ticket. Although it is difficult to say how many blacks actually voted Democratic across the state, one historian estimates that probably no more than one hundred blacks in each county voted for Hampton and his party.<sup>17</sup>

Nonetheless, even without substantial black support, Hampton eventually forced his Republican rival to resign his office. As he and Chamberlain disputed each other's legitimacy into the spring of 1877, the hopes of Republicans that somehow the Radical ticket could still win grew ever dimmer. Hampton and his Red Shirts advised supporters to pay taxes to the Democracy, not Columbia, so that the Republican regime could not operate the daily duties of government. In fact, the power of the conservative Democracy had grown so that just before Chamberlain resigned his office in April 1877, Hampton reputedly claimed that if the former governor had not given up his office he would have had every tax

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<sup>16</sup> For an account of the stalemate in the State House after the election see Cisco, *Wade Hampton*, 250-2.

<sup>17</sup> For an account of Hampton's inaugural address and its content see *Charleston News and Courier*, December 14, 1876, extra edition, HFP; and Cisco, *Wade Hampton*, 256-8. For estimates on the number of black voters that supported Hampton see Williamson, *After Slavery*, 411.

collector in the state hanged. But the final chapter in Republican rule only ended after Hampton visited the president in Washington. There, after he assured the newly inaugurated Rutherford B. Hayes that he would guarantee political rights and protection to blacks as well as whites, regardless of party, the president agreed to pull out all remaining Federal troops from the state. With federal protection now gone, Chamberlain had no other recourse but to resign his office and leave the state.<sup>18</sup>

With Hampton and the Democrats finally undisputed victors, the former cavalry hero continued to claim that he regarded both races as equals before the law and that African Americans should enjoy the same political rights and protections as whites. Perhaps the Redeemer governor truly believed this but some, if not most, of his lieutenants did not. Just as they had directed the Red Shirt campaign, Matthew C. Butler and Martin Gary demanded that every white voter make sure that he intimidated every black voter he knew to either vote Democratic, or not at all, through whatever means he had. They were determined to use any means at their disposal to elect Hampton and throw out the Republicans.<sup>19</sup>

Whether Hampton considered that racial dominance was the essence of the struggle or not, it is obvious that he viewed blacks as second-class citizens who could only participate in politics under white supervision. Old Confederates such as M. C. Butler were determined to eradicate black political participation, regardless of who might supervise black voters. Although Butler's extreme position—advocating the removal of African Americans from the State House and all local offices as well—failed in the early post-Reconstruction era, over time black political participation was steadily eroded. It started within months of Hampton assuming undisputed office in the spring of 1877. In Richland County, Senator Beverly Nash and State Supreme Court Justice Jonathan

<sup>18</sup> On the claim by Hampton, see Cisco, *Wade Hampton*, 267. For the end of Chamberlain's tenure, see Cisco, *Wade Hampton*, 266-9.

<sup>19</sup> For more, see especially William J. Cooper, *The Conservative Regime: South Carolina, 1877-1890* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1968).



Wright were forced to resign their offices by the fall of 1877 after trumped-up charges of corruption and drunkenness were brought against them. By the early 1880s most black politicians resigned even if they weren't directly threatened, once they realized how tenuous their own position in the white-dominated government had become. But a few African Americans held onto their offices through the 1880s because they came from predominately black counties. Yet even the few who clung to political office had little but symbolic impact on policy. By the 1890s, white supremacy would be complete and remained so for nearly a century.<sup>20</sup>

As for Hampton, his political leadership continued to have impact through the 1878 election. He worked to improve funding for the budding public education system created by the Republicans and expenditures per pupil continued to rise for both blacks and whites through the decade of the 1880s under those who succeeded Hampton. But while Hampton's legacy for equal education appeared genuine, that for equality in the political process never did. Constitutional offices during the Hampton years became all white.

In addition to legal ways of excluding African-American voters from exercising their rights at the ballot box, the former general's party lieutenants also found ways to stuff ballots and restrict minority voters through literacy tests and grandfather clauses. And not only did Hampton oversee new voting rights restrictions, he did little to support the few remaining African Americans in local

<sup>20</sup> On Wright's removal from office, see Richard Gergel and Belinda Gergel, "To Vindicate the Cause of the Downtrodden': Associate Justice Jonathon Jasper Wright and Reconstruction in South Carolina," in *At Freedom's Door, African American Founding Fathers and Lawyers in Reconstruction South Carolina*, ed. James Lowell Underwood and W. Lewis Burke, Jr. (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2000), 64-7. On Beverly Nash's removal, see John Hammond Moore, *Columbia and Richland County: A South Carolina Community, 1740-1990* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1992), 265-6. For the general campaign used by Hampton and his allies to remove most blacks from office, see Moore, *Columbia and Richland County*, 267. For a comprehensive examination of the removal of blacks from politics in the 1880s, see Cooper, *The Conservative Regime*, 90-107.

offices, even if they were Democrats. The few that gained local offices did not keep them long after Hampton left to become United States Senator in 1879.<sup>21</sup>

In 1878 Hampton was elected to a second term as governor but plans were already afoot to send him to Washington where his influence on state politics would be minimized. Although the war hero's prestige as a Redeemer leader would survive as a symbol of white supremacy over the hated Radical regime, his presence on the political stage was no longer essential to white political dominance. Now over sixty, Hampton's age was probably affecting his ability. And there were younger leaders, some former Confederates, who were ready to take over the reigns of real political control. In late 1878, following a serious hunting accident, Hampton's very survival seemed precarious. The conservative regime that Hampton had returned to power in 1877 continued to maintain political control through most of the 1880s, but their days were numbered as Ben Tillman's star began to rise.

Even though the hero and leader of the 1876 election survived his accident and continued his political career in Washington for another decade, Hampton became largely a symbol of the old guard whose influence on state politics was steadily eroded. While respected by most of his colleagues in the U. S. Congress, Hampton's tenure had little significance for the state or the nation. He rarely spoke to the assembled body and often missed sessions because of illness or infirmity. By the end of the 1880s, even his symbolic value to the state's young Turks, led by Tillman, was finished. At the end of the decade the state senate voted him out of office.<sup>22</sup>

Hampton lived for another decade struggling to support his family while attending Confederate reunions inside and outside the

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<sup>21</sup> On Hampton's short tenure as governor and his modest success in carrying out his election promises to blacks, see Kantrowitz, *Ben Tillman*, 78-79; Williamson, *After Slavery*, 412-17; and Cooper, *The Conservative Regime*, 90, 96, 111-12. Also see Gergel, "Wade Hampton," 9-14.

<sup>22</sup> On Hampton's health and waning influence see Cisco, *Wade Hampton*, 270-324; and Kantrowitz, *Ben Tillman*, 91-4, 185.



state when his health permitted. When he died in April 1902, he was praised for his determination and bravery as a soldier who did all in his power to protect his state during four years of war. There is no denying that he was one of the last of the old cavaliers who fought ferociously for his state, but his political leadership during and after Reconstruction is not so clear. While Hampton continued to fight for his state, he did so from the perspective of an old guard trying to return the state to some semblance of its pre-war days. Steeped in the old white planter view of society where blacks and most whites accepted the planter oligarchy without question, Hampton envisioned an ordered world, as he perceived it had been before secession. Although he opposed violence after Appomattox, he still acquiesced in the Red Shirt campaign of 1876.

Even though he continued to claim that he had garnered a significant number of black votes to win back the state in 1876, most white supporters from that election later admitted that Hampton was misled. According to Ben Tillman, reflecting on these events years later, despite Hampton's claim that he had won sixteen thousand votes from black constituents in 1876, "... every active worker in the cause knew that in this he was woefully mistaken." A noble soldier, Wade Hampton was at best a resolute but reactionary politician. While he was willing to accept blacks in the political arena, it could only be on white terms.

Despite his rhetoric to the contrary, Hampton accepted white methods of intimidation and violence to save the state from what he and other white leaders considered chaos under a black dominated Republican Party. He, like most whites, believed that the best option for all, black and white, was a paternalistic society that controlled the economic and political course of the state. To Hampton, equitable distribution of political power and economic freedom for recently freed slaves was a recipe for disaster. His philosophy and upbringing made his political career one of reaction and retrenchment.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Kantrowitz, *Ben Tillman*, 78-79. Kantrowitz argues persuasively that Hampton's paternalistic view of race was really little different from the violence which Ben Tillman and M. C. Butler advocated in 1876. In the end both sides believed that the only conceivable order of society was for whites to dominate blacks.